


CHARACTERISATION IN THE RAMCHARITMANAS

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This work is dedicated to my husband,

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for his encouragement, inspiration and patience.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Objectives of and Need for the Study

The story of Sri Rama (Ramayana) is the immortal story of Indian culture. Sage Valmiki wrote the original Ramayana in Sanskrit. Goswami Tulsidasa retold the Ramayana in the context of sixteenth century India, in the form of Ramcharitmanas in the Avadhi dialect of Hindi. One of the most outstanding features of the Ramcharitmanas is the manner in which it depicts human values of a universal nature that have been cherished and preserved by Hindus throughout the centuries. The ideologies, beliefs, motives, actions and reactions symbolised in the Ramcharitmanas are applicable to all times and in all places. It teaches man to imbibe the fundamental values like honesty, truth, chastity, fidelity, mutual love, sympathy, respect and justice. It does so through the lives and conduct of the characters within the story. These characters have been immortalised through the pen of Tulsidasji. They are role models for society, worthy of reverence and emulation.

Hindus in South Africa are also acquainted with the major characters of the Ramcharitmanas even though many may not have read the scripture. However this knowledge is generally preliminary and cursory. It is therefore felt that a comprehensive study of all the major characters and some of the minor ones will be extremely useful not only to Hindus but to all the people of this country who can be inspired and benefit from such a work.

It is the intention of the writer to present the characters as depicted by Tulsidasji within the framework of the central theme of the Ramcharitmanas, which is the attainment of Ramarajya, the perfect state, or idealistic existence. Tulsidasji's emphasis of the importance of the worthiness of means, as much as the, worthiness of ends will be borne in mind in this work. All the characters in the Ramcharitmanas are either helpful or impediments in this process and are consequently good or evil. Of the four Purusharthas i.e. Dharma (righteous duty), Artha (material acquisition), Kama (fulfillment of desires) and Moksha (spiritual liberation), Tulsidasji's main concern was the principle of Dharma and it was for this reason that

he presented the Lord Sri Rama as the Dharma Avatara (Incarnation of duty) and all good characters as His devotees. Avatara (physical manifestation of the divine) and Lila (divine pastimes) are fundamental to Tulsidasji's theology and Dharma and Maryada (bounds of propriety) are the pillars to support this. All characters are viewed from these standpoints and their actions lead to the culmination of Tulsidasji's theme. Hence, the theoretical framework of this study will be within the four ethical pillars of Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha. The various characters will be analysed to determine the degree of adherence to, or deviation from these principles.

This proposed thesis (D. Litt) is envisaged as a major academic challenge in that the values radiated by Goswami Tulsidasa's characters seem to be the answer to the present crisis in human society. The detailed analysis of his characters, in comparison with the traits emphasised by other writers of the Ramayana, will provide the key to an understanding of the vision and advice to the future generations inherent in Tulsidasji's Ramcharitmanas.

1.2 Key Questions to be Answered in the Research

1. Who are the significant characters in the Ramcharitmanas?
2. How have these characters impacted on the story of the Ramayana?
3. In which way has Goswami Tulsidas enhanced or modified these characters to achieve his own purpose?
4. In which significant aspects of the characterisation does Goswami Tulsidas differ from other major writers of the Ramayana?
5. To what extent does Goswami Tulsidas's version of the characterisation serve to make the Ramayana ethos a powerful and pervasive influence in the modern age?

1.3 Research Approach and Methods

A thorough knowledge of the Ramayana versions of sage Valmiki (first poet of the Ramayana), Goswami Tulsidas (medieval period) and Maithili Sharana Gupta (modern period), amongst others is prerequisite for the study. Further, a survey of critical literature on aspects to be dealt with has to be done. The hermeneutical method (understanding and interpreting) will be applied to the text of the Ramcharitmanas in order to appreciate his

characterisation. Participation and observation at discourses by adepts on the Ramcharitmanas of Goswami Tulsidasa will be undertaken, particularly to determine how scholars/preachers perceive Tulsidasji's characters, as well as to find out to what extent Tulsidasji's message through his characters is found to be apt for contemporary society. For this purpose, the researcher will have to engage in empirical research locally and abroad.

1.4 General

In this work a study of the character of Sri Rama has not been undertaken. The reason for this the writer subscribes to Tulsidasji's belief that Sri Rama is God incarnate and therefore cannot be fully understood. Sita, as the divine consort of Sri Rama, has also been excluded for the same reason.

Even the divinely revealed Vedas exhaust themselves in their descriptions of the Supreme Being and finally resort to the Mahavakya "Neti Neti", meaning Not This! Not this! Tulsidasji in his Ramcharitmanas has adopted a similar approach. This is expressed by Kakabhushundi when he says to Garuda:

Mahimaa naam roop gun gaathaa,
 Sakal amit anant raghunaathaa.
 Nij nij mati muni hari gun gaavahi,
 Nigam sesh siv paar na paavahi.
 Tumhahi aadi khag masak prajantaa,
 Nabh udaahi nahi paavahi antaa.
 Timi raghupati mahimaa avgaahaa,
 Taat kabahu kou paav ki thaahaa.
 Raamu kaam sat koti subhag tan,
 Durgaa koti amit ari mardan.
 Sakra koti sat saris bilaasaa,
 Nabh sat koti amit avkaasaa.
 Marut koti bipul bal rabi sat koti prakaas.
 Sasi sat koti suseetal saman sakal bhav traas.
 Kaal koti sat saris ati dustar durga durant.
 Dhoomketu sat koti sam, duraadharash bhagavant.
 Prabhu agaadh sat koti pataalaa,
 Saman koti sat saris karaalaa.
 Teerath amit koti sam paavan,
 Naam akhil agh poog nasaavan.
 Himgiri koti acal raghubeeraa,
 Sindhu koti sat sam gambheeraa.
 Kaamdheni sat koti samaanaa,
 Sakal kaam daayak bhagvaanaa.
 Saarad koti amit caturaabee,
 Bidhi sat koti srishti nipunaabee.
 Bishnu koti sam paalan kartaa,
 Rudra koti sat sam sanhartaa.
 Dhanad koti sat sam dhanvaanaa,
 Maayaa koti prapanc nidhaanaa.
 Bhaar dharan sat koti aheesaa,
 Niravadhi nirupam prabhu jagdeesaa.
 Nirupam na upamaa aan raam

*Samaan raamu nigam kahai,
Jimi koti sat khadyot sam rabi
Kahat ati laghutaah lahai.
Ehi bhaati nij nij mati bilaas
Munees harihi bakhaanahee,
Prabhu bhaav gaahak ati kripaah
Saprem suni sukh maanahee.*

"Sri Rama's greatness, His Name, beauty and the song of His praises, they are all boundless and endless; and the Lord of the Raghus Himself is infinite. The sages sing Sri Hari's praises each according to his wits; but neither the Vedas nor Shesha (the serpent-god) nor the blessed Shiva Himself can reach their end. All winged creatures, from yourself down to the mosquito, take their flight across the sky, but none can reach the end of it. Even so, dear Garuda, can anyone ever gauge the extent of Sri Rama's greatness, unfathomable as it is? Sri Rama's body possesses the charm of a myriad Cupids. He is as inexorable in crushing the enemy as countless millions of Durgas. He enjoys the luxury of a myriad Indras and is immeasurable in expanse as a myriad firmaments. He has the might of a myriad winds and the brilliance of a myriad suns. He is as cool as a myriad moons and allays all the fears of mundane existence. Again, He is irresistible, unapproachable and interminable as a myriad Deaths. Nay, the Lord is

irrepressible as a myriad fires. The Lord is unfathomable as a myriad Patalas and dreadful as a myriad Yamas. He is sanctifying as countless millions of sacred places; nay, His very name obliterates all one's accumulated sins. The Hero of Raghu's line is as immovable as a myriad Himalayas and as deep as a myriad seas. The Lord is as liberal in bestowing all one's cherished objects as a myriad cows of plenty. He is as sharp as countless millions of Sharadas and possesses the creative skill of a myriad Brahmas. Again, He is as good a preserver as a myriad Vishnus and as thorough a destroyer as a myriad Rudras. He is as rich as a myriad Kuberas and as capable of bringing forth material universes as a myriad Mayas. He is as good a supporter (of the universes) as a myriad Sheshas. In short, Lord Sri Rama, the sovereign of the universe, is infinite and incomparable (in every respect). Incomparable as He is, He has no compeer. Sri Rama alone is Sri Rama's peer - so declare the Vedas - even as the sun really suffers diminution by being likened to a myriad glow-worms. So do the great sages sing the praises of Sri Hari each according to the flight of his own wits and the Lord lovingly hears them and feels delighted (however inadequate the praise may be); for

He respects the sentiments of His devotees and is extremely kind.'" (Ramcharitmanas 7/90/2 - 7/92).

It must also be borne in mind that Tulsidasji believed that all the characters in the Ramcharitmanas serves only to bring out the glory of Sri Rama. They are like many flowers that carry His fragrance. The Ramcharitmanas is permeated, from beginning to end, with the singular theme of Sri Rama's glory.

*Sunia tahaa hari kathaa suhaaee,
Naanaa bhaati muninha jo gaaee.
Jehi mahu aadi madhya avasaanaa,
Prabhu pratipaadya raam bhagvaanaa.*

“(The story) has been sung by the sages in diverse ways, the sole theme of which - at the beginning, in the middle as well as in the end - is the divine Lord Sri Rama.” (Ramcharitmanas 7/60/3).

To complete the study, the researcher has selected a few representative characters from the five categories of divine, saintly, Sri Rama's family, animal and bird devotees of Sri Rama and the demons of Lanka. An attempt will be made, through an analysis of these characters, to demonstrate how Tulsidasji developed the theme of universal human welfare through Rama-bhakti (devotion to Sri Rama) in the Ramcharitmanas.

CHAPTER TWO

CHARACTERISATION IN LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction:

It is common knowledge that no two people are identical physically, mentally and intellectually. Nor do any two persons have identically the same qualities in them. Each person is unique in appearance, thinking and behaviour. It is equally well known that no individual remains the same throughout life. Change is constantly taking place either subtly or radically. Much thought has gone into the factors, which determine individual, human nature. The two most important elements that contribute to the formation and development of an individual's nature and personality are genetics and environment. Both these elements appear to play pivotal roles in determining what a person is or becomes.

2.1.1 Genetics:

Mankind has learnt from experience very early in history that humans inherit much of their

characteristics from their parents. It is commonly believed that the blood of the parents runs in the veins of the children. Not only do children bear physical similarity to their parents, they also inherit much of their mental traits. Insanity is a strong case in point. The children of intelligent parents are often more intelligent than the children of parents who are not so intelligent.

Francis Galton has written in his book 'Hereditary Genius' published in 1869 that an individual's physical and mental conditions are dependant on ancestry. Genetic factors determine an individual's physical development, weight, complexion, health, mental prowess, intellect, capabilities and other attributes. (Galton in Ramayani :1996:50). After Galton, Alfrenso D Candol of France and Carl Pearson of Britain carried out important research on this subject. (Ramayani:1996:50).

2.1.2 Environment:

Environment is the second most important factor in determining the nature and personality of individuals. A person is powerfully influenced by the surroundings

and atmosphere in which he lives. Miss Works carried out extensive research in various child centres and orphanages where children from different families lived together and it was her finding that the intellectual development of an individual is influenced to the extent of 80 percent by the environment and 20 percent by hereditary factors. (Ramayani:1996:51). David Abraham concluded that man's capability and potential is determined by hereditary factors whilst the environment determines what he actually becomes. (Ramayani:1996:51). In other words the seed of a person's potential is inherited but actual growth and development is dependant on the environment.

It is clear from the above that a person's nature and personality is largely dependant on both the genes he has inherited as well as the environment in which he lives. An individual's development depends on how much he has acquired due to genetic factors and how much he has assimilated from his environment. His potential is gained genetically, but the opportunities to realise that potential; is presented by his environment. If the genetic factor is prominent in an individual the greater will be his chance of realising his full potential even if the environmental factor is

unfavourable. By the same token if the environment is conducive then the greater will be the person's chance of realising his full potential even if the genetic factor is not so strong.

2.2 The Importance of Characterisation in Indian Literature

Special importance is attached to characterisation in Indian literature. Indeed all literature is an expression of human joys and sorrow, hopes and aspirations. Literature is an expression of the writer's mental reaction to his experiences and feelings. An individual's characteristics are revealed by an analysis of his experiences and emotional momentum. In Indian literature the words Caritra, Carit and Caaritraya are used to describe character. These words, though similar, are not identical in their implication. The word Caritra is used to describe all the attributes of a person whilst the word Caaritraya is used to describe only the good or noble attributes. The word Carit, however, is used in Indian literature in the sense of biography.

The principle amongst the two main categories of Indian literature is known as Prabandha Kavya. This again is divided into the two categories of Shastriya Prabandha Kavya and Carit Kavya. Dr Dheerendra Varma in his book Hindi Sahitya Kosha has listed the following features of Carita Kavya. (Varma D:1963:286)

1. It follows the style of biographies. It describes the genealogy of the hero or his previous lives as well as the cause or purpose of his birth. The hero's life is described from the time of his birth till his death. The writer does not deviate from the main story to dwell at length on descriptions of nature etc.
2. The writer generally attempts to synthesise the elements of love, heroism, duty or righteousness and detachment. Some love story is generally present. The romantic element is generally stimulated by dream, hearing of the qualities of a person, seeing a picture or painting or personal meeting. The lovers go through trials and tribulations and, sometimes, great struggle but in the end they are happily united.
3. Some dialogue or question - answer format is generally woven into the plot.

4. There are generally some super natural and super human elements, which are drawn from Pauranic stories or folk tales.

5. Unlike the Shastriya Prabandha Kavya, which is more poetically embellished, the Carit Kavya is generally more simple and straightforward and is more attractive to the masses.

6. Carit Kavya is written with a purpose other than mere entertainment. This purpose may be religious, panegyric or for the welfare of society.

In Indian literature, numerous poems and dramas have been written with their titles bearing the word "Carit" like Naishadcarit by Sri Harsha, Dashkumarcarit by Dandi, Padmacarit by Ravisen, Harshacarit by Banabhatt, Paomcariya by Vimalsuri, Buddhacarit by Ashvaghosh, Uttarramcarit by Bhavabhuti etc. This tradition of "Carit" literature; coming down from Sanskrit, Prakrit and Apabramsha was naturally continued by Hindi poets eg. Sudamacarit by Narottamdas.

The "Carit" literature is most popular and yet the most complicated form of literature written in the medieval period. It was by this means that the path of literature expanded into the tradition of epic poems. The poetical conventions of many forms of literature,

including Western historical writings, influenced the further development of "Carit" literature. "Carit" literature, sometimes contain exaggerations of the historical elements of folktales as well as works of fiction. (Ramayani:1996:53).

"Carit" literature is also called "Katha". Goswami Tulsidasa, in the Ramcharitmanas, has also called his narrative a "Katha". It is clear from this that the definition of "Carit" literature is very broad and almost any chronicle may be included in it.

A portrayal of the life history of the hero, either completely or partially, therefore, prominently features in all "Carit" literature. Literally speaking, the terms biography (carit) and character (caritra) have become inter-dependant in the sense that an appropriate analysis of a person's character cannot be undertaken without a proper understanding of that person's life history.

The word character in the sense of a description of a person's qualities has a relative connotation. The concepts and presumptions held by society that measure character differs in accordance with time and place. There is no universal model of character. It is formed

within a particular social environment. Man does not act only in accordance with his physical needs and sensual cravings, but is also influenced by his faculty of reasoning and discretion. It is this in fact which informs him of the sense of appropriateness which in turn is based on the prevailing social norms. Life's values are constantly changing and the norms of behaviour, morality and ethics change accordingly.

There is an interdependent relationship between literature and human life. Man's emotions, ideas, experiences, thoughts and mental perceptions are expressed through the medium of literature. A writer translates the perceptions so formed in his works through the medium of characters. Even though this may be a mental creation of the writer, it is nevertheless based on the reality of human life. The writer however shapes his characterisation in accordance with the objective, purpose or message, which motivates him in his work. The writer therefore does not delineate all the incidents in the life of his characters but only chooses those that serve to convey his message or fulfil his objective or purpose. Thus the writer's inner compulsions take precedence over external elements in his portrayal of characters.

In life there is coexistence of optimism and pessimism as well as idealism and realism. A writer whose mind is focused to a greater degree on the negative aspects of life portrays more pessimism and the harsher realities of life in his writings. On the other hand, a writer who has greater faith in the higher values of life tries to inspire refinement in society by portraying more optimism and the cherished ideals of society. In between these two extremes is the writer who does not turn away from the harsh realities of life but at the same time is anxious to establish a healthier society through his writings. Each type of writer portrays characterisation in his work on the basis of his own experiences and viewpoint.

Generally speaking, in Indian literature, greater emphasis has been given to a portrayal of idealism in characterisation.

CHAPTER THREE

CHARACTERISATION IN THE RAMCHARITMANAS

3.1 Introduction

The Ramcharitmanas is regarded as the finest work of literature in the Hindi language. From the medieval period up to the present day, this work has been able to influence the thinking of the entire population of Northern India in a manner that no other work of literature has been able to do. It is an inspired work of a literary genius who in turn has inspired countless others. It has the lofty purpose of universal welfare as its theme. It serves not only to propagate sound religious or spiritual ideas but also to establish human values in society. The values propounded in it are universal and eternal. The writer, Tulsidasji appears to have conceived of different categories of characters from the religious, ethical and idealistic viewpoints and he moulded each of his characters to represent these different categories. (Singh:1978:537). We therefore find in this work, a portrayal of the ideal father, ideal mother, ideal brother, ideal wife, ideal friend, ideal servant, ideal

companion, ideal priest, ideal citizen etc. (Mishra:1963:418) The Ramcharitmanas has gained immense popularity because of the importance of its characters. Many people are oblivious of the philosophical importance as well as the poetical excellence of the Ramcharitmanas. But almost everyone readily identifies with the characters in this great work. People from all walks of life from the ordinary to the elite, get direction, inspiration and solace from the characters in the Ramcharitmanas. These characters influence society in a major way.

3.2 Characterisation in the Ramcharitmanas

Acharya Ramachandra Shukla has divided the characters of the Ramcharitmanas into two categories - idealistic and ordinary. According to him Sri Rama, Sita, Bharata, Hanumanji and Ravana will come into the category of the idealistic, whereas Dasharatha, Lakshmana, Vibhishana, Sugriva and Kaikeyi will come into the category of the ordinary. He opines that the idealistic characters will maintain their conduct and tendencies from beginning to end, whether those tendencies be Sattvic or Tamasic in nature. Of the characters mentioned above Sri Rama, Sita, Bharata and

Hanumanji display the same Sattvic tendencies throughout the epic whereas Ravana is consistent to his Tamasic tendencies from beginning to end. (Shukla:2000:72).

Mr Ramratan Bhatnagar has pointed out that the following six features form the basis of Tulsidasji's characterisation. (Bhatnagar in Ramayani:1996:53)

1. The realistic portrayal of characters depicted in the Valmiki Ramayana.
2. The religious and devotional elements of the Adhyatma Ramayana.
3. Tulsidasji's own sentiments regarding devotion.
4. The sentiment of presenting ideal human characteristics.
5. Tulsidasji's observation of reality.
6. Personification

The mundane features of all the characters are co-ordinated in the context of devotion. All the main characters have depth as well as disciplined nature. According to Pundit Ayodhya Singh Upadhyaya, the Ramcharitmanas is conditioned by the portrayal of its characters. It skilfully describes in striking language the ideal father like the truthful king

Dasharatha, the ideal mother like the soft hearted and generous Kaushalya, the ideal co-wife like the self-sacrificing Sumitra, the ideal wife like the chaste Sita, the ideal brothers like the self-sacrificing Bharata and Lakshmana and the ideal servant like the dedicated and loyal Hanumanji. (Upadhyaya in Shukla:2000:11).

Dr Hazariprasad Dwivedi in his book "Hindi Sahitya ki Bhumika" has presented a factual and commendable view with regard to characterisation in the Ramcharitmanas. According to him Tulsidasji is incomparable in his characterisation and all his characters are living beings like us, made of flesh and bones. Whatever is supernatural in them can also easily be understood and accepted. Every action of his characters have some specific purpose which sheds light on some aspect of human life, or sharply criticises some personal or social evil, or promotes goodwill amongst all human beings. He was an idealist who, through his writings, was helping to create a healthier society for future generations. (Dwivedi in Ramayani:1996:59).

Rajnikant Shastri, the writer of "Manas Mimamsa", who is considered to be an impartial critic of the

Ramcharitmanas, whilst commenting on the uncommon popularity of the work, also points out some of the special features of characterisation in the Ramcharitmanas. He says that Tulsidasji's characterisation is astonishing. The readers tend to become so absorbed in the characters that they share in all their emotions. Together with the characters, the reader begins to laugh, or cry, or become elated or dejected, or even become angry. They merge their own existence into that of the characters and have a life-like experience of the events described. (Shastri in Ramayani:1996:59-60).

Ramcharan Mahendra, who researched thoroughly on all the epics of Hindi literature as well as their writers, has declared the Ramcharitmanas to be the finest work of Hindi epic literature on account of its subtle psychological characterisation. He says that Tulsidasji had a penetrating insight into human nature and a thorough knowledge of the inner workings of the human mind, in different circumstances and situations. For this reason his characterisation is complete and flawless. He has demonstrated his expertise in depicting every type of character in the Ramcharitmanas. (Mahendra in Ramayani:1996:61).

The characters of the Ramcharitmanas may also be divided into three categories according to their nature - idealistic, extraordinary and ordinary. The idealistic characters have in them the beautiful synthesis of purity, piety and benevolence in both the individual as well as the universal sense. Sri Rama, Sita, Kaushalya and Bharata come within this category. (Ramayani:1996: 61).

The distinguishing nature of the extraordinary characters is that they have a predisposition towards a particular sentiment. They are driven by a specific tendency which may be either selfish or selfless. Whilst Ravana represents those of a selfish nature, Lakshmana is representative of the selfless. (Ramayani:1996:61).

The character development of the ordinary characters is powerfully influenced by the circumstances into which they are placed. Their thoughts and feelings do not remain consistent because they are not committed to any sound moral resolve. Dasharatha, Vibhishana, Kaikeyi and Manthara come into this category. (Ramayani:1996:61).

The central theme of the Ramcharitmanas is that Sri Rama is a human manifestation of the Supreme Lord of the universe. He was born for the good of the world. The main purpose of Tulsidasji writing the Ramcharitmanas was to promote human welfare. He believed that the principal means of promoting human welfare is Rama-Bhakti or devotion to Sri Rama. All the characters of the Ramcharitmanas revolve around this theme. From this point of view, the characters may be divided into two categories - positive and negative. The positive characters are those who promote human welfare through devotion to Sri Rama. Vashishta, Vishwamitra and Vibhishana are examples of characters in this category. The negative characters are those who retard human welfare and as such they are shown to bear animosity to Sri Rama. Ravana and Shurpankha are some of the characters who fall into this category. (Singh:1975:304).

The character of Parshurama is a special case. He is also an Avatara (manifestation of God). On the occasion of the bow sacrifice, he served to terrify the evil kings and establish the supremacy of Sri Rama. In this way, the Ramcharitmanas acknowledges him as a

positive character who contributes to the development of Rama-Bhakti. (Singh:1975:304).

A fact to be borne in mind is that the characters of the Ramcharitmanas are not of Tulsidasji's own creation. They are cast in the traditional mould, having made their appearance time and again in various works of literature from Valmiki down the centuries to Tulsidasji's own period. However, Tulsidasji gave them a touch of his own feelings and values.

Valmiki's monumental work was indelibly stamped on the Indian psyche. Almost all the Puranas contain some version of the Rama saga, giving it the stamp of religious authority. Of the vast array of Puranic literature covering the subject, the most important and popular is undoubtedly the Adhyatma Ramayana. This work has influenced, to a large extent, many subsequent works on the subject, not excluding the Ramcharitmanas. In fact, it is claimed that the Adhyatma Ramayana has more powerfully influenced Tulsidasji than even Valmiki.

Other renowned writers like Kalidas, Bhavabhuti, Kshemendra, Jayadeva and Kampan had made their mark

even before the advent of Tulsidasji. All these writers had made some contribution to the overall picture of the characters of the Ramayana story that was inherited by them. To make any acceptable change to this picture was a formidable task, even for Tulsidasji.

Furthermore, the rules of Poetical Science (Kavya Shastra) governing the creation of epic literature, laid down by the Acharyas, especially regarding the characterisation of the hero, heroine and arch villain, were limiting factors which constrained Tulsidasji considerably.

In spite of all these constraints, and without detracting from tradition, Tulsidasji made significant changes in his characters to fit in with his sense of decorum, synthesis of literature and spirituality, and most importantly, his mission to promote human welfare through Rama-Bhakti. To him, (Tulsidasji) Sri Rama was the Unqualified Supreme, Brahman, and source of all Creation, all laws of conduct and Ocean of Mercy. Having taken human form for the welfare of the world all human actions had to be carried out through and for Him. In delineation of his characters, Tulsidasji

therefore made Rama-Bhakti the only criterion to determine whether they were good or bad. This will be borne out clearly in the study of the characters which follows.

CHAPTER FOUR

DIVINE CHARACTERS IN THE RAMCHARITMANAS

4.1 Introduction

Among the characters in the Ramcharitmanas, there are some who are divine in nature. Lord Shiva and Parvati, Hanumanji and Parshurama as well as Indra and all the celestials play some role in the story.

Lord Shiva is the principal narrator of the Ramcharitmanas. In fact, the entire story of Sri Rama was first conceived by him and then later played out by Sri Rama in His human Lilas or divine sport.

*Raci mahes nij maanas raakhaa,
Paai susamau sivaa san bhaashaa.*

**"Having conceived, the great Lord Shiva treasured it in His mind till, when a favourable opportunity presented itself, he communicated it to His consort, Parvati."
(Ramcharitmanas 1/34/6).**

Lord Shiva is Sri Rama's greatest devotee besides being His best friend. He is also Sri Rama's Lord and Master, in the sense that he is Sri Rama's Ishtadevta or chosen

deity. Tulsidasji has pointed out this unique triple relationship in the words

*Gur pitu maatu mahes bhavaanee,
Pranavau deenbandhu din daanee.
Sevak swaami sakhaa siya pee ke,
Hit nirupadhi sab bidhi tulsee ke.*

"I adore the great Lord Shiva and His consort Goddess Bhavani (Parvati), my preceptors and parents, friends of the forlorn and ever given to charity, servants, masters and friend's of Sita's Lord, and true benefactors of Tulsidasa in every way."
(Ramcharitmanas 1/14/2).

Perhaps the reason for emphasising this was the desire of Tulsidasji to bring about a reconciliation between Vaishnavites and Shaivites who were bitterly opposed to each other during his time.

Parshurama, who was also an Avatara (manifestation of God), superficially appears to be an opponent of Sri Rama. But it will be shown in the study that he was in fact a great being, who served to enhance the glory of Sri Rama.

The role of Hanumanji in the Ramcharitmanas is only too well known. He is depicted as a devotee of the Lord,

serving Him through the Dasya or servant sentiment and he plays this part to perfection. It is hard to imagine that this utterly humble servant of the Lord is himself worshipped by countless devotees throughout the world. The depiction in the Ramcharitmanas of divine beings serving and offering devotion to Sri Rama serves to illustrate that he is worthy of adoration even by the greatest of the great.

4.2 Lord Shiva

Shiva is the main narrator of the Ramcharitmanas. His personality is so complex that to describe it in its entirety is not possible. His multi-faceted personality is so captivating that the reader is naturally attracted to him. His inner peculiarity is reflected in his outer dress and appearance which gives rise to both fear and laughter. When one first reads his description one wants to laugh but when one looks deeper, this laughter turns to fear. Thus, the female goddesses on seeing him dressed as a bridegroom remarked:

Bar laayak dulahini jag naahee.

"The world has no bride worthy of the bridegroom,"
(Ramcharitmanas 1/91/3).

While he appears as an object of ridicule to the goddesses, to Maina, the mother of Parvati, he instilled immense fear when she beheld him. The golden tray she held for his welcome fell to the ground.

*Mainaa subh aaratee savaaree,
Sang sumangal gaavahi naaree.
Kancan thaar soh bar paanee,
Parichan calee harahi harshaanee.
Bikat besh rudrahi jab dekhaa,
Abalanha ur bhay bhayau bisekhaa.
Bhaagi bhavan paithee ati traasaa,
Gae mahesu jahaa janvaasaa.*

"Maina (Parvati's mother) kindled auspicious lights for waving round the bridegroom and the women accompanying her sang melodious songs of rejoicing. A salver of gold adorned Maina's fair hands and she proceeded to welcome Lord Hara with great delight. The women were seized with excessive fear when they saw Rudra (Shiva) in frightful accoutrements. They fled in great panic and entered the house; while the great Lord Shiva repaired to the lodgings of the bridegroom's party."
(Ramcharitmanas 1/95/1-3).

Shiva is described as one who dwells naked in the cremation grounds having renounced all worldly connections. But when one sees him immersed in bliss with Parvati, it becomes even more difficult to

understand him. A person's perspectives are based on social norms and thus he judges others according to his own limited definitions. Man creates boundaries for society. He prides himself in creating laws and various codes of conduct, believing them to be signs of a civil society. In reality, this excessive emphasis on social recognition reduces man from the grandiose to insignificance. Man creates boundaries on land and proclaims himself victor when he destroys the boundaries of others, all in the name of self-protection. By building a home, he sets in motion a never ending cycle of thine and mine and thus he is never able to have mental peace. Man places so much emphasis on his outer appearance that he totally ignores his inner beauty. Shiva's non-acceptance of social norms brings one face to face with the eternal truth. Boundaries, house and clothing are necessary, but these should not give rise to pride and should not become a source of bondage.

The homeless and wandering Shiva frees man from his foolish insistence to attachments. Thus those who have a very strong attachment to worldliness find it very difficult to understand Shiva. Even in the Puranas, several characters eg. Bhrigu, Chitraratha and Daksha

have gravely criticized Shiva. They however praise Vishnu as they see him as the protector of ethical propriety. The Ramcharitmanas does not subscribe to this view. Sri Rama himself worshipped Shiva, thus portraying a balanced and unifying philosophy of life. Shiva is not opposed to propriety, but rather he frees man from the shackles of attachments. Thus he is known as the giver of liberation (Moksha). Man is not bound by a physical rope but by his own beliefs and thus becomes unhappy. Although he is part of the Eternal Bliss (Brahman), he believes himself to be this body and remains tormented. Man becomes entangled in innumerable struggles or conflicts relating to race, creed etc. This in turn gives rise to either a feeling of superiority or inferiority. He becomes totally engrossed in trying to achieve a high position which he believes will give him social status and true happiness. To free oneself from these false beliefs is true liberation. Shiva's philosophy of life is an attack on man's imaginary and false notions. His appearance and dress shake man from his slumber and confronts him with the truth.

One who fears death is surprised when he hears that Shiva lives in the cremation grounds. Those who

consider the cremation ground to be impure find it improper to worship Shiva, who smears his body with the ash of burnt out corpses and experiences bliss while doing so. According to the Ramcharitmanas, Shiva does not become impure by smearing ash on his body but the ash becomes sacred, thereby giving rise to auspiciousness.

Although his appearance is peculiar, his every action symbolizes the truth. He is extremely tenderhearted and his tenderness can be seen in various episodes of the Ramcharitmanas.

Seeing Sri Rama grieving for Sita in the forest, the consort of Shiva, Sati, is filled with doubt. She would not otherwise have been surprised at this scene, had Shiva not saluted him as the Supreme Being.

*Jay saccidaanand jag paavan,
As kahi cale manoj nasaavan.
Cale jaat siv satee sametaa,
Puni puni pulkat kripaaniketaa.
Satee so dasaa sambhu kai dekhee,
Ur upjaa sandehu bisekhee.
Sankaru jagatbandya jagdeesaa,
Sur nar muni sab naavat seesaa.
Tinha nripasutahi keenha parnaamaa,
Kahi saccidaanand pardhaamaa.*

Bhae magan chabi taasu bilokee,
Ajahu preeti ur rahati na rokee.
Brahma jo byaapak biraj aj, akal aneeha abhed.
So ki deh dhari hoi nar, jaahi na jaanat bed.

" 'Glory to the Redeemer of the universe, who is all Truth, Consciousness and Bliss!' As Shiva went on His way with Sati, the all-merciful Lord was repeatedly thrilled with joy. When Sati beheld Shambhu in this state, a grave doubt arose in Her mind: 'Shankara is a Lord of the universe Himself, and deserves universal adoration; gods, men and sages all bow their head to Him. Yet He made obeisance to this prince, referring to him as the Supreme Being who is all Truth, Consciousness and Bliss. He was enraptured to behold his beauty and felt an upsurge of emotion in His heart, which He is unable to control even to this moment! The Supreme Eternal, which is all-pervading, unbegotten, without parts, free from desire, beyond Maya and beyond all distinction and which not even the Vedas can comprehend - can It assume the shape of a man?' "

(Ramcharitmanas 1/49/2-4, 1/50).

Shiva tried to free her from her doubts but he failed. Being naturally tolerant he did not become angry, but rather allowed her to test Sri Rama for herself.

Jau tumhare man ati sandehoo,

*Tau kin jaaí pareechaa lehoo.
Tab lagi baith ahau bat chaahee,
Jab lagi tumha aihahu mohi paahee.
Jaise jaaee moh bhram bhaaree,
Karehu so jatanu bibek bicaaree.*

"'If you have a great doubt in your mind, why not go and verify the thing? I shall be waiting in the shade of this banyan tree till you come back to Me. Using your critical judgement you should resort to some device whereby the stupendous error born of your ignorance may be rectified.'" (Ramcharitmanas 1/51/1-2).

In order to test Sri Rama, she assumed the form of Sita and when she returned to Shiva she lied to him.

*Kachu na pareechaa leenhi gosaaee,
Keenha pranaamu tumhaarihi naaee.*

"'I made no test my Lord; I made obeisance just like You.'" (Ramcharitmanas 1/55/1).

The all knowing Shiva knew of her deception. It would not have been unnatural if he became enraged with her. But what one sees in this episode, is his graciousness. He did not speak of his inner torment. Rather, he perceived Sati's action as God's will, thus freeing her from blame.

*Tab sankar dekheu dhari dhyaanaa,
Satee jo keenha carit sabu jaanaa.
Bahuri raamamaayahi siru naavaa,
Preri satihi jehi jhoot kahaavaa.
Hari icchaa bhaavee balvaanaa,
Hriday bicaarat sambhu sujaanaa.
Satee keenha seetaa kar beshaa,
Siv ur bhayau bishaad bisheshaa.*

"Lord Shankara then looked within by contemplation and came to know all that Sati had done. Again, He bowed His head to the delusive power of Sri Rama, that had prompted Sati to tell a lie. What has been pre-ordained by the will of Sri Hari must have its way, the all-wise Shambhu thought within Himself. Sati had assumed the disguise of Sita: this made Shiva much disconsolate at heart." (Ramcharitmanas 1/55/2-4).

Although he did not attribute blame on Sati, Shiva was restless and deeply tormented by the fact that she had assumed the form of Sita in order to test Sri Rama. As a result, he found it impossible to accept her as his wife. Goswami Tulsidasji states the following in describing Shiva's dilemma:

*Param puneet na jaai taji,
Kie prem bad paapu.*

"Sati is too chaste to be abandoned, and it is a great sin to love her anymore as a wife.'" (Ramcharitmanas

1/56). The great Lord Shiva uttered not a word aloud, although there was great agony in his heart.

Many scholars, even today, cannot reconcile Shiva's state of mind. They do not see any impropriety in Sati's changing her form. They say that this continually happens in drama, and whatever happens on stage does not affect or influence a person's family life or social standing. They see Shiva's abandoning of Sati as inappropriate and an over-reaction on his part.

Shiva is a true, sentimental devotee of God with form. To him Rama is the Supreme Lord and Sita, the Divine Mother of the universe.

To accept the all pervading Lord as a mere person defies logic, especially to those who are given to debate regarding God with form and the formless aspect of God.

Shiva's abandoning of Sati was very peculiar. Outwardly, he did not show it. He conversed with her and tried to make her happy and content. An aerial voice proclaimed Shiva's greatness.

*Calat gagan bhai giraa suhaaee,
Jay mahes bhali bhagati dridaaee.
As pan tumha binu karai ko aanaa,
Raambhagat samrath bhagvaanaa.*

"Even as He (Shiva) stepped forward a charming voice from heaven thundered forth 'Glory to the great Lord Shiva, who has so staunchly upheld the cause of Devotion. Who else than You can take such a vow. You are a devotee of Sri Ram and the all-powerful Lord at the same time.'" (Ramcharitmanas 1/56/2-3).

There is no room for sentimentality for a renunciate. But Shiva's sacrifice and renunciation give rise to an incomparable degree of tenderness. Sati became alarmed when she heard the heavenly voice, for she knew that she had erred. She also knew that the vow of Shiva must somehow be connected to her and she then addressed Shiva:

*Suni nabhgiraa satee ur socaa,
Poochaa sivahi samet sakocaa.
Keenha kavan pan kahahu kripaalaas,
Satyadhaam prabhu deendayaalaas.*

"Sati felt troubled at heart when She heard the heavenly voice. She addressed Shiva in a faltering voice, 'Tell me, O merciful Lord! What vow You have taken. You are an embodiment of Truth and compassionate to the poor.'" (Ramcharitmanas 1/56/3-4).

Here again, Shiva's extraordinary self control is depicted. Just a few moments before, Sati had spoken a lie to Shiva and now she called him an embodiment of truth and expected the truth from him. Shiva however, was not taken in by her praises and remained silent regarding his vow. It is almost impossible and extremely rare to find both the qualities of satya (truth) and sheel (amiability and modesty) together. As truth is always bitter, its usage is not always congenial to the listener. A modest person is always considering others' feelings, and in order not to offend, he inadvertently suppresses the truth. In various episodes of the Ramcharitmanas, many of the outstanding characters are faced with this problem and in most cases they are forced to choose either satya or sheel. The only exceptions are Sri Rama and Shiva. Shiva's renunciation of Sati illustrates these qualities. He did not totally abandon her, nor did he make her feel uncomfortable. In fact, he went out of his way to keep her happy. She repeatedly questioned him about his vow but he remained silent so as not to hurt her feelings.

*Jadapi satee poochaa bahu bhaatee,
Tadapi na kaheu tripur aaraatee.*

"Even though Sati enquired in ways more than one, the slayer of the demon Tripura (Shankara), spoke not a word." (Ramcharitmanas 1/56/4).

Here Shiva is referred to as Tripura Arati, that is, the slayer of Tripurasura. According to an episode in the Puranas, this demon had performed severe austerities through which he was able to build three cities in space. One was constructed with gold, another with silver and the third with iron. Each of these cities could move in different directions. He had asked for the boon that only when these three cities were destroyed simultaneously with one arrow could he be killed. He believed that this task was impossible and thus he would remain immortal. However, Shiva accomplished the feat and killed Tripurasura.

In the Sati episode Shiva successfully protects his vow, truth and modesty by remaining silent. Vows and other good deeds should not be broadcast but kept secret. Sati would have been devastated with the truth, and in order to preserve his amiability, he had to remain silent. It seems as though with one arrow, that of silence, he was able to conquer self praise,

untruth and heartlessness. Thus his being called Tripurari in this context is most apt.

Sati however, was overcome by guilt and she therefore experienced extreme remorse.

*Hriday socu samujhat nij karanee,
Cintaa amit jaai nahi baranee.
Kripaasindhu siv param agaadhaa,
Pragat na kaheu mor apraadhaa.*

"Sati felt perturbed in Her heart at the thought of what She had done; and the extent of Her anxiety could neither be gauged or described. She realised that Lord Shiva is a supremely unfathomable ocean of mercy, hence He did not openly declare Her fault." (Ramcharitmanas 1/57b/1).

Shiva's compassion for Sati is illustrated when he tried to alleviate her agony by relating various stories.

*Satihi sasoc jaani brishketoo,
Kahee kathaa sundar such hetoo.
Barnat panth bibidh itihaasaa,
Biswanaath pahuce kailaasaa.
Tah puni sambhu samujhi pan aapan,
Baithe bat tar kari kamalaasan.
Sankar sahaj saroopu samhaaraa,
Laagi samaadhi akhand apaaraa.*

"Perceiving the sad look of Sati, Shiva narrated beautiful stories in order to divert Her mind. Relating various legends while on His way, the Lord of the universe, Shiva, reached Kailasa. Then, recalling His vow, Shambhu sat down there under a banyan tree in the Yogic pose known as Padmasana (the pose of a lotus). Shankara communed with His own Self and passed into an unbroken and indefinitely long Samadhi (trance)." (Ramcharitmanas 1/57/3-4).

Shiva's going into Samadhi was also a means of liberating Sati from her present tormented state of mind which his silence had created. Sati was so overcome with Shiva's immense compassion and love for her that when she gave up her life she prayed that she may remain devoted to Shiva in future births.

*Satee marat hari san baru maagaa,
Janam janam siv pad anuraagaa.*

"While dying, Sati asked a boon of Sri Hari that She might remain devoted to the feet of Shiva in all successive births." (Ramcharitmanas 1/64/3).

In this episode, Shiva's extraordinary sense of justice, compassion, truthfulness, amiability and single mindedness is portrayed. His self-control

together with a more humorous aspect of his character can be seen in the marriage episode.

We are confronted with a totally different Shiva during the time of his bereavement after the death of Sati.

*Jab te satee jaai tanu tyaagaa,
Tab te siv man bhayau biraagaa.
Japahi sadaa raghunaayak naamaa,
Jah tah sunahi raam gun graamaa.*

*Cidaanand sukhdhaam siv, bigat moh mad kaam.
Bicarahi mahi dhari hriday hari, sakal lok abhiraam.
Katahu muninha updesahi gyaanaa,
Katahu raam gun karahi bakhaanaa.
Jadapi akaam tadapi bhagvaanaa,
Bhagat biraha dukh dukhit sujaanaa.*

"Ever since Sati went and quitted her body, Shiva's mind recoiled from everything. He ever repeated the name of the Lord of Raghus and heard the recitation of Sri Rama's glories here and there. The embodiment of intelligence and bliss, the abode of happiness, Shiva, who is ever free from error, arrogance and desire, roamed about on earth with his heart fixed on Sri Hari, the delight of the whole world. Here He instructed the sages in wisdom and there He extolled the virtues of Sri Rama. Though passionless and all-wise, the Lord was smitten with the pangs of separation from His devotee (Sati)." (Ramcharitmanas 1/74/4, 1/75, 1/75/1).

Normally a person who has lost a dear one would become indifferent, apathetic and introspective. However, even in this mental state, Shiva remained engaged in activities that are uplifting to mankind. He was immersed in the ever-captivating story of Sri Rama, which he preferred to Vedanta (a treatise on renunciation). During one of his journeys, he heard his disciple Kakabhushundi relating the story on the top of Mount Sumeru. He assumed the form of a swan and delightfully listened to the story of Sri Rama.

Shiva's humility and simple-mindedness are illustrated by the fact that without his disciple knowing, and without introducing himself, he listened to the discourse. On such occasions, even renunciates and ascetics seek recognition, but Shiva is an exception.

Sati took birth as Parvati at the home of Himachala, and through the inspiration and advice of Rishi Narada, she began to perform austerities in order to obtain Shiva as her husband. As Sati, there had been no lack of love for Shiva in her heart, but it was her mind that could not be unified with his. She was the daughter of Daksha who was worshipped by all and who possessed both wealth and respect. Being the daughter

of a person of such a high standing, she was married to someone who moved in completely different circles. Shiva's views with regard to things that were regarded as sacred and pure in her home environment were completely different. Things such as ashes, funeral pyres and skulls were regarded as impure by Sati, whilst these objects were sacred to Shiva. Whilst he gave prominence to perception, she believed in tradition, logic and reasoning. That is why Shiva was hesitant in accepting Sati even when she was born as Parvati. Sri Rama had to appear before Shiva to reassure him and request him to marry Parvati.

*Nemu premu sankar kar dekhaa,
Abical hriday bhagati kai rekhaa.
Pragate raame kritagya kripaala,
Roop seel nidhi tej bisaalaa.
Bahu prakaar sankarahi saraahaa,
Tumha binu as bratu ko nirbaahaa.
Bahubidhi raam sivahi samujhaavaa,
Paarbatee kar janmu sunaavaa.
Ati puneet girijaa kai karanee,
Bistar sahit kripaanidhi baranee.*

*Ab binatee mam sunahu siv, jau mo par nij nehu,
Jaai bibaahahu sailajahi, yah moho maage dehu.*

"When Sri Rama saw the self-discipline and affection of Shankara and the indelible stamp of devotion on His heart, the merciful Lord, who fully recognises services rendered to Him, and is a mine of beauty and amiability

and an embodiment of great splendour, appeared before Shankara and extolled Him in ways more than one. 'Who else than You can accomplish such a vow?' he said, Sri Rama admonished Him in many ways and told Him of the birth of Parvati. The Lord in His infinite compassion narrated at full length the most pious doings of Girija. 'Now, Shiva, if You have any affection for Me, listen to My appeal. Go and marry Shailaja (daughter of Himachala): grant this boon to Me.'" (Ramcharitmanas 1/75/2-4,1/76).

Shiva accepted Sri Rama's request but it appears as though he forgot for a while. He was overcome with emotion just thinking of Sri Rama's graciousness. He recollected his and Sati's visit to the hermitage of Agastya where they both heard the discourse on the glories of Sri Rama. It appeared as though she had not paid attention to the discourse since doubts had arisen in her mind and she had the audacity of testing Sri Rama. Yet Sri Rama now wanted him to marry Sati who had incarnated as Parvati. Thus thinking of Sri Rama and remembering His beautiful form, Shiva once again went into deep meditation. Not understanding Shiva's psychological state of mind, the creator of the universe, Brahma, sought the assistance of Kama, the

god of love, to kindle passion in Shiva so that he would marry Parvati. In his effort to do so, Kama, was punished by Shiva by having his body burned to ashes. However, he granted a boon to kama's wife, Rati, that her husband will dominate all even without a body. Moreover, he would be born in a later age as Pradyumna, a son of Lord Krishna. This consoled Rati and she happily went away. Brahma, Vishnu and the other gods then approached Shiva and praised him for the compassion he had shown. They narrated to him the severe penance of Parvati and pleaded with him to marry her. Shiva remembered the words of Sri Rama and agreed to do so.

Although Shiva consented to marriage, he did not accept the traditional wedding attire. However, it was a time for great rejoicing for his attendants. With a great deal of enthusiasm, they began to adorn Shiva according to their own wishes. The attendants of Shiva were world famous for their peculiarities. It is said that in Vaikunta, the abode of Vishnu, everyone residing there has the form of Vishnu himself. Even the gatekeepers, Jaya and Vijaya, have the form of Vishnu. But in Kailasha, the abode of Shiva, the position is completely different. Every attendant has a different

form, shape, dress and vehicle. In Shiva's retinue there is an abundance of diversity. All experience the bliss of liberation without having to undergo any outward change in form. Thus there is true unity in diversity.

It is said that the spirit stage of existence is a very low form of life. Therefore, the scriptures have laid out numerous methods whereby the departed souls can be liberated. However, in Shiva's abode, there are ghosts, spirits and goblins, indicating that his attendants have no desire for outer change after realising the Ultimate Reality, since there is no longer any discrimination in their minds.

The most outstanding feature of a bridegroom is his headgear and there is no specific requirement. The amount spent on headgear depends on the finances of the bridegroom and can be made with anything ranging from flowers to gold with precious stones. But the attendants of Shiva felt that he always uses snakes to adorn himself, so they decided to use snakes to make his headgear. How could he leave out the snakes at this auspicious time of his marriage? A beautiful

description of Shiva as a bridegroom is given in the Ramcharitmanas.

*Sivahi sambhu gan karahi singaaraa,
Jataa mukut ahi mauru savaaraa.
Kundal kankan pahire byaala,
Tan bibhooti pat kehari chaalaa.
Sasi lalaat sundar sir gangaa,
Nayan teeni upbeet bhujangaa.
Garal kantha ur nar sir maalaa,
Asiv besh siv dhaam kripaalaa.
Kar trisool aru damaru biraajaa,
Cale basah cadi baajahi baajaa.*

"The attendants of Shambhu began to adorn their Lord. His matted locks were formed into a crown and decked with a crest of serpents. He had serpents for His earrings and bracelets, smeared His person with ashes and wrapped a lion's skin around His loins. He bore the crescent (moon) on His charming brow and the river Ganga on the crown of His head and had three eyes and a serpent for the sacred thread. His throat was black with the poison swallowed by Him at the beginning of creation and had a wreath of skulls about His neck. Thus clad in a ghastly attire, He was nonetheless an embodiment of blessings and merciful to the core. A trident and a damaru (a small drum shaped like an hour glass) adorned His hands. Shiva rode on a bull while

musical instruments played." (Ramcharitmanas 1/91/1-3).

The goddesses' remarks were full of sarcasm when they saw Shiva. To them it seemed absurd that the tender Uma was going to wed Shiva whose appearance was so forbidding. This came as no surprise, for Maina the mother of Uma, was also taken aback by Shiva and she equated him to the thorny acacia tree. The reaction of those who saw Shiva was either anger, resentment, or ridicule. For most of them it was difficult to come to terms with this union. Their reaction, though, is not relevant as this does not reflect a realistic picture of creation. Even in nature there is no conformity e.g. when one looks at thorny branches of a rose tree, it becomes difficult to imagine that such a tree can produce the delicate, fragrant and beautiful rose. This point is also illustrated by the story of the intelligent traveller who questioned the intelligence of Brahma, the creator when he observed the paradox in nature. As he lay under a huge mango tree, he thought that Brahma was foolish to create such a huge tree that bore such little fruit whereas the pumpkin grew on a creeper that could not even lift itself off the ground. As he was deep in contemplation, a mango fell on his

head and he began to praise the creator, for had that been a pumpkin, his head would have been crushed to pieces. The traveller in the story was quite satisfied with the solution of the problem. But today's logical thinker will say the solution is ludicrous, saying that if the mango tree bore such huge fruit, then no sensible person would rest under it. Or would the creator have allowed the fruit to fall to the ground? In reality, there are innumerable questions like this to which there are no possible solutions. When a person reaches this point, he either becomes an agnostic or he thinks that the ways of the Lord are extremely mysterious. When the solution to a problem is beyond our understanding, there is no use in trying to tire our brains over it. Therefore, to accept the whole of creation as it is, is an indication of wisdom. Non-acceptance only invites sorrow. One should try to change the position if it is possible, but one should always remember that this is not always possible and that one will only be peaceful if one is able to accept that situation. Thinkers have called this destiny or fate. When destiny or fate makes one inactive it can be fatal. But it becomes a boon when one is able to face reality believing in it. Parvati used this mode

of reasoning when she tried to relieve the agony of her mother, Maina. She reassured her thus.

*Jani lehu maatu kalanka karunaa
Pariharahu avsar nahee.
Dukhu sukhu jo likhaa lilaar hamare
Jaab jah paaub tahee.*

"Take no reproach on you; cease lamenting this is no occasion for it. The amount of joy and sorrow that has fallen on my lot I must reap wherever I go."
(Ramcharitmanas 1/96 Chand).

Shiva by his very form inspires one to accept this reality. Even his attendants have no desire for outer change and retain their peculiar form whilst enjoying the highest bliss. Thus, the manner in which they adorn Shiva is in keeping with their blissful state.

Lord Vishnu was also in the marriage procession. He and Shiva are portrayed as great friends, both forming the Trinity with Brahma. Although both are one and the same, they are portrayed as two different entities. There is such a vast difference between the two that it makes it difficult to find common ground. They are different in name, form, actions and philosophy of life, and in many instances, they are portrayed as rivals. Sometimes Shiva wins and sometimes Vishnu wins

and all disputes culminate with pleasant words. Most of their disputes are because of the gods and demons who are constantly involved in conflict. Since Vishnu is the protector of the gods, he invariably sides with them. Shiva on the other hand, has equal regard for both the gods and demons. The number of Shiva devotees, are very large and includes the demons. Vishnu supports the gods for the sake of the welfare of the world, for they have a sense of decorum. As a result of their good deeds, the gods have attained a place in heaven. Ordinary human beings will only perform good deeds if the gods are victorious, and thus by following their example, ordinary human beings will acquire true faith to perform good deeds. Shiva does not see much difference between the gods and the demons. To him, both are immersed in enjoyment. Whereas the gods perform good deeds in order to achieve enjoyment, the demons use both fair and foul means for the same result. However, on numerous occasions, even the gods have used unfair methods to achieve their own selfish goals. Thus, looking at it from this point of view, there is not much difference between the gods and the demons. However, Shiva fulfils the desires of all those who go to him, irrespective of whether they are gods or demons. Listening to the prayers of the gods,

he sometimes confronts the demons, and at other times he does not hesitate to challenge his friend, Lord Vishnu, on behalf of the demons who approach him for help. Shiva is an embodiment of selfless action for he is not affected by the result of these confrontations. Friendship between Vishnu and Shiva is enhanced by these confrontations, and it is at this point that unity between the two can be seen.

Thus Lord Vishnu jubilantly joined the wedding procession on this auspicious occasion. What is amusing is the fact that the seven sages, in order to test her loyalty, had proposed to Uma that she should marry Lord Vishnu instead of Shiva. But the steadfast Uma put a damper on their scheme with her response:

Mahaadev avgun bhavan, bishnu sakal gun dhaam.

Jehi kar manu ram jaahi san, tehi tehee san kaam.

"The great God Shiva may be full of faults and Vishnu may be a repository of all virtues. One is, however, concerned with him alone who gladdens one's heart."
(Ramcharitmanas 1/80).

However, Lord Vishnu himself was not the proposer in this instance. Rather it was Shiva who had urged the seven Rishis to test Parvati.

Lord Vishnu joined the wedding procession and with his humorous remarks created a jovial atmosphere all round.

Bishnu kahaa as bihasi tab, boli sakal disiraaaj.

Nilag hoi calahu sab, nij nij sahit samaaj.

Bar anuhaari baraat na bhaaee,

Hasee karaihahu par pur jaaee.

"God Vishnu then called all the guardians of the different quarters and smilingly said 'Everyone of you should march separately, each with his own retinue. The procession, brothers, is no way worthy of the bridegroom; you will make yourself a butt of ridicule in a strange city!'" (Ramcharitmanas 1/92, 1/92/1).

Shiva laughed at the sarcastic remark of Lord Vishnu. Shiva is known for transgressing the norms of society and he relinquished any honour that accrued from adhering to propriety. People find it easy to transgress propriety but they find it very difficult to endure the condemnation that goes with it. Therefore, it can be fatal if one tries to imitate the actions of Shiva, for it is only Shiva that can turn poison into nectar. Thus, with his sarcastic remark, Lord Vishnu warned the gods who forever desired respect and worship. The gods had been waiting anxiously for this marriage to take place so that their own selfish interest would be served, ie. the destruction of

Tripurasura. Shiva smiled to himself when he heard Lord Vishnu's remarks. Normally, people do not take too well to sarcasm for they do not want to be an object of ridicule. They prefer compliments. However, Shiva's every action gives rise to sarcasm and he seemed to enjoy hearing Vishnu's remarks. He immediately summoned his own attendants and he laughed, for each attendant was a symbol of innuendo and laughter. To Shiva the whole universe was a symbol of poetry in which all the literary motifs are present. Readers enjoy both the loathsome and fearful or dreadful sentiment in poetry, but in real life their reaction is quite different. This paradox is not present in Shiva, for he sees all the sentiments present in his attendants and he accepts them all.

The bride's party enthusiastically awaited the arrival of the bridegroom's procession. When they saw the gods in their splendid attire and a picture of beauty, they wondered how much more magnificent and affluent the groom would be. They were pleased to see Lord Vishnu, but when they saw the attendants of Shiva all their enthusiasm subsided and they were terror-stricken on seeing Shiva himself. Turmoil erupted at the welcome reception.

Seeing the reaction of the welcome party, Shiva could have transformed himself into a handsome person in a moment, but in his view, it is foolish for one to try to escape from the realities of life and dwell in an imaginary world. It was unacceptable to him to have Himachala and Maina entrust their daughter to him under false pretences.

Parvati's nature is beyond the pairs of opposites and there is no confusion in her mind regarding Shiva. She had heard innumerable allegations about him, first by Rishi Narada and then by the seven sages, but her reverence for Shiva remained unchanged. However, Maina's case was different. She had also heard a great deal about Shiva, but she had not given any importance to it for she believed that he would appear in a different form on the auspicious occasion of marriage. But this was not the case as Shiva appeared in his natural form at Himachala's home. With a great deal of enthusiasm, she went to welcome the bridegroom, but returned home full of terror, sorrow and anger.

Shiva on the other hand, was unaffected by Maina's reaction and went to his assigned lodgings. He

realised that it was because of her motherly love that she could not face reality. He also knew that her mental state would change after she had the company of the holy. The seven holy sages and Rishi Narad dispelled the illusion of Maina and she became eager to surrender her daughter to Shiva. When the news spread throughout the city, the momentary gloom and grief disappeared and jubilation filled the air.

The delighted Himachala and Maina bowed at the feet of their daughter after hearing that Uma was the eternal spouse of Shiva. It was through Shiva's compassion that Uma was born in their home in order to give them the opportunity to surrender. A beautiful and elaborate description of the wedding ceremony is given in the Ramcharitmanas.

After the marriage ceremony, a description of the wedded life of Shiva and Parvati is given in the Ramcharitmanas. The sentiment of love or romance as portrayed in the Ramcharitmanas is restricted by propriety, unlike in other works such as Kalidasa's 'Kumara Sambhava'.

With the birth of their son, the problem of the gods was solved and they once again enjoyed the pleasures of heaven. But the greatest benefit of the marriage was the revelation of the Ramcharitmanas, which Shiva had narrated to the worthy and eager Parvati. Tulsidasji presents the entire Ramcharitmanas as a dialogue between Shiva and Parvati. When Parvati showed an interest in Ramkatha, Shiva was overjoyed and he praised her as follows.

*Dhanya dhanya girirajkumaaree,
Tumha samaan nahi kou upkaaree.
Poocheu raghupati kathaa prasangaa,
Sakal lok jag paavani gangaa.*

"You are indeed blessed and worthy of applause, O daughter of the mountain-king; there is no such benefactor as you. You have asked Me to repeat the history of the Lord of Raghus, which is potent enough to sanctify all the spheres even as the Ganga purifies the whole world.'" (Ramcharitmanas 1/111/3,4).

In the Vedas, there are several hymns to Shiva and there are innumerable stories of him in the Puranas. He is depicted as a God who is unapproachable and his name is Rudra. But in the Ramcharitmanas, he is portrayed as a great devotee. He is an abode of

infinite virtue and his character is indescribable. An appropriate description of him is given by Parvati:

*Prabhu samrath sarbagya siv,
Sakal kalaa gun dhaam.
Jog gyaan bairaagya nidhi,
Pranat kalpataru naam.*

"My Lord, You are all-powerful, all-wise and all-blissful; You are a repository of all arts and virtues and a store house of Yoga (askesis), wisdom and dispassion. Your Name is a wish-yielding tree as it were to the suppliant.'" (Ramcharitmanas 1/107).

Shiva is the patron of the arts. Through the sound of his Damaru, the Rishis were able to intuit grammar. The entire creation is destroyed when he opens his third eye. His character is incomparable.

*Carit sindhu girijaa raman, bed na paavahi paaru.
Baranai tulseedaasu kimi, ati matimanda gavaaru.*

"The exploits of Girija's Lord are illimitable like the ocean; even the Vedas cannot reach their end. How, then, can Tulsidasa, a most dull-witted clown, succeed in describing them." (Ramcharitmanas 1/103).

4.3 Hanumanji

The saying 'Greater than God is His true devotee' applies more to Hanumanji than to any other devotee

known to man. Even though there are many temples dedicated to Sri Rama, the number of temples and shrines dedicated to Hanumanji are far greater in number. From the big cities to the tiniest villages his icons will be found even in countless street corners, smeared with vermilion and extracting obeisance from countless devotees even as they go about their daily chores. There are more supernatural events connected with his life and deeds than even those of his illustrious master, Sri Rama. It is said that it was through his inspiration that Tulsidasji went to Chitrakuta where he had the vision of Sri Rama. (Shukla U.D.: 1992: 72). Tulsidasji expressed his adoration and reverence to Hanumanji in his Vinay Patrika where among the deities being worshipped, Hanumanji occupies pride of place. The eleven verses dedicated to Hanumanji in the Vinay Patrika is without a parallel in as far as intimacy and surrender to the Lord is concerned.

In the Ramcharitmanas, where the final scene of Sri Rama with His brothers is depicted, a very touching picture of Hanumanji is included.

*Haran sakal shram prabhu shram paaee,
Gae jahaa seetal avraaee.*

*Bharat deenha nij basan dasaaee,
Baithe prabhu sevahi sab bhaaee.
Maarutsut tab maarut karaee,
Pulak bapush locan jal bharaee.
Hanoomaan sam nahi badbhaagee,
Nahi kou raam caran anuraagee.
Girijaa jaasu preeti sevkaaee,
Baar baar prabhu nij mukh gaaee.*

"The Lord, who is the reliever of all fatigue, Himself felt tired and retired to a cool mango grove, where Bharata spread his own scarf and the Lord took His seat thereon with all His brothers in attendance. The son of the wind-god now began to fan Him; he felt a thrill of joy all over his body and his eyes filled with tears. (Says Shiva,) 'There is no one so blessed nor anyone so devoted to Sri Rama's lotus- feet as Hanuman whose love and service, O daughter of the mountain-king have been repeatedly extolled by the Lord with His own mouth.'" (Ramcharitmanas 7/49/3-5).

The fact that Hanumanji has been singled out for praise, even in a verse which describes him in the company of exalted personalities like Lakshmana, Bharata and Shatrughna, speaks volumes for his greatness. They were bound to serve Sri Rama, as they were His younger brothers. But Hanumanji had no such

obligation, for he was not even a citizen of Ayodhya nor was he of the same caste or race.

Hanumanji had only met Sri Rama after the abduction of Mother Sita when He (Sri Rama) was searching for Her. At their first meeting, the Lord showered so much love on him that it did not seem that they were total strangers meeting for the first time. Sri Rama embraced him and with tears in His eyes said,

*Sunu kapi jiy maanasi jani oonaa,
Tai mam priya lachiman te doonaa.
Samdarasee mohi kah sab kooo,
Sevak priya ananyagati sooo.*

"Listen, O Hanuman: be not depressed at heart; you are twice as dear to Me as Lakshmana. Everyone says that I look upon all with the same eye but a devotee is particularly dear to Me because he too depends on none but Me." (Ramcharitmanas 4/2/4)

Hanumanji is first introduced in the Ramcharitmanas as the minister of Sugriva. After the conflict between Vali and Sugriva, very few monkeys accompanied Sugriva whilst the majority opted to remain with the victorious Vali. In spite of Sugriva's weaknesses, Hanumanji decided to serve him, thereby indicating his firm resolve to uphold the cause of righteousness. Sugriva

too had a great deal of faith and confidence in Hanumanji and it was this faith that later led to his success. In his childhood Hanumanji had made Surya his guru. In return he had promised to serve and protect Surya's son, Sugriva. In the Valmiki Ramayana, Sri Rama asked the sage Agastya whether there was anyone in the world who was as powerful as Hanumanji and if he was more powerful than Vali, then why did he not punish him in order to protect Sugriva? The sage Agastya replied that Hanumanji was indeed the greatest warrior but due to a curse of the sages, he had forgotten about his strength and therefore could not protect Sugriva from the atrocities of Vali.

Sri Rama and Lakshmana, who were searching for Mother Sita approached the Rishyamuka hills. They had been told by Shabari that Sugriva who lived there would assist them in their search. Because of his timid nature, Sugriva could not recognise the Lord when he saw Him approaching. He thought that the two brothers had been sent by Vali to kill him. In order to ascertain their identity, he sent his most trusted minister Hanumanji who was the only monkey skilled in the art of changing his form. Sugriva asked him to take the form of a brahmin and then approach Sri Rama

and Lakshmana. The manner in which Hanumanji questioned Sri Rama and Lakshmana indicated that he did not consider them to be ordinary human beings.

*Ko tumha syaamal gaur sareeraa,
Chatree roop phirahu ban beeraa.
Kathin bhoomi komal pad gaamee,
kavan hetu bicrahu ban swaamee.
Mridul manohar sundar gaataa,
Sahat dusah ban aatap baataa.
Kee tumha teeni dev mah kooo,
Nar naaraayan kee tumha dooo.*

Jag kaaran taaran bhav, bhanjan dharanee bhaar.

Kee tumha akhil bhuvan pati, leenha manuj avtaar.

"Who are you, heroes - one of dark hue, the other fair - that roam the woods disguised as Kshatriyas? Treading the hard ground with your tender feet, wherefore are you wandering in the forest, my masters? Though possessed of delicate, charming and beautiful limbs, how is it that you have exposed yourself to the scorching sun and stormy wind of these wild regions? Do you count in the trinity (viz., Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, the creator, Preserver and Destroyer of the three worlds) or are you the twin sages Nara and Narayana? Or are you the Prime Cause of the world and the Lord of all the spheres, manifested in human form to bridge the ocean of mundane existence and relieve the burden of the earth?" (Ramcharitmanas 4/0/3-5,

4/1). His extraordinary intellect allowed him to perceive their divinity. That is why he is considered as the crest jewel of the wise. It is only a few rare saints who are able to recognise the Lord. It is not very difficult to understand the concept of the formless and attributeless but when the formless manifests itself, then even great sages are mystified.

Hanumanji's appraisal of Sri Rama was remarkable considering that, at that time, the lord was in a pitiable condition having been separated from Mother Sita. How could he be accepted as the all-mighty when His wife had been abducted by a demon and He was in agony, wandering about in search for Her?

When Hanumanji enquired about his identity, Sri Rama replied.

*Kosales dasrath ke jaae,
Ham pitu bacan maani ban aae.
Naam raam lachiman dou bhaaee,
Sang naari sukumaari suhaaee.
Ihaa haree nisicar baidehee,
Bipra phirahi ham khojat tehee.*

"We are the sons of king Dasharatha, the lord of Koshala, and have come to the forest in obedience to our father's command. We two brothers are called by the

names of Rama and Lakshmana. We had with us a pretty and delicate girl, the daughter of King Videha, who has been carried away by some demon here. It is in quest of her that we are moving about, O holy Brahmana.'" (Ramcharitmanas 4/1/1-2).

Even though Sri Rama introduced Himself as an ordinary prince, Hanumanji immediately recognised Him as his Lord and was overcome by emotion. He fell at His feet and sang His praises. He said that it was because of the Lord's Maya that he failed to recognise Him. Hanumanji then revealed his monkey form and fell at the feet of Sri Rama, who picked him up, and with tears in His eyes, embraced him.

Hanumanji told Sri Rama about the plight of Sugriva and suggested that He befriend Sugriva. He then carried Sri Rama and Lakshmana on his shoulders and went to Sugriva. This seemingly ordinary act revealed his extraordinary ability to serve both the Lord and His devotee. Lakshmana was the greatest servant of Sri Rama but his service was exclusive to the Lord. When Sri Rama had instructed him earlier to remain in Ayodhya and serve his guru, father and mothers, he did not agree and wanted only to serve Sri Rama who meant

everything to him. Bharata on the other hand, was not able to directly serve Sri Rama. He carried out Sri Rama's instructions and diligently served his guru, mothers and the citizens of Ayodhya. Hanumanji's service represented service in its entirety. He was able to serve both the Lord as well as His devotees. His personal service to Sri Rama as well as his deeds away from Him, were most inspiring. Thus Hanumanji can be seen as an embodiment of knowledge, devotion and action.

Hanumanji acted as a mediator and concluded an alliance between Sri Rama and Sugriva. Sugriva promised his assistance to find Mother Sita and Sri Rama vowed to kill Vali for his injustice towards Sugriva. After the killing of Vali, Sugriva became king of Kishkindha and Angada, Vali's son, was named crown prince. It was the rainy season, and Sri Rama and Lakshmana spent that period in a mountain cave, close to the kingdom of Kishkindha. Sugriva knew that the search for Mother Sita had to commence as soon as the rainy season was over. But he was so engrossed in his worldly pleasures that he forgot his promise to Sri Rama. Hanumanji as his dedicated minister, was concerned about Sugriva's forgotten promise, and had to firmly remind him about

it. Sri Rama was disappointed with Sugriva and expressed His disappointment to Lakshmana who became enraged and wanted to punish Sugriva. Sri Rama pacified Lakshmana and told him to go and frighten Sugriva and not harm him since he was a friend. Hanumanji diligently carried out the instructions of his king, when asked by Sugriva to take Tara, the wife of Vali, to go and welcome Lakshmana. Lakshmana was so overcome by emotion with the kind reception and loving words of Hanumanji that he forgot that he was supposed to frighten Sugriva. Hanumanji's great oratorical skills can be seen here, where on the one hand, he instilled fear in Sugriva which then inspired devotion in him and on the other hand, he was able to turn the anger of Lakshmana into affection. Lakshmana embraced Sugriva when he went to humbly bow to him.

Large groups of monkeys were sent in all directions to search for Mother Sita. Hanumanji was part of the group of monkeys headed by Angada, who were dispatched to the southerly direction. Hanumanji enjoyed a very cordial relationship with Angada even though he had not been supportive of Vali. Hanumanji always considered the feelings of Angada in all their interactions. After Sita had been located, the monkeys triumphantly

returned to Kishkindha. With great joy and enthusiasm, Angada gave them permission to help themselves to the fruit of the royal orchard of Sugriva. Even though Hanumanji was an obedient servant of the king, he did not oppose Angada, and he too, indulged with the other monkeys.

Many facets of Hanumanji's character were revealed during the search for Mother Sita. Sugriva had chosen his most accomplished warriors to go to the south and gave them instructions for their mission. The monkeys then took leave of their king and departed. Hanumanji was the last one to take leave. Sri Rama knew that Hanumanji would accomplish the task and called him near. He then stroked his head and gave him the ring from His finger saying,

Bahu prakaar seetahi samujhaaehu,

Kahi bal birah begi tum aaehu.

"'Comfort Sita in various ways and return quickly after telling Her of my might and the agony of my heart due to separation from Her.'" (Ramcharitmanas 4/22/6). The monkeys were given a time limit of one month to find Mother Sita or they would have to face death. During their search, they were faced with many difficulties but each time it was Hanumanji who was able to solve

their problems and encouraged them to continue with their mission. At one stage the monkeys were overcome with thirst and were lost in the dense forest. It was Hanumanji who was able to locate a cave from where he had seen birds entering and flying out. He had always remained at the back of the group for it was not in his nature to brush aside others in order to be in the front. Since Angada was afraid to enter the cave, Hanumanji led the way into the cave. There they saw a lady who was an embodiment of austerity. In the Puranas her name is given as Swayamprabha. She was seated near a beautiful temple close to a lake and a garden. The monkeys respectfully bowed to her and she told them to refresh themselves and help themselves to the fruit of the garden. After the monkeys had helped themselves to the fruit and quenched their thirst, they returned to her. She related to them her own story and then reassured them that they would find Mother Sita. She asked them to close their eyes and when they opened their eyes again they found themselves on the sea shore.

Although the monkeys had felt rejuvenated in the cave, they were once again filled with despair when they found themselves in front of the vast ocean. Even

though Swayamprabha had assured them that they would find Sita, they now seemed confused. They expected to find Sita, the moment they opened their eyes, but to their dismay, they found themselves at land's end, with no way forward. They concluded that there was no way that they could find Sita and vowed to go on a fast till death. If they returned to Kishkindha without news of Sita they would have to face death anyway. Then they all sat down on the sea shore with the firm resolve to give up their lives. When the vulture Sampati heard of their vow, he became jubilant and he said that with so many monkeys about to die, he would have food for many days. The monkeys were terrified but Angada reassured them and tried to inspire them by relating the glorious story of Jatayu. Hanumanji had firm belief in Swayamprabha's words and sat quietly throughout. He wanted Angada to react in order for his followers to regain their faith in his leadership. The words of Angada had such an effect on Sampati, who fondly remembered his younger brother Jatayu, that he immediately decided to assist the monkeys in their quest for Sita. With his keen eye sight, Sampati was able to perceive Mother Sita in the Ashoka gardens in Lanka.

Having knowledge of the whereabouts of Mother Sita, the question on everyone's mind was who would cross the vast ocean and make contact with Her? All the monkeys expressed their capabilities but none was strong enough to go to Mother Sita and return with news from Her. Then Jambhavan turned to Hanumanji and said,

*Kahai reechpati sunu hanumaanaa,
Kaa cup saadhi rahehu balvaanaa.
Pavan tanay bal pavan samaanaa,
Budhi bibek bigyaan nidhaanaa.
Kavan so kaaj kathin jag maahee,
Jo nahi hoi taat tumha paahee.
Raam kaaj lagi tav avataaraa.*

"Listen, O mighty Hanuman: how is it that you are keeping mum? A son of the wind-god, you are as strong as your father and are a storehouse of intelligence, discretion and spiritual wisdom. What undertaking in this world is too difficult for you to accomplish, dear child? It is for the service of Sri Rama that you have come down upon earth." (Ramcharitmanas 4/29/2-3). When he heard these words of Jambhavan, Hanumanji grew huge in size and was full of enthusiasm. He realised that his aim in life was to do the work of the Lord (Rama Raja). Hereafter these words became a mantra (sacred formula) to him. He became extremely eager to

accomplish his mission and roaring like a lion, he said,

Leelahi naaghau jalnidhi khaaraa.

Sahit sahaay raavanhi maaree,

Aanau ihaa trikoot upaaree.

Jaamvant mai poochau tohee,

Ucit sikhaavanu deejahu mohee.

"I can easily spring across the salt ocean and killing Ravana with all his army can uproot the Trikuta hill and bring it here. But I ask you, Jambhavan kindly tender me suitable advice.'" (Ramcharitmanas 4/29/4-5).

The brave words of Hanumanji brought joy to his companions who had been full of despair just a little earlier. Jambhavan then told him that he had only to bring back news from Mother Sita after locating Her. Sri Rama would then go to Lanka, exterminate the demons and bring back Sita.

The journey of Hanumanji is one of trials and tribulations, indicating to us that the path of spirituality has many obstacles. Soon after Hanumanji commenced his journey, the golden mountain Mainaka emerged from the depths of the ocean and offered him rest. He respectfully declined the offer saying,

Raam kaaju keenhe binu,

Mohi kahaa bishraam.

"There can be no rest for me till I have accomplished Sri Rama's work." (Ramcharitmanas 5/1). This shows Hanumanji's dedication to the Lord's work.

Soon thereafter Hanumanji faced another obstacle Surasa, the mother of serpents, who, having been sent by the gods, came to test him. The gods knew that the group of monkeys that were sent to the south were very brave, and together they might succeed in finding Mother Sita. But here was Hanumanji, all alone, and they doubted his ability to complete the task. The gods themselves had been defeated by Ravana, and thus, it was natural for them to be concerned about the success of the mission. Surasa wanted to devour Hanumanji but he said to her,

*Raam kaaju kari phiri mai aavau,
Seetaa kai sudhi prabhuhi sunaavau.
Tab tav badan paithihau aae,
Satya kahau mohi jaan de maaee.*

"Let me return after accomplishing Sri Rama's errand and tell my Lord the news of Sita. Then I will approach you and enter your mouth: I tell you the truth. Mother, only let me go now." (Ramcharitmanas 5/1/2-3).

Hanumanji had dedicated his life to serving Sri Rama and felt no desire to keep the body after accomplishing

the Lord's work. He was neither attached to his body nor was he afraid to die. Surasa did not understand his philosophy and became eager to swallow him. She extended her mouth to eight miles and Hanumanji grew to double that size. She continued to extend her mouth and each time Hanumanji doubled himself in size. Eventually when she opened her mouth to eight hundred miles, he assumed a minute form, entered her mouth and re-emerged. Then Surasa became convinced of Hanumanji's strength, skill and wisdom. She blessed him and allowed him to continue his journey.

While on his journey Hanumanji felt that he was being prevented from moving forward. This was due to the demoness Sihika who lived in the depths of the ocean and who was able to catch her victims by grasping their shadows. The ever vigilant Hanumanji, saw through her trickery and he killed her with a single bow. When he reached the shores of Lanka, he was prevented from entering the city by Lankini who threatened to devour him. He immediately knocked her down with a single blow which transformed her entire attitude. She praised Hanumanji and extolled the value of *Satsanga* with such a great spiritual being. She blessed him and

allowed him to enter the city. Hanumanji thus receives the respect, even reverence of people he confronts.

Hanumanji knew that Sita was in the Ashoka Vatika as was stated by Sampati and he knew that his mission was to convey Sri Rama's message to Her. Yet, instead of going directly to Her he surveyed all the buildings in Lanka. He even entered Ravana's splendid palace and saw him buried in deep sleep. This shows that Hanumanji was not simply a messenger of Sri Rama, but he used his own initiative to gather as much information as possible about the heavily fortified city of Lanka. It was essential to ascertain the resources and capabilities of the enemy in the event of impending hostilities.

Hanumanji saw a building that was unlike any other in Lanka. Next to it was a temple, the walls of which were painted with insignia of Lord Vishnu and in the courtyard there were Tulsi plants. Hanumanji was surprised to see such a temple for the demons were known to be worshippers of Shiva and they generally opposed Vishnu, whom they saw as being partial to the gods. Hanumanji was also aware of the fact that the demons were noted for using magic and this could be one

of their tricks. He was still trying to figure out how Ravana could tolerate a Vishnu temple so close to his palace, when he heard the repetition of Sri Rama's name. This was Vibhishana, the younger brother of Ravana. Hanumanji was amazed that a pious man could be staying in the midst of the demons. It was daybreak and Hanumanji assumed the form of a Brahmin and went to meet Vibhishana. After exchanging courtesies, Vibhishana enquired after Hanumanji's identity exclaiming that his heart was filled with exceeding love at his sight. Hanumanji told him all about Sri Rama and also revealed his identity. Vibhishana described his precarious situation in Lanka as being similar to the tongue that lives in the midst of the teeth. Vibhishana was yearning for God's grace, which he felt he will not get, since he belonged to the demon race. Hanumanji assured Vibhishana of the constant affection of the Lord for His devotees.

*Sunahu bibheeshan prabhu kai reetee,
Karahi sadaa sevak par preetee.
Kahahu kavan mai param kuleenaa,
Kapi cancal sabahee vidhi heenaa.
Praat lei jo naam hamaaraa,
Tehi din taahi na milai ahaaraa.
As mai adham sakhaa sunu, mohoo par raghubeer.
Keenhee kripaa sumiri gun, bhare bilocan neer.*

"Listen, Vibhishana: the Lord is ever affectionate to His servants; for such is His wont. Tell me what superior birth can I claim - a frivolous monkey vile in every way, so much so that if anyone mentions our name early in the morning he is sure to go without any food that day. Listen, my friend: though I am so wretched, the Hero of Raghu's race has shown His grace even to me! and his eyes filled with tears as he recalled the Lord's virtues.'" (Ramcharitmanas 5/6/3-4, 5/7) Thus

speaking together of the Lord's wonderful attributes both Hanumanji and Vibhishana derived unspeakable solace. Truly what can be more satisfying to a devotee than to speak and hear about the glories of God. Finally, Hanumanji learnt from Vibhishana that Mother Sita was kept by Ravana in the Ashoka grove.

Hanumanji assumed a minute form and went straight there unobserved. He saw Her sitting weak and sad under the Ashoka tree, continuously repeating Sri Rama's name. He mentally bowed to Her and concealed himself among the leaves of the tree wondering how he should approach Her, considering Her present delicate state of mind. Just then, Ravana arrived there, gaily adorned and accompanied by an entourage of women. He tried to persuade Mother Sita to marry him by inducements of

wealth and power. He even offered to make Mandodari, his chief queen, as well as all the other queens, her handmaids. Mother Sita responded by flatly rejecting Ravana's advances saying that a lotus flower will only blossom at the sight of the sun and not the glow of a firefly. She called Ravana a vile and impudent rogue who should be ashamed of himself for carrying her off when she was alone and unprotected. When Ravana heard himself compared to Sri Rama as a glow-worm to the sun, he became furious, and drawing his sword, rushed forward to kill her. It was queen Mandodari who intervened and pleaded with Ravana not to take upon himself the unpardonable sin of killing an unarmed and helpless woman. Ravana gave Mother Sita an ultimatum to marry him within one month, failing which, he would behead her. He instructed a troop of demonesses to harass and intimidate Mother Sita in every way, in order to persuade Her to become his wife, and he returned with his entourage to his palace.

Whilst the demonesses were intimidating Mother Sita, a demoness by the name of Trijata came and stopped them. She told them of her dream, in which a monkey came and burnt the city of Lanka and the terrible battle in which Ravana was killed and the entire demon army

destroyed by Sri Ram. She proclaimed her belief that the dream would come true in a few days. The demonesses were terrified. They fell at the feet of Mother Sita and then dispersed. In gratitude Mother Sita said to Trijata that she was Her only companion in adversity. She then pleaded to Trijata to put up a pyre and set fire to it, so that she may end Her life. She preferred to become a Sati than be killed at the hands of Ravana. Trijata then clasped Mother Sita's feet and comforted Her by recounting the majesty, might and glory of Sri Rama. In response to Mother Sita's request, she merely made the excuse that no fire could be had at night, with the hope that Mother Sita will change her mind by the morning. Trijata then left for her residence. Mother Sita continued her lamentation. She addressed the Ashoka tree, below which She was sitting, asking it to be true to it's name and take away Her sorrow by supplying Her with fire.

Hanumanji was extremely distressed to see Mother Sita in such a pitiable condition. Tulsidasji describes his reponse as follows:

Dekhi param birahaakul seetaa,

Sochan kapihi kalap sam beetaa.

Kapi kari hriday bicaar, deenhi mudrikaa daari tab.

Janu asok angaar, deenha harashi uthi kar gaheu.

"The moment seemed like an age to Hanuman as he beheld Sita extremely distressed due to Her separation from Her lord. Then, taking thought within himself, Hanuman dropped down the signet ring, as though the Ashoka tree had thrown down a spark (in response to Her prayer). She sprang up with joy and took it in Her hand."
(Ramcharitmanas 5/11/6, 5/12).

Mother Sita recognised the charming ring with the name of Sri Rama most beautifully engraved on it. She wondered how the ring got there knowing that none could conquer Her invincible Lord and take away His ring and neither could the ring be duplicated. When Hanumanji saw that She was confused and agitated, he began to relate the glories of Sri Rama. Mother Sita's grief vanished as She listened to his sweet and melodious words and expressed Her desire to see the narrator. When Hanumanji sprang down next to Her, She was startled and turned away from him. Hanumanji tried to assure Her that he was a messenger from Sri Rama and that he had brought the ring. At first, Mother Sita did not believe him, wondering how could there be this association between a man and a monkey. Hanumanji then

explained the circumstances in which he met the Lord and was deployed as His messenger. Hanumanji's affectionate words gained Mother Sita's trust and She recognised him to be a servant of the all-merciful Lord in thought, word and deed.

*Boodhat birah jaladhi hanumaanaa,
Bhayau taat mo kahu jal jaanaa.
Ab kahu kusal jaau balihaaree,
Anuj sahit sukh bhavan kharaaree.
Komalcit kripaal raghuraaee,
Kapi kehi hetu dharee nituraaee.
Sahaj baani sevak sukh daayak,
Kabahuk surati karat raghunaayak.
Kabahu nayan mam seetal taataa,
Hoihahi nirakhi syaam mridu gaataa.*

"To me who was being drowned in the ocean of desolation, dear Hanuman, you have come as a veritable bark. Now tell me, I adjure you, the welfare of the all-blissful Sri Rama (the slayer of Khara) and His younger brother (Lakshmana). Wherefore has the tender-hearted and compassionate Lord of the Raghus become so hard hearted? Does the Chief of Raghus ever remember me - He who is by natural disposition a source of delight to His servants? Will my eyes, dear Hanuman, be ever gladdened by the sight of His swarthy and delicate

limbs?" (**Ramcharitmanas 5/13/1-3**). Seeing Her distress due to Her separation from Her Lord, Hanumanji spoke to Her in soft and polite accents. He said that Sri Rama and Lakshmana were both doing well except for the fact that the all-merciful Lord was sorrowful because of Her sorrow. Hanumanji assured Her that Sri Rama loved Her twice as much as She loved Him. Hanumanji then related Sri Rama's message, which described the agonising pain He suffered as a result of their separation. As She heard Her Lord's message Mother Sita was so absorbed in love that She lost all consciousness of Her body. Hanumanji then reassured Her that Sri Rama would definitely come to rescue Her and destroy the demon race.

Hanumanji asked Mother Sita to wait patiently for some days more, assuring Her that Sri Rama will destroy the demon host and rescue Her shortly. Mother Sita expressed some misgivings on the matter saying that all the monkeys must be tiny like him, whereas the demons were huge and mighty warriors. On hearing this Hanumanji revealed his natural form, colossal as a mountain of gold, terrible in battle, possessing great strength and full of valour. Mother Sita then took

comfort in Her heart and Hanumanji resumed his diminutive appearance. He said to Mother Sita that monkeys possessed neither great strength nor intelligence, but due to the grace of the Lord, they had become brilliant, mighty and invincible. Hanumanji's words reminded Mother Sita of Sri Rama's majesty, glory and power and She felt gratified at heart to see Hanumanji's boundless devotion. She gave him Her blessing saying:

*Hohu taat bal seel nidhaanaa.
Ajar amar gunanidhi sut hohoo,
Karahu bahut raghunaayak chohoo.*

"May you become a repository of strength and virtue, dear child. May you ever remain immune from old age and death and prove to be a storehouse of good qualities, my son; and may Sri Rama shower His abundant grace on you." (Ramcharitmanas 5/16/1-2). The moment Hanumanji heard the words "May the Lord shower His abundant grace on you", he was utterly overwhelmed with emotion. Again and again he fell at her feet and said,

*ab kritkritya bhayau mai maataa,
aasish tav amogh bikhyaataa.*

"I have now accomplished all that I had to accomplish, my mother; for your blessing, everyone knows, is unfailing." (Ramcharitmanas 5/16/3).

Then Hanumanji said that he was extremely hungry and wanted permission to eat the fruit from nearby trees. Mother Sita was apprehensive because the orchard was guarded by most valiant and mighty demons. But Hanumanji said that he was not afraid of them since he had Her blessings. Seeing Hanumanji perfect in strength and wisdom, She gave him permission to enjoy the luscious fruit, with his heart fixed on Sri Rama's feet. As Hanumanji began to eat the fruit and break down the trees, the guards tried to stop him. He beat them severely and those who remained alive took flight and went to Ravana. This was necessary to instil hope and confidence in Mother Sita who had been harassed and intimidated by the demons. It was also necessary to evoke terror in their minds. The psychological fear that gripped the demons by Hanumanji's actions, could be seen much later when Angada was sent to the court of Ravana.

When Ravana heard what had happened, he sent a number of his champions under the leadership of his son Akshaya Kumara to kill Hanumanji. Hanumanji killed Akshaya Kumara and crushed his warrior companions. A few that survived went back and reported the incident to Ravana. Ravana flew into a rage when he heard of

his son's death and sent his eldest son, the mighty Meghnada, with a contingent of warriors instructing them that Hanumanji should be captured and brought before him. In spite of his rage, Ravana was curious to see the monkey that possessed such great power and who had caused such havoc and he also wanted to ascertain where he had come from. Meghnada waged a furious battle with Hanumanji but Hanumanji proved himself to be superior in strength and valour. Finally, Meghnada resorted to the ultimate weapon, the Brahma Astra, in order to overcome Hanumanji. Even though Hanumanji knew that he had received a boon from Lord Brahma himself, that the Brahma Astra will not be able to harm him, he nevertheless submitted to the weapon out of concern and respect for Lord Brahma's prestige and infinite glory. Hanumanji allowed himself to be captured and taken to Ravana's court. He observed that even the gods and regents of the quarters stood meek with joined palms in front of Ravana, whose superb glory baffled description. Everyone appeared terrified of Ravana. But Hanumanji was no more disturbed at the sight of Ravana's power than a lion would be even in the midst of elephants. Ravana was alarmed to see the fearlessness of Hanumanji. He was even more surprised to see his calmness of expression

for even the gods were terror-stricken in his presence. Ravana was annoyed by the sight of Hanumanji's boldness. He wanted to know who Hanumanji was and where did he get the strength to destroy his orchard and kill so many of his warriors. He asked Hanumanji if he had not heard of his name and power and if he was not afraid of losing his life. Hanumanji replied:

*Sunu raavan brahmaand nikaayaa,
Paai jaasu bal biracati maayaa.
Jaake bal biranci hari eesaa,
Paalat srijat harat dasseesaa.
Jaa bal sees dharat sahasaanan,
And kos samet giri kaanan.
Dharai ji bibidh deh surtraataa,
Tumha se sathanha sikhaavanu daataa.
Hara kodanda kathin jehi bhanjaa,
Tehi samet nrip dal mad ganjaa.
Khar dooshan trisiraa aru baalee,
Badhe sakal atulit balsaalee.
Jaake bal lavales te, jitehu caraacar jhaari.
Taasu doot mai jaa kari, hari aanehu priya naari.*

"Listen, Ravana recall Him by whose might Maya (nature) brings forth numberless universes; by whose might, O ten-headed monster, Brahma, Hari (Vishnu) and Isha (Shiva) carry on their respective function of creation, preservation and destruction; by whose might the thousand-headed serpent (Shesha) supports on his head the entire globe with its mountains and forests;

who assumes various forms in order to protect the gods and teach a lesson to wretches like you; who broke Shiva's unbending bow and crushed with it the pride of a host of princes; who dispatched Khara, Dushana, Trishira and Vali. All unequalled in strength; by an iota of whose might you were able to conquer the entire creation, both animate and inanimate, and whose beloved spouse has been stolen away by you. Know me to be His envoy.'" (Ramcharitmanas 5/20/2-5, 5/21).

Then in reply to the question of whether Hanumanji was aware of Ravana's glory, Hanumanji replied that he knew of Ravana's encounter with Sahasrabahu and Vali. These were instances of Ravana's defeats and failures and were intended to remind Ravana of his own vulnerability and shortcomings. But Ravana laughed away the words of Hanumanji. In reply to Ravana's question as to why he destroyed the orchard and killed the demons, Hanumanji replied that he ate the fruit because he was hungry and he used the uprooted trees to kill the demons in self-defence since they had attacked him first. Hanumanji said that he was not ashamed of being bound and captured by Meghnada, keen as he was to serve the cause of His Lord. Hanumanji told Ravana never to antagonise the Lord, Who is a source of terror even to Yamraj, the

god of death, who devours all created beings, both animate and inanimate, gods as well as demons, and he asked Ravana to return Mother Sita to the Lord. He said,

*Pranatpaal raghunaayak,
karunaa sindhu kharaari.
Gaye saran prabhu raakhihai,
tav aparaadh bisaari.
Raam caran pankaj ur dharahoo,
Lankaa acal raaju tumha karahoo.
Rishi pulasti jasu bimal mayankaa,
Tehi sasi mahu jani hohu kalankaa.
Raam bimukh sampati prabhutaaee,
Jaai rahee paaee binu paaee.
Sajal mool jinha saritanha naahee,
Barshi gaye puni tabahi sukhaahee.
Sunu daskant kahau pan ropee,
Bimukh raam traataa nahi kopee.
Sankar sahas bishnu aj tohee,
Sakahi na raakhi raam kar drohee.*

*Mohmool bahu sool prad, tyaagahu tam abhimaan.
Bhajahu raam raghunaayak, kripaa sindhu bhagvaan.*
"Lord Sri Rama, the slayer of Khara, is a protector of the suppliant and an ocean of compassion. Forgetting your offences, He will give you shelter if you but turn to Him for protection. Install the image of Sri Rama's lotus feet in your heart and enjoy the uninterrupted sovereignty of Lanka. The glory of the sage Pulastya (your grandfather) shines like a moon without its spot;

be not a speck in that moon ... The fortune and lordship of a man who is hostile to Rama eventually leave him even if they stay a while, and are as good as lost if acquired anew. Rivers that have no perennial source get dried up as soon as the rains are over. Listen, O ten-headed Ravana, I tell you on oath; there is none to save him who is opposed to Sri Rama. Shankara, Vishnu and Brahma in their thousands are unable to protect you, an enemy of Sri Rama. Abandon pride, which is the same as Tamoguna (darkness), rooted as it is in ignorance and is a source of considerable pain; and adore Lord Sri Rama, the Chief of the Raghus and an ocean of compassion.'" (Ramcharitmanas 5/22, 5/22/1, 5/22/3-4, 5/23).

Although Hanumanji gave him exceedingly salutary advice, full of devotion, discretion, dispassion and wisdom, the most haughty Ravana laughed and mockingly said,

*Bolaa bihasi mahaa abhimaanee,
Milaa hamahi kapi gur bad gyaanee.
Mrityu nikat aae khal tohee,
Laagesi adham sikhaavan mohee.*

"'We have found a most wise Guru in this monkey!' (turning towards Hanuman he continued) 'Death hangs over your head, O wretch; that is why you have started

exhorting me, O vile monkey.'" (Ramcharitmanas 5/23/1-

2). Ravana then ordered his soldiers to kill Hanumanji and as the demons rushed forward to do so, Vibhishana came in with his counsellors. He pleaded to Ravana that it was against all statecraft to kill an envoy and that he may be punished in some other way. When the other ministers exclaimed to each other that this was sound advice, Ravana laughed and said,

Sunat bihasi bolaa daskandhar,

Ang bhang kari pathaia bandar.

Kapi ke mamtaa pooch par, sabahi kahau samujhaai,

Tel bori pat baandhi puni, paavak dehu lagaai.

"'Alright, the monkey may be sent back mutilated. A monkey is very fond of his tail: I tell you this secret. Therefore, swathe his tail with rags soaked in oil and then set fire to it.'" (Ramcharitmanas 5/23/5,

5/24). Hanumanji smiled to himself when he heard the words of Ravana. The demons carried out Ravana's command and wrapped more and more rags soaked in oil as Hanumanji playfully grew his tail longer. The citizens thronged to see the fun. They kicked Hanumanji and jeered at him. With beating of drums and clapping of hands they took him around the city and then set fire to his tail. When Hanumanji saw the fire blazing, he immediately assumed a diminutive size, and slipping out of his bonds, he sprang to the attics of the golden

palaces to the dismay of the demons. At that moment, impelled by God, all the forty-nine winds began to bluster. Hanumanji roared with a loud laugh and swelled to such a size that he seemed to touch the sky.

Though colossal in size, Hanumanji appeared most nimble bodied as he ran and sprang from palace to palace. The city was ablaze and the demons were at their wit's end. Terrible flames burst forth and piteous cries were heard everywhere. In the twinkling of an eye Hanumanji burnt down the whole city. With the exception of Vibhishana's house, every building was ablaze. Hanumanji went unscathed because he was the messenger of Him who created fire itself. He burnt the whole of Lanka from one end to the other and then leapt into the ocean. After extinguishing his tail and relieving his fatigue, Hanumanji resumed his diminutive form and stood before Mother Sita with joined palms. He asked Mother Sita to give him some token to take back to Sri Rama. She thereupon unfastened Her crest jewel and gave it to Hanumanji who gladly received it. She asked Hanumanji to convey to the Lord the message that even though He was all-sufficient; yet because of His vow of kindness to the afflicted, He must relieve Her of Her grievous distress. Furthermore, She asked Hanumanji to

convey to the Lord that if He did not arrive there within a month, He would not find Her alive. After entrusting this message to Hanumanji, Mother Sita then expressed Her pain of being left alone again after Hanumanji left. Hanumanji reassured Mother Sita and consoled Her in many ways. He bowed his head to Her lotus feet and set forth to meet Sri Rama.

Taking a leap across the ocean he reached the opposite shore and greeted his companions with a shrill cry of joy. They were all delighted to see Hanumanji and felt as if they had been born anew. He wore a cheerful countenance and his body shone with a brilliance which left no doubt in their minds that he had completed his mission. Then they all gladly proceeded to Kishkindha. They went to Sugriva and bowed their heads at his feet. Sugriva learnt from them that it was Hanumanji who had accomplished everything. Sugriva embraced Hanumanji again and again and he took them all to Sri Rama and Lakshmana. When Sri Rama saw them approaching, He knew immediately that their mission had been duly accomplished. He met them all cordially. Then Jambhavan related to Sri Rama the charming exploits of Hanumanji and the all-merciful Lord felt much delighted at heart to hear them. In His joy, Sri Rama embraced

Hanumanji and asked him about the condition of Mother Sita. Hanumanji very skilfully reported to Sri Rama, the desperate condition Mother Sita was in. Hanumanji told Him that he was sure that they would be successful in bringing Her back. Sri Rama then said to Hanumanji,

*Sunu kapi tohi samaan upkaaree,
Nahi kou sur nar muni tanudhaaree.
Prati upkaar karau kaa toraa,
Sanmukh hoi na sakat man moraa.
Sunu sut tohi urin mai naahee,
Dekheu kari bicaar man maahee.*

"No one endowed with a body - a god, human being or sage - has put me under such obligation, Hanuman, as you have done. Even my mind shrinks to face you; how, then, can I repay your obligation? Listen, my son: I have thought over the question and concluded that the debt which I owe you cannot be repaid."

(Ramcharitmanas 5/31/3-4). Tulsidasji describes Hanumanji's reaction to Sri Rama's praises as follows.

*Suni prabhu bacan biloki mukh, gaat harashi hanumant.
Caran pareu premaakul, traahi traahi bhagavant.*

"Even as Hanuman listened to the words of his lord and gazed on His countenance he experienced a thrill of joy all over his body and fell at His feet, overwhelmed with love and crying: 'Save me, save me (from the tentacles of egoism), my lord.'" (Ramcharitmanas

5/32). Again and again the Lord tried to raise him up, but he was so absorbed in love that he would not rise. The lotus hand of the Lord rested on Hanumanji's head.

Lord Shiva, who was relating the story to Mother Parvati, was overcome with emotion as He called to mind the scene being described by Him. It must be remembered that it was Lord Shiva Himself who had taken the form of Hanumanji and was remembering His own emotional experience when relating the story. However, Lord Shiva quickly recovered Himself and resumed the most charming narrative.

The Lord picked up Hanumanji and embraced him. He held Hanumanji by the hand, and seating him close to Him, asked Hanumanji how he had burned Ravana's stronghold of Lanka, which was a most impregnable fortress. Finding his lord pleased, Hanumanji replied in words altogether free from pride, that a monkey's greatest valour lies in jumping from tree to tree. The ability to leap across the ocean, burn the golden city of Lanka, and kill the demon host was all due to the Lord's might. Hanumanji did not want any credit for this. He said that nothing is unattainable for one who enjoys the Lord's grace. Hanumanji then asked from the

Lord the boon of unceasing devotion which is a source of supreme bliss. The Lord granted this wish of Hanumanji.

Hanumanji's deeds on the battlefield of Lanka were indeed remarkable. He came to the rescue of the monkeys on several occasions. Sri Rama was surprised to see the prowess, valour and courage displayed by Hanuman. Both Sri Rama and Lakshmana possessed divine weapons whereas Hanuman used his intellect and superhuman strength to overcome the enemy. In the Gitavali Ramayana, Tulsidasji described how Hanumanji used the enemy's elephants and horses as weapons. He destroyed those who tried to attack from behind by extending his tail and knocking them to the ground. According to the Gitavali Ramayana, the success in the battle was largely due to the extraordinary deeds of Hanumanji.

Hanumanji played a vital role in saving the life of Lakshmana when he was struck down by the powerful *shakti* weapon of Meghnada. Sri Rama was full of despair and lost all hope of winning the battle whilst he lamented that life without Lakshmana would be worthless. It was at this trying time that Hanumanji

came to the rescue. He single-handedly completed three impossible tasks. The physician, Sushena, who had to be consulted, lived in the heavily fortified city of Lanka. He entered the city and carried off Sushena together with his house. Sushena then prescribed a herb which was only available on the Drona mountains, thousands of miles away. Even more difficult was the fact that the herb had to be brought before sunrise. Hanumanji made the impossible possible by bringing the physician, then defeating the demon Kalanemi who had been sent by Ravana to prevent him from returning with the herb, and then bringing back the herb within the prescribed time limit. When searching for the herb, he could not recognise it amongst the other vegetation. But he did not despair and, knowing that time was of the essence, carried off the whole mountain. Meanwhile, seeing Sri Rama extremely distressed and lamenting like an ordinary human being, the host of monkeys were filled with despair. When Hanumanji arrived, everyone was relieved and filled with joy. Sri Rama then embraced Hanumanji and was exceedingly grateful to him for saving the life of Lakshmana.

After the battle in Lanka, Hanumanji returned with Sri Rama to Ayodhya. On several occasions, Sri Rama

expressed His gratitude to Hanumanji and told him that he was deeply indebted to him. Amongst the qualities of Hanumanji was his steadfast adherence to duty. This quality reaches its peak six months after the coronation of Sri Rama as king of Ayodhya. Sri Rama felt that the monkeys and bears had been separated from their families for a long period and it was now time for them to return home. To everyone's surprise, Hanumanji, who was so devoted to the Lord, silently accepted His decision and left. Angada, the crown prince of Kishkindha, caught hold of the feet of Sri Rama and begged to remain with Him. However, Sri Rama lovingly reassured him and sent him off. A short while into the journey, Hanumanji approached Sugriva and asked his permission to return and serve Sri Rama for some days more. Sugriva was overcome by Hanumanji's humility and loyalty and he granted him leave to remain forever in the service of the Lord. He knew that Hanumanji wanted to serve the Lord more than anything else but was willing to relinquish the desire due to his steadfast loyalty.

The characterisation of Hanumanji in the Ramcharitmanas follows the ideal of the supreme devotee. Sri Rama had recognised Hanumanji's qualities and placed reliance on

him to undertake the most urgent and difficult task of finding Mother Sita. Sri Rama entrusted his signet ring to Hanumanji, and made him the bearer of and privy to his innermost thoughts and feelings about Sita. Celibate Hanumanji carried this information as the outpourings of the Divine towards the Jiva, i.e. Sita. He duly conveyed this message to Mother Sita, and dutifully brought back Her sentiments to Sri Rama. Hanumanji's learning, spirituality and devotion to Sri Rama made him a suitable instrument of deliverance to many people - Sugriva, Sita, Lakshmana (by bringing the Sanjivani) and Bharata who was contemplating death if Sri Rama did not return on time. In all these services, Hanumanji was actually serving Sri Rama Himself, who declared that He would never be able to repay His debt to Hanumanji. Thus Hanumanji, of Divine origin himself, became the leading devotee and eternal representative of Sri Rama in the world.

4.4 Parshurama

The episode in the Ramcharitmanas dealing with Sri Parshurama at first glance seems relatively small and unimportant in the context of the Ramcharitmanas as a whole. However, a careful analysis of this event

proves it to be very thought provoking and of great significance.

From the point of view of presentation, it can be said without any doubt, that the dramatic impact produced by the confrontation of Sri Rama and Sri Parshurama and their ensuing dialogue is without a parallel in the entire epic. When all the kings and princes who had gathered on the occasion of the bow sacrifice in order to contest for the hand of Mother Sita had tried their best and failed in their efforts to even pick up the bow, then the success of Sri Rama, who so easily picked up the bow and broke it in two, seemed to bring this entire episode to a climax. This being so, the episode ought to have been brought to a happy conclusion with the garlanding of Sri Rama by Mother Sita.

But this did not happen. The contestants who had failed to win the hand of Mother Sita were not prepared to accept their defeat, and were ready to challenge Sri Rama as well as king Janaka in order to take Mother Sita by force. It seemed as if war was imminent and the happy ending to the episode was to be spoiled by bloodshed.

Just at this moment of tension, Sri Parshurama made his appearance on the scene. He was furious at the news of the breaking of the bow of Lord Shiva, who was his Guru, and angrily demanded from king Janaka the identity of the person who had dared to do this. He further threatened to destroy the entire kingdom of king Janaka if he failed to hand over the culprit :

*Ati ris bole bacan kathoraa,
Kahu jad janak dhanush kai toraa.
Begi dekhaau moodh na ta aajoo,
Ultaoo mahi jah lahi tav raajoo.*

"Tell me, O stupid Janaka, who has broken the bow? Show him at once, or this very day I will overthrow the whole tract of land over which your dominion extends.'"
(Ramcharitmanas 1/269/2).

He viewed the breaking of the bow as an insult to his Guru and threatened to kill the miscreant. Sri Rama immediately bowed His head before Parshurama and in a respectful tone said that the breaker of the bow could be none other than his (Parshurama's) servant. But Parshurama was not satisfied with this humble submission of Sri Rama, saying that a servant will render service and not perform acts of enmity. He further reiterated that whosoever broke the bow will be regarded as an enemy and severely dealt with.

At this point, Lakshmana got into the fray and began to taunt Parshurama, thereby making him even more furious. Finally, Parshurama got so furious that he was about to strike Lakshmana's head off with his axe. Sri Rama interceded and asked Parshurama to forgive Lakshmana, and at the same time, admitted to breaking the bow himself and offered himself for any punishment that Parshurama would care to mete out to him.

Parshurama challenged Sri Rama to a duel, but Sri Rama respectfully declined saying that as a Kshatriya, he considered it sacrilegious to raise arms against a Brahman. Parshurama accused Sri Rama of cowardice and again demanded that Sri Rama do battle against him or else be slaughtered like a sacrificial animal. Sri Rama replied that, being born in a Kshatriya lineage of great heroes, he was not afraid of battle and was prepared to face even Yamraj, the god of Death, in mortal combat. He further said that he, together with all the members of his lineage, derived their natural fearlessness from their submission and humility towards Brahmans, whose blessings they ever sought.

Parshurama then perceived the extraordinary combination of fearlessness and sincere humility in Sri Rama and a

great doubt entered his mind about the true identity of this rare personality. In order to dispel his doubts, he asked Sri Rama to string the bow of Lord Vishnu which he had with him, and as he stretched out his hand offering the bow to Sri Rama, he was astonished to perceive that the bow left his hand of its own accord and went into the hands of Sri Rama, who then fitted an arrow and effortlessly drew it. Parshurama was now convinced that Sri Rama was none other than the almighty Lord in human semblance and he begged forgiveness for his harsh words. He then offered worship to the Lord and departed to do penance.

*Suni mridu goodh bacan raghupati ke,
Ughare patal parsudhar mati ke.
Raam ramaapati kar dhanu lehoo,
Khaicahu mitai mor sandehoo.
Det caapu aapuhi cali gayao,
Parsuraam man bismay bhayao.
Jaanaa raam prabhaau tab, pulak praphullit gaat.
Jori paani bole bacan, hriday na premu amaata.
Anucit bahut kaheu agyaataa,
Chamahu chamaamandir dou bhraataa.
Kahi jay jay jay raghukulketoo,
Bhrigupati gaye banahi tapatoo.*

"When he heard the soft yet profound words of Sri Rama, Parshurama's mind was disillusioned. 'O Rama, take this bow of Ramā's lord and draw it, so that my doubts may be cleared.' As Parshurama offered his bow, it

passed into Rama's hands of its own accord, and Parshurama felt amazed at this. He then recognized Sri Rama's might and his whole frame was thrilled with joy and his hair stood on end. Joining his palms together he addressed the following words to Sri Rama, his heart bursting with emotion:- '... In my ignorance, I have said much that was unseemly; therefore pardon me, both brothers, abodes of forgiveness that You are. Glory, glory, all glory to the Chief of Raghu's race!' So saying, the lord of Bhrigus withdrew to the forest to practise penance.'" (Ramcharitmanas 1/283/3-4, 1/284, 1/284/3-4).

A careful analysis of the foregoing episode raises some burning questions with regard to its significance. It is well known that both Parshurama and Sri Rama are incarnations of God, i.e. the sixth and seventh incarnations respectively. Whilst all the other incarnations followed each other after long intervals, these two are the only ones that were contemporaneous. All incarnations have as their aim the destruction of evildoers and the protection of the pious. This is clearly stated in the Srimad Bhagavad Gita in the words of Lord Krishna in chapter 4 verses 7 and 8:

Yadaa yadaa hi dharmasya glaanirbhavati bhaarata,

Abhyutthaanamadharmasya tadaatmaanam srijaamyaham.
Paritraanaaya saadhoonaam vinaashaaya ca dushkritaam,
Dharmasansthaapanarthaya sambhavaami yuge yuge.
**"Whenever there is a decline in dharma and a rise of
adharma, then I embody myself, O Bharata. For the
protection of the good, for the destruction of the
wicked and for the establishment of dharma, I am born
from age to age.'"**

When the gods, sages and Earth itself could no longer bear the wicked oppression of Ravana, the Lord promised to take human form and overcome this evil. The question arises as to why was it necessary for the advent of Sri Rama when Parshurama, also an incarnation, was already present at that time. The situation becomes even more puzzling when we observe that Parshurama enters into conflict with Sri Rama instead of Ravana, and we observe that Sri Rama has to subdue Parshurama first even before destroying Ravana.

In order to resolve this issue and get a better understanding of the matter, it will be necessary for us to look into some of the details of Parshurama's earlier life. This information can be gleaned from a

range of religious literature including the Srimad Bhaagvad and other Puranas.

Parshurama was the youngest son of the sage Jamadagni and Renuka Devi. One day, a powerful king called Kartavirya Sahasrarjuna, together with his hunting party, visited the ashrama of sage Jamadagni. The king was astounded to see the royal reception and feast offered to him by the sage. When he learnt that the sage was able to do this with the power of the heavenly cow he had with him, the king forcefully took the cow from the sage and returned with it to his palace.

Parshurama was not in the ashram at that time. When he learnt of what had happened, he angrily stormed into the palace of Sahasrarjuna, and after slaying him with his axe, returned with the divine cow to his father's ashram. Sage Jamadagni was not pleased when he received the news of the king's death at the hands of his son. He severely criticised him for his rash actions. He said to Parshurama that, even though he was a brave hero, he ought not to have killed the king who might have on certain occasions behaved improperly, but was nevertheless the nurturer and protector of all the citizens of the state. A Brahman's glory lies in the

virtue of forgiveness through which he is able to win all hearts and gain reverence in the world. Sage Jamadagni informed Parshurama that having resorted to violence as a Brahman, he had committed a grave sin for which it will be necessary to do penance in order to erase the sin. This indicates how tolerant, forgiving and far-sighted the sage was. Even though Sahasrarjuna had treated him with such disrespect and humiliation, he nevertheless was ready to overlook the lapses on the part of the king, and forgive him without any reservation.

The sage believed in the principle of bringing about transformation in even the minds of the transgressors by treating them with love and compassion. Parshurama on the other hand, believed only in the principle of justice and the necessity of meting out punishment where it was deserved. In this way, this episode deals with the eternal question of justice and punishment on one hand and compassion and forgiveness on the other.

Even though Parshurama differed radically from his father with regard to this question, he nevertheless was prepared to give his father the benefit of the doubt and obediently went off to do penance at places

of pilgrimage. As far as he was concerned, this chapter of his life had come to an end.

But destiny did not concur and the situation was aggravated further by the sons of Sahasrarjuna who wanted to avenge their father's death. They refused to accept their father's death as the outcome of his own actions, and they resorted to further acts of violence in retaliation for Parshurama's actions. They attacked the sage Jamadagni in his ashram and, catching hold of him by his hair while he was in meditation, dragged him on the ashram grounds and mercilessly put him to death. The screaming mother of Parshurama helplessly looked on.

When Parshurama returned from his penance and learnt of what had happened, his fury knew no bounds. He had always believed in the principle of justice and punishment, but out of reverence for his father he was prepared to accept that this was perhaps a failing in himself. That is why he repented of his previous actions and followed his father's commands to do penitence. But now, as far as he was concerned, it was not only his father but the entire ideal of compassion and forgiveness that was put to death. If the sons of

Sahasrarjuna had challenged him for his deed of killing their father, he would have gladly accepted the challenge and engaged in battle with them being the brave warrior that he was. He would not even have blamed them for wanting to seek revenge on account of their father's death.

But the irony of fate was that they exacted their revenge on that great sage who believed all his life in forgiveness and compassion. He now began to see forgiveness and compassion as elements of weakness in human beings, and was fully convinced that it was only through harsh justice and punishment that order can be maintained in the world. He became even more perplexed by the fact that the control of justice and punishment lay in the hands of the Kshatriya rulers, the very same people who were unjust and oppressive. He firmly resolved to revolutionise the entire system that had become an aberration in society.

Ordinarily, when an individual feels that the ruling class is oppressive and evil, he keeps silent on account of his incapacity to do anything about it. But this was not so in the case of Sri Parshurama who was blessed with limitless strength and courage. He began

to feel that all the rulers of the earth were collaborators in his father's murder, for not only had they failed to punish the sons of Sahasrarjuna, but they had not even raised a voice of protest against their deed. As far as he was concerned, this was not a conflict between two families but between two castes. The fact is that the ruling class of that time was incensed by the death of king Sahasrarjuna at the hands of a Brahman lad, and they saw it as a challenge to their own authority that a Brahman boy could have the audacity to kill a great king. When the sons of Sahasrarjuna had killed sage Jamadagni, all the kings felt that justice had been served. That is why Parshurama felt that all the kings of the earth were culpable for the murder of his father and he resolved to punish them all. He did this by exterminating all the Kshatriya kings of the earth, not once, but 21 times.

This clearly shows that Parshurama was an extremist and a person of anger and violence. But he also had some very good qualities. He never acted out of selfishness and personal desires but only in the course of what he thought was his duty. He never married and observed strict celibacy all his life. After killing the kings

he did not appropriate their kingdoms for himself but always gifted them to the Brahmans. He led a well-disciplined life of self-sacrifice and service, but his extreme views made him unbalanced in his approach to life.

None of the other sages agreed with his opinions and he remained alone in his cause. That is why, in spite of his best efforts, the Kshatriya race was not totally obliterated from the earth, for the other sages were successful to some extent in protecting those kings who were their proteges. Examples are sage Vashishta who protected the Raghu clan and sage Sadananda who protected the Janaka clan. He could clearly see that through this protection, the Kshatriya kings had again risen in power, but he satisfied himself in the knowledge that they did not have the courage to raise their heads before him. He was widely respected on account of his noble qualities, but his mercilessness made him the object of terror amongst men.

He gradually became aloof from the events of the world, so much so that he did not even make an attempt to protect the sages from the atrocities of Ravana. He did not see Ravana as a wicked king, but rather as a

Brahman and a devotee of Lord Shiva, his own Guru. He therefore felt some kinship with Ravana and overlooked his atrocious deeds. Ravana's attacks on the kings during his world conquest must have appealed to him as proper action.

When Sri Rama broke the bow of Lord Shiva, Parshurama saw this as an act of impertinence by some Kshatriya prince. It now becomes clear that whereas Parshurama initially came on earth to resolve the problem of cruel and arrogant kings, he later became a problem himself on earth because of his unbalanced views. It is for this reason that Parshurama is referred to in the scriptures as an Aavesh Avataar, meaning an Avataar only for a specific period of time. That is why, in spite of his presence on earth, it became necessary for another Avataar to manifest on earth in the form of Sri Rama.

The paradox of Parshurama was that the Avataar of Sri Ram took place in a Kshatriya family. It was as if the Lord was rejecting Parshurama's philosophy of life vis a vis the principal of justice and punishment. To link any attribute, whether it be a virtue or a vice to any particular group of people is an indication of

immaturity and narrow sightedness. This one sided view of Parshurama not only rendered him incapable of resolving the problems of the world, but he ended up actually compounding them.

Sri Rama, however, combines in himself the perfect synthesis of justice and compassion as well as punishment and forgiveness. When this truth finally dawned on the mind of Parshurama, he totally accepted the supremacy of Sri Rama, and in submitting to the Lord, he restored within himself that balance which is necessary for a healthy spiritual life.

The characterisation of Parshurama serves to drive home the message that is much needed in mankind. If we think deeply into the matter and look carefully at our own selves, I believe that we will all find a little bit of Parshurama in our selves. We unwittingly adopt views of partiality and prejudice when we identify ourselves as a particular group whether it be based on nationality, race, religion, language, class or caste. These views blind us to the extent that we are unable to make any real progress in spiritual life. The Ramcharitmanas, however, reaffirms our faith in the glory of Divine Grace and its power to redeem us in such circumstances

and enables us to render true service to society and to God.

One approach to the advent of Parshurama on the Dhanush Yajna scene, in addition to demonstrating the superiority of Sri Rama's humble grace as opposed to Parshurama's terror, was to reinforce the validity of Sri Rama's right to Sita. When the bow broke with a sound piercing the heavens, Parshurama approached Janaka regarding the culprit. Janaka was mortally terrified of the outcome of Parshurama's intervention: the end of the prospects of Sita's marriage, death of Rama, Lakshmana and all the contenders to the hand of Sita in short the end of life as they knew it.

Even more terror-stricken were the princes who came from far and wide; and who were planning to reverse the results of the contest - meaning that Sri Rama could not marry Sita. They knew of Parshurama's anti-Kshatriya vow; even rejoiced that Parshurama might kill Rama, thus opening the way for them.

Whilst everybody watched in stunned silence, Sri Rama won Parshurama over with His graciousness, and Parshurama acknowledged Him as the Lord.

This put an end to any plans by the disgruntled princes, and the marriage went ahead.

This deus ex machina aspect of Parshurama in the Ramcharitmanas is significant.

CHAPTER FIVE

SAINTS AND SAGES IN THE RAMCHARITMANAS

5.1 Introduction

Saints and sages play a paramount role in Hindu religion and culture. The eternal truth and the hidden secrets of life are revealed to them when they are in Samadhi or the transcendental state of meditational intuition, and these are recorded by them in the form of Mantras for the benefit of mankind. They are the leaders of Hindu society giving guidance and inspiration by precept and practice. It is but natural for them to interact with the Lord, when He takes human birth, at the highest possible level.

In the Ramcharitmanas, Sri Rama is shown to have great love and reverence for all the saints and sages of His times. He held them in the highest esteem and He looked forward to meeting them whenever this was possible. When he was banished from Ayodhya, Sri Rama saw this as a golden opportunity to visit the saints and sages who lived in forest hermitages, pay homage to them and seek their blessings.

He made both Vashishta and Vishwamitra, two of the greatest sages of His time, into His Gurus or spiritual preceptors and in doing so eliminated their past rivalry and united them with a common purpose.

This chapter of the work will analyse the lives of Vashishta and Vishwamitra as depicted in the Ramcharitmanas and assess their contribution to the welfare of the world.

5.2 Vashishta

Of all the great sages described in the Ramcharitmanas, the position of the sage Vashishta is unequalled. He was an enlightened ascetic and an expert in the art of performing Vedic sacrifices. He was also a great philosopher. "Yoga Vashishta" composed by him bears testimony to his philosophical insight. Thus, we find that Vashishta was a great teacher of both Karma Yoga and Gyana Yoga. However, in the Ramcharitmanas, he is portrayed as a great and humble devotee. On the one hand we see him instructing his students on the essence of righteousness and austerity and on the other hand we see him willing to learn from a worthy student.

Austerity and renunciation are the main characteristics of the sage. Through penance, sages strive to control their senses and they remain aloof to material possessions. They prefer to live in isolation rather than in a city. Sages that become priests are looked down upon. When the king Ikshavaku approached Vashishta to become his family priest, Vashishta turned him down. But when Brahma told him that the Lord Himself would be born in that dynasty, he willingly accepted the position knowing that it would ultimately lead him to God. Thus by accepting to become the family priest of the Ikshavaku clan, one clearly sees that Vashishta was inspired by devotion to the Lord. He knew that the ultimate aim of life was to attain God realisation, and if he could achieve his goal by becoming a priest, then so be it:

Tab mai hriday bicaaraa, jog jagya brat daan.
Jaa kahu karia so paihau, dharma na ehi sam aan.
"Then I thought to myself, (Through this very office) I shall attain to Him who is the object of Yogic practices, performance of sacrifices, religious vows and charity. Thus there can be no other vocation like this.'" (Ramcharitmanas 7/48).

Even though he had accepted to become the priest of the solar dynasty, and having resolved all their problems

efficiently, Vashishta eagerly awaited the appearance of the Lord. When king Dasharatha went to him and related his sorrow of not having a son, Vashishta reassured him and advised him to perform a sacrifice. He requested for the sage Shringi to perform the sacrifice, even though he himself was capable of doing it. Thus he ensured that the material desire of king Dasharatha turned into a spiritual one:

*Ek baar bhoopati man maahee,
Bhai galaani more sut naahee.
Gur griha gayau turat mahipaalaa,
Caran laagi kari binay bisaalaa.
Nij dukh sukh sab gurahi sunaayau,
Kahi vasishta bahubidhi samujhaayau.
Dharau dheer hoihi sut caaree,
Tribhuvan bidit bhagat bhay haaree.
Sringeri rishihi basishta bolaavaa,
Putrakaam subh jagya karaavaa.
Bhagati sahit muni aahuti deenhe,
Pragate agini caroo kar leenhe.
Jo basishta kachu hriday bicaaraa,
Sakal kaaju bhaa siddha tumhaaraa.
Yah habi baati dehu nrip jaaee,
Jathaa jog jehi bhaag banaaee.*

"One day the king was sad at heart that he had no son. He hastened to his preceptor's residence and, falling at his feet, made many entreaties. He told the Guru all his joys and sorrows; the sage Vashishta comforted him in many ways and said, 'Take heart and wait; you

will have four sons, who will be known throughout the three worlds and will rid the devotees of their fears.' Then Vashishta summoned the sage Shringi and had a noble sacrifice performed by him for the birth of a son to the king. When the sage devoutly offered oblations into the sacred fire, the fire-god appeared with an offering of rice boiled with milk in his hand. Said the fire god, 'Whatever Vashishta has contemplated for you that object is fully accomplished. Take this oblation, O king, and divide it in such proportions as you think fit.'" (Ramcharitmanas 1/188/1-4).

After the birth of the four sons, king Dasharatha was extremely grateful to Vashishta. Both before the birth of the boys and at their naming ceremony, Vashishta tried to emphasise to the king that these were no ordinary boys.

*Inha ke naam anek anoopaa,
Mai nripa kahab swamati anuroopaa.
Jo aanand sindhu sukhraasee,
Seekar te trailok supaasee.
So sukh dhaam raam as naamaa,
Akhil lok daayak bishraamaa.
Biswa bharan poshan kar joee,
Taakar naam bharat as hoee.
Jaake sumiran te ripu naasaa,
Naam satruhan bed prakaasaa.
Lacchan dhaam raam priya, sakal jagat aadhaar.*

Guru basishta tehi raakhaa, lachiman naam udaar.
" 'Their names are many and unique; yet O king I will declare them according to my own lights. This eldest boy of yours, who is an ocean of felicity and an embodiment of joy, a particle of which fills the three worlds with delight, has for His name, 'Rama', the very home of bliss and the comforter of all the worlds. Your second son, who sustains and supports the universe, will be called 'Bharata'; while he whose very thought destroys one's enemies is celebrated in the Vedas by the name of 'Shatrughan'.' He who is the abode of noble characteristics, the beloved of Sri Rama and the mainstay of the whole universe, was given by Guru Vashishta the splendid name of Lakshmana" (Ramcaritmanas 1/196/2-4, 1/197).

The foresight of Vashishta is clearly indicated by the way in which he named the four sons of king Dasharatha, for he knew the destiny of the boys and thus named them appropriately. After the sacred thread ceremony (Upanayana Sanskara) king Dasharatha sent the boys to the hermitage of Vashishta to begin their studies, indicating the trust the king had in the knowledge of the Sage. After their education was completed the princes returned with the Sage to Ayodhya.

The first indication of his ability to foresee the future was at the arrival of the Sage Vishwamitra in Ayodhya. It is well known that these two great sages were extremely staunch opponents of each other and it was unimaginable that these two could ever reconcile and become friends. However, the impossible became possible when Vishwamitra realised that it was not possible for him to destroy the demons Maricha and Subahu who had spread a great deal of terror amongst the sages living in the forest. He had learned through meditation that the Lord had taken birth in the Raghu dynasty and that he would relieve the distress of the afflicted. Thus for the sake of the world he decided to go to Ayodhya, not allowing his pride to get in the way, even though he knew that his old opponent was the family priest of the Raghu dynasty. Vishwamitra believed that Vashishta would not be an obstacle as far as the good of the world was concerned.

The conflict between the Brahmin Vashishta and the Kshatriya Vishwamitra had begun when the latter was a great king. He had gone to the hermitage of Vashishta and was so impressed by the wish-fulfilling cow, Kamdhenu, that he tried all means to get it. Vashishta refused to part with the cow and thus their rivalry

began. This rivalry inspired the king to give up his kingdom and perform spiritual disciplines in order to defeat Vashishta. He performed rigorous penance over a long period and raised himself to such a high spiritual level that the compassionate Vashishta declared him to be his equal calling him Vishwamitra (the friend of the world). (Rajagopalacarya : 1982 : 20-21).

When Vishwamitra approached king Dasharatha for help in destroying the demons the king agreed to assist him in every possible way but his filial love would not allow him to part with his sons. He said,

Kah nisicar ati ghor kathoraa,

Kah sundar sut param kisoraa.

"My lovely boys, who are yet too young, are no match for the most hideous and relentless demons."
(Ramcharitmanas 1/207/3).

However, had it not been for the compassionate Vashishta, Vishwamitra would have been unsuccessful in convincing king Dasharatha to allow Rama and Lakshmana to accompany him to the forest. Vashishta pleaded with the king to send the princes with Vishwamitra to the forest for he knew that this would be the best training ground for the future.

Vashishta had originally refused to let Vishwamitra have the sacred cow Kamdhenu because his motive at that time was a selfish one. However, now he had come with a plea on behalf of humanity. It is indeed only a few rare persons who can evolve from being selfish to becoming selfless. Even though Vishwamitra had killed the hundred sons of Vashishta, Vashishta had no feelings of vengeance in his heart for Vishwamitra. This quality of Vashishta is indeed an exception as far as human beings are concerned. After the marriage of the princes, the magnanimity of Vashishta is again revealed when he praises Vishwamitra in the royal court:

*Muni man agam gaadhisut karanee,
Mudit basishta bipul bidhi baranee.*

*Bole baamdeu sab saacee,
Keerati kalit lok tihu maacee.
Sunī aanandu bhayau sab kaahoo,
Raam lakhan ur adhik uchaahoo.*

"In the course of his narration the sage gladly recounted in diverse ways the doings of Vishwamitra, that surpassed the imagination even of hermits. Vamadeva (another family preceptor of King Dasharatha) observed that whatever Vashishta said was true and that Vishwamitra's fair renown had pervaded all the three spheres. Everyone rejoiced to hear that, while Sri

Rama and Lakshmana were all the more delighted at heart". (Ramcharitmanas 1/358/3-4) .

There was great joy in Ayodhya after the marriage of the princes and festivities carried on for a long time. The king announced the coronation of Sri Rama as crown prince of Ayodhya, but queen Kaikeyi then demanded his banishment. It was only the sage Vashishta who was able to guide the kingdom after the turmoil that gripped the city and had left the citizens in great despair. Sri Rama requested Vashishta to take charge of the kingdom, for king Dasharatha was heart broken and not in a position to carry out his duties. At this trying time, Vashishta was faced with the problem of having to bear the stigma of failure, for it was on his instruction that preparations for the coronation were taking place. Now when everything was in disarray, then the question of his knowledge of the future would become an issue. But he was not concerned about personal fame or infamy. On the one hand, he had enthusiastically welcomed king Dasharatha's decision of Sri Rama's coronation, and on the other hand, he indicated to Sri Rama that there was a possibility of there being obstacles to this plan:

*Bhoop sajeu abhishek samaajoo,
Caahat den tumhahi jubraajoo.*

*Raam karahu sab sanjam aajoo,
Jau bidhi kusal nibaahai kaaजू.*

"The king has made preparations for the installation ceremony; he would invest You with regal powers. Rama, You should observe religious austerity today so that God may bring this affair to a happy conclusion."
(Ramcharitmanas 2/9/1-2).

However, Vashishta knew that Sri Rama was not influenced by any desire for the kingdom and was merely fulfilling a duty.

Before Sri Rama left for the forest, he lovingly bowed to his guru and left his servants in his care.

*Daasee daas bolaaि bahoree,
Gurahi saupi bole kar joree.
Sab kai saar sambhaar gosaaee,
Karabi janak jananee kee naaee.*

"He then called His men-servants and maid-servants and entrusting them to the care of His Guru spoke to them with joined palms, 'My lord, pray look after them and tend them as their own mother and father.'"
(Ramcharitmanas 2/79/3).

The diplomacy of the sage Vashishta is clearly revealed when, after the demise of king Dasharatha, he sent messengers to the maternal kingdom of Kaikeyi in order

to bring back Bharata and Shatrughna. The messengers were specifically instructed not to reveal the news of the king's death for he was well aware of the political sensitivities, which were prevalent under these circumstances. Queen Kaikeyi's father had taken a promise from king Dasharatha before his marriage that the son of his daughter would become king of Ayodhya. At that time Dasharatha had no sons so he willingly gave his word. However, circumstances had changed thereafter which put an end to the question of succession. Even Kaikeyi had abandoned such a desire and had welcomed the news of Sri Rama's coronation. It was only after Manthra had reminded her of the boons Dasharatha had given to her and the miserable plight she would find herself in if Sri Rama were to become king that she decided to use her boons as inspired by the evil Manthra. Bharata was now going to be crowned king of Ayodhya as per the boon asked for by Kaikeyi. If the news of Dasharatha's death was given to Bharata, then his grandfather would send representatives to Ayodhya to oversee the coronation of Bharata. The people of Ayodhya were in extreme distress due to the banishment of Sri Rama as well as the death of the king. It would be difficult to imagine the hostility with which they would receive any entourage that

accompanied Bharata, especially after the deplorable acts of his mother. They may even see this as a plot hatched by her father. Under such circumstances, Bharata would not get any cooperation from his citizens who would always doubt him. It is for these reasons that Vashishta kept the news of the death of king Dasharatha from Bharata.

After the princes' arrival in Ayodhya, the final rites for the king were performed. Thereafter in the royal court, Vashishta asked Bharata to accept the kingdom. As the guru he could instruct him to do so, but his tone was more of a request rather than an order. He gave an extensive and balanced account of righteousness, the duties of various classes of people and finally about devotion to God. He considered those who abandon these virtues as being pitiable. His entire exposé revealed a thread of harmony which he himself had lived throughout his life. Through his excellent discourse, he hoped that Bharata would accept the throne. However, with great humility and in a voice choked with emotion, Bharata disclosed his inability to accept such a proposal. The citizens of Ayodhya also agreed with Bharata and felt that he had lived up to their expectations. Vashishta did not feel

that his authority was being slighted by this reaction of both the citizens and Bharata, and without any hesitation, he accepted Bharata's proposal to go to the forest and bring back Sri Rama who he felt was the rightful heir of the kingdom.

Henceforth, Vashishta was completely influenced by Bharata's emotional state of mind. This fact is clearly evident in Vashishta's behaviour towards Nishad. On the journey to Chitrakuta, Nishad came to welcome Bharata to Shringverpur. As was customary then, Nishad greeted Vashishta from a distance and Vashishta gave him his blessings. Thereafter, Vashishta introduced Bharata to Nishad stating his name and status. He also mentioned that Nishad was a very dear friend of Sri Rama, clearly indicating that Gods love is beyond class and caste. Vashishta himself, as a teacher, decided to conform to the norms of society and kept his distance. Bharata on the other hand, abandoned his chariot and ran to embrace Nishad, his heart overflowing with divine love. Bharata's action would have had an adverse effect on Vashishta had Vashishta harboured any sense of pride of his authority as a preceptor. However, Bharata's reaction created such an effect that Vashishta felt that the true

meaning of righteousness was embodied in Bharata's character, for he had risen above social norms, totally disregarding class and caste and only recognised the love that Nishad had for Sri Rama. It is extremely rare to reach such a state of love without discrimination. One such person was Vashishta, who at first due to social custom, preferred to stay far from Nishad. Later however, when an opportune moment arose, he abandoned his former stance and established the true glory of divine love. In Chitrakuta, Nishad again prostrated to Vashishta from a distance, but Vashishta was not satisfied with merely blessing him from afar. When Nishad prostrated on the ground in greeting as a mark of respect,

*Raamsakhaa rishi barbas bhetaa,
Janu mahi luthat saneh sametaa.
Raghupati bhagati sumangal moolaa,
Nabh saraahi sur barisahi phoolaa.
Ehi sam nipat neec kou naahee,
Bad basishta sam kou jag maahee.
Jehi lakhi lakhanahu te adhik,
Mile mudit muniraau.
So seetaapati bhajan ko,
Pragat prataap prabhaau.*

"the sage however, forcibly embraced him as a friend of Sri Rama; it seemed as though he had gathered up love lying scattered on the ground. 'Devotion to the Lord of Raghus is the root of all choice blessings!' With

these words of praise the gods in heaven rained flowers. "There is no one so utterly vile as this man; and who is so great as Vashishta in this world? Yet on seeing him the king of sages embraced him with greater joy than he did Lakshmana. Such is the palpable glory and effect of adoring Sita's lord!" (Ramcharitmanas 2/242/3-4, 2/243).

At special occasions in the Ramcharitmanas, we see gods showering flowers. However, one would expect to see such an occurrence when Sri Rama and Bharata met or when Vashishta and Sri Rama met. But this did not happen. Vashishta, a Brahmin, rose above all social norms and picked up an untouchable and embraced him. He thus becomes a symbol of true divine love. The most surprising reaction of this incident was the influence it had on the citizens of Ayodhya. They immediately follow Vashishta's actions and begin to embrace Nishad. Upon contemplation, one finds that this incident, which seems rather ordinary, has a great deal of significance. It is easy for a few to break tradition and rise to great spiritual heights, but it is very difficult to change the behaviour of the masses who are bound by norms and tradition. Bharata's meeting with Nishad at Shringverpur was to them an exception.

However, at Chitrakuta they felt that Vashishta's behaviour was now the rule and not the exception and then they followed his example.

Vashishta was greatly influenced by Bharata's love and self-surrender to Sri Rama. This was clearly revealed at the assemblies held at Chitrakuta where his sentimental state was evident. Even when Sri Rama had decided that he would comply with whatever Vashishta and king Janaka decided, Vashishta leaves the final say to Bharata. Without seeming to take sides, he manipulates Sri Rama towards exile and Bharata to the throne.

*Satya sandh paalak shruti setoo,
Raam janamu jag mangal hetoo.*

**"Sri Rama is true to His word and maintains the standard of morality set up by the Vedas; His very advent is a source of blessing to the world."
(Ramcharitmanas 2/253/2).**

After it was decided that Bharata would return and rule over the kingdom until Sri Rama's return, Bharata asked Sri Rama for instructions regarding the ruling of the kingdom. Sri Rama then expressed his deep faith in Vashishta saying that they did not have to worry as

long as they had their Guru with them for with his blessings all their problems would be solved.

Bharata's influence on Vashishta continued even after they returned to Ayodhya. Bharata wanted to live a life of penance in Nandigrama and conduct his royal duties from there. For this he sought the permission of Vashishta, as he wanted to ascertain whether his action was proper. Vashishta's reply constituted the highest testimony any teacher could ever confer on his disciple:

*Bole muni tan pulaki sapemaa.
Samujhab kahab karab tumha joe,
Dharam saaru jag hoihi soe.*

"Thrilling over with love the sage replied, 'Whatever you think, speak or do will be the essence of piety in this world.'" (Ramcharitmanas 2/322/4).

Bharata followed Vashishta's instructions in all matters regarding the state.

Sri Rama bestowed the greatest honour on Vashishta when he returned to Ayodhya after his victory in Lanka and introduced His friends to His Guru saying:

*Muni pad laagahu sakal sikhaae.
Gur basishta kulpoojya hamaare,
Inha kee kripaa danuj ran maare.*

"Clasp the feet of My Guru, the sage Vashishta, who is worthy of adoration to our whole race. It was by his grace that all the demons were slain in battle."
(Ramcharitmanas 7/7/3).

The glorious character of Vashishta as the world teacher could have been concluded with the above attributes, but Tulsidasji had yet another aspect of his character to reveal. He wanted to present Vashishta as a true devotee. One day, after the coronation of Sri Rama, Vashishta met with him alone, thus fulfilling an inner desire. As always, Sri Rama welcomed and worshipped him. Vashishta clearly stated that he did not see Sri Rama as a prince or a disciple, but saw Him as the Supreme Lord of the universe. He further stated that it was for this reason that he had accepted the vocation of a family priest after his father, Brahma, had told him that the Supreme Spirit will be born in the Raghu family. After praising the Lord to his hearts content he finally departed after asking the following boon from Sri Rama:

Naath ek bar maagau, raam kripaa kari dehu.
Janma janma prabhu pad kamal, kabahu ghatai jani nehu.
"My lord, I would ask one boon; grant it in Your mercy, Rama. May my love for Your lotus-feet, O Lord,

never flag in the course of my future births.'"
(Ramcharitmanas 7/49).

5.3 Vishwamitra

The development of the unique character of the sage Vishwamitra is described in the Puranas and other ancient works. He was born in a Kshatriya family as the son of king Gadhi. When he inherited the kingdom, he ruled as a competent and worthy king and he had great respect for saints and sages as was traditional in those days. The king had a duty to protect the sages who fulfilled the spiritual needs of society. On the other hand the king was responsible for preserving order and fulfilling the material needs of the subjects. Thus we see that the renunciate who possesses nothing and the king who has complete power compliment each other in order to give completeness to society.

One day Vishwamitra went to pay homage to the sage Vashishta at his Ashram. The latter gave the king a royal welcome. If he wanted, he as a renunciate could have served him fruits and berries. But he felt that a guest should be given due honour and, since he had the

means, he served the king appropriately. Through severe penance, Vashishta had acquired a divine cow that could fulfil all desires. He did not use the cow to fulfil his own needs. However, he felt that he should not impose his lifestyle onto others. The king was accustomed to having the very best so he decided to provide him with royal cuisine (Rajagopalacarya C: 1982: 20-21). However, this goodwill had an adverse effect on the king for when he realised what miracles the cow could perform, he became impatient to acquire it. He felt that such a cow could be put to maximum use in a palace and not in a hermitage. Vashishta refused to part with the cow for he knew very well that such unlimited power would be dangerous in the hands of a worldly person. Had Vishwamitra accepted the sage's position and returned to the kingdom there would have been no conflict between the two. However, this incident gave rise to a series of conflicts which clearly demonstrated Vishwamitra's conduct as extremely inappropriate. He was prepared to go to any length to fulfil his desires and the number of obstacles he had to face did not stop him from pursuing his objective. He used all his kingly might against Vashishta but the latter's spiritual power always kept him a step ahead. Vishwamitra could not accept defeat and eventually

abandoned his mighty kingdom and took to a path of penance in order to defeat Vashishta. Under no circumstances did he want to be inferior for having been born in a Kshatriya family. Thus by his severe austerities he was able to rise above caste consciousness even though he faced a great deal of opposition and a number of obstacles. Eventually he became a great seer and intuited a Mantra.

Vishwamitra's greatness was clearly revealed after the manifestation of Sri Rama. In the Ramcharitmanas, he is introduced as a great saint who was always engaged in penance, sacrifices and Yoga at his Ashrama. However, he and his fellow saints were constantly being disturbed by demons who did not allow the sages to complete their sacrifices. Vishwamitra was determined to complete the sacrifices for the sake of the world and decided to seek the assistance of the Lord who he knew had incarnated Himself.

*Tab munibar man keenha bicaaraa,
Prabhu avatareu haran mahi bhaaraa.
Ehoo mis dekhau pad jaaee,
Kari binatee aanau dou bhaaee.
Gyaan biraag sakal gun ayanaa,
So prabhu mai dekhav bhari nayanaa.*

"The great sage then said to himself, 'The Lord has already taken birth in order to relieve the earth of

its burden. Let me make the outrage of the demons an excuse of seeing His feet and after due entreaty bring the two brothers here. I will regale my eyes with the sight of Him who is the abode of knowledge, dispassion and all virtues.'" (Ramcharitmanas 1/205/3-4).

The thought of the Lord filled Vishwamitra with such devotion that he forgot his past enmity with Vashishta even though he knew that Sri Rama was the disciple of Vashishta. Although Vishwamitra had tirelessly endeavoured to become a Brahmin, he now ironically sought the assistance of the Lord who was born in a Kshatriya family.

At Ayodhya, he was given a grand welcome by king Dasharatha who felt extremely blessed to have such an extraordinary guest. King Dasharatha was curious to know the reason for the sage's visit and assured him that he would fulfil his desires immediately. Vishwamitra's reply surprised the king when he gave his reason for his visit.

*Asur samooh sataavahi mohee,
Mai jaacan aayau nrip tohee.
Anuj samet dehu raghunaathaa,
Nisicar badh mai hon sanaathaa.*

*Dehu bhoop man harshit, tajahu moh agyaan.
Dharma sujas prabhu tumha kau, inha kah ati kalyaan.*

"Hosts of demons molest me, O king; I have therefore come to ask something of you. Let me have the Lord of Raghus, Sri Rama, with His younger brother (Lakshmana); with the extermination of the demons I will feel secure. Entrust them to me, O king, with a cheerful heart; let no infatuation or ignorance stand in your way. You will earn religious merit and fair renown thereby, and your sons will be highly blessed.'" (Ramcharitmanas 1/206/5, 1/207).

Vishwamitra knew that it would not be easy for the king to part with Sri Rama for his filial love was very strong. Dasharatha immediately refused Vishwamitra's proposal. In the Puranas, Vishwamitra was well known for having a short temper. If anyone went against his wishes he would become extremely angry and often he would curse them. However, in the Ramcharitmanas there seems to be a change in his attitude. Instead of becoming angry, he is delighted to see the king's filial love for Sri Rama. At this juncture, Vashishta intervened and advised the king that he should not be overcome by attachment for his sons and that it was for the good of the boys that they should accompany Vishwamitra. Vashishta had imparted all his knowledge to the princes but he knew that it was Vishwamitra's

guidance and knowledge that would eventually help Sri Rama accomplish his mission on earth. Eventually king Dasharatha gave his permission for Rama and Lakshmana to accompany Vishwamitra thereby fulfilling the desires of the sage.

Vishwamitra then happily proceeded to his hermitage with the princes. On the way they encountered the demoness Taraka, the mother of the wicked Maricha and Subahu. Taraka, who was vicious by nature, not only terrorised the sages but also encouraged her sons to harass the sages and destroy their sacrifices. However, neither she nor her sons could demoralise Vishwamitra in spite of all their efforts. When she saw Vishwamitra with the princes, she became extremely angry and was about to attack them when the sage instructed Sri Rama to kill her with his arrows. Vishwamitra himself had taken a vow to adhere to the path of non-violence yet, for the sake of the world, he had to resort to violence. But he also knew that an act of violence should be performed by one who was not a violent person or one who did not propagate violence. That is why he did not hesitate to instruct Sri Rama to kill Taraka. Ordinarily a Kshatriya would not kill a woman since she is regarded as weak and tender. But

when she herself becomes violent and wicked then she forsakes the protection due to her. Sri Rama followed the instruction of Vishwamitra and killed Taraka with a single arrow. Vishwamitra witnessed the destruction of Taraka and the compassion of Sri Rama who also liberated her.

A feeling of self-surrender arose in the mind of Vishwamitra and he then imparted all his knowledge of the Shastras as well as that of warfare to Sri Rama. By this act he himself felt fulfilled.

Tab rishi nij naathahi jiy ceenhee,

Bidyaaanidhi kahu bidyaa deenhee.

Jaate laag na chuuaa pipaasaa,

Atulit bal tanu tej prakaasaa.

Aayudh sarba samarpi kai, prabhu nij aashram aani,

Kand mool phal bhojan, deenha bhagati hit jaani.

"Then the seer Vishwamitra, while recognising his Lord as the fountain of knowledge, imparted to Him a sacred formula which armed Him against hunger and thirst and endowed Him with unequalled strength of body and a glow of vigour. Making over to Him every kind of weapon the sage took the Lord to his own hermitage and devoutly gave Him bulbs, roots and fruits to eat, perceiving in Him his greatest friend." (Ramcharitmanas 1/208/4, 1/209).

The next day Sri Rama and Lakshmana destroyed the demons who had been constantly preventing the sacrifice of the sages from being completed. However, in spite of the sacrifice being completed, Vishwamitra did not take the princes back to Ayodhya but instead he got them to accompany him to Mithila. Here king Janaka had arranged a bridal contest whereby a suitable groom would be chosen for his daughter Sita. Vishwamitra did not regard this as just a social event for he knew that the marriage that would take place would not be an ordinary one.

On their way to Mithila, they came across a forsaken hermitage. When the princes enquired about it, Vishwamitra narrated to them the story of Ahalya who had been cursed to become a stone. However, Vishwamitra saw this as an act of compassion rather than that of punishment. He was well aware of the divinity of Sri Rama and asked Him to have compassion on her:

Gautam naari shraap bas, upal deh dhari dheer.

Caran kamal raj caahati, kripaa karahu raghubeer.

"'Gautama's consort, having assumed the form of a stone under a curse, seeks with patience the dust of Your lotus-feet; show mercy to her, O Hero of Raghu's race.'" (Ramcharitmanas 1/210). Without any

hesitation Sri Rama obediently carried out the instructions of the sage for he knew that this would benefit Ahalya. In the Ramcharitmanas, Vishwamitra told Sri Rama merely to show compassion. Tulsidasji did not go into detail when describing this episode, as he knew that most readers are acquainted with the incident. It also shows his decorum when dealing with such matters. However, in the Valmiki Ramayana Ahalya's transgression is described in detail in order to clarify the incident.

When Vishwamitra together with the princes arrived at Mithila, he adopted a different approach from that he had done in Ayodhya. Instead of going straight to the palace, he halted at a mango grove on the outskirts of the city. Here he had come as an invited guest to bestow his blessings whereas he had gone to Ayodhya to ask a favour. Many seekers had often come to the great king Janaka who was well known for his generosity as well as his spiritual wisdom. He was an enlightened king who had perceived God in His formless aspect. Here Vishwamitra had brought God in an embodied form with him that is why he wanted Janaka himself to come and meet Sri Rama and to experience delight in God with form. The meeting of Sri Rama and Janaka was arranged

in an outstanding manner by Vishwamitra. He had sent the two brothers to see the flower garden when Janaka came to welcome him. After the meeting of the sages and the king and when the whole gathering had settled down, Sri Rama and Lakshmana arrived. A remarkable scene then unfolded. The entire assembly rose to welcome them. They were all captivated by the extraordinary beauty of the princes and gazed at them without blinking. The entire scene was ethereal and unprecedented but it was what Vishwamitra had anticipated and he took delight in witnessing such an event. That is why he had sent the princes away for if they were present when Janaka and his entourage arrived, they would have had to stand in order to greet him. Sri Rama would have readily done so but Vishwamitra did not want that to happen. Then he would have had to introduce them as the sons of a great emperor. He wanted to present to Janaka God with form whose attraction was such that even unknown persons were drawn towards him and felt blessed by His sight. King Janaka was overcome with love and he enquired about the princes for he knew that no ordinary being could have such an effect on him. He said,

*Kahahu naath sundar dou baalak,
Munikul tilak ki nripkul paalak.
Brahma jo nigam neti kahi gaavaa,*

*Ubhay besh dhari kee soi aavaa.
Sahaj biraagroop manu moraa,
Thakit hot jimi canda cakoraa.
Taate prabhu poochau satibhaaoo,
Kahahu naath jani karahu duraaoo.
Inhahi bilokat ati anuraagaa,
Barbas brahmasukhahi man tyaagaa.*

"'Tell me, my lord: Are these two pretty boys the ornament of a sage's family or the bulwarks of some royal dynasty? Or, is it that Brahma (the absolute), whom the Vedas describe in negative terms such as 'Not that' (Neti), has appeared in a dual form? My mind, which is dispassion itself in its natural form, is enraptured at their sight even as the Chakora bird is transported with joy at the sight of the moon. Therefore, Sir, I earnestly enquire of you: tell me the truth, my Lord; hide nothing from me. Deeply attached to them at their very sight, my mind has perforce renounced the joy of absorption into Brahma.'" (Ramcharitmanas 1/215/1-3).

King Janaka's reaction gave a great deal of satisfaction to Vishwamitra. Here we see another aspect of his character. He was renowned as a seer who had intuited mantras but here he is presented as an exponent of devotion. He knew that Yoga and knowledge would satisfy only a few and he saw devotion as a means

of solving the problems of mankind. Vishwamitra seemed to have transformed from being a serious renunciate after his meeting with Sri Rama. He joyfully replied to king Janaka's enquiry thus:

*Bacan tumhaar na hoi aleekaa.
E priya sabahi jahaa lagi praanee,
Man musukaahi raamu suni baanee.
Raghukul mani dasrath ke jaae,
Mam hit laagi nares pathaae.*

Raamu lakhanu dou bandhubar, roop seel bal dhaam.

Makh raakheu sabu saakhi jagu, jite asur sangraam.

"'You have spoken well, O king; your words can never be untrue. Whatever living beings there are in this world, they all love these boys.' Sri Rama smiled within Himself on hearing these words. 'They are the sons of king Dasharatha, the jewel of Raghu's race; the king has sent them for my cause. These two noble brothers, Rama and Lakshmana, are the embodiment of beauty, virtue and strength. The whole world knows that they conquered the demons in battle and protected my sacrifice from harm.'" (Ramcharitmanas 1/215/3-4, 1/216).

Another aspect of the character of Vishwamitra emerges when Sri Rama requests permission from him to visit the city of Mithila in order to fulfil the desire of Lakshmana. Sri Rama felt some hesitation in asking

permission for he felt that it would not be appropriate to leave the company of the sages with whom they had come. He therefore carefully chooses his words so as not to offend the sage. In spite of being a strict disciplinarian, Vishwamitra's reaction was greatly influenced by the humble request of Sri Rama and he said:

Kas na raam tumha raakhahu neetee.

Dharam destu paalak tumha taataa,

Prem bibas sevak sukh daataa.

Jaai dekhi aavahu nagaru, sukh nidhaan dou bhaai.

Karahu suphal sab ke nayan, sundar badan dekhaai.

"It is no wonder, Rama, that You should respect good manners. You are the upholder of the moral code, my son, and bring joy to Your servants out of love for them. Go, blissful pair of brothers, and having seen the city come back. Bless the eyes of all by showing them your charming countenance." (Ramcharitmanas 1/217/4, 1/218).

A liberal aspect of the character of Vishwamitra is portrayed in the Ramcharitmanas at the end of the flower garden episode. Sri Rama and Lakshmana had gone to pick flowers for worship for the sage. At the flower garden, Sri Rama saw mother Sita and he was captivated by her incomparable beauty and modesty. As a result he was late in taking the flowers to his guru.

However, the latter did not ask for any explanation for the delay. But the guileless Sri Rama related the entire episode and unhesitatingly opened his heart to him. He felt great satisfaction in confiding in his guru. Earlier in the flower garden, Sri Rama had expressed his feelings for Sita to Lakshmana who had remained silent. Now again Vishwamitra silently listened and after his worship, he blessed the princes thereby showing his approval.

Early the next morning, Vishwamitra and the princes attended the bow sacrifice or bridal contest. Innumerable kings in all their splendour had already assembled in the arena. Each king was accompanied by praise singers who introduced them, glorified their actions and sang their praises. Sri Rama and Lakshmana were sons of a mighty emperor yet they entered with a host of sages. After they had taken their seats, king Janaka sent for Sita. Thereafter the contest began. All the kings tried to lift the bow but were unsuccessful. King Janaka's speech reflected his sorrow and agitation when he stated that had he known that the earth was bereft of brave men, he would not have taken such a vow. He felt greatly pained that his beautiful and virtuous daughter would have to remain

unmarried. After the king had spoken, a deadly silence and a sense of immense despair filled the entire assembly. Suddenly the brave voice of Lakshmana echoed forth, breaking the silence and shaking the audience with his powerful speech. This was the first time that a youth had challenged king Janaka for his utterances. The entire assembly was stunned at the audacity of Lakshmana but Vishwamitra's reaction was totally different.

*Gur raghupati sab muni man maahee,
Mudit bhae puni puni pulkaahee.*

"The preceptor (Vishwamitra), the Lord of the Raghus and all the hermits were glad of heart and thrilled all over again and again." (Ramcharitmanas 1/253/2).

Lakshmana's reaction to Janaka's speech was one of opposing injustice and impropriety. This pleased Vishwamitra for he knew that Sri Rama was very tolerant and that he would not react in such a manner. Lakshmana on the other hand, was outspoken and intolerant thereby complementing the character of Sri Rama. Both Sri Rama and Lakshmana were necessary to bring a solution to the problem Janaka was facing and when Vishwamitra instructed Sri Rama to lift the bow, he went forth immediately.

Biswaamitra samay subh jaanee,

*Bole ati sanehmay baanee.
Uthahu raam bhanjahu bhavcaapaa,
Metahu taat janak paritaapaa.
Suni guru bacan caran siru naavaa,
Harashu bishaadu na kachu ur aavaa.*

**"Perceiving that it was a propitious time, Vishwamitra said in most endearing terms, 'Up, Rama, break the bow of Siva and relieve Janaka, my boy, of his anguish.' On hearing the Guru's words Sri Rama bowed His head at his feet; there was no joy or sorrow in his heart."
(Ramcharitmanas 1/253/3-4).**

Here the question can be asked as to why Vishwamitra did not at the outset request Sri Rama to lift the bow and easily solve the problem. Why was there such a delay? If one looks at it carefully, one can find many reasons for his thoughtful decision. By his skilful act, he was able to establish Sri Rama as being the most powerful amongst the assembled kings. No ordinary person could achieve this status in such a short time. Had Sri Rama broken the bow at the outset, the other kings would have asserted that had they been given the opportunity, they would have succeeded in winning the hand of Sita. But after every king had tried and failed, Sri Rama's heroism shone forth thereby establishing him as the conqueror of the world.

Before the birth of the four princes when king Dasharatha was sad at not having a son, he had gone to his guru Vashishta who had reassured him saying,

*Dharahu dheer hoihahi sut caaree,
Tribhuvan bidit bhagat bhay haaree.*

"Take heart and wait; you will have four sons, who will be known throughout the three worlds and will rid the devotees of their fears.'" (Ramcharitmanas 1/188/2). It was Vishwamitra who was able to give this blessing its fruition.

Had he succeeded at the commencement of the bow sacrifice, people would only recognise him as one with great strength. By remaining silent even after Janaka's speech, his modesty and self-discipline can be seen. Even after Lakshmana's outburst, he remained silent and only went forward when Vishwamitra instructed him to do so.

After the breaking of the bow, king Janaka was greatly relieved and he asked Vishwamitra for further instructions regarding the marriage ceremony to which Vishwamitra replied:

*Kah muni sunu naranaath prabeenaa,
Rahaa bibaahu caap aadheena.
Tootatahee dhanu bhayau bibaahoo,
Sur nar naag bidit sab kaahoo.*

Tadapi jaai tumha karahu ab, jathaa bans byavahaaru.

Boojhi bipra kulbriddha gur, bed bidit aacaaru.

"Listen, wise king; the marriage depended on the bow, and took place directly the bow broke, as is well-known to all, including gods, human beings and Nagas. Nevertheless you now go and perform according to the family usage whatever practices are prescribed in the Veda, after consulting the Brahmins, the elders of your family, and your own preceptor (Satananda).'"
(Ramcharitmanas 1/285/4, 1/286).

Even though Vishwamitra was a sage of such a high calibre, he did not disregard custom and tradition. He wanted the people of Ayodhya to experience the joy and bliss that the people of Mithila were experiencing by this unique union of Sri Rama and Sita. After the marriage ceremony, king Dasharatha requested Vishwamitra to accompany the bridal procession to Ayodhya. In the royal court of Ayodhya, king Dasharatha expressed his gratitude to Vishwamitra:

Baar baar kausik caran, seesu naai kah raau.

Yah sabu sukhu muniraaj tav, kripaa kataaccha pasaau.

"Again and again the king bowed his head at the feet of Kausika and said, 'All this joy, o chief of sages, is a gift of your gracious looks.'" (Ramcharitmanas 1/331).

The queens also lavished their praises on the sage Vishwamitra whilst they spoke to the princes in their private palaces.

*Muni prasaad bali taat tumhaaree,
Ees anek karvare taaree.
Biswa bijay jasu jaanaki paaee,
Aae bhavan byaahi sab bhaaee.
Sakal amaanush karam tumhaare,
Keval kausik kripaa sudhaare.*

"I offer myself, dear child, as a sacrifice for your sake; it was through the goodwill of the sage Vishwamitra alone that God kept away a number of calamities from you. ... You gained the glory of having triumphed over the world and won the hand of Janaka's daughter, and then returned home after marrying all your brothers. All your actions have been superhuman and were accomplished only by the grace of the sage Kausika.'" (Ramcharitmanas 1/356/1, 1/356/3).

The next day in the royal assembly, Vashishta praised Vishwamitra in many ways even though there had been a great deal of animosity between the two previously.

*Kahahi basishtu dharam itihaasaa,
Sunahi maheesu sahit ranivaasaa.
Muni man agam gaadhisut karanee,
Mudit basishta bipul bidhi baranee.
Bole baamdeu sab saacee,
Keerati kalit lok tihu maacee.*

*Suni aanandu bhayau sab kaahoo,
Raam lakhan ur adhik uchaahoo.*

"The sage Vashishta narrated sacred legends, while the king and the ladies of the gynaeceum listened. In the course of his narration the sage gladly recounted in diverse ways the doings of Vishwamitra, that surpassed the imagination even of hermits. Vamadeva (another family preceptor of king Dasharatha) observed that whatever Vashishta said was true and that Vishwamitra's fair renown had pervaded all the three spheres. Everyone rejoiced to hear that, while Sri Rama and Lakshmana were all the more delighted at heart."
(Ramcharitmanas 1/358/3-4).

Vishwamitra's greatest achievement was having Sri Rama and Lakshmana as disciples who were both worthy and who fulfilled all his aspirations. After meeting Sri Rama, he was able to channel all his actions towards the betterment of the world.

Thus we see Vishwamitra evolving from a powerful king who wanted to conquer the world to becoming one of the greatest sages the world has known. In the Ramcharitmanas, he is portrayed as an eager devotee wishing to meet the Lord and wanting to serve Him. His

greatness was acknowledged by Sri Rama, who as his disciple pressed his feet.

*Munibar sayan keenhi tab jaaee,
Lage caran caapan dou bhaaee.
Jinha ke caran saroruh laagee,
Karat bibidh jap jog biraagee.
Tei dou bandhu prem janu jeete,
Gur pad kamal palotat preete.*

"The chief of sages, Vishwamitra, then retired to his bed; and the two brothers began to rub his feet. The couple whose lotus feet are sought by men of dispassion muttering various sacred formulae and practising different kinds of Yoga (means of union with God) lovingly rubbed the lotus-like feet of their Guru, conquered as it were by his love." (Ramcharitmanas 1/225/2-3).

CHAPTER SIX

THE ROYAL FAMILY OF AYODHYA

6.1 Introduction

The stimulation of family values as the bedrock of a healthy society is one of the main thrusts of the Ramcharitmanas. The bonds of love, affection and duty between Sri Rama and members of His family is depicted in the Ramcharitmanas as the ideal model to be imbibed for the betterment of society. We find in the Ramayana vivid descriptions of the ideal brother, the ideal father, the ideal mother, the ideal son and the ideal wife which have become the basis of Indian social value systems cherished in Indian society even today. (Rajurkar:1972:116).

This chapter will examine the family values expounded in the Ramcharitmanas through a thorough analysis of some of the characters in Sri Rama's family and show that ennobling family ideals form the basis for individual spiritual development as well as the self-sacrificing spirit that is essential for the promotion of human welfare.

6.2 Kaushalya

Kaushalya was a storehouse of virtues. Her character was flawless and she was rightfully chosen to be the mother of Sri Rama. However, she herself, through humility and remorse, declared to Bharata that she was unworthy of being Sri Rama's mother.

*Mohi na laaj nij nehu nihaaree,
Raam saris sut mai mahataaree.*

"I am ashamed of my love; to think that a son like Rama should have a mother like me!" (Ramcharitmanas 2/165/4).

However, her greatness was revealed in the manner in which, she accepted Sri Rama's banishment and her worthiness of being the mother of Sri Rama was most aptly proven. She controlled her emotions and did not blame anyone for the catastrophe that befell her and Ayodhya.

Kaushalya was the chief queen of king Dasharatha and hence she should have enjoyed a high status. But this was not completely so, for the king was more fond of his other wife, Kaikeyi, who was very beautiful. For most ordinary females, this situation would be unbearable. Yet, throughout the Ramcharitmanas, there

is not a single indication of any malice or jealousy towards Kaikeyi from Kaushalya.

The extraordinary balance of emotion and discretion in her character can be traced to her previous incarnation. It was Manu and Shatrupa who were born as Dasharatha and Kaushalya respectively in order to fulfil their previous desires. As king, Manu had ruled for a long period and had then decided to retire to the forest in order to do penance and thus realise the highest aim of human life. His wife Shatrupa accompanied him, even though it was not necessary for her to do so. She could have remained with her sons and enjoyed the comforts of the palace, instead of enduring the hardships of forest life.

Shatrupa possessed the qualities of detachment and renunciation. She was a faithful wife who supported her husband totally. For many years the royal couple performed severe austerities and finally, God together with his consort, appeared before them and told them to ask for a boon. Manu asked for God to be born as his son and his boon was duly granted. Then God asked Shatrupa for her wish and she agreed with her husband, but in addition she asked for devotion and

discrimination. Manu's supplication was based on emotion, for he only wanted God as a son, whereas Shatrupa's boon was a more balanced one, which revealed her individuality. The Supreme Lord was most pleased with Shatrupa when granting her wish. He said,

*Jo kachu ruci tumhare man maahee,
Mai so deenha sab sansay naahee.
Maatu bibek alaukik tore,
Kabahu na mitihi anugraha more.*

"Whatever desire you cherish in your mind I have granted; you should have no doubt about it. Mother, by my grace your uncommon wisdom shall never fail."

(Ramcharitmanas 1/150/1-2). The Lord immediately addressed her as mother, whereas Manu had to wait for his next birth in order to be called father by the Lord.

The natures of both Dasharatha and Kaushalya were similar to those of Manu and Shatrupa. Dasharatha's life was dominated by emotion as a result of which he gave up his life, unable to bear the separation from Sri Rama. On the other hand Kaushalya's emotions were controlled by her sense of discrimination. She easily accepted the king's preference to Kaikeyi, and did not become dejected or insecure. Kaikeyi's ego was only satisfied upon receiving all the attention of king

Dasharatha. There would have been conflict if Kaushalya had demanded the same attention as Kaikeyi. However, Kaushalya's large heartedness did not allow such a situation to arise, and thus, there was no conflict between the queens. Kaikeyi was an egoistic person who thrived on attention. She already had the love and attention of king Dasharatha and when the sons were born she expected the same from them. She felt satisfied that Sri Rama cared more for her than he did even for his own mother.

Kaushalya was able to keep the entire royal palace in peace and harmony. Even at the most testing time of her life, she emerged with great dignity. She had never asked for Sri Rama to be made crown prince, but when she received the news, she was extremely pleased, as this was in keeping with the royal family tradition. Had she known that this incident would cause such a great calamity, she would definitely have welcomed the idea that Bharata be given the kingdom. She was aware that the coronation of Sri Rama was taking place with unanimous consent of the king's counsellors and the people of Ayodhya.

Kaushalya's sense of discrimination was predominant even as far as her maternal love was concerned. Earlier when the sage Vishwamitra had come to take Sri Rama to the forest to protect his sacrifice, king Dasharatha was extremely troubled and overwhelmed by paternal love. He even considered such a request as being inappropriate. Vashishta had to convince him that Vishwamitra's request should be complied with, for this would be beneficial to Sri Rama as well. Kaushalya however, willingly gave her blessings to Sri Rama and Lakshmana before they departed to the forest with the sage. She did not think for a moment that it was unjust or unwise for such young and tender children to be sent to the forest to fight terrifying demons. She saw it as the good fortune of her sons to be able to serve the sages.

It was Kaushalya's good nature that became the device, which Manthra used against her. She convinced Kaikeyi that Kaushalya's affection for Bharata was mere exhibition and that since the announcement of the coronation she had become haughty and proud. She further said that Kaushalya must have instigated the king to make Sri Rama crown prince whilst Bharata was at his maternal uncle's home, and that after Rama

became king, she would make both Kaikeyi and Bharata her servants. With this kind of reasoning, Kaikeyi was convinced of Kaushalya's ulterior motives. Later by her actions and behaviour, Kaushalya demonstrated how magnanimous she was, compared to these lowly accusations and assumptions. Unaware of the plot of Kaikeyi, Kaushalya and the subjects of Ayodhya eagerly awaited the coronation of Sri Rama. Their thoughts were expressed thus:

*Kaali lagan bhali ketik baaraa,
Poojihi bidhi abhilaashu hamaaraa.
Kanak singhaasan seeya sametaa,
Baithahi raamu hoi cit cetaa.*

"When will that blessed hour start tomorrow; during which God will fulfil our desire, when with Sita beside Him Sri Rama will take His seat on the throne of gold and when the object of our desire be accomplished?"
(Ramcharitmanas 2/10/2-3).

The next morning when Sri Rama arrived in her chambers, there was a sense of urgency in her voice. She was overwhelmed with love, for she knew that the coronation ceremony would be a long one, and that her son might become hungry. She told him to eat some fruit before going to his father. Sri Rama gently broke the news of his banishment, and assured her that all will be well

in the end and asked for her blessings. Tulsidasji described Kaushalya's reaction thus:

*Bacan bineet madhur raghubar ke,
Sar sam lage maatu ur karake.
Sahami sookhi suni seetali baanee,
Jimi javaas pare paavas paanee.
Kahi na jaai kachu hriday bishaadoo,
Manahu mrigee suni kehari naadoo.
Nayan sajal tan thar thar kaapee,
Maajahi khaai meen janu maapee.*

"The gentle and sweet words of Sri Rama (the Chief of the Raghus) pierced the mother's heart and rankled there. Alarmed to hear His serene speech she turned pale in the same way as the Yavasaka plant is blasted by a shower in the monsoon. The agony of her heart was beyond description like that of a doe that has heard a lion's roar. Her eyes were wet with tears and her body violently shook like a fish that had got inebriated by sucking the scum raised by the first monsoon shower."
(Ramcharitmanas 2/53/1-2).

The minister's son who had accompanied Sri Rama related what had conspired to Kaushalya. This was a most testing time for her.

*Dharam saneh ubhay mati gheree,
Bhai gati saap chuchundari keree.*

"Kaushalya's judgement was swayed on the one hand by her sense of duty and on the other hand by her

affection. She found herself on the horns of dilemma like a snake that has caught hold of a musk-rat." (Ramcharitmanas 2/54/2). Though overwhelmed with grief she immediately composed herself and agreed with Sri Rama's decision to go to the forest.

*Saral subhaau raam mahataaree,
Bole bacan dheer dhari bhaaree.
Taat jaau bali keenhehu neekaa,
Pitu aayasu sab dharmak teekaa.
Raaaju den kahi deenha banu, mohi na so dukh lesu,
Tumha binu bharatahi bhoopatihi, prajahi pracand
kalesu.*

*Jau keval pitu aayasu taataa,
Tau jani jaahu jaani badi maataa.
Jau pitu maatu kaheu ban jaanaa,
Tau kaanan sat avadh samaanaa.*

"Again, realising the duty of a woman and remembering that Rama and Bharata were equally her sons the prudent Kaushalya, who had a guileless disposition, spoke as follows with great courage, 'You have done well, my child, I swear; a father's command is the most sacred of all obligations. That having promised to bestow on you the kingdom of Ayodhya your father has now decided to exile you to the woods does not make me the least sorry. But your absence from our midst will mean a terrible ordeal to Bharata, to the king himself and to the people. In any case if it be your father's command alone, my boy, then go not, remembering that a mother

ranks higher than one's father. If on the other hand, both father and mother have asked you to proceed to the woods then, of course, the forest will equal a hundred cities like Ayodhya.'" (Ramcharitmanas 2/54/3-4, 2/55, 2/55/1).

Kaushalya's courageous reaction to Sri Rama's banishment was extraordinary. She had to endure seeing Him abandon His royal robes and put on clothes of an ascetic. She gazed at Him and could see no sign of either grief or elation on His countenance.

Sri Rama's reactions were in keeping with His tender nature. In the presence of His mother and the citizens of Ayodhya, He did not want to show any sign of emotion as this could give rise to more sorrow on their part. Kaushalya realised that Sri Rama was no ordinary being and this gave her courage to face the situation. However, king Dasharatha could not bear to see his son in such a situation and he eventually died of a broken heart.

After Sri Rama's departure to the forest, Dasharatha left the palace of Kaikeyi and came to Kaushalya's palace. She could have chastised him for being the

reason of this catastrophe, but instead she herself tried to give him courage.

*Kausalyaa nripu deekh malaanaa,
Rabikul rabi anthyau jiy jaanaa.
Ur dhari dheer raam mahataaree,
Bolee bacan samay anusaaree.
Naath samujhi man karia bicaaroo,
Raam biyog payodhi apaaroo.
Karandhaar tumha avadh jahaajoo,
Cadeu sakal priya pathik samaajoo.
Dheeraju dharia ta paaia paaroo,
Naahi ta boodihi sabu parivaaroo.
Jau jiy dharia binay piy moree,
Raamu lakhanu siy milahi bahoree.*

"When Kaushalya saw the king withered and blasted, she concluded in her mind that the sun of the solar race was about to set. Summoning up courage, therefore, Sri Rama's mother spoke words appropriate to the occasion: 'Ponder in your heart, my lord, and reflect that separation from Rama is a vast ocean, you are the helmsman and Ayodhya the bark which has been boarded by our near and dear ones as its passengers. We can hope to reach ashore only if you have patience. If not, the whole family will be drowned. If you take to heart this entreaty of mine, my beloved lord, we are sure to see Rama, Lakshmana and Sita again.'" (Ramcharitmanas 2/153/2-4). However, the king was not strong enough to heed her words for he felt that it was he alone that

was the cause of the entire problem and he finally gave up his life.

When Bharata returned from his grandfather's kingdom, once again Kaushalya's large-heartedness and fortitude came to the fore. Bharata was unaware of Kaikeyi's conspiracy. As he entered the city, he could sense that something was wrong for even the citizens' behaviour was indifferent towards him. They felt that he must have been part of the plot and their doubts seemed to be confirmed when, upon arrival, he immediately went to Kaikeyi's palace. But contrary to their belief, Kaushalya's faith in Bharata was intact. Even in these adverse circumstances, her love for Bharata seemed to be greater than her love for her own child. When she saw Bharata she was overcome by emotion and rushed to meet him. But she was so weak through grief that she fell unconscious. Later Bharata tried to assure her in many ways that he had nothing to do with the conspiracy. Tulsidasji describes mother Kaushalya's reaction in a most moving manner:

Maatu bharat ke bacan mridu, suni puni uthee sambhaari.

Lie uthaaee lagaai ur, locan mocati baari.

Saral subhaay maay hiy laae,

Ati hit manahu raam phiri aae.

Bheteu bahuri lakhan laghu bhaaee,

Soku sanehu na hriday samaaee.

*Dekhi subhaau kahat sabu koe,
Raam maatu as kaahe na hoe.
Maataa bharatu god baithaare,
Aasu pochi mridu bacan ucaare.
Ajahu baccha bali dheeraj dharahoo,
Kusamau samujhi sok pariharahoo.
Jani maanahu hiy haani galaanee,
Kaal karam gati aghatit jaanee.
Kaahuhi dosu dehu jani taataa,
Bhaa mohi sab bidhi baam bidhaataa.
Jo etehu dukh mohi jiaavaa,
Ajahu ko jaania kaa tehi bhaavaa.*

"On hearing Bharata's tender words, Kaushalya rose with a renewed effort and lifting him clasped him to her bosom; while tears streamed from her eyes. Guileless by nature, mother Kaushalya pressed him to her bosom with utmost affection as though Sri Rama Himself had come back. She then embraced Lakshmana's younger brother (Shatrughan); her heart was too full with grief and love. Everyone who saw her loving disposition said, 'Rama's mother that she is, no wonder she should be so loving.' The mother seated Bharata in her lap and wiping away his tears spoke to him in soothing words; 'I adjure you, my child, to compose yourself even now; knowing this to be an unpropitious time sorrow no more. Take not to heart the loss we have sustained and feel no remorse for it, remembering that the course of time and fate is unalterable. Do not blame anyone, my son;

it is Providence that has turned hostile to me in every way. And when He makes me survive even under such trying circumstances, who knows what may be His pleasure with regard to me even now?" (Ramcharitmanas 2/164, 2/164/1-4).

After great deliberation, the sage Vashishta proposed that Bharata become king for the good of the kingdom. Even though Kaikeyi had banished Sri Rama from Ayodhya, Kaushalya displayed her greatness by supporting the proposal in the royal assembly. She knew that Bharata had no desire for kingship, but she supported the proposal on grounds of expediency.

*Kausalyaa dhari dheeraju kahaee,
Poot pathya gur aayasu ahaee.
So aadaria karia hit maanee,
Tajia bishaadu kaal gati jaanee.
Ban raghupati surpati narnaahoo,
Tumha ehi bhaati taat kadraahoo.
Parijan prajaa saciv sab ambaa,
Tumhahee sut sab kah avalambaa.
Lakhi bidhi baam kaalu kathinaaee,
Dheeraju dharahu maatu bali jaaee.
Sir dhari gur aayasu anusarahoo,
Prajaa paali parijan dukhu harahoo.*

"Summoning courage Kaushalya said, 'Salutary, my son, is your Guru's command; the same should be respected and obeyed by you as conducive to your good. Cease to

grieve realising the vicissitudes of life. The Lord of Raghus is in the forest and the king is lording it over the gods (in heaven); while you, my son, are thus giving way to faint-heartedness. You, my child, are the only support of all including your family, subjects, ministers and all your mothers. Perceiving the antipathy of God and the relentlessness of fate, I adjure you by my life to have courage. Reverently obey your Guru's command, cherish your subjects and relieve the affliction of your family.'" (Ramcharitmanas 2/175/1-3).

Throughout the proceedings, Kaushalya never at any time blamed Kaikeyi even though all the subjects despised her actions. She did not say anything that would cause Kaikeyi pain even though Vashisht had criticised Kaikeyi for her evil actions in his opening remarks.

At Chitrakuta, Sita's mother, queen Sunaina, met the three queens of Ayodhya for the first time. The conversation between Sumitra and Sunaina regarding the present situation seemed to indicate that Kaikeyi was the cause of all the problems. Kaushalya immediately remarked,

*Kausalyaa kah dosu na kaahoo,
Karam bibas dukh sukh chati laahoo.*

*Kathin karam gati jaan bidhaataa,
 Jo subh asubh sakal phal daataa.
 Ees rajaai sees sabahee ke,
 Utpati thiti lay bishahu amee ke.
 Debi moh bas socia baadee,
 Bidhi prapancu as acal anaadee.
 Bhoopati jiab marab ur aanee,
 Socia sakhi lakhi nij hit haanee.
 Seey maatu kah satya subaanee,
 Sukritee avadhi avadhapati raanee.*

"It is nobody's fault; sorrow and joy, loss and gain are determined by our past actions. The inexorable ways of Providence are known to God alone, who dispenses all kinds of fruits, both good and evil. God's commands prevail over all, including the processes of creation, maintenance and dissolution and even over poison and nectar (which destroy and restore life respectively). It is no use lamenting, o good lady, out of infatuation. The doings of Providence are, as I have said, immutable and eternal. If we mourn over the contrast between the king's lifetime and his loss, my friend, it is because we see that our interests have suffered on account of his demise.' Sita's mother replied, 'Your noble words are quite true, a spouse that you are of Ayodhya's lord, who was the greatest of all virtuous souls known to history.'"
(Ramcharitmanas 2/281/2-4).

Another unique facet of Kaushalya's character was revealed in Chitrakuta. She forgot her own grief and was only concerned about Bharata who was in a dilemma. The proposals put forth thus far during formal discussions was what should be done now that the king was no more. Many felt that Sri Rama should return to Ayodhya but Kaushalya knew that he would not break his promise to his father and return. Then what would happen to Bharata? It was with these mixed thoughts that Kaushalya decided to seek the help of king Janak by sending the following message to him through queen Sunaina,

*Raani raay san avsar paaee,
Apanee bhaati kahab samujhaaee.
Rakhiahi lakhanu bharatu gavanahi ban,
Jau yah mat maanai maheep man.
Tau bhal jatanu karab subicaaree,
More socu bharat kar bhaaree.
Goodh saneh bharat man maahee,
Rahe neek mohi laagat naahee.*

"Yet finding a suitable opportunity, o queen, you may speak to the king as if on your own initiative and plead with him that Lakshmana may be detained and Bharata allowed to proceed to the forest. Should this proposal find favour with the king, let him do his utmost after due deliberation. I feel much concerned about Bharata; for the love in his heart is so profound

that if he stays at home I fear something untoward may happen to him.' " (Ramcharitmanas 2/283/1-2) .

Kaushalya had no objection to Sri Rama going to the forest, but in her view, Bharata's emotions should not be totally disregarded. Lakshmana had been close to Sri Rama since childhood and now she felt that Bharata should be given this opportunity. Upon receiving her message, king Janaka praised Kaushalya for putting forth such a proposal which was indicative of her love and good nature even though he knew that this was not possible. After the many deliberations and their outcome at Chitrakuta, she returned to Ayodhya with the rest of the retinue.

After the fourteen years of exile, Kaushalya was overjoyed to hear that her renowned son was safely returning with Sita and Lakshmana after defeating the powerful enemy Ravana.

*Kausalyaa puni puni raghubeerahi,
Citvati kripaasindhu ranadheerahi.
Hriday bicaarati baarahi baaraa,
Kavan bhaati lankaapati maaraa.
Ati sukumaar jugal mere baare,
Nisicar subhat mahaabal bhaare.
Lachiman aru seetaa sahit, prabhuhi bilokat maatu.
Paramaanand magan man, puni puni pulkit gaatu.*

"Again and again did Kaushalya gaze upon the Hero of Raghu's line, who was an ocean of compassion and an irresistible warrior, each time pondering within herself: 'How can he have killed the lord of Lanka? Too delicate of body are my two boys, while the demons were great champions of extraordinary might!' As the mother (Kaushalya) looked upon the Lord with Lakshmana and Sita, her soul was overwhelmed with supreme felicity and the hair on her body bristled up again and again." (Ramcharitmanas 7/6/3-4, 7/7).

Kaushalya was amazed at the remarkable feats performed by Sri Rama and Lakshmana and she attributed this to the grace of their guru. At the beginning of the Ramcharitmanas, Tulsidasji in his benedictions, praises Kaushalya thus:

*Bandau kausalyaa disi praacee,
Keerati jaasu sakal jag maacee.
Pragteu jah raghupati sasi caaroo,
Biswa sukhad khal kamal tamaaroo.*

"I greet Kaushalya (the eldest queen of king Dasharatha) whose glory stands diffused throughout the world. She is the eastern horizon whence arose the lovely moon in the shape of the Lord of Raghus, who affords delight to the entire universe and is blighting

as frost to lotuses in the form of the wicked."
(Ramcharitmanas 1/15/2-3).

6.3 Sumitra

Sumitra was the third queen of King Dasharatha. Not much emphasis is placed on her character during the time of peace and harmony in the palace, but under adverse circumstances, her qualities of dedication and surrender are highlighted. She is likened to the flowering plant "raat ki rani", which displays no significant beauty during the day, but at night when it blooms, its fragrance pervades the entire garden. Similarly, the hearts of readers are filled with reverence for mother Sumitra because of her fortitude and dedication during the most trying times in the Ramayana. Even though she did not enjoy the position of being the chief queen like queen Kaushalya, nor was she the favourite queen of Dasharatha, like queen Kaikeyi, her outstanding greatness can be found in her unique attitude of service. Her humility and simple loyalty gained her the love of both Kaushalya and Kaikeyi. This is clearly evident during the distribution of the kheer (rice boiled with milk and sugar) after the completion of the sacrifice for a son

performed by the renowned sage, Shringi. The fire-god, Agni Deva, appeared with a bowl of kheer and instructed the king to distribute it to his queens as he saw fit.

*Ardha bhaag kausalyahi deenhaa,
Ubhay bhaag aadhe kar keenhaa.
Kaikeee kah nrip so dayaoo,
Rahyo so ubhay bhaag puni bhayaoo.
Kausalyaa kaikeee haath dhari,
Deenha sumitrahiman prasanna kari.*

"He gave one half of the offering to Kaushalya and divided the other into two halves, one of which he gave to Kaikeyi. The remnant was again divided into two parts, which he placed in the hands of Kaushalya and Kaikeyi, and after thus obtaining their approval, handed both the shares to Sumitra." (Ramcharitmanas 1/189/1-2).

The distribution thus indicates the love and affection that both the queens had for Sumitra. This resulted in Sumitra's two-fold good fortune, for, while both Kaushalya and Kaikeyi had a son each, Sumitra had two sons. The generosity shown to Sumitra by the queens was well rewarded by the way Sumitra guided her two sons, Lakshmana and Shatrughna. Every ordinary mother wants her son to be a leader rather than a follower, and it is with this anticipation that she nurtures him from childhood. However, Sumitra had no such ambitions

for her sons and instead she guides them to become servants rather than masters. Thus in the Ramcharitmanas, we find her sons unflinchingly serving their two brothers. Lakshmana's service and surrender to Rama is unparalleled, and Shatrughna becomes a devoted servant of Bharata.

*Baarehi te nij hit pati jaanee,
Lachiman raam caran rati maanee.
Bharat satruhan doonau bhaaee,
Prabhu sevak jasi preeti badhaaee.*

"From his earliest days, Lakshmana came to look upon Sri Rama as his benefactor and master and conceived devotion to His feet. The love that existed between the two half-brothers, Bharata and Shatrughna, was as glorious as that which obtains between a master and a servant" (Ramcharitmanas 1/197/2).

The most outstanding feature of Sumitra's character is portrayed at the time of Sri Rama's banishment. Lakshmana wanted to accompany Rama to the forest, and in spite of Rama's advice to the contrary, he was unable to break the resolve of the adamant Lakshmana. Sri Rama's reasoning was that Lakshmana should not be emotional and abandon his duty because of his love for him. His duty was towards his elders and the subjects

of Ayodhya as a representative of the royal family. He tried to reason with Lakshmana thus:

*Bhavan bharatu ripusoodanu naahee,
Raaau briddha mam dukhu man maahee.
Mai ban jaau tumhahi lei saathaa,
Hoi sabahi bidhi avadh anaathaa.
Guru pitu maatu prajaa parivaaroo,
Sab kahu parai dusah dukh bhaaroo.*

"'Bharata and Ripusudana (Shatrughna) are not at home while the king is aged and full of grief for my sake. If I proceed to the woods taking you with me, Ayodhya will be rendered completely masterless and the preceptor and parents, the people as well as the family, all will be subjected to a spell of terrible suffering.'" (Ramcharitmanas 2/70/1-2).

Lakshmana was not in the least interested in the duties of the world and said,

*Deenhi mohi sikh neeki gosaaee,
Laagi agam apanee kadraaee.
Narbar dheer dharam dhur dhaaree,
Nigam neeti kahu te adhikaaree.
Mai sisu prabhu saneh pratipaalaa,
Mandaru meru ke lehi maraalaa.
Gur pitu maatu na jaanau kaahoo,
Kahau subhaau naath patiaahoo.
Jah lagi jagat saneh sagaaee,
Preeti prateeti nigam niju gaaee.
More sabai ek tumha swaamee,
Deenbandhu ur antarjaamee.*

*Dharam neeti upadesia taahee,
Keerati bhooti sugati priya jaahee.
Man kram bacan caran rat hoee,
Kripaasindhu pariharia ke soee.*

"My lord, you have given me a sound advice; but due to my faint heartedness it sounds impracticable to me. Only those noble men who are self-possessed and champion the cause of virtue are fit to be taught the gospel of the Vedas and moral philosophy. I am a mere child fostered by your loving care; can a cygnet lift Mount Mandara or Meru? I know no preceptor nor father nor mother; I tell you sincerely; believe me my lord. Whatever ties of affection, love and confidence exist in this world as declared by the Vedas - for me they are all centred in you and you alone, my lord. O friend of the afflicted, O knower of the innermost heart of all! Piety and propriety should be taught to him who is fond of glory, fortune and a noble destiny. He, however, who is devoted to your feet in thought, word and deed, - should he be abandoned, O ocean of grace?" (Ramcharitmanas 2/71/1-4).

Seeing Lakshmana's steadfastness, Sri Rama could not say anything more to make him change his mind and he then told him to take leave from his mother. Lakshmana went to his mother, Sumitra, after receiving Sri Rama's

instructions. Being unacquainted with the news regarding the banishment, she was surprised to see the sorrowful expression on his face and she was dumbfounded when she heard of what had transpired. The love and respect that she had for Kaikeyi disappeared in a moment and she unhesitatingly referred to her as a sinner. If Sumitra was worldly-minded, her reaction would not have been as harsh as it was towards Kaikeyi for she would have to consider her position as well as that of her two sons before making that statement. She would have to maintain a good relationship with Kaikeyi and her son Bharata who was to be king, for her own worldly good and the worldly good of her sons. But her pure nature and her love for Sri Rama were overwhelming and she denounced Kaikeyi's actions. Sumitra is a perfect example of Tulsidasji's teaching in the Vinay Patrika: **"One should abandon like tens and millions of enemies that person who has no love for Sri Rama and Janaki even if that person is a very dear one."** (Vinay Patrika 174/1).

Seeing his mother's reaction, Lakshmana felt apprehensive and he thought that due to her love for him, she might become an obstacle in his path. He felt nervous and hesitated in seeking her permission to

leave. However, instead of being an obstacle, she turned out to be his guide on his path of devotion and service; and her advice, her instructions and her blessings surprised him. Her words full of reverence and emotion constitute one of the most outstanding episodes in the Ramcharitmanas:

"My dear son, Videha's daughter is your mother while Rama, who loves you in every way, is your father. Ayodhya is there where Rama dwells; there alone is the day where there is sunlight. If Sita and Rama are really proceeding to the woods, you have no business in Ayodhya. One's preceptor, parents, brother, gods and master - all these should be tended as one's own life. Rama, however is dearer than life, the soul of our soul and the disinterested friend of all. Whosoever are worthy of adoration and most dear to us should be accounted as such only in so far as they are related to Rama. Bearing this in mind, accompany him to the forest and derive, my boy, the benefit of your existence in the world. It is your great good fortune as well as mine, I solemnly declare, that your mind has sincerely taken up its abode in Rama's feet. That woman alone can be said to have borne a male issue, whose son is a devotee of Rama (the Lord of Raghus). Otherwise she had better remain issueless; for she who deems

herself fortunate in having a son hostile to Rama has yearned in vain. It is due to your good fortune that Rama is proceeding to the forest; there is no other ground for his doing so, my boy. The highest reward for all meritorious acts is verily this - to have spontaneous love for the feet of Sita and Rama. Never give way even in a dream to passion, anger, jealousy, arrogance or infatuation. Giving up all sorts of morbid feelings serve them in thought, word and deed. You will be happy in every way in the forest since you will have with you your father and mother in Rama and Sita. Take care, my son, that Rama may be put to no trouble in the woods; that is my admonition to you. My admonition to you, dear child, is this; it is up to you to see that Rama and Sita lead a happy life in the forest through your good offices and forget their father and mother, near and dear ones as well as the amenities of city life.' Having thus admonished the Lord of Tulsidas (Lakshmana) Sumitra granted him leave (to accompany Sri Rama) and then invoked her blessing to him: 'May your devotion to the feet of Sita and the Hero of Raghu's race be constant and untainted and ever new.'" (Ramcharitmanas 2/73-75).

Earlier on, when Sri Rama had advised Lakshmana to remain in the palace, Lakshmana's reply indicated that duty and love for God are two different entities, and that he favored love for God over duty. Thus it seems that he disregarded the advice given by Sri Rama and that he completely rejects the advice to serve one's elders even though the Shastras place great importance on such service.

However, mother Sumitra's teachings unified both duty and love for God, and she gave an entirely new meaning to the Shastras which say that father is God and mother is God. Here the question arises as to the definition of father and mother, for a person takes innumerable births and in every life has different parents. Should one then disregard one's parents from previous births in favour of one's present parents in order to conform to the Shastras? In mother Sumitra's view, this dilemma can be solved by one's relationship with one's eternal parents. She tells Lakshmana that Sri Rama is his father and Sita is his mother even though his earthly father King Dasharatha and she, his mother, are still alive. King Dasharatha was well known as a very affectionate father but due to circumstances, over which he had no control, he was forced to abandon his

most beloved son Rama. By pointing out Sri Rama as his eternal father, Sumitra draws our attention to the instability of worldly relationships which constantly change with time and circumstances, whereas God never abandons His children under any circumstances. When there is a conflict of interest in the instructions of mother, father or teacher, one can turn to the teaching of Sumitra where she says,

*Poojaneeya priya param jahaa te,
Sab maaniahi raam ke naate.*

"'Whosoever are worthy of adoration and most dear to us should be accounted as such only in so far as they are related to Rama.'" (Ramcharitmanas 2/73/4). If one makes Sri Rama the focus of one's actions, then all obstacles can be overcome. But as long as actions are performed with the individual as the focal point, there will always be conflict. When one's relationships and actions are based on the eternal Lord, there is no question of inner conflict as exemplified in the life of Lakshmana.

Lakshmana is remembered as a servant who had completely surrendered himself to Sri Rama and one who had sacrificed everything for Sri Rama. But Sumitra's viewpoint is completely different. She does not see Lakshmana as the one who sacrifices but she sees Sri

Rama as the sacrificer. That is why she told Lakshmana that there should be no question of inconvenience to him in the forest because his mother and father would be with him and that Sri Rama was going into the forest in order to afford him the privilege of serving him. It is Sri Rama who was sacrificing his position as crown prince and the company of his mother and father. She told him this lest he should start entertaining the false notion that Kaikeyi sent Sri Rama to the forest as a punishment and that he was going in order to alleviate Sri Rama's hardship.

Having given Lakshmana advice and instructions, Sumitra finally bestowed her blessings by saying: "**May your devotion to the feet of Sita and the Hero of Raghu's race be constant and untainted and ever new.**" (Ramcharitmanas 2/75).

This is a supreme boon and the goal of all devotees:

*Santsabhaa cahu disi avraaee,
Shraddhaa ritu basant sam gaaee.
Bhagati niroopan bibidh bidhaanaa,
Chamaa dayaa dam lataa bitaanaa.
Sam jam niyam phool phal gyaanaa,
Hari pad rati ras bed bakhanaa.*

"The assemblages of saints referred to herein are the mango groves hemming the lake on all sides and piety

has been likened to the vernal season. Even so mind control, the five Yamas or forms of self-restraint (viz. non-violence, truthfulness, non-thieving, continence and non-acquisition of property), the five Niyamas or religious vows (viz. those of external and internal purity, contentment, austerity, study of sacred books or repetition of the Divine Name and self-surrender to God) are the blossoms of these creepers; spiritual enlightenment is their fruit and loving devotion to the feet of Sri Hari constitutes the sap of this fruit of spiritual enlightenment : so declare the Vedas." (Ramcharitmanas 1/36/6-7).

Sumitra allowed Lakshmana to accompany Sri Rama to the forest but she herself did not go to meet Rama for she did not want to exhibit her sacrifice. In this lies her greatness for she knew that if she came face to face with Sri Rama, he will be put into an uncomfortable position.

Sumitra accompanied Bharata and the other queens when they went to Citrakuta. She knew that Sri Rama would not return to Ayodhya and she had full trust in his actions. She did not have a role in trying to persuade

Rama to return. Her presence serves merely as a support to the other members of the family.

Towards the end of the fourteen year term of banishment, another aspect of Sumitra's character is revealed when she learned that Lakshmana lay wounded, unconscious and close to death on the battlefield in Lanka. Any other mother would have been devastated and angry towards Sri Rama for having brought about this catastrophe. Had these emotions entered her mind, no one would deem it inappropriate. However, her heart is like the unfathomable ocean. Tulsidasji very touchingly describes the reaction and emotions of mother Sumitra on hearing this news in Gitavali 6/13; she felt proud to be the mother of such a son who had sacrificed himself on the battlefield for his brother. However, she was filled with agony knowing that at this difficult time, Sri Rama was all alone and immediately she decided to send her other son, Shatrughna, who was eagerly awaiting her instructions to go to Sri Rama. She inspired him to follow the path that his brother had followed and to accompany Hanuman to the battlefield in Lanka. On hearing her words, Shatrughna stood with his palms together and his entire body was filled with rapture. Seeing this condition of

Shatrughna and the unselfish sacrifice of Sumitra even the great devotees, Hanuman and Bharata, felt even more humbled.

After the conquest of Lanka, Sri Rama returned to Ayodhya with Mother Sita and Lakshmana. Their meeting with their near and dear ones after a separation of fourteen years is described by Tulsidasji in most touching words. Perhaps the most emotional scene is presented when Lakshmana goes to meet mother Sumitra. He was about to touch her feet and seek her blessings when she picked him up and clasped him to her bosom and held him there for some time. The onlookers were moved considering this to be the epitome of motherly affection which brims over on a meeting after such a long and painful separation. But this was far from the truth as this mother was absorbed in a totally different emotion. Even though she was forced by circumstances to practically fulfill her role as a mother, she was in her heart an unparalleled lover of Sri Rama and also his secret devotee. Her greatest desire on this occasion was to touch the feet of Sri Rama, but this was practically impossible as such an act would cause consternation in society and embarrassment to Sri Rama. She knew that her son

Lakshmana had the lotus feet of Sri Rama embedded in his heart. By embracing Lakshmana, she not only fulfilled her earthly role of filial affection, but also fulfilled her secret desire of touching the Lord's feet. Blessed indeed is mother Sumitra who even whilst carrying out her earthly duties, achieved the highest spiritual attainment of unparalleled love for God's holy feet.

6.4 Bharata

All writers of the story of Sri Rama, from the time of sage Valmiki, have rendered a fascinating portrayal of the character of Bharata. However, the picture drawn by Tulsidasji is totally unique. He finds himself closer to Bharata than any other character in the Ramcharitmanas. Bharata is his inspiration and ideal. Tulsidasji felt that the main reason for Sri Rama going into the forest was to bring to the fore the character and ideal of Bharata. In several lines of the Ayodhyakand he expresses his gratefulness to Bharata and in the end he says,

*Siy raam prem piyoosh pooran
Hot janamu na Bharat ko,
Muni man agam jam niyam sam dam
Bisham brat aacarat ko.
Dukh daah daarid dambh dooshan*

*Sujas mis apahart ko,
Kalikaal tulasee se sathanhi hathi
Raam sanmukh karat ko.*

"If Bharata, who brimmed over with the nectar of devotion to Sita and Sri Rama, had never been born, who would have practised the difficult vow of self-abnegation and austerity and control of the mind and senses that transcended the imagination even of sages? Who would have dispelled the woes, burning agony, poverty, hypocrisy and the other evils of the world through his fair renown; and who in this Kali age would have possibly diverted the mind of the villains like Tulsidasa towards Sri Rama?" (Ramcharitmanas 2/325 - Chand).

Bharata was extremely humble in his childhood and he always remained in the background. His nature and appearance were so much like those of Sri Rama that many mistook him for Sri Rama. The respect and love he received because of this misunderstanding filled him with shame and embarrassment, which later became a part of his nature. It is for this reason, that in spite of the overwhelming love he had for Sri Rama, he always kept a distance from Him yet found solace in remembering and contemplating about Him. He expressed

the hesitation he felt in the presence of Sri Rama in Chitrakuta.

*Mahoo saneh sakoc bas,
Sanmukh kahee na bain.
Darsan tripit na aaju lagi,
Pem piaase nain.*

"'Overcome by affection and modesty I too never opened my lips before Him. And my eyes, that have been thirsting through love for His sight, have not been sated to this day.'" (Ramcharitmanas 2/260).

Soon after the birth of the four princes, king Dasharatha lovingly asked his guru, Vashishta, to perform the naming ceremony. When naming Bharata, Vashishta said,

*Biswa bharan poshan kar joee,
Taakar naam bharat as hoee.*

"'Your second son, who sustains and supports the universe, will be called 'Bharata'.'" (Ramcharitmanas 1/196/4).

After their education, the princes returned to Ayodhya and delighted the citizens whenever they went out into the city.

The sage Vishwamitra came to king Dasharatha for help to destroy the demons who were interrupting his

sacrifices. For this purpose, he chose Sri Rama and Lakshmana. He had seen the four princes for a very short while and he immediately knew that Lakshmana would be most suitable to accompany Sri Rama for Lakshmana was fiery and energetic. This journey with the sage made Sri Rama and Lakshmana famous throughout the world. With the destruction of the demoness Taraka and the demon Subahu, together with the demon army, the fame and glory of Sri Rama and Lakshmana became known to all. The breaking of the bow in Janakpura became an indelible chapter in the history of the world. Lakshmana had played an incomparable role in all these exploits.

Whilst Sri Rama and Lakshmana were gaining fame and glory, what must have been the mental state of Bharata? It would have been natural for him to be a bit envious of his two brothers. A very touching answer is given in the Ramcharitmanas. After the breaking of the bow, king Janaka sent an invitation to king Dasharatha informing him of the deeds of Sri Rama and Lakshmana. King Dasharatha was overjoyed with the news. At that time, Bharata was at play with his friends and as soon as he heard that a messenger had come from Janakpura,

he immediately went into the palace and asked his father about the letter.

Kusal praanpriya bandhu dou, ahahi kahahu kehi des.

Suni saneh saane bacan, baacee bahuri nares.

Suni paatee pulke dou bhraataa,

Adhik sanehu samaat na gaataa.

Preeti puneet bharat kai dekhee,

Sakal sabhaa sukhu laheu bisekhee.

"'Are my two brothers doing well and in what land do they happen to be?' On hearing his words steeped in love the king read the letter over again. On hearing the letter the two brothers experienced a thrill of joy; their whole frame was bursting with an excess of devotion. The whole court was particularly delighted to see Bharata's unalloyed love." (Ramcharitmanas 1/290,1/290/1). Bharata's reaction to the letter describing the exploits of Sri Rama and Lakshmana was one of excessive joy. There was not the least bit of envy in his mind even though he remained an ordinary prince whilst his brothers had become famous heroes. He did not even long to be in Lakshmana's place with Sri Rama, for he knew that Lakshmana was more capable of serving Sri Rama in that situation. Bharata's nature was such that he could never be as bold and outspoken as Lakshmana had been during the bow sacrifice. He considered Lakshmana to be blessed to be close to Sri Rama and to serve Him.

Ahaha dhanya lachiman badbhaagee,

Raam padaarabindu anuraagee.

"'Ah! How blessed and fortunate is Lakshmana, who is truly devoted to Sri Rama's lotus-feet.'"

(Ramcharitmanas 7/0/2).

Total lack of envy is present only in a few great souls. Even those who conquer other vices are unable to conquer envy. There is a psychological reason for this. Ordinarily, a person's character becomes tainted when he is overcome by vices, but envy often inspires one to do better. Bharata experienced extreme joy on hearing of the bow sacrifice. He is like a devotee who, whilst offering food to God, requests him to have all, not wanting even a morsel for himself. This sense of total surrender is inherent in the personality of Bharata.

Bharata was in charge of the horses, elephants and chariots that were to be part of the wedding procession from Ayodhya to Mithila. He accomplished his task as an act of worship.

The wedding ceremony of Sri Rama and Sita was duly completed. Bharata, Lakshmana and Shatrughna were then married to the sisters of Mother Sita (Mandavi, Urmila

and Shrutikirti). The princes and their brides together with the rest of the marriage procession then returned to Ayodhya. A short while thereafter Bharata and Shatrughna left Ayodhya with his (Bharata's) maternal uncle Yuddhajit for the kingdom of Kaikeya where he spent a considerable amount of time.

Here the question can be asked as to how Bharata, who was so devoted to Sri Rama, could spend such a long period of time away from the Lord when this was not necessary? In order to understand this, one has to go into the background of the events leading up to this point. The king of Kaikeya had extracted a promise from king Dasharatha at the time of his marriage, that the son of his daughter, Kaikeyi, must inherit the throne. King Dasharatha who had no sons at that time readily gave his word to the king. Bharata knew of the promise made to his grandfather and he also knew the tradition of his family was for the eldest son to become the king. The question of rightful heir could cause complications. Bharata wanted to solve this problem by staying out of the picture. His mother Kaikeyi was very fond of Sri Rama and Bharata was happy to remain in the background. However, the promise was given to his grandfather who was bound to bring the

matter up. Sri Rama had gained great fame and popularity and Bharata knew that this must have made his grandfather apprehensive. Bharata also knew that as long as he stayed in Kaikeya, his grandfather would not make any demands on king Dasharatha. The people of Ayodhya too would naturally take Sri Rama to be the rightful heir.

Bharata's plan would have succeeded if Manthara had not intervened after the announcement that Sri Rama was to be ordained crown prince. However, this situation was unacceptable to the gods who were being tormented by Ravana. The work of the gods could also be accomplished after Sri Rama had become king. It would have been easier for Him to wage war with Lanka together with the might of His entire army. Had this happened, it would have read like an ordinary page from history, which is filled with innumerable episodes of wars between kings and countries of the world. This war too would have been one of personal ambition rather than one of idealism. Another great disadvantage would have been that the character and greatness of Bharata would not have been revealed to the world. Devotees would have been deprived of an ideal, which enables one to overcome all vices and strive for the Supreme.

When Manthara, the handmaid of queen Kaikeyi heard of the coronation of Sri Rama, she immediately went to her queen and convinced her that if Sri Rama was crowned king she and Bharata would be made His servants. She reminded Kaikeyi of the two boons that king Dasharatha owed her and suggested that she use it for her own benefit immediately. Kaikeyi then asked the king for Bharata to be made king and Sri Rama to be sent into exile for fourteen years.

Sri Rama's exile was a terrible calamity, which had greatly shaken Ayodhya. The entire population was overcome by grief and king Dasharatha gave up his life as he could not bear the separation from Sri Rama. After the death of king Dasharatha, guru Vashishta immediately sent messengers to the kingdom of Kaikeya to bring back Bharata and Shatrughna immediately. The messengers were told not to reveal the reason for their recall.

Tulsidasji relates the premonitions that occurred to Bharata whilst this catastrophe occurred in Ayodhya.

*Anarathu avadh arambheu jab te,
Kusagun hohi bharat kahu tab te.
Dekhahi raati bhayaanak sapanaa,
Jaagi karahi katu koti kalpanaa.*

*Bipra jevaai dehi din daanaa,
Siv abhishek karahi bidhi naanaa.
Maagahi hriday mahes manaaee,
Kusal maatu pitu parijan bhaaee.*

*Ehi bidhi socat bharat man, dhaavan pahuce aai,
Gur anusaasan shravan suni, cale ganesu manaa.*

"Ever since things began to take a vicious turn in Ayodhya evil omens occurred before Bharata. He saw fearful dreams at night and on waking indulged in all sorts of unpleasant speculations. He would feast Brahmins daily and bestow gifts on them. With elaborate ritual he would sprinkle water over an image of Bhagavan Shiva and invoking the great Lord in his heart, begged of Him the welfare of his parents, family and half-brothers. While Bharata was thus passing an anxious time the couriers arrived. And hearing the guru's commands he proceeded with an invocation to Lord Ganesha." (Ramcharitmanas 2/156/3-4, 2/157).

Sri Rama's exile was such a great blow to Bharata that it was impossible for him to remain silent and endure it, especially since this conspiracy was hatched in order to give him the kingdom. When all the funeral rites had been completed, Vashishta requested Bharata to ascend the throne. He gave an extensive discourse of persons belonging to the various classes. Thereafter praising king Dasharatha he said that in his

view, there had never in the history of the world been such a great soul as king Dasharatha. In order to uphold Dharma (truth), he sent Sri Rama to the forest even though Sri Rama was dearer to him than life itself. This he proved by giving up his life being unable to bear the separation. Vashishta also said that being the son of such a great soul, it was now Bharata's duty to accept the kingdom of Ayodhya, to be steadfast in his path of duty and thereby to uphold the tradition of his family. When he realised that Bharata was not amenable to such a proposal, Vashishta suggested that Bharata should rule the kingdom for fourteen years and thereafter hand it over to Sri Rama. This proposal was well received by all. The ministers were all pleased and even the loving Kaushalya, the mother of Sri Rama, gave it her approval. The ministers were well aware of the weakness of persons who had tried not to succumb to the allurements of high office, but once they had a taste of power, it became extremely difficult to give it up. This psychological fact has been repeated innumerable times in history. However, Bharata was free from any such illusion and no amount of power could influence him to take the throne. The entire population of Ayodhya could not get him to change his mind. The combination of steadfastness and

humility is very rare to find in the same person. It is very difficult for a humble person to be firm, for firmness requires a certain amount of harshness. A steadfast person usually makes others agitated by his insistence. However Bharata was able to invoke such sweetness in others that even his refusal to accept a particular approach, did not perturb them. Bharata's reply to guru Vashishta can undoubtedly be said to be unparalleled in the Ramcharitmanas. He spoke from his heart whilst his whole body was filled with love for Sri Rama. When Bharata began his reply, it seemed to Vashishta and everyone else, that he was going to accept the kingdom. He stated that it was his duty to obey his guru and his parents. However, he questioned whether it is proper for a guru to burden a disciple without first determining whether the disciple is capable of fulfilling the task or not. Dharma can only be upheld if the guru carefully weighs the situation before giving an instruction, taking into account both the emotion and the intellectual make up of his disciple. He politely asked Vashishta to rethink his instruction, for, although his intellect might allow him to accept the kingdom, his heart would not. He apologetically put a question mark on Vashishta's request for him to take the throne. He wanted to know

if king Dasharatha had no doubts when he had issued his command and whether he had acted voluntarily. He knew that king Dasharatha's desire was to see Sri Rama as king. It was the plot hatched by Manthara and Kaikeyi that forced him to give a command that was contrary to his wishes. It was only by the installation of Sri Rama as king that his father's true wishes would be fulfilled. If he (Bharata) became king, then Kaikeyi's boons would be fulfilled even though she had caused such misery to all. Bharata did not want to be a part of this for it meant advocating unrighteousness. The scriptures place the greatest importance on truth and the real truth is that which is in the heart. Bharata's reasoning regarding Vashishta's commands was whether king Dasharatha had been compelled to issue such a command and if so one had to also take into consideration the consequences of such an action. The coronation of a king affects each and every citizen in his country. In Bharata's opinion, his installation would not fulfil the true desire of his father and would be detrimental to the citizens. It was for this reason that he could not concur with Vashishta even though it was his father's command.

By asking him to fulfil his duties, Bharata felt that Vashishta was merely taking the literal meaning and neglecting the true spirit of duty. He felt that if he did take the throne, the citizens would feel that he had the desire to be king. If the aspirations of the majority of the citizens were destroyed by the conspiracy of two individuals, and later this idea is given social acceptance, then it would mean that an injustice was being propagated. Bharata also wanted to know whether the kingship was being given to him out of pity or as an act of generosity. If this was so, then he wanted to reserve the right to accept it or not.

Those who listened to Bharata were transported to a different level of consciousness. His reply was a synthesis of emotion, discrimination and propriety. It had neither the pride of sacrifice nor the exhibition of intellectualism. Each word was full of sweetness. His voice, which was filled with humility, was as tender as a flower, yet it was as firm as the thunderbolt. His speech given in the royal court in the presence of the citizens of Ayodhya, Vashishta, the ministers and queens gives us a clear insight into Bharata's way of thinking.

What pained Bharata very much was that even though Vashishta condemned Kaikeyi for her wicked actions, he was, in fact, fulfilling her desires by now asking him to take the throne. What greater paradox can there be than this? On the one hand Vashishta cited Kaikeyi's wily actions and on the other hand he proposed her very plan giving it the sanction of the scriptures. In this Bharata saw the harshness of Providence. He saw Kaushalya's concurrence in this matter as an act of maternal affection.

Raam maatu suthi saralcit, mo par premu bisekhi.

Kahai subhaay saneh bas, mori deentaa dekhi.

"Sri Rama's mother (Kaushalya) is most guileless of heart and loves me in a special degree. Finding me in distress she has said all this under impulse of natural affection." (Ramcharitmanas 2/181).

Bharata refused to accept the throne for fourteen years and then hand it over to Sri Rama. If he did so, it would seem that he was accepting the throne as his right, and then handing it over to Sri Rama as a gift out of generosity. He considered this the height of impertinence. In his view, the rightful heir to the throne was Sri Rama and an injustice was being perpetrated by making him king. In surrender, there is sometimes a bit of hidden pride, which Bharata did not

allow to enter his mind in any way. One can only surrender or sacrifice a thing if it belongs to you. But if you do not have ownership, then how can the question of surrender arise. Later some of the citizens decided to let their property go to ruin if it prevented them from reaching God.

Jarau so sampati sadan sukhu, suhrid maatu pitu bhaai.

Sanmukh hot jo raam pad, karai na sahas sahaai.

"Perish that property, house, happiness, friend, father, mother or brother who does not gladly help one turn one's face towards Sri Rama's feet."

(Ramcharitmanas 2/185). Bharata however did not agree with this sentiment. He felt that if a thing belonged to you, you could destroy it. He saw everything as belonging to Sri Rama and therefore it was his duty as a servant to protect it by all means. Thus we see that before his departure for Chitrakuta he made adequate security arrangements for the safety of Ayodhya.

Bharata was well acquainted with the nature of Sri Rama. He knew that He had happily left the kingdom of Ayodhya to Bharata and that He would be extremely pleased if Bharata accepted and ruled as king. He also knew that if he did so, then Sri Rama would return after fourteen years to claim His right. In the Valmiki Ramayana it is clearly stated that after the

battle in Lanka, Sri Rama sent Hanumanji to Ayodhya in order to ascertain the well being of Bharata and also establish whether Bharata had whole heartedly accepted the kingdom, in which case he must not meet him but rather return and inform Him (Sri Rama) so that He could halt His departure to Ayodhya. In such a situation, He did not want to pose a new problem by His return. However, in the Ramcharitmanas, Sri Rama does not have this doubt about Bharata and merely said to Hanumanji:

*Prabhu hanumantahi kahaa bujhaaee,
Dhari batu roop avadhpur jaaee.
Bharatahi kusal hamaari sunaaehu,
Samaacaar lai tumha cali aaehu.*

"Go ahead of us to the city of Ayodhya in the guise of a religious student, tell Bharata the news of our welfare and then come back with all the news about him." (Ramcharitmanas 6/120/1).

Bharata's refusal was against all contemporary tradition. The guru's orders had been carried out faithfully by all his previous disciples. Obedience to teacher, father and mother is considered the pinnacle of righteousness. Bharata had the unanimous command of his guru, father and mother and this command was a reasonable one, which even Sri Rama had endorsed.

Perceiving this command to be improper, he steadfastly refused to comply, thereby presenting an extraordinary ideal.

Bharata's refusal cleared the doubts of all who may have believed that he had been part of his mother's conspiracy. Naturally, many may have thought that his maternal relatives may have instigated such a situation since Bharata had spent a considerable length of time in their kingdom. The promise that was extracted from king Dasharatha at the time of his marriage to Kaikeyi was also known to all. The servant Manthara herself had come from the kingdom of Kaikeya.

When Sri Rama went into exile, the people of Ayodhya tried to follow Him, indicating their resentment for Bharata, whom they were not prepared to accept as king. Now, finding that Bharata himself was refusing the kingdom, there was a change of attitude in the citizens of Ayodhya towards him. Hearing his emotional reply, their hearts went out to him. The people were overcome with love for him and when he announced that they would depart for Chitrakuta in the morning, it was as though Bharata had given voice to their very own aspirations.

Their previous belief that he could not be innocent was now proven wrong.

*Matuu saciv gur pur nar naaree,
Sakal saneh bikal bhae bhaaree.
Bharatahi kahahi saraahi saraahee,
Raam prem moorati tanu aahee.
Taat bharat as kaahe na kahehoo,
Praan samaan raam priya ahahoo.
Jo paavaru apanee jadtaaee,
Tumhahi sugaai maatu kutilaaee.
So sathu kotik purush sametaa,
Basihi kalap sat narak niketaa.
Ahi agh avgun nahi mani gahaee,
Harai garal dukh daarid dahaee.*

Avasi calia ban raamu jah, bharat mantru bhal keenha.

Sok sindhu boodat sabahi, tumha avalambanu deenha.

"The mothers, the ministers, the preceptor and the people of the city, were all overwhelmed with emotion. They praised Bharata again and again and said, 'Your body is the very personification of affection for Sri Rama. It is no wonder that you should say so, dear Bharata, since you are dear to Rama as his own life. The vile man who through his ignorance hates you because of your mother's perversity, the wretch shall abide in hell for a hundred Kalpas (cycles) with millions of his past generations. A gem on the head of a serpent is not affected by the sins and faults of the serpent; on the other hand it counteracts poison, sorrow and indigence. Bharata, you have thought out a

good plan by all means; let us proceed to the woods were Sri Rama is. You have held out a helping hand to us all while we were being drowned in an ocean of grief.' " (Ramcharitmanas 2/183/2-4, 2/184).

This change of emotion in the people of Ayodhya is a very good example of how difficult it is to understand society. There are numerous occasions, when a person's actions are totally different from his mental aspirations. Several factors influence his actions, particularly the emotions of fear and temptation. When Bharata had returned from his grandfather's kingdom, people were angry and resentful towards him and regarded him with disdain. Therefore when they saw him approaching, they greeted him from afar as they had no desire to speak to him. They felt that it was their destiny to live under Bharata's rule and accepted this situation outwardly. Now they realised that Bharata was completely free from any attachment to the kingdom and that he wanted to be instrumental in establishing the rule of Sri Rama, thereby fulfilling their aspirations. The fourteen year period of Bharata's rule after the death of Dasharatha, was necessary to prepare the people for Rama Rajya (the ideal kingdom).

Many facets of Bharata's character are revealed during the journey from Ayodhya to Chitrakuta. One of the important episodes is his meeting with the chief of the Nishadas who belonged to a very low caste. According to traditional Hindu law, a person's actions in his previous birth, determines his present birth. If his deeds were honourable he will attain a high status and even a Shudra can be born as a Brahmin. In like manner, a Brahmin who forsakes his duty can be born as a Shudra. That is why, one who practises traditional Hindu law does not see any impropriety in untouchability.

Tulsidasji is regarded as a supporter of the caste system and this is evident in several of his works. He has condemned those who opposed this system. During Rama Rajya the system worked wonderfully. Tulsidasji's definition of the caste system is totally different from what is being practised at the present time, where discrimination is prevalent. People of high birth now look down upon others because of pride and arrogance.

However, it is wrong to condemn Tulsidasji for his adherence and support of the caste system. One has only to read the episodes of Sri Rama's meeting with

Nishada and Bharata's meeting with Nishada to understand his standpoint. Sri Rama accepted Nishada as His friend and as an equal. Nishada and his people had taken presents of fruits and roots in baskets and proceeded to meet the Lord. He prostrated on the ground and placed the presents before Him and gazed on Him with great affection. Sri Rama made him sit next to Him and spoke lovingly to him. Nishada then said,

*Naath kusal pad pankaj dekhe,
Bhayau bhaagbhaajan jan lekhe.
Dev dharani dhanu dhaamu tumhaaraa,
Mai janu neecu sahit parivaaraa.
Kripaa karia pur dhaaria paaoo,
Thaapiya janu sabu logu sihaaoo.*

"The sight of your lotus-feet, my lord, is the root of all welfare; I can now count myself as a blessed man. My land, house and fortune are yours, holy sir; my family and myself are your humble servants. Do me the favour of visiting my town and confer dignity on me. Let everyone envy my lot." (Ramcharitmanas 2/87/3-4).

Although Sri Rama declined Nishada's invitation he lovingly conveyed His appreciation for his kind gesture.

From the above, it is evident that although Tulsidasji supported the caste system, he was against the practise of untouchability. The low caste Nishada became a

friend of Sri Rama whereas Ravana, though born in a Brahmin family had to be punished by Sri Rama for his evil actions.

On his way to Chitrakuta Bharata had to pass through the village of Nishada. Nishada was unsure of Bharata's intentions but nevertheless he approached the procession with presents.

*Jaani raampriya deenhi aseesa,
Bharatahi kaheu bujhaai muneesaa.
Raam sakhaa suni sandanu tyaagaa,
Cale uteri umgat anuraagaa.
Gaau jaati guh naau sunaaee,
Keenha johaaru maath mahi laaee.*

Karat dandvat dekhi tehi, bharat leenha ur laai.

Manahu lakhan san bhet bhai, premu na hriday samaai.

"The sage (Vashishta), who knew him to be a friend of Sri Rama, bestowed his blessing on him and told Bharata in detail about him. Hearing that he was a friend of Sri Rama, Bharata alighted from his chariot and, leaving it behind, advanced towards him with a heart overflowing with love. Guha on his part mentioned his village, caste and name and greeted him by placing his head on the ground. When Bharata saw him falling prostrate on the ground he lifted and pressed him to his bosom. He felt as if he had met Lakshmana and the surging emotion of his heart could not be repressed.

(**Ramcharitmanas 2/192/3-4, 2/193**). Bharata saw no difference between Lakshmana and Nishada for both were dear to him because they were both dear to Sri Rama. Bharata's actions here were against all contemporary traditions. His behaviour had an influence on Vashishta, which was seen later on in Chitrakuta.

*Prem pulaki kevat kahi naamoo,
Keenha doori te dand pranaamoo.
Raamsakhaa rishi barbas bhetaa,
Janu mahi luthat saneh sametaa.
Raghupati bhagati sumangal moolaa,
Nabh saraahi sur barisahi phoolaa.
Ehi sam nipat neec kou naahee,
Bad basishta sam kou jag maahee.*

Jehi lakhi lakhanahu te adhik, mile mudit muniraau.

So seetaapati bhajan ko, pragat prataap prabhaau.

"Thrilling all over with emotion and mentioning his name the Nishada chief too fell prostrate on the ground at a respectable distance. The sage, however, forcibly embraced him as a friend of Sri Rama; it seemed as though he had gathered up love lying scattered on the ground. 'Devotion to the lord of Raghus is the root of all choice blessing!' with these words of praise the gods in heaven rained flowers. 'There is no one so utterly vile as this man; and who is so great as Vashishta in this world? Yet on seeing him the king of sages embraced him with greater joy than he did Lakshmana. Such is the palpable glory and effect of

adoring Sita's lord!'" (Ramcharitmanas 2/242/3-4,
2/243).

In Bharata's character guru Vashishta discovered a new meaning to the word Dharma. That caste system which filled some people with pride whilst others were filled with a feeling of inferiority, could never be a means of uplifting an individual. When such a situation arises, then the true significance of life is lost, for true Dharma is supposed to free one from the feelings of pride and compunction. Sri Rama had freed Nishada from his inferiority complex by befriending him. That is why when Bharata embraced him and asked him about his well-being, he confidently replied,

*Kusal mool pad pankaj pekhee,
Mai tihu kaal kusal nij lekhee.
Ab prabhu param anugrah tore,
Sahit koti kul mangal more.*

Samujhai mori kartooti kulu, prabhu mahimaa jiy joi.

Jo na bhajai raghubeer pad, jag bidhi bancit soi.

"Now that I have beheld your lotus feet, which are the very fountain of happiness, I have accounted myself blessed for all time. And now, my lord, by your supreme grace my well fare is assured for millions of generations. Remembering my doings and my descent, on the one hand, and realising the Lord's greatness on the other, he who does not devote himself to Sri Rama's

feet has been befooled in this world by Providence."
(Ramcharitmanas 2/194/4, 2/195).

All those who encountered Bharata on his journey to Chitrakuta felt enlightened and experienced a great deal of joy and satisfaction. One of them was the great sage Bharadwaja who belonged to a very high category of saints. He was foremost amongst the saints who had forsaken all material pleasures in order to attain the ultimate goal of life. Countless aspirants came to him for guidance regarding spiritual practices. Yet even the sage Bharadwaja had these words of praise for Bharata:

*Sunahu bharat ham jhoot na kahahee,
Udaaseen taapas ban rahahee.
Sab saadhan kar suphal suhaavaa,
Lakhan raam siy darsanu paavaa.
Tehi phal kar phalu daras tumhaaraa,
Sahit payaag subhaag hamaaraa.
Bharat dhanya tumha jasu jagu jayao.*

"Listen, Bharata - I tell no falsehood, I am an ascetic dwelling in the forest and having no concern with the world - I obtained the happy and excellent reward of all spiritual practices when I saw Lakshmana, Rama and Sita. The reward of that reward itself is your sight, on which not only I but the whole of Prayaga deserves to be congratulated. Bharata, you deserve all praise

since by your glory you have conquered the whole world." (Ramcharitmanas 2/209/2-3).

Sage Bharadwaja saw Bharata as an embodiment of sacrifice and renunciation. As a result of his severe austerities, the sage had mastery over several supernatural powers which he used for taking care of the needs of all the guests in Bharata's entourage. He had provided great luxuries and sumptuous feasts for everyone. In spite of being in the midst of all these pleasures, Bharata's mind was not attracted to them in the least. To him this was all a mirage. Many people consider material objects to be real and are impatient to possess them, whilst others who think that they are spiritually advanced, regard material objects with contempt. However, those who share Bharata's view will consider these objects as God's play and influence, and they are neither attached nor do they shun these objects. Thus Bharata set a new ideal, not only to those aspirants who are in the midst of the world, but also to those who have renounced the material way of life. The inhabitants of Prayaga, where the great sage Bharadwaja had his hermitage, had only good words about Bharata. Bharata inspired countless people in his journey to Chitrakuta. As he passed through villages,

people were delighted to behold his beauty and charm. Some even mistook Bharata and Shatrughna to be Rama and Lakshmana, but then when they saw their royal attire in place of the hermit's garb and their expressions of sorrow and anxiety instead of joy and bliss, they realised that they were mistaken. Bharata visited many hermitages and temples and he made obeisance in those places, asking for devotion to the lotus feet of Sita and Sri Rama. As Bharata approached Chitrakuta, Lakshmana noticed from a distance the army procession. He was perturbed and informed Sri Rama that Bharata was now on his way to attack them. But Sri Rama knew Bharata's character and asked Lakshmana to be patient and not to judge Bharata wrongly.

Kahee taat tumha neeti suhaaee,

Sab te kathin raajmadu bhaaee.

Jo acvat nrip maatahi teee,

Naahin saadhusabhaa jehi seee.

Sunahu lakhan bhal bharat sareesaa,

Bidhi prapanc mah sunaa na deesaa.

Bharatahi hoi na raajmadu, bidhi hari har pad paai.

"What you have said, dear Lakshmana, is sound wisdom; the intoxication of kingly power is worst of all. But of those rulers who have tasted it they alone lose their head who have never waited on an assembly of saints. As for Bharata, I tell you, Lakshmana, in the whole of God's creation I have never seen or heard of

anyone so good as he. Bharata would never be intoxicated with sovereign power even if he attained the position of Brahma, Vishnu or Shiva." (Ramcharitmanas 2/230/3-4, 2/231). Even the gods; when they heard Sri Rama praising Bharata, felt that they had to make their contribution in this regard. They said,

*Jau na hot jag janam bharat ko,
Sakal dharam dhur dharani dharat ko.
Kabi kul agam bharat gun gaathaa,
Ko jaanai tumha binu raghunaathaa.
Lakhan raam siy suni sur baanee,
Ati sukhu laheu na jaai bakhaanee.*

"'Had Bharata not been born into the world, who on this earth would have championed the cause of virtue in its entirety? Who else than you, O Lord of Raghus, can know Bharata's good qualities, which are unapproachable even to the race of bards?' On hearing these words of the gods, Lakshmana, Sri Rama and Sita were more delighted than words can tell." (Ramcharitmanas 2/232/1-2).

Bharata was overcome by emotion when he sighted the Chitrakuta mountains. He took leave from the rest of his entourage and hastily proceeded ahead with Shatrughna and Nishada. He was hoping that Sri Rama would not abandon His abode on hearing of his

(Bharata's) arrival, taking him to be an accomplice if his mother. When Bharata entered the precincts of the hermitage, he saw Sri Rama seated amidst a host of hermits. He fell prostrate on the ground. Lakshmana, who noticed him, informed Sri Rama of Bharata's presence. Tulsidasji describes this very emotional scene thus:

Uthe raamu suni pem adheeraa,

Kahu pat kahu nikhang dhanu teeraa.

Barbas lie uthaai ur, laae kripaanidhaan.

Bharat raam kee milani lakhi, bisare sabahi apaan.

"Overwhelmed with emotion Sri Rama started up as soon as He heard this, His robe flying in one direction, and his quiver and bow and arrows in another. The all-compassionate Lord forcibly lifted Bharata and clasped him to His bosom. Everyone who witnessed the meeting of Bharata and Sri Rama lost all self-consciousness."
(Ramcharitmanas 2/239/4, 2/240).

Bharata had come to Chitrakuta with the intention of taking Sri Rama back to Ayodhya. He was, however, too afraid to make any such suggestion to Sri Rama. Vashishta, who was completely influenced by Bharata's overwhelming love, described to Sri Rama Bharata's emotional state and told him of Bharata's wishes. Sri Rama then said that he would accept whatever Bharata

proposed. There were two totally different reactions to the response of Sri Rama. The inhabitants of Ayodhya were delighted for they could now see their desires being fulfilled. The gods on the other hand became terror-stricken when they realised that if Sri Rama were to return to Ayodhya, then how would the task of killing Ravana be accomplished. This reaction was due to the fact that they had failed to pay attention to what Sri Rama had said earlier to Bharata.

*Taat tumhahi mai jaanau neeke,
Karau kaah asmanjas jeekee.
Raakheu raay satya mohi tyaagee,
Tanu parihareu pem pan laagee.
Taasu bacan metat man socoo,
Tehi te adhik tumhaar sankocoo.
Taa par gur mohi aayasuu deenhaa,
Avasi jo kahahu cahau soi keenhaa.*

"'I know you full well, dear brother; but what am I to do? There is great perplexity in my mind. The king (our father), you know, kept his word and abandoned me; nay, he gave up his life in order to keep his vow of love. I feel perturbed in my mind if I proceed to violate his word; and my scruple on your account is even greater. On top of it my preceptor has given his command to me. In any case I am prepared to do precisely what you suggest.'" (Ramcharitmanas 2/263/3-4). Sri Rama placed a very huge responsibility on

Bharata's shoulders. It is essential for every person to be steadfast in his duty and strive to reach his goal. However, an individual's achievements cannot be beneficial to all since they give rise to competition, selfishness and injustice. He then thinks only of himself and his own interests and has total disregard for everyone else. However, Bharata's nature was completely different. Sri Rama knew that Bharata would never ever act in a manner that would be detrimental to the common good. He also knew that Bharata had come with the idea of asking Him to return, but would abandon his resolve as soon as he realised that this would not be for the general good. Sri Rama's faith in Bharata's judgement proved to be correct. When Bharata was faced with such a responsibility, he immediately withdrew his request. He said that he would do whatever pleased Sri Rama. He condemned that servant who thought only of himself and put his master into a predicament. Bharata proposed several other options to Sri Rama and said that He should consider these if they pleased Him.

*Saanuj pathaia mohi ban, keejia sabahi sanaath.
Nataru pheriahi bandhu dou, naath calau mai saath.
Nataru jaahi ban teeniu bhaaee,
Bahuria seey sahit raghuraaee.
Jehi bidhi prabhu prasanna man hoee,
Karunaa saagar keejia soee.*

*Dev deenha sabu mohi abhaaroo,
More neeti na dharam bicaaroo.
Kahau bacan sab swaarath hetoo,
Rahat na aarat ke cit cetoo.*

"Send me into exile with my younger brother (Shatrughna) and let everybody feel secure under your protection. Or else send back both the younger brothers (Lakshmana and Shatrughna) and let me accompany you my lord. Or (as a third alternative) we three brothers may remain in the forest, while Sita and yourself may return to Ayodhya. Do that O ocean of mercy, which may please your heart, my lord. You have thrown the whole burden on me, my master; but I have no ethical insight nor any idea of religion. I am actuated by self-interest in whatever I say; a man in distress loses his senses.'" (Ramcharitmanas 2/268, 2/268/1-2).

Soon thereafter, king Janaka and his party arrived at Chitrakuta. He had received news of the death of king Dasharatha and the banishment of Sri Rama. He was unsure of what would happen in Ayodhya. He therefore sent spies to Ayodhya to ascertain the situation. When they heard of Bharata's decision to go to Chitrakuta, they immediately returned to Mithila. Janaka then

immediately set out for Chitrakuta, after praising Bharata.

The citizens of Ayodhya felt most relieved with the arrival of king Janaka and his queen Sunaina. Later when Sunaina met the queens privately, Kaushalya expressed her concern for Bharata. She was not so concerned about Sri Rama for she knew that he would do what was right. But she felt that Bharata would not be able to survive if he were to go back to Ayodhya alone. She asked Sunaina to tell king Janaka to assist in reaching a decision whereby Bharata could remain with Sri Rama. When king Janaka heard Kaushalya's message he was overcome with emotion and said,

*Saavdhaan sunu sumukhi sulocani,
Bharat kathaa bhav bandh bimocani.
Dharam raajnay brahmabicaaroo,
Ihaa jathaamati mor pracaaroo.
So mati mori bharat mahimaahee,
Kahai kaah chali chuati na chaahee.
Bidhi ganpati ahipati siv saarad,
Kabi kobid budh buddhi bisaarad.
Bharat carit keerti kartootee,
Dharam seel gun bimal bibhootee.
Samujhat sunat sukhad sab kaahoo,
Suci sursari ruci nidar sudhaahoo.
Nirvadhi gun nirupam purushu, bharatu bharat sam jaani.
Kahia sumeru ki ser sam, kabikul mati sakucaani.
Agam sabahi barnat barbarnee,*

*Jimi jalheen meen gamu dharnee.
Bharat amit mahimaa sunu raanee,
Jaanahi raamu na sakahi bakhaanee.
Bharatu avadhi saneh mamtaa kee,
Jadyapi raamu seem samtaa kee.
Parmaarath svaarath sukh saare,
Bharat na sapnehu manhu nihaare.
Saadhan siddhi raam pag nehoo,
Mohi lakhi parat bharat mat ehoo.*

Bhorehu bharat na pelihahi, mansahu raam rajaai.

Karia na socu saneh bas, kaheu bhoop bilkhaai.

"Listen attentively, O fair-faced and bright-eyed lady: The story of Bharata loosens the bounds of worldly existence. Religion, statecraft and an enquiry about Brahma (the infinite) are domains to which I have some access according to my own lights. But though acquainted with these subjects, my wits cannot touch the shadow of Bharata's glory even by trick, much less describe it. To Brahma (the creator) Lord Ganapati (Ganesha), Shesha (the king of serpents), Lord Shiva, Sharada (the goddess of learning), seers, sages and wise men and others who are clever in judgement the story, fame, doings, piety, amiability, goodness and unsullied glory of Bharata are delightful to hear and appreciate. They surpass the celestial stream in purity and even nectar in taste. Possessed of infinite virtues and a man above comparison, know Bharata alone to be the like of Bharata. Can Mount Sumeru be likened

to a seer? Hence the wit of the race of poets was confused (in finding a comparison for him). The greatness of Bharata, O fair lady, baffles all who attempt to describe it, even as a fish cannot glide on dry land. Listen, O beloved queen: Bharata's inestimable glory is known to Sri Rama alone; but he too cannot describe it. Even though Sri Rama is the highest example of even mindedness, Bharata is the perfection of love and affection. Bharata has never bestowed any thought on his spiritual or worldly interests or personal comforts. Devotion to Sri Rama's feet is at once the means and the end; to my mind this appears to sum up Bharata's creed. Bharata would never think of flouting Sri Rama's orders even unwittingly. We need not, therefore, in our affection give way to anxiety,' said the king in choked accents." (Ramcharitmanas 2/287/2-4, 2/288, 2/288/1, 2/288/3-4, 2/289).

Sri Rama was concerned about Bharata's happiness and satisfaction whilst the latter was worried about that which would please Sri Rama. Their concern for each other made it very difficult for them to reach a solution. Even the gods became worried that Bharata's love may compel Sri Rama to return to Ayodhya. They

wanted to contrive some underhand plot in order to prevent Sri Rama's return. They invoked Goddess Saraswati to intervene, but she realised that their selfishness had robbed them of their senses. She reprimanded them and refused to do their bidding. Finally she said,

*Bharat hriday siy raam nivaasoo,
Tah ki timir jah tarani prakaasoo.*

"Bharata's heart is the abode of Sita and Rama; can darkness ever enter where the sun shines."

(Ramcharitmanas 2/294/4).

After spending many days and pondering over the issue, Bharata realised that it would not be fair for him to expect Sri Rama to return. He felt that he had embarrassed Sri Rama by asking Him to consider his various proposals. He knew that Sri Rama's actions would never contravene Dharma and whatever He did would be to uphold Truth. Finally, he said,

*Naath bhayau sukhu saath gae ko,
Laheu laahu jag janamu bhae ko.
Ab kripaal jas aayasuhoe,
Karau sees dhari saadar soee.
So avlamb dev mohi deee,
Avadhi paaru paavau jehi seee.*

"My lord, I have derived the joy of having accompanied you and have also obtained the reward of being born

into this world, now, my gracious lord, whatever be Your command, I will bow to it and carry it out with reverence. Pray vouchsafe me, good sir, some tangible support by serving which I may be enabled to reach the end of the term of your exile." (Ramcharitmanas 2/306/3-4).

Bharata had come to Chitrakuta to coronate Sri Rama as king of Ayodhya. He had brought the sacred waters from all the holy places for this purpose. He asked Sri Rama what he should do with it. Sri Rama told him to seek the advice of the sage Atri in this regard. With the instruction of the sage, Bharata deposited the sacred waters into a well thus sanctifying it. The sage then named the well 'Bharatkupa'.

Bharata then spent some time visiting the holy places around Chitrakuta. Finally it was time for Bharata to leave Chitrakuta and return to Ayodhya. Sri Rama advised him briefly regarding the duties of a king. He reassured him that he would have no problem as long as he had the blessings of the sage Vashishta and the queens. Sri Rama gave Bharata His wooden sandals, which Bharata reverently placed on his head.

Tulsidasji describes the final meeting of Sri Rama and Bharata in a most moving manner.

*Bhetat bhuji bhari bhaai bharat so,
Raam prem rasu kahi na parat so.
Tan man bacan umag anuraagaa,
Dheer dhurandhar dheeraju tyaagaa.
Baarij locan mocat baaree,
Dekhi dasaa sur sabhaa dukhaaree.
Munigan gur dhur dheer janak se,
Gyaan anal man kase kanak se.
Je biranci nirlep upaae,
Padamu patra jimi jag jal jaae.*

Teu biloki raghubar bharat, preeti anoop apaar.

Bhae magan man tan bacan, sahit biraag bicaar.

"Sri Rama locked his brother, Bharata, in a close embrace; the ecstasy of His love cannot be described in words. His body, mind and speech overflowed with love and the firmest of the firm lost all firmness. His lotus eyes streamed with tears, even the assembly of gods was grieved to see His condition. The host of sages (assembled there), the preceptor (the sage Vashishta) and a champion of firmness like Janaka, the gold of whose mind has been tested in the fire of wisdom, nay, who were created by Brahma as free from all attachment and were born in this world even as the lotus springs up from water (and yet remains ever above it) - Even they overwhelmed in mind, body and speech and lost all reason and dispassion when they saw the

incomparable and boundless affection of Sri Rama (the Chief of Raghus) and Bharata. (Ramcharitmanas 2/316/2-4, 2/317).

After returning to Ayodhya, Bharata placed the sandals of Sri Rama upon the throne and reverently worshipped them. Guru Vashishta had the highest regard for Bharata and he remarked,

Samujhab kahab karab tumha joee,

Dharam saaru jag hoihi soee.

"Whatever you think, speak or do will be the essence of piety in this world." (Ramcharitmanas 2/322/4).

Bharata's adherence to Dharma was constant throughout the fourteen years. He conducted the affairs of the kingdom not as a king but as a servant. By doing so he demonstrated that power and wealth belonged only to God. He did not live in the palace but he chose to live at Nandigram, which was on the outskirts of the city. He did not wear royal attire but he wore the robes of a hermit. In fact he lived exactly like Sri Rama and Lakshmana did, anxiously waiting for the term of exile to expire so that he could meet his beloved Rama.

Whilst in exile, Sri Rama constantly remembered Bharata. After His victory in Lanka He became eager to meet him for He knew that his brother was anxiously

waiting for Him. He was also aware of the fact that if He did not return after fourteen years had expired, Bharata would give up his life. He expressed His concern for Bharata to Vibhishana who then offered Him the Pushpaka (aerial car), which had been in the possession of Ravana. Therefore instead of walking, He embarked on the aerial car and proceeded to Ayodhya.

Before reaching Ayodhya, Sri Rama halted at the Ashrama of Bharadwaja. He then sent Hanumanji ahead to inform Bharata of their welfare and to return with news from him. When Hanumanji arrived in Nandigrama he saw Bharata in a pitiable condition. He was physically emaciated and sat on a mat of kusa grass repeating the name of Sri Rama with tears streaming from his eyes. When Hanumanji gave him Sri Rama's message, Bharata was overjoyed and embraced him and said.

*Kapi tav daras sakal dukh beete,
Mile aaju mohi raam pireete.*

"At your very sight, O Hanumana, all my woes have disappeared. In you I have embraced today my beloved Rama Himself.'" (Ramcharitmanas 7/1/6).

After Hanumanji left, Bharata immediately set out for Ayodhya to inform his guru, the queens and the citizens of Sri Rama's pending arrival. Elaborate preparations

were made for the welcome of Sri Rama. After Sri Rama met His guru, the sages and Brahmanas, Bharata approached Him and fell prostrate on the ground. Sri Rama forcibly lifted him and embraced him. Both experienced an indescribable joy in their hearts. When Sri Rama enquired about his welfare Bharata replied,

*Ab kusal kausalnaath aarat
Jaani jan darsan diyo,
Boodat birah baarees kripaanidhaan
Mohi kar gah liyo.*

"'All is well now with me, since the All-merciful Lord of Koshala has blessed me with his sight, realising the distress of His servant, and taken me by the hand just when I was sinking in the ocean of desolation.'"
(Ramcharitmanas 7/4 Chand 2).

Despite all the tears and sorrow, the literature of the world has immensely benefited by the portrayal of the character of Bharata. During his stay at Chitrakuta, he exhibited numerous remarkable qualities, which make him a model to emulate with regard to dispassion, loyalty, fortitude and righteousness.

6.5 Lakshmana

It is generally known that a close relationship is formed between two people who have much in common. However, the relationship between Sri Rama and Lakshmana appears to be an exception to this rule. Not only are they vastly different in their physical appearance but also in their very nature. The truth is that the personality of Sri Rama is more dependant on Lakshmana, than on any other character in the Ramcharitmanas. Tulsidasji draws our attention to this in the invocatory verses where he says,

*Bandoo lachiman pad jaljaataa,
Seetal subhag bhagat sukh daataa.
Raghupati keerti bimal pataakaa,
Danda samaan bhayau jas jaakaa.
Sesh sahasrasees jag kaaran,
Jo avtareu bhoomi bhay taaran.*

"I reverence the lotus feet of Lakshmana - cool and charming and a source of delight to the devotee - whose renown served as a staff for the spotless flag of Sri Rama's glory. He is no other than the thousand-headed serpent-god, Shesha the cause (support) of the universe, who came down to dispel the fear of the earth." (Ramcharitmanas 1/16/3-4).

The role of Lakshmana indicated in this invocation is clearly revealed in the unfoldment of events throughout the Ramcharitmanas. In this respect Lakshmana is perceived not only as a devotee of Sri Rama but also as His complement.

From the point of view of devotion and Maryada it would be considered a sin to speak of Sri Rama's dependence on someone else. Likewise it is totally inappropriate to speak of Lakshmana as Sri Rama's complement. However, this doubt is eliminated when we consider that whilst the former part of the above invocation indicates the relationship between Sri Rama and Lakshmana as two different beings, the latter part indicates that in essence they are essentially two different manifestations of one and the same being. The Purusha Sukta, a hymn from the Vedas, refers to the Supreme Being as the Purusha (man) with a thousand heads. Lakshmana too is believed to be an incarnation of Shesha, the thousand-headed serpent who supports the globe. Therefore, just as in the Puranas Lord Narayana and Shesha are two different manifestations of the same entity, the purpose of the latter being to support the former, likewise in the context of the Ramayana, Sri Rama and Lakshmana are two different manifestations of

the same entity, the purpose of the latter being to support the former. This, indivisibility between the two brothers was felt by Hanumanji when he first met them.

Kee tumh teeni dev mah kooo,

Nar naaraayan kee tumh dooo.

Jag kaaran taaran bhav, bhanjan dharnee bhaar,

Kee tumh akhil bhuvan pati, leenha manuj avtaar.

"Do you count in the trinity or are you the twin divine sages Nara and Narayana? Or are you the Prime Cause of the world and the Lord of all the spheres manifested in human form to bridge the ocean of mundane existence and relieve the burden of the earth?"
(Ramcharitmanas 4/0/5, 4/1).

King Janaka got a similar impression when he first met, the two brothers in the company of the sage Vishwamitra who had taken them to Mithila to witness the bow sacrifice.

Finding his heart overwhelmed with love the king recovered himself by recourse to reason and, bowing his head at the sage's feet, spoke the following pregnant words in a voice choked with emotion:

Kahahu naath sundar dou baalak,

Munikul tilak ki nripkul paalak.

Brahma jo nigam neti kahi gaavaa,

Ubhay besh dhari kee soi aavaa.

"Tell me, my lord: are these two pretty boys the ornament of a sage's family or the bulwarks of some royal dynasty? Or, is it that Brahman (the Absolute), whom the Vedas describe in negative terms such as 'Not that' (Neti), has appeared in a dual form?'"
(Ramcharitmanas 1/215/1).

The sage Vishwamitra smilingly replied to Janaka's query with the mysterious words,

Kah muni bihasi kahehu nrip neekaa,

Bacan tumhaar na hoi aleekaa.

"You have spoken well, O king; your words can never be untrue.'" (Ramcharitmanas 1/215/3).

In this way Vishwamitra confirmed to king Janaka the essential oneness of Sri Rama and Lakshmana being manifested in two different forms without directly exposing their human Lila or sport.

Thus, in a philosophical sense it would not be inappropriate to refer to Lakshmana as Sri Rama's complement as it has been shown above. However, if from the point of view of devotion, Lakshmana is to be regarded as a devotee of the Lord, then too, the presence of Lakshmana is essential for the

manifestation of Sri Rama's divine qualities. This point is very well illustrated when the two brothers arrive in Janakpura with the sage Vishwamitra. Lakshmana was very eager to see the sights of this wonderful city but he remained silent and did not express his desire through fear borne of reverence towards Sri Rama and the sage. Sri Rama perceived this unspoken desire of His younger brother and politely asked the sage's permission to show Lakshmana around the city.

*Lakhan hriday laalsaa biseshee,
Jaai janakpur aaia dekhee.
Prabhu bhay bahuri munihi sakucaahee,
Pragat na kahahi manahi musukaahee.
Raam anuj man kee gati jaanee,
Bhagat bachaltaa hiy hulsaanee.
Param bineet sakuci musukaaee,
Bole gur anusaasan paaee.
Naath lakhanu puru dekhan cahahee,
Prabhu sakoc dar pragat na kahahee.
Jau raaaur aayasu mai paavau,
Nagar dekhaai turat lai aavau.*

"Lakshmana felt in his heart a great longing to go and see Janaka's capital. He was, however, afraid of the Lord and stood in awe of the sage; therefore he did not openly declare it and smiled within himself. Sri Rama understood what was passing in His younger brother's mind; and His heart overflowed with a kindly feeling

for His devotee. Taking leave of His preceptor to speak, He smilingly spoke with much diffidence in most polite terms, 'My lord, Lakshmana longs to see the city, but out of fear and respect for you he does not make it known to you. If I have your permission, I will take him round the city and quickly bring him back.'" (Ramcharitmanas 1/217/1-3).

The actual words used by Tulsidasji in the text in describing the feeling of Sri Rama for Lakshmana in this context, "Bhagat Bachalata", which means the Lord's love for His devotee, similar to the love of a cow for its calf, is full of esoteric meaning. This love of a cow for its calf is not always apparent. However, when a calf runs towards its mother for milk, then the cow's motherly love, presents a wonderful sight as it affectionately licks its young whilst suckling it. Similarly, the compassion of the Lord is not always perceived. Only when a devotee is sorely afflicted and appeals to the Lord in distress does the compassionate nature of the Lord manifests itself. In other words the humble yearning of a devotee is a precondition for the manifestation of the Lord's compassionate nature. Just as other people benefit from the milk of a cow, which begins to flow at the sight of its calf, so too does everyone else benefit from the

compassion of the Lord, which manifests itself on the appeal of a devotee. The sage Vishwamitra recognised this and replied to the Lord's request in the following words.

*Jaai dekhi aavahu nagaru, sukh nidhaan dou bhaai,
Karahu suphal sab ke nayan, sundar badan dekhaai.*
"Go, blissful pair of brothers, and having seen the city come back. Bless the eyes of all by showing them your charming countenance.'" (Ramcharitmanas 1/218).

Whilst Lakshmana has been portrayed in the episode mentioned above as a devotee responsible for the manifestation of the Lord's compassion, it must be noted that Lakshmana's relationship to the Lord is not limited to devotion only. He sometimes adopts a very heroic stance and brings forth the Lord's power and glory. At other times he adopts different roles that result in the manifestation of the Lord's multi-faceted personality. Thus in the entire Ramcharitmanas, Lakshmana appears in a variety of different roles which result in the manifestation of the Lord's divine glories, and in each of these roles, the common element is his unparalleled love for the Lord.

In the epic we find great devotees making their appearance one by one. In each of them we see a point

in time when the love for the Lord springs in their heart and develops. In the case of Lakshmana, however, we do not see the beginning of such love as the poet wishes to remind us that in the case of Lakshmana this love is without beginning or end. This love existed even before the advent of the creator, Brahma, when nothing existed except the Lord Narayana resting in deep sleep in the cosmic ocean. But even then there was one other who was awake, conscious and a witness to this sleep of the Lord. He did not feel disturbed by his loneliness and the silence all around him for the Lord of the universe was blissfully sleeping on his very lap. At that time, Shesha was serving as the couch for the Lord and his hood of a thousand heads served as a shelter and protection for the Lord. When the Lord awoke from His deep slumber and sat up, then the very same Shesha served as the royal throne for the Lord and his hood of a thousand heads as the Lord's royal umbrella. When the Lord resolved to create the universe through Brahma who sprang from His navel, then again, it was that Shesha who supported the entire universe on one of its thousand heads as if it was a speck of dust. That Shesha appeared to be oblivious of everything else but the Lord. Thus when the Lord resolved to manifest Himself in human form, then that part of Himself who

served as His eternal companion also manifested in human form as His brother.

The profound love of Lakshmana towards Sri Rama became apparent, to everyone from his very infancy.

*Baarehi te nij hit pati jaanee,
Lachiman raam caran rati maanee.*

"From his earliest days Lakshmana came to look upon Sri Rama as his benefactor and master and conceived devotion to His feet." (Ramcharitmanas 1/197/2).

Their childhood days were spent in playing together and during the nights too neither could sleep peacefully without the other. When playing games the four brothers and their friends divided into two groups. Except for Lakshmana and Bharata, everyone else was given a chance to play on different sides on different days. If one was to play on the side of the Lord on one day then he was to play on the other side on another day. Lakshmana always played on the side of the Lord and Bharata always on the opposite side. However, Sri Rama always deliberately lost the game to Bharata because He could never bear to see the sadness of this very sensitive brother. In such circumstances, how was it possible for Lakshmana to derive pleasure from the games knowing fully well that he would always be on the losing side? However, the uniqueness of Lakshmana's

character is that he derived more pleasure than anyone else from these games because he knew how much the Lord was delighted to see Bharata's delight and this knowledge of the Lord's delight was enough to send Lakshmana into raptures.

Only on one occasion did Lakshmana have cause to complain about Sri Rama allowing Bharata to be victorious in all the childhood games. This happened many years later when the Lord was in exile and residing at Chitrakuta together with Lakshmana and Mother Sita. News had come to them that Bharata was approaching that place with a huge army from Ayodhya. It occurred to Lakshmana that Bharata, having had a taste of royal power, now wanted to secure the throne permanently rather than surrender it to Sri Rama after the expiry of His exile. He was astonished that Bharata could have the audacity to assume that he could conquer the Lord and he felt that the reason for this was that the Lord had always allowed him victory in their childhood games and this was taken by Bharata to be due to his own superior prowess. Lakshmana had never shied away from the prospect of conflict and battle. He was confident that as long as he had the Lord's blessings he could single-handedly face any military force. He

solemnly declared this in a loud voice. He was anxious to rectify the mistake that Bharata had made in judging the Lord, but he himself was actually making the mistake in judging Bharata by assuming that the reason for Bharata bringing along with him the army from Ayodhya was for the purpose of battle. Sri Rama however entertained no doubts about the intentions of His dear brother Bharata. The Lord knew that Lakshmana's misapprehensions were due to his fierce loyalty and protectiveness towards the Lord, as a result of which he was even prepared to slay not only Bharata but also his own dear brother, Shatrughna, who was accompanying Bharata.

The necessity for Lakshmana to be with Sri Rama is also revealed when the sage Vishwamitra came to Ayodhya. The sage was perplexed with the atrocities of Subahu, Maricha and Taraka and their numerous followers. These demons were constantly disrupting and defiling the sacrifices of the sages. It occurred to the sage Vishwamitra that the Lord alone was able to bring relief to them from these atrocities. He had divined, through his spiritual insight, that the Lord had taken human birth in Ayodhya. Thus he journeyed to Ayodhya to request from king Dasharatha the services of Sri Rama

for the protection of the sacrifices. In Ayodhya he was pleased to meet all the princes, but in meeting Sri Rama he experienced ineffable bliss. However, he immediately realised that his objective will not, be accomplished by Sri Rama alone. He realised the necessity of Lakshmana to accompany Sri Rama on this mission and he therefore asked for both these princes to be sent with him to the forest.

Accompanied by Sri Rama and Lakshmana on the journey from Ayodhya to his hermitage in the forest, the sage Vishwamitra experienced a feeling of total joy. Sri Rama and Lakshmana are described here as two lions in the form of men.

*Purushsingh dou beer, harshi cale muni bhay haran,
Kripaasindhu matidheer, akhil bisva kaaran karan.*

"The two heroes, lions among men, oceans of compassion, resolute of purpose and the ultimate cause of the whole universe, gladly proceeded to rid the sage of his fear." (Ramcharitmanas 1/208b).

A well-known proverb says that two lions cannot live in the same forest. Literally speaking, this may not be altogether true, but the underlying idea of this proverb cannot be altogether negated. A lion is a symbol of majesty and virility. People endowed with these qualities are not very tolerant of rivalry. They

prefer to be the first amongst their peers. But Sri Rama and Lakshmana were 'lions' of a different sort. It was not possible to separate these two. The fact is that a 'lion' like Sri Rama needed the roar of a 'lion' like Lakshmana in order to awaken His lion-like qualities. From this point of view it was necessary for these two 'lions' to hunt together. It is noteworthy that they are both described in this context as equally matched in heroism, determination and compassion.

The principal demons Taraka, Maricha and Subahu were vanquished at the hands of Sri Rama. But the entire army of demons who accompanied them were slain single-handedly by Lakshmana.

*Paavak sar subaahu puni maaraa,
Anuj nisaacar kataku sanghaaraa.*

"The Lord next despatched Subahu with an arrow of fire; while His younger brother, Lakshmana, exterminated the demon host." (Ramcharitmanas 1/209/2).

This, incident was recalled by Sri Rama many years later just prior to the war in Lanka. Sugriva was objecting to the granting of refuge to Vibhishana who had left Lanka and come to Sri Rama's camp. He was afraid that Vibhishana might have been sent by Ravana as a spy to learn of their military secrets. He frankly

declared his suspicions to Sri Rama and recommended that Vibhishana be taken a prisoner.

*Bhed len patvaa dasaseesaa,
Tabahu na kachu bhay haani kapeesaa.
Jag mahu sakhaa nisaacar jete,
Lachimanu hanai nimish mahu tete.*

"Even if Ravana has sent him to find out our secrets, we have nothing to fear or lose, O lord of the monkeys. Lakshmana, O my friend, can dispose of in a trice all the demons the world contains.'" (Ramcharitmanas 5/43/3-4).

Sri Rama's statement to Sugriva about Lakshmana's prowess may appear to be an exaggeration, but it was actually the plain truth. Lakshmana had in fact, never demonstrated the full extent of his powers, and this was in keeping with his nature and philosophy. He preferred to be the staff holding aloft the flag of Sri Rama's glory rather than seek glory for himself. Should it be asked that if Lakshmana was capable of single-handedly annihilating the entire demon army, then why did Sri Rama find it necessary to seek the help of the monkeys and bears in the battle of Lanka, then the answer to this is that whilst an ordinary person will derive joy on being free from debt to others, Sri Rama derived joy in being indebted to others. Now, if Lakshmana was to single-handedly annihilate the entire

demon army, then Sri Rama would be deprived of this joy, and as has been stated before, Lakshmana's delight depended solely on the Lord's delight. Sri Rama merely mentioned the fact of Lakshmana's prowess to Sugriva in order to allay his fear of the risks involved in giving shelter to Vibhishana.

After completing the sacrifice under the protection of Sri Rama and Lakshmana, the sage Vishwamitra took both brothers to Janakpura in Mithila. The multi-faceted roles played by Lakshmana in Mithila are truly astounding. The impressions we have of him when he strolls through the city with Sri Rama, in the flower garden where they have their first contact with Sita, during the bow sacrifice and during his discourse with Parshurama are indeed different from each other to say the least.

In his first day in Janakpura, Lakshmana is seen in the role of a young man who is eager to explore an exciting new place, which he is visiting for the first time. Due to his disciplined nature, he is hesitant to do so out of deference to Sri Rama and Vishwamitra. Sri Rama however notices the suppressed eagerness of Lakshmana

and asks the permission of Vishwamitra to show Lakshmana around the city.

It is astonishing that Sri Rama was exposing the very feelings that Lakshmana was trying to hide and suppress. This appears to be inconsistent with the nature of the Lord as has been depicted in the Ramcharitmanas. It would have been more in keeping with the character of Sri Rama if he had stated to the sage that He Himself was eager to see the city and under that pretext fulfil the hidden desire of Lakshmana.

An instance of such a characteristic of Sri Rama is clearly demonstrated when Vibhishana left Lanka and took shelter with the Lord, who, in welcoming, Vibhishana addressed him as the king of Lanka. Vibhishana was startled as if he had been caught out. He admitted to the Lord that he did have some lurking desire in his heart before, but that had been washed away by the stream of devotion to the Lord's feet.

*Sunahu dev sacraacar swaamee,
Pranatapaal ur antarjaamee.
Ur kachu pratham baasnaa rahee,
Prabhu pad preeti sarit so bahee.
Ab kripaapal nij bhagti paavanee,
Dehu sadaa siv man bhaavanee.*

"'Listen, my lord, Ruler of the whole creation - animate as well as inanimate, Protector of the suppliant and Knower of all hearts: I did have some lurking desire in my heart before; but the same has been washed away by the stream of devotion to the Lord's feet.'" (Ramcharitmanas 5/48/3).

But Sri Rama, being sensitive to Vibhishana's embarrassment, comforted him by saying,

*Jadpi sakhaa tav icchaa naahee,
Mor darasu amogh jag maahee.*

"'Even though, my friend, you have no craving, My sight in this world never fails to bring its reward.'" (Ramcharitmanas 5/48/4).

In the case of Lakshmana however, the Lord demonstrated his complete faith, trust and feeling of oneness with His younger brother. He knew that He could count on Lakshmana to take the blame for the controversial aspects of His Lilas and Lakshmana too was more than willing to drink the poison of infamy for the sake of his beloved Lord. In this simple and ordinary incident of sight seeing the city of Janakpura, we find the seeds of the self-sacrificing trait of Lakshmana's character, which later became intensified to the extent that he staked both his reputation and his life while

protecting and enhancing the prestige and glory of Sri Rama. Thus, by taking up the awesome task of criticising king Janaka in the presence of all the people in the arena of the bow sacrifice, Lakshmana exposes his own impulsiveness and intolerance only to establish the self-control, fortitude, profundity and modesty of Sri Rama. This was only possible for someone as dedicated and selfless as Lakshmana. Therefore, whether it be confronting Parshurama or mutilating Shurpankha or subjecting Sita to the test of fire, Lakshmana did not hesitate even for a moment to risk his reputation and life and engage even in the most unpleasant duties for his beloved Lord. Sri Rama too reposes such faith and confidence in Lakshmana that He does not hesitate to put His younger brother in the firing line. In this way, starting with the incident of sight seeing in the city of Janakpura, the sequence of events that unfolded in the Ramcharitmanas brings out this unique characteristic of Lakshmana in a most dramatic way. Whilst most people have taken Lakshmana at face value and dismissed him merely as an impetuous young man, the few that have really understood him have held him in the highest esteem. That is why when Sri Rama said to Vishwamitra that Lakshmana wanted to see the city, the sage understood the importance of the

difficult but crucial role that Lakshmana was secretly playing to bring out the glory of Sri Rama. The people of Mithila were Vedantists. They believed that God is formless and attributeless. Vishwamitra knew that under the pretext of wanting to see the city, Lakshmana's real intention was to reveal to them the beauty of Sri Rama, the Lord incarnate with form and attributes, and thereby expand their mental horizons, enabling them to have a comprehensive and complete understanding of the Divine Lord. That is why, in giving permission to his disciples to tour Janakpura, Vishwamitra says,

Jaai dekhi aavahu nagaru, sukh nidhaan dou bhaai.

Karahu suphal sab ke nayan, sundar badan dekhaai.

"Go, blissful pair of brothers, and having seen the city come back. Bless the eyes of all by showing them your charming countenance.'" (Ramcharitmanas 1/218).

The day following the tour of Janakpura, both Sri Rama and Lakshmana set out at dawn to pick flowers for the morning prayers of the sage Vishwamitra. They went to the royal garden, and with the consent of the gardeners, they leisurely began to gather the flowers. Mother Sita too arrived there with Her companions, having been sent by Her mother to worship Girija (Mother Parvati) in a temple dedicated to the Goddess

close to a small lake in the garden. Whilst Mother Sita was offering Her prayers, one of Her companions who, was strolling about in the garden saw the two brothers and was overwhelmed with their spiritual beauty and attractiveness. She returned to Sita and said,

*Dekhan baagu kuar dui aae,
Bay kisor sab bhaati suhaae.
Syaam gaur kimi kahau bakhaani,
Giraa anayan nayan binu baanee.*

"Two princes have come to see the garden, both of tender age and charming in every way, one dark of hue and the other fair; how shall I describe them? For speech is sightless, while the eyes are mute."
(Ramcharitmanas 1/228/1).

Sita recollected sage Narada's prophecy that She will meet Her future husband in that very garden and an intense longing to see the Lord arose in Her heart. She asked Her companion to lead the way and She followed, Her eyes restless for the sight of the princes.

Before She could appear in the view of the two brothers, Sri Rama heard the sound of Her jewellery, which reflected the gracefulness of Her movements.

*Kankan kinkini noopur dhuni suni,
Kahat lakhan san raamu hriday guni.*

*Maanahu madan dundubhee deenhee,
Manasaa bisva bijay kaha keenhee.*

"Hearing the tinkling of bangles, the small bells tied round the waist and anklets Sri Rama thought within Himself and then said to Lakshmana, 'It seems as if cupid has sounded his kettledrum with intent to conquer the universe.'" (Ramcharitmanas 1/229/1).

The Ramcharitmanas does not mention any response from Lakshmana to these words of Sri Rama. One can however deduce his thoughts and feelings on the occasion from the delineation of his character in the Ramcharitmanas as a whole. Lakshmana regarded Sri Rama as the Supreme Lord of the universe and himself as a devoted servant of the Lord. He could therefore regard the one about whom Sri Rama was speaking as none other than the Divine Mother of the universe. It follows that whilst Sri Rama was smitten with love at the very sound of Sita's jewellery as She gracefully walked towards Him, Lakshmana, on hearing Sri Rama's words, was immediately filled with a deep sense of child-like love and reverence towards Her. It is stated that Sri Rama eagerly looked in the direction from which the sound of the jewellery came.

*As kahi phiri citae tehi oraa,
Siya mukh sasi bhae nayan cakora.*

"So saying, He looked once again in the same direction (whence the sound came); and lo! His eyes feasted themselves on Sita's countenance even as the Cakora bird gazes on the moon." (Ramcharitmanas 1/229/2).

One can imagine that Lakshmana, whose whole attitude towards Sita was one of pious reverence, must have cast his eyes on the ground in deep humility.

*Dekhi seeya sobhaa sukhu paavaa,
Hriday saraahat bacanu na aavaa.
Janu biranci sab nij nipunaaee,
biraci bisva kah pragati dekhaaee.*

"Sri Rama was filled with rapture to behold Sita's beauty; He admired it in His heart, but utterance failed Him. He felt as if the Creator had put his whole creative skill in visible form and demonstrated it to the world at large." (Ramcharitmanas 1/229/2-3).

Generally speaking, a man may only share such intimate feelings with his closest friends but not with a younger brother. Besides, Sri Rama has been hailed as "Maryada Purshottam", the very paragon of decorum. This episode shows that Sri Rama regarded Lakshmana as a friend as well as a brother. In fact, as events unfold, we will learn that the relationship between these two was limitless. As the need of the occasion arose, the appropriate relationship was established.

Throughout the royal orchard episode, Lakshmana maintained an extraordinary silence. Time and again, Sri Rama addressed him, sharing with him His innermost thoughts and most emotional feelings, but Lakshmana did not respond on a single occasion. It is strange that he, who was at all other times most outspoken, maintained such unusual silence on this occasion. When a speaker does not get a response from his audience, he may feel ignored and insulted. Surely, Lakshmana would not have liked Sri Rama to feel that way. However, if we look deeply into the matter, we will appreciate the uncommon wisdom of Lakshmana's silence. Firstly, Lakshmana was not in a position to appreciate Sita's beauty in the same sense that Sri Rama did because, as has been shown above, he regarded Her as the Divine Mother of the universe. Secondly, he easily sensed the overwhelming love that Sri Rama felt towards Sita and he knew that any interjection from him would momentarily distract Sri Rama from His total absorption in Her beauty. His silence therefore enabled Sri Rama to fully relish, undisturbed, the deepest sentiments that were stirring in His heart for the first time in His human experience. When seen in this light, Lakshmana is revealed to be highly sentimental and sensitive to the feelings of others, which was in

direct contrast to his role of a brash young man in which he was normally perceived. This also demonstrates that Lakshmana accepted that Sita was Sri Rama's concern alone.

In the arena of the bow sacrifice, the role of Lakshmana was radically different from that of the one in the royal garden. Right from the outset, Lakshmana had no misgivings about the outcome of this event. As far as he was concerned the bow had to break and that too at the hands of Sri Rama. On arising early on the morning of the bow sacrifice, Sri Rama said to Lakshmana,

*Uyau arun avlokahu taataa,
Pankaj kok lok sukh daataa.*

"'Lo brother, the day has dawned to the delight of the lotus, the Cakravaka and the whole world.'"
(Ramcharitmanas 1/237/4).

Lakshmana replied,

*Arunoday sakuce kumud, udgan joti maleen.
Jimi tumhaar aagaman suni, bhae nripati balheen.
Nrip sab nakhat karahi ujiaaree,
Taari na sakahi caap tam bhaaree.
Kamal kok madhukar khag naanaa,
Harshe sakal nisaa avsaanaa.
Aisehi prabhu sab bhagat tumhaare,
Hoihahi toote dhanush sukhaare.
Uyau bhaanu binu shram tam naasaa,*

*Dure nakhat jag teju prakaasaa.
Rabi nij uday byaaj raghuraayaa,
Prabhu prataapu sab nripanh dikhaayaa.
Tav bhuja bal mahimaa udghaatee,
Pragatee dhanu bighatan paripaatee.*

"The day having dawned, the lily has faded and the brightness of the stars is dimmed, just as the news of Your arrival all the princes (assembled here) have grown faint. Though twinkling like stars, all the princes put together are unable to lift the thick darkness in the form of the bow. And just as lotuses and bees and the Cakravaka and various other birds rejoice over the termination of the night, even so, my lord, all Your devotees will be glad when the bow is broken. Lo, the sun is up and the darkness has automatically disappeared; the stars have vanished out of sight and light flashes upon the world. Under pretence of its rising, O Lord of Raghus, the sun has demonstrated to all the princes the glory of my lord (Yourself). It is in order to reveal the might of Your arms that the process of breaking the bow has been set into operation.'" (Ramcharitmanas 1/238, 1/238/1-3).

Later in the morning when king Janaka sent for them, Vishwamitra said to Sri Rama:

*Calahu taat muni kaheu tab patvaa janak bolaai.
Siyaswayambaru dekhia jaaee,*

Eesu kaahi dhau dei badaaee.

"Come on, my son: Janaka has sent for us. Let us go and see how Sita elects her husband; we have yet to see whom Providence chooses to honour.'" (Ramcharitmanas 1/239, 1/239/1).

Lakshmana then addressing the Lord said,

Lakhan kahaa jas bhaajanu soee,

Naath kripaa tav jaapar hoee.

"He alone deserves glory, my lord, who enjoys your favour.'" (Ramcharitmanas 1/239/1).

The bow sacrifice commenced with the heralds proclaiming king Janaka's vow that whosoever succeeded in breaking Shiva's bow, would be given Sita's hand in marriage. Numerous kings gathered there made an attempt, first individually, then later collectively, but they all failed to even lift the heavy bow. Lakshmana sat and observed all this with silent indifference. He knew that it was necessary for all others to try and fail before Sri Rama broke the bow in order for the entire assembly to appreciate the greatness of the Lord. But when king Janaka expressed his disappointment at the failure of the kings by saying that had he known that there were no more heroes in the world, he would not have taken such a vow,

Lakshmana could not contain his indignation. He challenged Janaka and severely criticised him for his choice of words. He said,

*Raghubansinha mahu jah kou hoee,
Tehi samaaj as kahai na koe.
Kahee janak jasi anucit baanee,
Bidyamaan raghukul mani jaanee.*

"In an assembly where anyone of Raghu's race is present no one would dare speak such scandalous words as Janaka has done, even though conscious of the presence of Sri Rama, the jewel of Raghu's race."
(Ramcharitmanas 1/252/1).

Lakshmana's, outburst is viewed as inappropriate by many readers of the Ramcharitmanas, as it must have been with many of the people assembled there. Even if he were to be excused for castigating Janaka or indirectly insulting Sri Rama, his subsequent speech seemed to baffle all imagination. He said,

*sunahu bhaanukul pankaj bhaanoo,
kahau subhaau na kachu abhimaanoo.
Jau tumhaari anusaasan paavau,
Kanduk iva brahmaanda utaavau.
Kaace ghat jimi daarau phoree,
Sakau meru moolak jimi toree.
Tav prataap mahimaa bhagvaanaa,
Ko baakuro pinaak puraanaa.*

"'Listen, O Delighter of the solar race, I sincerely tell You, without any vain boasting: if I have but Your permission, I will lift the round world like a ball and smash it like an ill-baked earthen jar; and by the glory of Your majesty, O blessed Lord, I can break Mount Meru like a radish. What, then, is this wretched old bow?'" (Ramcharitmanas 1/252/2-3).

Having been acquainted with Sri Rama's feelings towards Mother Sita in the royal garden the day before, these words uttered by him seems to be a total transgression of all protocol and decorum. From the point of view of devotion, his conduct here will seem unpardonable. This speech was such that Sri Rama and Mother Sita should be very embarrassed, to say the least. However, by describing the reaction of Sri Rama, Mother Sita, sage Vishwamitra and other sages, Tulsidasji forces us to reconsider our judgement of Lakshmana in this context.

*Lakhan sakop bacan je bole,
Dagmagaani mahi diggaj dole.
Sakal log sab bhoop deraane,
Siy hiy harshu janaku sakucaane.
Gur raghupati sab muni man maahee,
Mudit bhae puni puni pulkaahee.*

"'As Lakshmana spoke these angry words, the earth shook and the elephants supporting the quarters tottered. The whole assembly, including all the princes, was struck

with terror; Sita felt delighted at heart while Janaka blushed. The preceptor (Vishwamitra), the Lord of Raghus and all the hermits were glad of heart and thrilled all over again and again.'" (Ramcharitmanas 1/253/1-2).

This informs us that Sri Rama and Mother Sita saw a deeper significance to Lakshmana's words than merely their outward implication. The contest of breaking the bow was open to everyone. Just as the other kings had done, Lakshmana could have got up and attempted to break the bow himself if he had even the slightest desire of marrying Mother Sita. Even now, instead of seeking the permission of Janaka or Vishwamitra to do so, his suggestion that this could easily, be accomplished by him, if he had the permission of Sri Rama, indicated that the outcome of this event did not rest with Janaka but with the will of the Lord. He further suggested that this deed could only be accomplished by the power of the Lord. As far as Lakshmana was concerned, the breaking of the bow had no connection with the marriage of Sri Rama and Mother Sita, whose union is eternal and independent of all external factors. He felt that the bow was necessary to be broken only to shatter the delusion of Janaka and

his words were a direct assault on this misconception of the king. By stating that he himself could easily shatter the bow with the power of Sri Rama, Lakshmana was clearly pointing out to everyone present there that Sri Rama was indeed the Supreme Lord of the universe. If a humble servant like himself could break the bow after taking recourse to the power and glory of the Lord, then what was there that the Lord Himself could not accomplish? Thus, we find that by his speech, Lakshmana gave a completely different meaning to the episode of the bow sacrifice, the loftiness of which sent Sri Rama, Mother Sita, Vishwamitra Muni and the other sages into ecstasies. They knew that Lakshmana's purpose was not to break the bow but to shatter Janaka's delusion. Furthermore, he was preparing the ground for the breaking of the bow by Sri Rama. He knew that Janaka's vow and his speech of disappointment when the other kings failed to lift the bow were the biggest impediments for the Lord to break the bow. When it was announced that the breaker of the bow will gain fame as victor of the three worlds and would be able to marry Sita, Sri Rama found nothing there to motivate or inspire Him. Can there be desire for fame in the Lord? And why would He strive to win the hand in marriage of Sita who was His own Divine Energy? It was Lakshmana's

speech that changed the entire situation and laid the framework for the Lord's intervention in the stalemate that had arisen. Sage Vishwamitra understood all this and he seized the opportunity by asking Sri Rama to break the bow, not in order to marry Sita, but in order to remove the grief of Janaka.

*Bisvaamitra samay subh jaanee,
Bole ati sanehamay baanee.
Utahu raam bhanjahu bhav caapaa,
Metahu taat janak paritaapaa.*

"Perceiving that it was a propitious time, Vishwamitra said in most endearing terms, 'Up, Rama, break the bow of Shiva and relieve Janaka, my boy, of his anguish.'"
(Ramcharitmanas 1/253/3).

It now becomes clear that the purpose of Lakshmana in the arena of the bow sacrifice was not to demonstrate his fearlessness and valour but rather to reveal to everyone in the assembly the eternal unity of the Lord and His Divine Energy. In his view, the bow was a symbol of dense darkness, which obscured the reality of Sri Rama and Sita and this darkness could only be eliminated by the brightness of Sri Rama's act of breaking the bow.

Immediately after the bow was broken by Sri Rama there was great rejoicing in the entire assembly but this was threatened by the evil kings who had tried but failed to lift the bow.

*Tab siya dekhi bhoop abhilaashe,
Koor kapoot mood man maakhe.
Uti uti pahiri sanaah abhaage,
Jaha taha gaal bajaavan laage.
Lehu cadaai siy kaha kooo,
Dhari baandhahu nrip baalak dooo.
Tore dhanushu caad nahi saraee,
Jeevat hamahi kuari ko baraae.
Jau bidehu kachu karai sahaaee,
Jeetahu samar sahit dou bhaaee.*

"Then, as they looked on Sita, a few princes were filled with longing for Her; those wicked, degenerate fools grew indignant. Rising from their seats one after another and donning their armour the wretches began to brag about. Someone said, 'Carry off Sita by force and capturing the two princes hold them in bondage. No purpose will be served by merely breaking the bow; for who shall marry the princess while we still live? Should Janaka come forward to help them, rout him in battle along with the two brothers.'"

(Ramcharitmanas 1/265/1-3). Such reaction from the princes suggested that they were not fully impressed by Lakshmana's revelations, and Parshurama had to appear to diffuse the growing rebellion.

Sri Rama was so engrossed in thoughts of Sita at that time that he did not even take notice of the nasty turn of events. But Lakshmana, who was ever vigilant, immediately appraised the situation. He did not say anything, lest Sri Rama's thoughts at that moment became disturbed but

Arun nayan bhrikutee kutil, citvat nripanha sakop

Manahu matt gajgan nirakhi, singhkisorahi cop.

"With fiery eyes and knitted brows he cast an angry look at the kings, as though, at the sight of a herd of wild elephants in a rut, a young lion was eager to pounce on them." (Ramcharitmanas 1/267). But this was not sufficient to deter the evil kings from their purpose and it appeared to Lakshmana that a bloody battle with them was unavoidable. He was confident that he could, by the grace of the Lord, single-handedly annihilate the entire hall of evil kings, but he was aware that this would mar the auspiciousness of the occasion of Sri Rama's marriage to Sita. Just then the sage Parshurama arrived there, having heard the news of the breaking of the bow.

Sees jataa sasi badanu suhaavaa,

Ris bas kachuk arun hoi aavaa.

Bhrikutee kutil nayan ris raate,

Sahajahu citvat manahu risaate.

Brishabh kandh ur baahu bisaalaa,

Caaru janeu maal mrig chaalaa.

*Kati muni basan toon dui baandhe,
Dhanu sar kar kutaaru kal kaandhe.*

"Having matted locks on the head, his handsome moonlike face was a bit reddened with anger; with knitted brows and eyes inflamed with passion, his natural look gave one the impression that he was enraged. He had well-built shoulders like those of a bull and a broad chest and long arms; he was adorned with a beautiful sacred thread, rosary and deerskin. With an anchorite's covering about his loins and a pair of quivers fastened by his side, he held a bow and arrows in his hands and an axe upon his fair shoulder." (Ramcharitmanas 1/267/3-4).

Knowing of his reputation as an enemy of Kshatriyas, everyone seemed terrified at the sight of Parshurama.

*Dekhat bhrigupati beshu karaalaa,
Ute sakal bhay bikal bhuaalaa.
Pitu samet kahi kahi nij naamaa,
Lage karan sab dand pranaamaa.
Jehi subhaay citvahi hitu jaanee,
So jaanai janu aai khutaanee,
Janak bahori aai siru naavaa,
Seey bolaai pranaamu karaavaa.
Aasish deenhi sakhee harshaanee,
Nij samaaj lai gae sayaanee.
Bisvaamitru mile puni aae,
Pad saroj mele dou bhaae.
Raamu lakhanu dasrath ke dhotaa,*

*Deenhi asees dekhi bhal jotaa.
Raamahi citai rahe thaki locan,
Roop apaar maar mad mocan.*

"Beholding the frightful figure of Parshurama the kings all rose in consternation; and mentioning his own as well as his father's name, each fell prostrate on the ground before him. Even he on whom Parshurama cast a friendly look in a natural way thought the sands of his life had run out. Then came Janaka and bowed his head; and sending for Sita he made Her pay homage to the sage. Her companions rejoiced when he bestowed his blessing on Her, and cleverly took Her where the other ladies were. Next came Vishwamitra, who met him and placed the two brothers at his lotus-feet, saying that they were king Dasharatha's sons, Rama and Lakshmana by name; seeing the well-matched pair, he blessed them. His eyes were rivetted on Sri Rama's incomparable beauty, which would humble the pride of Cupid himself." (Ramcharitmanas 1/268/1-4).

After enquiring for the reason of the gathering and being informed that the bow of Shiva (his Guru) had been broken, Parshurama flew into a rage and threateningly demanded of Janaka to reveal the identity of the person who had broken the bow.

Sabhay biloke log sab, jaani jaankee bheeru.

Hriday na harshu bishaadu kachu, bole shreeraghubeeru.

*Naath sambhudhanu bhanjnihaaraa,
Hoihi keu ek daas tumhaaraa.
Aayasu kaah kahia kin mohee,
Suni risaai bole muni kohee.
Sevaku so jo karai sevkaaee,
Ari karnee kari karia laraaee.
Sunahu raam jehi sivdhanu toraa,
Sahasbaahu sam so ripu moraa.
So bilgaau bihaai samaajaa,
Na ta maare jaihihi sab raajaa.
Suni muni bacan lakhana musukaane,
Bole parsudharahi apmaane.*

"When the Hero of Raghu's race saw everyone seized with panic and perceived Janaki's anxiety, He interposed, there was neither joy nor sorrow in His heart. 'My lord, it must be some one of your servants who has broken the bow of Shiva. What is your command? Why not tell me?' At this the furious sage was all the more incensed, and said, 'A servant is he who does service; having played the role of an enemy, one should give battle. Listen O Rama; whoever has broken Shiva's bow is my enemy no less than the thousand-armed Karthavirya. Let him stand apart, leaving this assembly; or else everyone of these kings shall be slain.'" (Ramcharitmanas 1/270, 1/270/1-3).

Lakshmana saw this as an opportunity to intervene. He had noticed how terrified the evil kings were of

Parshurama. He also knew that the humility and conciliatory approach of Sri Rama would eventually satisfy the ego of Parshurama who would finally bless Sri Rama and depart from the scene. But then, the evil kings would conclude that like us, Sri Rama is also afraid of Parshurama, and they would revert to their original intention of waging battle and carrying Sita off by force. Parshurama too would be deprived of learning about the true greatness of Sri Rama. He therefore began to sarcastically taunt Parshurama. In doing so, he not only exposed himself to the danger of incurring the full force of Parshurama's wrath but also the disapproval and censure of everyone present there. In spite of all this, he persisted in his objective with determination and confidence. He proved himself to be above censure and praise. His persistence in doing only that, which would be in the final analysis, in the best interests of everyone concerned, including that of Parshurama and the evil kings, reveals his boundless fortitude and unswerving faith in the Lord. Even though he continued to taunt Parshurama to the brink of his tolerance, Lakshmana was careful not to allow the confrontation to develop into physical combat, in spite of Parshurama's repeated challenges and his confidence in his own military prowess. Like

Parshurama, he too could have given a Brahmin-Kshatriya conflict aspect to the whole incident and justifiably given a Kshatriya response to the insults, threats and challenges of Parshurama who prided himself to be a Brahmin more powerful than the Kshatriyas. Lakshmana knew that Parshurama was behaving in this way because of not recognising the Lord and that his attitude would change once his delusion is removed by the Lord's grace. And that is exactly what happened. The episode ends in what appears to be the defeat of Parshurama, but Parshurama himself did not feel the pain and humiliation of defeat.

Jaanaa raam prabhaau tab, pulak praphullit gaat.

**"He then recognized Sri Rama's might and his whole frame was thrilled with joy and his hair stood on end."
(Ramcharitmanas 1/284).**

After glorifying the Lord and paying obeisance to Him, Parshurama departed with the words,

Anucit bahut kaheu agyaataa,

Chamahu chamaamandir dou bhraataa.

"'In my ignorance I have said much that was unseemly; therefore pardon me, both brothers, abodes of forgiveness that You are.'" (Ramcharitmanas 1/284/3).

No further mention is made in the Ramcharitmanas of the evil kings who wanted to intervene militarily in the marriage of Sri Rama and Sita, but it can be imagined that after the submission of Parshurama they must have run from there with their lives.

King Janaka too was repentant of his earlier harsh criticism of Lakshmana and he now appreciated the role played by Lakshmana before and after the breaking of the bow. He realised that if it were not for Lakshmana, neither would Sri Rama have broken the bow, nor would the ugly situation of battle with the evil kings have been averted. Therefore, addressing sage Vishwamitra, Janaka said,

Mohi kritkritya keenh duhu bhaaee,

Ab jo ucit so kahia gosaaee.

" 'The two brothers have gained me my purpose; pray tell me now, reverend sir, what it behoves me to do.' "
(Ramcharitmanas 1/285/3).

When news of Sri Rama's banishment reached the ears of Lakshmana, his mind became possessed with the single thought of whether Sri Rama would allow him to accompany Him in exile. His anxiety at that time is described thus:

Kahi na sakat kachu citvat thaadhe,

Meenu deen janu jal te kaadhe.

"He was unable to speak and stood gazing piteously like a fish taken out of water." (Ramcharitmanas 2/69/2).

But even this comparison between Lakshmana's mental condition at that time and a fish that is taken out of water appears to be inadequate. A fish experiences agony only after it is taken out of water, but for Lakshmana, the very thought of separation from Sri Rama was agonising beyond endurance.

On seeing this state of Lakshmana, Sri Rama was placed on the horns of a dilemma. On one hand was His sense of duty to family and country and on the other hand was His unprecedented love for His younger brother. The very thought of Lakshmana being absent from Ayodhya in the current circumstances was frightening. But at the same time, he knew how incomplete he would feel without Lakshmana, who had always been His constant companion. Finally, His mind weighed more heavily in favour of duty and the welfare of family and country. He said to Lakshmana,

Bole bacanu raam nay naagar,

Seel saneh saral sukh saagar.

Taat prem bas jani kadraahoo,

Samujhi hriday parinaam uchaahoo.

Maatu pitaa guru swaami sikh, sir dhari karahi subhaay,

Laheu laabhu tinh janam kar, nataru janamu jag jaay.

*As jiy jaani sunahu sikh bhaaee,
Karahu maatu pitu pad sevkaaee.
Bhavan bharatu ripusoodanu naahee,
Raau briddha mam dukhu man maahee.
Mai ban jaau tumhahi lei saathaa,
Hoi sabahi bidhi avadh anaathaa.
Guru pitu maatu prajaa parivaaroo,
Sab kahu parai dusah dukh bhaaroo.
Rahahu karahu sab kar paritoshoo,
Nataru taat hoihi bad doshoo.
Jaasu raaj priya prajaa dukhaaree,
So nripu avasi narak adhikaaree.
Rahahu taat asi neeti bicaaree,
Sunat lakhanu bhae byaakul bhaaree.*

" 'Pray do not lose your balance of mind out of affection, dear brother, and be convinced in your heart of hearts that the end will be a happy one. Those who reverently and unconstrainedly follow the advice of their father and mother, preceptor and master have reaped the fruit of their birth or else their coming into this world has been in vain. Bearing this in mind, brother, listen to my advice and wait upon the feet of our father and mothers. Bharata and Ripusudana (Shatrughna) are not at home, while the king is aged and full of grief for my sake. If I proceed to the woods taking you with me, Ayodhya will be rendered completely masterless and the preceptor and parents the people as well as the family, all will be subjected to a spell of terrible suffering. Stay, then, to comfort

all; otherwise, brother, we shall incur great sin. A king whose reign brings suffering to his beloved people surely deserves an abode in hell. Bearing in mind this maxim, dear brother, stay at home.'" (Ramcharitmanas 2/69/4, 2/70, 2/70/1-4).

In reply to this, Lakshmana said,

Deenhi mohi sikh neeki gosaaee,
Laagi agam apanee kadraaee.
Narbar dheer dharam dhur dhaaree,
Nigam neeti kahu te adhikaaree.
Mai sisu prabhu saneh pratipaalaa,
Mandaru meru ki lehi maraalaa.
Gur pitu maatu na jaanau kaahoo,
Kahau subhaau naath patiaahoo.
Jah lagi jagat saneh sagaaee,
Preeti prateeti nigam niju gaaee.
More sabai ek tumha swaamee,
Deenbandhu ur antarjaamee.
Dharam neeti upadesia taahee,
Keerati bhooti sugati priya jaahee.
Man kram bacan caran rat hoee,
Kripaasindhu pariharia ki soee.

"My Lord, you have given me a sound advice; but due to my faint-heartedness it sounds impracticable to me. Only those noble men who are self-possessed and champion the cause of virtue are fit to be taught the gospel of the Vedas and moral philosophy. I am a mere child fostered by Your loving care; can a cygnet lift

Mount Mandara or Meru? I know no preceptor nor father nor mother: I tell you sincerely; believe me, my Lord. Whatever ties of affection, love and confidence exist in the world as declared by the Vedas - for me they are all centred in you and you alone, my lord. O friend of the afflicted, O knower of the innermost heart of all! Piety and propriety should be taught to him who is fond of glory, fortune and a noble destiny. He, however, who is devoted to your feet in thought, word and deed - should he be abandoned, O ocean of grace?" (Ramcharitmanas 2/71/1-4). Sri Rama felt impelled to allow Lakshmana to accompany Him into exile.

Throughout the course of Sri Rama's fourteen years in exile, Lakshmana unstintingly and tirelessly served the Lord day and night. This service constitutes an epic in itself. Unmindful of his own comforts and conveniences, he was ever engaged in catering to the needs of Sri Rama and Sita, striving at all times to make them feel as comfortable as possible in the forest so that they may not miss too much the comforts of the palace, to which they were accustomed. He fetched delicious fruits, roots and bulbs for them to eat and clear sparkling spring water for them to drink. At night he made the beds out of the tenebrous leaves and

grass and while they slept peacefully, he kept vigil for their safety and security. He made beautiful huts out of mud, twigs and leaves for them to stay and he adorned the yard with plants of holy basil and beautiful flowers.

When, whilst at Chitrakuta, news came to them of Bharata's approach to that place with a huge army from Ayodhya, Lakshmana noticed a troubled look appearing on Sri Rama's face. Sri Rama knew that Bharata was coming there to convince Him to return and become regent of Ayodhya. This would be in conflict with the promise made by His father to which He was determined to adhere. The thought of having to reject Bharata's proposal and hurt his feelings in the process was very painful to Him. Lakshmana, however, misinterpreted the troubled look on Sri Rama's face. He concluded that Bharata, finding them alone and vulnerable, was coming there with a vast army to attack them and secure for himself the throne of Ayodhya permanently. He thought that this was the cause of Sri Rama's anxiety and concern.

Lakshmana was filled with fury at the thought that Bharata could have the temerity to attack the ever-

gracious Sri Rama whilst he, Lakshmana, was there at the Lord's side. He strung his bow, fastened his quiver and asked permission from Sri Rama to meet Bharata in an encounter saying,

*Aaju raam sevak jasu leoo,
Bharatahi samar sikhaavan deoo.
Raam niraadar kar phalu paaee,
So bahu samar sej dou bhaaee.*

"Let me distinguish myself as a servant of Sri Rama today and teach Bharata a lesson in the battle. Reaping the fruit of their contempt for Sri Rama let the two brothers sleep on the couch of the battlefield." (Ramcharitmanas 2/229/2). He then vowed to kill the entire host from Ayodhya even if Lord Shiva came to their aid.

Lakshmana has often been criticised by scholars of literature for his lack of self-control and impulsive outburst on this occasion. It is pointed out that his behaviour on this occasion goes to show that he was incapable of understanding the true nature of either Sri Rama or Bharata and that compared to them he was fickle and indisciplined.

However, if we consider the matter from the point of view of devotion, then we will find that Lakshmana's

outburst was not only justified but also highly commendable. The waves of emotion that arise in a heart of a devotee cannot be attributed to logic or reason but to the essence of love, which only a devotee of the calibre of Lakshmana could possess. The very thought of danger or harm to his beloved Lord instinctively drives him to defend and protect the Lord irrespective of the outcome or consequences. Furthermore, he was playing the role of a bodyguard to Sri Rama and Sita and it is the duty of a bodyguard to suspiciously view anyone approaching his ward, especially if that person was coming with weapons or an armed escort. His harsh words were not animated by any personal animosity towards Bharata. In fact he had always held Bharata in the highest esteem. In this instance, he was prepared to kill even his own beloved twin brother who was accompanying Bharata to Chitrakuta. This only indicates that he put his love for the Lord above all personal relationships and was practically implementing the advice given to him by his mother upon leaving Ayodhya when she said to him,

Gur pitu maatu bandhu sur saaee,

Seiahi sakal praan kee naaee.

Raamu praan priya jeevan jeeke,

Swaarath rahit sakhaa sabahee ke.

Poojaneeya priya param jahaa te,

Sab maaniahi raam ke naate.

"'One's preceptor, parents, brother, gods and master - all these should be tended as one's own life. Rama, however, is dearer than life, the soul of our soul and the disinterested friend of all. Whosoever are worthy of adoration and most dear to us should be accounted as such only in so far as they are related to Rama.'" (Ramcharitmanas 2/73/3-4).

Sri Rama understood the reason for Lakshmana's misplaced outburst against Bharata. Therefore, instead of reprimanding Lakshmana, He goes on to compliment him with the words,

*Kahee taat tumha neeti suhaaee,
Sab te katin raajmadu bhaaee.*

"'What you have said, dear Lakshmana, is sound wisdom; the intoxication of kingly power is the worst of all.'" (Ramcharitmanas 2/230/3). However, He goes on to explain to Lakshmana:

*hoi na nripmadu bharatahi bhaaee.
Lakhan tumhaar sapath pit aanaa,
Suci subandhu nahi bharat samaanaa.*

"' ... but Bharata will never be intoxicated by kingly power, O brother. Lakshmana, I swear by you as well as our father that there is no brother so good and innocent as Bharata.'" (Ramcharitmanas 2/231/2).

On hearing Sri Rama's speech, Lakshmana immediately changed his stance and his heart was once again filled with love for Bharata. Eventually when the four brothers meet at Chitrakuta, Tulsidasji describes the scene in a most touching and tender manner. The episode at Chitrakuta further enhanced Lakshmana's already high regard for Bharata and in the end when they are reunited in Ayodhya, after the completion of the term of exile, Tulsidasji says,

Bharataanuj lachiman puni bhete,

Dusah birah sambhav dukh mete.

"Then Lakshmana embraced Shatrughna (Bharata's younger brother) and thus relieved each other of the terrible agony of separation." (Ramcharitmanas 7/5/1). Thus when embracing his own twin brother, Lakshmana was overwhelmed with the knowledge that Shatrughna was sanctifying his life by being a worthy follower of the saintly Bharata.

After Bharata returned to Ayodhya with all the citizens who had accompanied him to Chitrakuta, Sri Rama, Sita and Lakshmana resumed their blissful stay in the forest, having moved from Chitrakuta to Panchavati. The fourteenth and final year of their exile proved to be the most eventful and trying period of their lives. It was during this period that Shurpankha (sister of

Ravana) approached the two brothers to satisfy her lust and upon being rejected by them tried to attack Sita whom she considered to be the obstacle in her path. Lakshmana then cut off Shurpankha's ears and nose and this led to a conflict with the demon hordes. First Khara and Dushana tried to avenge the mutilation of Shurpankha but they were killed along with their fourteen thousand followers. Then Ravana sent Maricha to lure Sri Rama and Lakshmana away from their hermitage so that he could carry away Sita. Sri Rama pursued the golden deer Himself whilst leaving Lakshmana behind to protect Sita. When Maricha however, after being mortally wounded by Sri Rama's arrow, called out in Sri Rama's voice to Lakshmana for help, Sita became alarmed and ordered Lakshmana to go to Sri Rama's aid. It was inconceivable to Lakshmana that any harm could befall the Lord. He therefore laughed the matter off. However, the laughter of Lakshmana offended Sita greatly and forgetting about his long years of selfless service, dedication and sacrifice, in that instant, She accused him of having ulterior motives towards them. Her words made his mind reel and his resolution was shaken. But even then, he refrained from giving a harsh reply to Her words, which would have been a natural response for anyone else in

his position. The fact that he, who could not tolerate injustice and inappropriate speech from anyone, maintained his reverence towards Mother Sita even under extreme provocation, speaks volumes for Lakshmana's fortitude and unshakeable faith in the Lord. Even now he believed that these were not the words of Sita but the will of the Lord that required him to leave the hermitage. Before leaving the hermitage he drew a line on the ground and pleaded to Sita not to cross it under any circumstances. Lakshmana firmly believed that, the line drawn by him for Sita's protection, could not be crossed by any being whether human, divine or demonic. However, the extraordinary feature of this line was Sita could cross it at any time She wished to do so. The line was drawn to protect Sita, not to imprison Her. To Lakshmana, Sita was someone to be worshipped; to whom he could only appeal but not instruct. This line was his response to Her vile accusation and proof of his sacred purity. When Sita, induced by Ravana, eventually did cross the line She failed to give Lakshmana the respect due to him, as a result of which She was deceived by the false saint Ravana through distrusting the true saint Lakshmana. On being abducted and carried off by Ravana, Sita's lamentations reflected Her repentance when She cried,

Haa lachiman tumhaar nahi dosaa,

So phalu paayau keenheu rosaa.

"'Ah! Lakshmana, the fault is none of yours; I have reaped the fruit of the temper I showed.'"

(Ramcharitmanas 3/28/2).

When Sri Rama established friendship with Sugriva, Lakshmana maintained civil courtesies with him out of deference to Sri Rama, even though he personally felt that the monkey king was too weak to be worthy of the Lord's friendship. This belief of Lakshmana was vindicated when after Vali's death, Sugriva forgot all about his pledge to Sri Rama and indulged in an excess of material enjoyment and sense pleasures. Therefore, when Sri Rama spoke about punishing Sugriva, Lakshmana was eager to implement the decision immediately. Sri Rama however, reminded Lakshmana that Sugriva was a friend and therefore not to be harmed but only frightened. Lakshmana unquestioningly accepted Sri Rama's decision and once more became tolerant of Sugriva. Thereafter, Sugriva too became aware of his own shortcomings and remedied his faults to eventually become worthy of Sri Rama's friendship.

This also happened when Vibhishana came to Sri Rama and was accepted as a friend. Lakshmana differed with

Vibhishana that very day when the latter advised Sri Rama to plead to the ocean for a path across to Lanka. Lakshmana immediately declared that the path advised by Vibhishana was meant for the cowardly and the indolent and that Sri Rama, who was All Powerful, should fill His mind with indignation and dry up the ocean. But when Sri Rama reassured and eased the mind of Lakshmana, he became reconciled to Vibhishana and slowly grew to respect him as a friend and devotee of the Lord.

In the battle of Lanka, when Lakshmana was gravely wounded by Meghnada the grief that Sri Rama underwent is testimony to the unprecedented love the Lord had for His younger brother. Even though Sri Rama felt extreme sorrow when He heard of His father's death as well as when Sita was abducted the grief that He now felt was so much greater that He felt His life was not worth living without His brother. He declared that had He known that He would lose His brother in banishment He would never have obeyed His father's command. Sri Rama then went so far as to say that He would rather have forgone Sita than lose a brother like Lakshmana.

When Hanumanji brought the life-giving herb that was used to revive Lakshmana, Sri Rama was transported with joy and embraced Hanumanji out of sheer gratitude.

Lakshmana's greatest achievement in the battle of Lanka was his victory over Meghnada whom he killed after a fierce battle. Meghnada was the solitary warrior in Lanka who had never been defeated in his life. Even his father, Ravana, the conqueror of the three worlds, could not claim such a record. Sri Rama however, was confident that Lakshmana could defeat Meghnada and charged him with the task in engaging the demon in battle. Lakshmana's deep faith in the Lord and confidence in himself was apparent when he said,

*Jau tehi aaju badhe binu aavau,
Tau raghupati sevak na kahaavau.
Jau sat sankar karahi sahaaee,
Tadpi hatau raghubeer dohaaee.*

"If I return today without slaying him (Meghanada), let me no longer be called a servant of Sri Rama. Nay, even if a hundred Shivas came to his help, I shall nonetheless kill him in the name of Rama."
(Ramcharitmanas 6/74/7). After killing Meghnada, Lakshmana returned and humbly bowed his head at the feet of Sri Rama. The defeat of Lanka was truly sealed with the death of Meghnada.

When Lakshmana's mother, Sumitra, met him as he returned with the Lord to Ayodhya after the period of fourteen years of exile, she proudly embraced her son and felt gratified that he had vindicated her trust in him and lived up to her expectations in his unparalleled service to Sri Rama and Sita.

Lakshmana's true greatness however, is revealed when he joyously met Kaikeyi again and again and showered his love upon her. After Sri Rama's banishment, everyone in Ayodhya regarded her with contempt and hatred. Even her own son Bharata had disowned and shunned her. In such circumstances it appears inconceivable that Lakshmana who was such a strict disciplinarian and who could not endure anyone who bore animosity to Sri Rama, should treat Kaikeyi with such kindness and love. So deep was his insight, that he realised that if it were not for Kaikeyi, the destruction of the demons and the death of Ravana, who was a cruel tyrant and menace to the world, would not have been achieved. But even more than that, he was grateful to her for having provided him with the opportunity of rendering exclusive service to the Lord for fourteen blissful years.

Lakshmana truly revealed himself to be a unique devotee of the Lord and an inspiration to the whole world.

6.6 Shatrughna

Shatrughna was the youngest of the four sons of king Dasharatha. He was the son of queen Sumitra and the twin brother of Lakshmana.

In the Ramcharitmanas, Shatrughna is referred to as the younger brother of both Lakshmana and Bharata. His personality comprises the quiet surrender of Bharata as well as the fieriness of Lakshmana. Even though both these qualities are present in him he is predominantly the follower of Bharata.

Tulsidasji pays his obeisance to Shatrughna in the following manner:

*Ripusoodan pad kamal namaamee,
Soor suseel bharat anugaamee.*

"I adore the lotus feet of Shatrughna (lit. the slayer of his foes), who is valiant yet amiable in disposition, and a constant companion of Bharata."
(Ramcharitmanas 1/16/5).

It may be said that the name Shatrughna would have been more appropriate for Lakshmana who was an embodiment of vigour and radiance. Yet Guru Vashishta saw it fit to give this name to that person whose bravery is not even mentioned in the Ramcharitmanas. We do see him punishing Manthara, but this however does not give any credibility to his name. To exhibit ones virtues at an appropriate time is an art, but when one is capable yet withdraws in order to put others forward it is an even greater virtue which is incomparable. Shatrughna is such a person who remained in the background, content to be known as the younger brother of Lakshmana and the follower of Bharata. If Sri Rama didn't have to go into exile, then Bharata would have remained in the background as Shatrughna did. Bharata's philosophy was of total self-surrender. It was only because of circumstances that he was forced to come forward. Shatrughna faced no such circumstances and therefore he remained as the very shadow of Bharata.

There is only one episode where he is seen to behave differently from Bharata. His attack on Manthara is an act against injustice and resembles one that is characteristic of Lakshmana. Manthara's cruel action was the main cause of the misfortune in Ayodhya.

Having created such a calamity, she felt no remorse. The whole of Ayodhya was grief stricken and the palace appeared like a ghost house yet she remained unaffected by the tragedy that had befallen the nation. When Bharata arrived she welcomed him and believed that she will be rewarded for being instrumental in having acquired the throne for him.

*Suni satrughun maatu kutilaaee,
Jarahi gaat ris kachu na basaaee.
Tehi avasar kubaree tah aaee,
Basan bibhooshan bibidh banaaee.
Lakhi ris bhareu lakhan laghu bhaaee,
Barat anal ghrit aahuti paaee.
Humagi laat taki koobar maaraa,
Pari muh bhar mahi karat pukaaraa.
Koobar tooteu phoot kapaaroo,
Dalit dasan mukh rudhir pracaaroo.
Aah daia mai kaah nasaavaa,
Karat neek phalu anais paavaa.*

"When Shatrughna heard of mother Kaikeyi's wickedness, he burned all over with rage; but there was no help. That very moment came the hunchback (Manthara) clad in a variety of rich costumes and adorned with various ornaments. The very sight of that woman filled Lakshmana's younger brother with anger as though clarified butter had been poured into fire. Springing forward he kicked her with such steady aim at the hump that she fell flat on her face and screamed aloud. Her

hump was smashed, her head split and her teeth broken and her mouth emitted blood. 'Ah, my God! What harm have I done? Surely this is an ill recompense for my services.'" (Ramcharitmanas 2/162/1-3).

Her utterance was directed towards Bharata in order to create a division between the brothers. In her mind, Shatrughna was not happy about Bharata's progress even though he was so close to him, whereas she was undergoing such punishment for the sake of Bharata. On hearing her cry, Shatrughna recognised her loathsome nature and he realised that wickedness pervaded her entire being for she felt no remorse whatsoever. For such a cruel hearted person, death should be the only punishment. Shatrughna's action was symbolic of such punishment. It was necessary for the people to see Manthara being punished in this way, for an air of doubt had prevailed in Ayodhya. Many felt that Bharata had been part of the plot to exile Rama and ascend the throne of Ayodhya. Shatrughna's actions dispelled all doubts about Bharata's involvement in such a conspiracy. Bharata eventually freed Manthara from Shatrughna when he felt that she had received sufficient punishment for her actions.

After this incident, Shatrughna was seen as a silent follower of Bharata. He did not voice his opinion as to whether Bharata should accept or reject the throne. He remained silent during the journey to Chitrakuta. At Chitrakuta, he silently awaited the outcome of the deliberations between Bharata and Sri Rama. Bharata proposed that if Sri Rama returns to Ayodhya, he and Shatrughna would serve the term of exile in the forest. This he proposes without consulting Shatrughna, knowing full well that Shatrughna would have no objection. When the decision for Bharata to return to Ayodhya was taken, Shatrughna silently went with him. He was at Bharata's side and assisted him in running the kingdom. Thus Shatrughna was one of the foremost characters that sacrificed for the sake of Ramrajya, particularly in serving the regent Bharata and protecting the Raghu dynasty through his military prowess.

In the Ramcharitmanas, there is no further mention of Shatrughna. In Pauranic literature, he is portrayed as a great warrior who freed the city of Mathura from the demon Lavanashur after a fierce battle. Sri Rama then installed him as the ruler of Mathura.

CHAPTER SEVEN

ANIMAL AND BIRD DEVOTEES OF SRI RAMA

7.1 Introduction

The uniqueness of the story of Sri Rama is that it includes among the devotees of the Lord even non-human species such as animals and birds. It is known that animals and birds are capable of giving care and affection, especially to their young offspring, but it is generally assumed that they do this more out of natural instinct than through thoughtfulness and discrimination. The animal and bird characters of the Ramcharitmanas, however, are bestowed with human-like qualities of love, dispassion, service and sacrifice.

This chapter will analyse some of these characters to reveal the belief of Tulsidasji that the whole of creation exists only to serve the Lord whose spirit pervades everywhere and whose grace enables even the lowest of the low to rise to great heights.

7.2 Vali and Sugriva

The two brothers Vali and Sugriva had great love for each other but later they became the greatest of

enemies. The brothers looked so much alike that even Sri Rama had to place a garland around the neck of Sugriva as a means of identification. Even though they were identical in form, they were totally different in nature. Vali was fearless and domineering whilst Sugriva was humble, timid and fearful. It was because of their diverse natures that they both shared a very strong bond of affection. Had they been similar in nature, there would have been conflict between the two. It was in Sugriva's humility and fearful nature that Vali found satisfaction whilst Sugriva was content with having a most capable and powerful brother to take care of him.

Vali's greatest achievement was his defeat of the mighty conqueror Ravana. It is said that after defeating Ravana, Vali kept him pressed under his arm for six months and then released him after they had become friends. For the conqueror and the conquered to become friends seems to be unnatural, but for this one has to look at their mental background. Ravana's endless desire for both power and enjoyment can be seen throughout his life. He used all his might, weapons and penance in order to satisfy his desires and to become the greatest of conquerors. Vali's character

and nature were different to that of Ravana. Ravana had waged numerous wars whereas Vali, even though he was extremely powerful, never waged a war with anyone. He was content with his kingdom but he did not tolerate anyone who challenged him. He would use all his might to face his opponent and he was never defeated by anyone. His encounter with Ravana was of a similar nature. It was Ravana who had challenged Vali who then defeated him. But Vali himself was content to keep him under his arm for six months rather than take over the kingdom of Lanka. It was indeed a very great achievement for Vali to have defeated the most powerful king of that era. Ravana was humbled by Vali's strength and a bond between the two developed during the six months. Thereafter Ravana was duly released and he returned to his kingdom.

At the beginning, there was very strong bond of brotherly love between Vali and Sugriva. But later they became such great enemies that it resulted in the death of Vali. In recounting his story to Sri Rama, Sugriva told him of how a mighty demon by the name of Mayavi had challenged Vali at the dead of night. The strength of demons is at its peak at night whereas monkeys are most inactive at that time. The demon had

challenged Vali thinking that he would not respond and he could then proclaim that Vali had not accepted the challenge out of fear. However, Vali was most annoyed at being disturbed and immediately pursued the demon. At that time Sugriva thought it appropriate to accompany his brother even though he knew that he would not be of much assistance to him. Vali on the other hand, did not depend on Sugriva and therefore asked him to remain outside the cave when he went in to fight the demon. Sugriva readily accepted Vali's proposal thus indicating his weak nature. Sugriva used Vali's instructions as an excuse for remaining outside the cave.

Contrary to Vali's prediction, the battle in the cave took longer than a fortnight for there were other demons present there who had to be killed also. When Sugriva saw the blood coming out of the cave after a month, he became alarmed and thought that Vali had been killed. He realised that if Vali could be defeated then there was definitely no chance of victory or safety for him. Thinking that the demon would now come after him, he blocked the mouth of the cave in order to delay the demon and ran away. Although Sugriva was not

skilled in warfare, he was extremely good at protecting himself.

Upon his return to the kingdom, Sugriva was asked by the ministers to become king and he immediately accepted. Had he refused and proposed the name of Angada (Vali's son) there would not have been any conflict between the brothers. However, there must have been a latent desire for kingship in his heart which prompted him to accept the position. Later he made the excuse that he was forced to do so by the ministers. Here the question arises as to why the ministers proposed that Sugriva be made king knowing him to be timid and not Angada who was valiant like his father. Maybe they were not totally satisfied with Vali who was domineering by nature and they saw similar traits in Angada. Their positions would be enhanced if they had a timid and weak king like Sugriva.

Vali, having defeated the demon in a long battle, returned and found Sugriva on the throne of Kishkindha. He was furious for he saw Sugriva as an enemy who had plotted to become king. He totally misjudged the situation. He felt that Sugriva had always desired the kingdom and that he had had deliberately blocked the

entrance of the cave. Sugriva may have been weak by nature, but he could never conspire to harm anyone. Vali could have reprimanded him and removed him from the throne. But instead he became so enraged that he forgot all reason and disowned Sugriva and belittled him by taking away his wife. This type of punishment was unpardonable. The terrified Sugriva fled from Kishkindha but Vali did not leave him as he was revengeful by nature. As long as Sugriva was dependent on him he was good to him, but now he considered him to be his greatest enemy.

Although Sugriva was not as powerful as Vali, he was definitely more intelligent and he was skilled in self-defence. He was well aware of his limitations and was able to successfully evade Vali and his forces.

Another virtue of Sugriva was that he was good to his friends. That is why, even though he was thrown out of the kingdom, some of his ministers accompanied him, the most prominent of them being Hanuman. Sugriva had the unique quality of judging the character of others and he always relied on the counsel of his wise ministers to guide him. Because of his humble nature, even the

elderly and wise Jambhavana accompanied him in his most difficult days to exile.

Sugriva and his companions were able to find a secure place where they knew Vali would not be able to harm them. The Rishyamuka Mountain was where Vali could not enter due to a curse. If he entered the precincts of this mountain, he would be killed immediately. This curse was pronounced on Vali because of his irrational actions. He had killed the mighty demon Dundubhi and had flung the remains of the demon in the air. The bones of the demon landed on the Rishyamuka Mountain where many sages had their hermitage. Seeing their hermitage thus defiled, they became extremely angry and cursed the wrongdoer. Vali would not have acted in such a manner had he as much discretion as he had strength. His irrational action provided Sugriva with a safe haven. But Sugriva was still uneasy and felt that Vali may send some powerful ally to harm him.

Sugriva was not content with leaving his security to his ministers and he himself kept watch on the valley also. He was the first one to spot Sri Rama and Lakshmana coming towards the Rishyamuka mountain. He became fearful when he saw the powerful and valiant

princes, thinking that they were sent by Vali. Even at a time of crisis, he did not lose courage or his sense of discrimination and flee. Instead he decided to examine the situation before reaching any conclusion. He then sent Hanuman to meet Sri Rama and Lakshmana who agreed to befriend Sugriva and help him to get back his kingdom in return for his assistance in finding Mother Sita. A vow of friendship between Sri Rama and Sugriva was taken with fire as witness. This friendship with Sri Rama totally changed the life of Sugriva.

Sri Rama was aware of Hanuman's genius, his erudition and his diplomacy and he was greatly influenced by the way Hanuman had represented his king. Although Sri Rama had heard Sugriva's story from Hanuman, he again asked Sugriva to tell him about himself. He wanted to understand Sugriva's mental disposition which was possible only if he heard Sugriva's story from him personally. Hanuman had not mentioned the weaknesses or virtues of Sugriva to Sri Rama. By analysing Sugriva's character, Sri Rama wanted to make the best use of his good qualities and also he wanted to strengthen their bond of friendship. By hearing Sugriva speak about his pitiable plight and his recounting of Sita's abduction, Sri Rama was able to

assess Sugriva's psychological makeup. The manner in which he related his quarrel with Vali indicated that he did not have a malicious nature, for he did not use a single harsh word against Vali. There was great pain in his voice and he became sorrowful to think that a long and close bond of brotherly love could so easily be shattered by a single incident.

When he spoke about Sita, his eyes filled with tears, indicating his tender nature and warm heartedness. He was easily moved by the suffering of others, but he was incapable of rendering any help himself. He had witnessed Ravana carrying away the wailing Sita but he could do nothing to help her. However, he had carefully kept the bundle of jewels which she had thrown down in his direction. He presented them to Sri Rama, consoled him, and assured him that he will assist in getting Sita back.

*Kah sugreev sunahu raghubeeraa,
Tajahu soc man aanahu dheeraa.
Sab prakaar karihau sevkaaee,
Jehi vidhi milihi jaanakee aaee.*

"Said Sugriva, 'Listen, O hero of Raghu's line : sorrow no more and take courage in your heart. I will render service to you in everyway so that Janaka's daughter may come and see you.'" (Ramcharitmanas 4/4/4).

This statement seems odd coming from Sugriva who could not recover his own wife from Vali. How then would it be possible for him to recover Sita when he had remained a dumb witness to her abduction? It appears as if Sugriva had felt weak previously, but in the presence of the Lord, he felt empowered and was confident that together they could recover Sita. Even though Sri Rama saw the irony of the situation, he appreciated Sugriva's gesture, bearing in mind Sugriva's good qualities.

Sri Rama assured Sugriva of His help and promised to kill Vali. Sugriva however was doubtful whether Sri Rama, who was so tender, would be able to kill the powerful Vali. To allay the doubt of Sugriva, Sri Rama shot down seven palm trees with a single arrow and also struck down the bones of the demon Dundubhi. **(Ramcharitmanas 4/6/6)**. Witnessing this amazing sight, Sugriva was reassured and felt that Vali's death was at last possible.

But suddenly a change came into Sugriva and he said,

*Naath kripaa man bhayau alolaa.
Sukh sampati parivaar badaaee,
Sab parihari karihau sevkaaee.
E sab raambhagati ke baadhak,*

*Kahahi sant tav pad avaraadhak.
Satru mitra sukh dukh jag maahee,
Maayaa krit paramaarath naahee.
Baali param hit jaasu prasaadaa,
Milehu raam tumha saman bishaadaa.
Sapne jehi san hoi laraaee,
Jaage samujhat man sakucaaee.
Ab prabhu kripaa karahu ehi bhaatee,
Sab taji bhajanu karau din raatee.*

"My mind, O Lord, has been set at rest by Your grace. Renouncing pleasure, prosperity, home, personal glory and all I will render service to You. All these are stumbling blocks on the path of Devotion to Sri Rama (Yourself): so declare saints given to the worship of Your feet. Pairs of opposites such as friend and foe, joy and sorrow, in this world are products of Maya (illusion) and have no reality. Vali is my greatest friend, by whose grace I have met You, Rama, the Allayer of sorrow. On waking from a dream when a man comes to know the identity of him with whom he had fought in the dream, he feels abashed. Now, my lord, do me this favour that I may renounce all and worship You night and day.'" (Ramcharitmanas 4/6/8-11). Most devotees can identify with this state of mind. At moments when one perceives the might and the glory of the Lord, one feels a sense of dispassion and realises the transitory nature of the world. However, this

frame of mind does not generally last for long. This again is reflected in the life of Sugriva.

Sri Rama was not influenced by Sugriva's momentary renunciation for he was well aware of Sugriva's nature. He told Sugriva that whatever he had said was true but that his (Sri Rama's) words could never be otherwise for he had promised Sugriva that he would punish Vali. Sugriva was looking at the situation from a personal level whereas Sri Rama was looking at it on a universal level. Vali's misdeed were a concern for all, and if he was not punished, it would mean that an injustice was being condoned. If this happened, then Vali would not repent his evil actions and thus the question of him being forgiven would not arise. If Sugriva did not pursue the matter, Vali would not see it as his (Sugriva's) good nature but rather as his weakness and incapability. It would strengthen his belief that might is right and that any person who has might is free to do as he pleases. Sugriva did not look at the situation in this light and he was carried away by his emotions. Sri Rama saved Sugriva from being drowned by his emotions and reminded him of His pledge to destroy Vali.

Sugriva then went to Kishkindha and challenged Vali who reacted in a warrior-like manner. He did not care to think about how the timid and fearful Sugriva was able muster up enough courage to challenge him. His wife, Tara, however, warned him thus:

*Sunu pati jinhahi mileu sugreevaa,
te dwau bandhu tej bal seevaa.
Kosles sut lachiman raamaa,
kaalahu jeeti sakahi sangraamaa.*

"Listen my Lord: the two brothers with whom Sugriva has concluded an alliance are of unapproachable majesty and might. They are no other than Sri Rama and Lakshmana, the sons of king Dasharatha (the Lord of Koshala), who can conquer Death himself on the field of battle.'" (Ramcharitmanas 4/6/14-15).

Vali disregarded his wife's entreaties and replied:

*Kah baalee sunu bheeru priya, samdarsee raghunaath.
Jau kadaaci mohi maarahi, tau puni hou sanaath.*

"Listen, my timid darling, the Lord of the Raghus looks upon all with the same eye. Even if He kills me, I will attain His divine abode and have Him as my eternal Lord.'" (Ramcharitmanas 4/7).

Vali's remarks to Tara indicated that he had great spiritual wisdom. However, his knowledge was based on egoistic misconceptions. By merely stating a truth

does not make one learned. One has to experience it and have firm belief in order to become knowledgeable. God in his unmanifest form is described as nameless, formless and as a witness whereas God in his manifest form has innumerable qualities. All attributes are present in him. But of all God's qualities Vali could only see Him as one who sees all equally. How then could he be punished by such a Lord? He failed to see God as one who upholds justice and one who grants the fruits of one's actions. He only saw that quality which allowed a person to do as he pleases. For a moment he realised that he could be killed by Sri Rama and he welcomed the benefit of that action.

Vali totally rejected his wife's plea and went forth to fight Sugriva. He defeated Sugriva and this increased his pride and gave his ego a boost. He was aware of the fact that Sri Rama was a witness to his encounter with Sugriva. Sri Rama's non-interference at this juncture was to give Vali time to rethink his actions. After the severe beating, Sugriva returned to Sri Rama. He was much aggrieved by the fact that Sri Rama had done nothing to assist him after having promised to do so. Maybe Sri Rama allowed Sugriva to take a thrashing to make him realise that alone he was nothing.

Previously Sugriva had considered Vali to be his benefactor when he momentarily proclaimed renunciation. Had Sri Rama interfered in the first round, Sugriva would have said that he only went to challenge Vali in order to keep Sri Rama's promise and that he had no desire to overcome Vali. Sri Rama wanted Sugriva to come to terms with his weakness and he comforts him by stroking his body thereby relieving him of all his pain. Sri Rama tells him:

*Ek roop tumha bhraataa dooo,
Tehi bhram te nahi maareu sooo.*

"You two brothers are identical in appearance; it was because of this confusion that I did not kill him."

(Ramcharitmanas 4/7/3). Sri Rama's touch filled Sugriva with renewed strength. He goes back to fight Vali after Sri Rama places a garland of flowers round his neck.

Sugriva and Vali fought for a long time. When Sugriva became exhausted, Sri Rama drew his arrow and shot Vali in his heart. Sri Rama then went to Vali and they had a long discussion. This situation is unlike the other encounters where Sri Rama cuts off the heads of demons like Ravana and Kumbhakarana. This clearly indicates that Sri Rama did not consider Vali to be in the same category. Before killing Ravana, Sri Rama had tried to

redeem him in many ways but all his efforts were in vain. Vali's actions were different from Ravana. He was not ambitious to rule the world nor did he harm or persecute the good and the helpless. But for a moment he had become revengeful thereby inflicting a grave injustice on Sugriva. The question arises as to whether Sri Rama was unfair to Vali for he did not give him a chance to redeem himself whereas Ravana was given several chances. Sri Rama's long discussion with Vali answers this question adequately. His reply to Vali's questions, clearly indicate that his main aim was not to punish him but rather to bring about a change in him. In order to achieve this, it became necessary to strike him. Vali had never been defeated in his life and as a result this pride had reached its peak where he refused to heed the good advice given to him by his wife. He knew that Sugriva had taken shelter at the Lord's feet yet his pride drove him to go against the Lord Himself.

Sri Rama went to him as soon as he fell to the ground. Vali questioned Sri Rama's actions thus:

*Dharma hetu avtarehu gosaaee,
Maarehu mohi byaadh kee naaee.
Mai bairee sugreev piaaraa,
Avgun kavan naath mohi maaraa.*

"'Even though, my lord, you descended on earth for upholding righteousness, You have killed me as a hunter would kill a wild beast. I, Your enemy and Sugriva, Your dear friend! For what fault did You take my life, my lord?'" (Ramcharitmanas 4/8/3). Here Tulsidasji portrays Vali as a devotee whose heart is full of love and affection for God yet his utterances are harsh. This gives rise to a sense of duality in his character which was always present but which now becomes prominent. As a part manifestation of the lord of the gods, Indra, he is a symbol of virtue and good deeds. Yet his actions are contrary to this when he becomes revengeful against his own brother. He accepted Sri Rama as God yet he did not hesitate to fight Sugriva who had sought refuge at the Lord's feet. He had love for Sri Rama in his heart yet he questioned and accused him. There appeared to be a conflict between discrimination and force of habit within Vali. This conflict of duality is removed by Sri Rama's reply:

*Anuj badhoo bhaginee sut naaree,
 Sunu sath kanyaa sam e caaree.
 Inhahi kudrishti bilokai joe,
 Taahi badhe kachu paap na hoee.
 Moodh tohi atisay abhimaanaa,
 Naari sikhaavan karasi na kaanaa.
 Mam bhuj bal aashrit tehi jaanee,
 Maaraa cahasi adham abhimaanee.*

"The sin, o wretch: a younger brother's wife, a sister, a daughter-in-law and one's own daughter - these four are alike. One would incur no sin by killing him who looks upon these with an evil eye. Fool, in your extravagant pride you paid no heed to your wife's warning. You knew that your brother had taken refuge under the might of my arm; and yet in your vile arrogance you sought to kill him!"
(Ramcharitmanas 4/8/4-5).

Had Vali made his accusations against Sri Rama as a prince or warrior, then his accusations would be extremely strong, for it is considered an act of cowardice to strike from behind. But Vali considered Sri Rama as God and as such he was not limited by man-made rules. God not only creates and preserves but also destroys continuously. Since Vali considered Sri Rama as a manifestation of God, his accusations against him were nullified by the very reasons for God manifesting himself on earth. Sri Rama clearly stated that Vali's actions were unrighteous and so in keeping with the purpose of a manifestation of God he had punished him appropriately. Vali had accused Sri Rama of striking him from behind a tree. This in Vali's opinion was an act of cowardice. This view can only be

meaningful if he had no knowledge of Sri Rama's presence. He was very much aware of the fact that Sugriva was in Sri Rama's care and this was even more evident when Sri Rama placed a garland around the neck of Sugriva and sent him to fight. But Vali paid no heed to these signs and he was bent on killing Sugriva. His actions and his total disregard of his wife's advice was an indication of his pride and it was this pride that made him wrongfully accuse Sri Rama and ignore his own wrong-doing. After hearing Sri Rama's reply, Vali realised his mistakes, accepted his faults and very humbly made the following plea to the Lord:

Sunahu raam swaamee san, cal na caaturee mori.

Prabhu ajahoo mai paapee, antakaal gati tori.

"Listen Rama: My shrewdness cannot avail against my master. But, my lord, am I a sinner yet even though I have found shelter in You at the hour of my death?"
(Ramcharitmanas 4/9).

Vali's words touched Sri Rama to such an extent that he wanted to restore his life, even forgetting his vow to kill him. This reaction of Sri Rama is an indication of the extremely compassionate nature of God. Vali's emotional plea to Sri Rama in the above extract can be seen as one of a great saint even though in real life he was far from being one. It is indeed surprising

that at the time of his death, he was able to make such great spiritual progress. Compared to Vali, Sugriva had fewer faults but his spiritual progress was slow. In spite of his faults, Vali leaves Sugriva far behind and attains the abode of the Lord. Several explanations can be attributed to this. Sugriva was fearful and timid by nature therefore he was more inclined towards God. The fearless and proud Vali had no need for God and it was only after Sri Rama had destroyed his pride that he was able to surrender to him. Vali had his share of worldly enjoyments whereas Sugriva, who was always in his shadow, never openly enjoyed himself. Later on he was denied the luxuries of the palace and the company of his wife. Thus it was easy for Vali to free himself from worldly enjoyments. At the time of his death, Vali was given the option of becoming immortal but he preferred not to return to the same lifestyle and he said,

*Ab naath kari karunaa bilokahu
Dehu jo bar maagao,
Jehi joni janmau karma bas tah
Raam pad anuraagao.
Yah tanay mam sam binay bal
Kalyaanaprad prabhu leejie,
Gahi baah sur nar naah aapan
Daas angad keejie.*

"Now, my lord, look upon me with compassion and grant me the boon that I ask: In whatever species of life it may be my fate to be born, I may continue to love Sri Rama's (Your) feet. This son of mine, Angada by name, is my equal in training and strength. O Bestower of Blessedness; therefore, accept him, my master; and holding him by the arm, O Lord of Gods and men, treat him as Your servant.'" (Ramcharitmanas 4/9/Chand 2).

He had the Lord in front of him and rising above body consciousness he gives up his life.

After the death of Vali, Sugriva was crowned king of Kishkindha and Angada was made crown prince as per Sri Rama's instructions. Sri Rama advised Sugriva to include Angada in the administration of the kingdom and that he should not forget his promise to assist in the finding of Mother Sita. Sri Rama and Lakshmana spent the rainy season on the Pravarshana hills near Kishkindha whilst Sugriva and his ministers went back to the kingdom. Sugriva became engrossed in worldly pleasures and forgot about his promise to Sri Rama. Hanuman expected Sugriva to remember his promise to begin the search after the rainy season was over, thinking that by that time Sugriva would have had enough of worldly enjoyments. But this was not the

case. Hanuman, in order to save Sugriva from being drowned in pleasures, approached him very humbly and reminded him of his obligation to Sri Rama. Sugriva came to his senses and ordered the monkey troops to gather within two weeks. Sri Rama had earlier requested that measures be taken to find Sita but he had not put a time frame to it. Sugriva had taken advantage of this fact and now he did not want the monkeys to make the same mistake as he did.

Meanwhile Sri Rama became perturbed by the fact that he had not received any news of Sita and he expressed his concern to Lakshmana. **"Sugriva too has forgotten me now that he has got a kingdom, a treasury, the amenities of the city life and his own spouse. I will shoot the fool tomorrow with the same arrow which I used in killing Vali."** (Ramcharitmanas 4/17/2-3).

Lakshmana became happy to hear Sri Rama's words and told him that they should act immediately. He strung his bow and wanted to punish Sugriva for failing to keep his promise but Sri Rama responded differently. **"The Lord of the Raghus, who was the highest embodiment of compassion, then instructed His younger brother saying, 'Sugriva is our friend, dear brother; you**

should only frighten him and bring him here.'"
(Ramcharitmanas 4/18).

The decision of both Sri Rama and Hanuman were very similar. Both knew that Sugriva was fearful by nature. It was because of his fear for Vali that he became friends with Sri Rama who removed this fear. When he got news of Lakshmana's entry into the kingdom and knowing his wrath, he was too afraid to confront him. He sends Hanuman and Tara to receive him saying.
"'Listen, Hanuman: take Tara with you and with suppliant prayers appease the prince (Lakshmana).'"

Ramcharitmanas 4/19/2). Hanuman and Tara welcome Lakshmana and thereafter Sugriva met Lakshmana and apologised for his actions. Lakshmana too was pleased with him and praised him for his efforts to gather the monkey troops.

Then they all went to Sri Rama and Sugriva humbly addressed him,

*Naath mohi kachu naahin khoree.
Atisay prabal dev tav maayaa,
Chootai raam karahu jau daayaa.
Bishay basya sur nar muni swaamee,
Mai paavar pasu kapi ati kaamee.
Naari nayan sar jaahi na laagaa,
Ghor krodh tam nisi jo jaagaa.*

*Lobh paas jehi gar na bandhaayaa,
So nar tumha samaan raghuraayaa.
Yah gun saadhan te nahi hoee,
Tumharee kripaa paav koi koe.
Tab raghupati bole musukaaee,
Tumha priya mohi bharat jimi bhaaee.
Ab soi jatanu karahu man laaee,
Jehi bidhi seetaa kai sudhi paaee.*

"My lord, I am not at all to blame (for what I have done). Exceedingly powerful, O Lord, is Your Maya (deluding potency), which withdraws itself only when You O Rama, show Your grace to a Jiva. Gods, men and Sages, my master, are all slaves of their senses; while I am a vile brute and a monkey, the most libidinous of animals. A man who is not pierced by the shaft of a woman's glances, nay, who remains wakeful even in the dark night of anger (who is not swayed by passion) and who is never caught in the meshes of greed, is as good as Yourself, O Lord of Raghus. It is a virtue which cannot be attained by personal endeavour; it is only by Your grace that one here and one there can acquire it. Thereupon the Lord of Raghus smiled and said 'Brother, you are dear to me as Bharata. Now with all your heart make some organised effort whereby we may get tidings of Sita.'" (Ramcharitmanas 4/20/1-4).

Although there is no apparent similarity between Sugriva and Bharata, Sri Rama considered him to be as dear to him as Bharata because of his humility. This statement of Sri Rama brought about a great change in Sugriva and inspired him to prove this comparison true. Henceforth in the Ramcharitmanas the change in the character of Sugriva became apparent. He very skilfully expressed himself when he addressed the groups of monkeys that were being dispatched to search for Sita.

*Raam kaaju aru mor nihoraa,
Baanar jooth jaahu cahu oraa.
Janaksutaa kahu khojahu jaaee,
Maas divas mah aaehu bhaaee.
Avadhi meti jo binu sudhi paae,
Aavai banihi so mohi maraae.*

"I exhort and commission you to do Sri Rama's work. Therefore, O monkey hosts go forth in every direction and institute a search for Janaka's Daughter, but you should all return in the course of a month, my brethren. He who returns beyond this limit without any news shall meet his death at my hands."
(Ramcharitmanas 4/21/3-4).

Sugriva recognised the divinity of Sri Rama when he told the monkeys that they were not doing any favour to Sri Rama, but rather that it was their good fortune

that they were being given an opportunity to serve him. Sugriva's qualities of tolerance and generosity come to the fore after the search for Sita. On the outskirts of Kishkindha there was a royal orchard reserved for him. After the monkeys triumphant return, they went and helped themselves to the fruit of this orchard with Angada's consent. The guards tried to stop them but they beat them up and went to complain to Sugriva. Sugriva was not in the least bit angered by the monkeys' actions. In fact he was very pleased for he knew that they would not dare to eat the fruit or return to Kishkindha if they had not accomplished their mission. Sugriva's reaction is totally different from that of Ravana who had become extremely angry when he learnt that Hanuman had entered his orchard.

Sri Rama made Sugriva the commander-in-chief of his army and he always strove to do his best in this position. He did not hesitate to express his views to Sri Rama and he was not in the least bit perturbed if a decision contrary to his was taken. This was clearly demonstrated when Vibhishana came to seek refuge at Sri Rama's feet. Sugriva was against giving him shelter and his view was a politically correct one. Sri Rama praised Sugriva for his sound advice but reminded him

of his vow to protect anyone who sought refuge in him. Sugriva did not protest for he had complete faith in Sri Rama.

Sugriva did not show great valour on the battlefield as did Hanuman and Angada. However, at a very difficult time during the war he used his wits to get out of an extremely grave situation. Kumbhakarana, the brother of Ravana had defeated the monkey army. Even Hanuman was not spared in his onslaught. At their first encounter, Hanuman had rendered Kumbhakarana unconscious but later he recovered and rendered both Angada and Hanuman unconscious. Kumbhakarana dealt with Sugriva in a totally different manner. After rendering him unconscious, he pressed him under his arm and proceeded towards Lanka. Sugriva regained consciousness and found himself in a very awkward position but he did not lose his composure. He pretended to be dead and Kumbhakarana loosened his grip. If Sugriva was only concerned with his own safety, he would have escaped with his life. Even though he knew that he could not defeat Kumbhakarana, he wanted him to return to the battlefield and face Sri Rama. In order to prevent him from returning to Lanka, he bit off his nose and ears knowing very well that

this would infuriate the demon who would not want to return in such a pitiable condition. The disfigured Kumbhakarana became extremely enraged and again entered the battlefield and was eventually killed by Sri Rama.

After the victory in Lanka, Sugriva returned to Ayodhya with Sri Rama. He very enthusiastically took part in the coronation ceremony and remained in Ayodhya for a further six months. Although he had been away from home for a very long period, he was not homesick. This was indeed a very great achievement for a person who was so attached to his pleasures at one stage that he had to be reminded of his duty.

Sugriva's greatest sacrifice was surrendering his most able minister and friend, Hanuman, into the service of Sri Rama. It was Hanuman's great desire to remain close to Sri Rama, but knowing Sugriva to be his master, he did not want to do anything contrary to his wishes.

*Tab sugreev caran gahi naanaa,
Bhaati binay keenhe hanumaanaa.
Din das kari raghupati pad sevaa,
Puni tav caran dekhihau devaa.
Punya punj tumha pavankumaaraa,
Sevahu jaai kripaa aagaaraa.*

"He thus approached Sugriva saying: After spending ten more days in the service of Sri Rama, if you please, I will see your feet again, my master.' 'A storehouse of merit as you are O son of the wind-god, you go and serve the All-merciful.'" (Ramcharitmanas 7/18/4-5).

In spite of his many weaknesses, Sugriva evolved in a steady manner and in the end came very close to perfection. He had lived a very meaningful life and served Sri Rama with great fervour. His brother Vali had expressed his complete fulfilment at the time of his death. The lives of both these characters depict the completeness of life and are most inspiring.

7.3 Angada

The role of Angada in the Ramcharitmanas is a small but important one. The most striking feature of his personality is the manner in which he was able to progress in self-improvement through sadhana (spiritual discipline) in a relatively short period of time. The personality of Angada is plagued in the beginning with many frustrations and inner conflicts, but he rapidly frees himself from them by availing himself of every

opportunity that came his way through divine grace. Nevertheless, his mind is never completely free from anxiety in relation to Sugriva, but this does not in any way diminish the importance of Angada's personality. Sugriva was the contemporary ruler of Kishkindha and Angada was designated as successor to the throne by Sri Rama himself who proclaimed him the crown prince. As successor to the throne of Kishkindha, there was no visible obstacle in his path. There was nothing that Angada said or did at any time which indicated that he could have a problem with the status quo. Outwardly, the relationship between Angada and Sugriva was quite cordial. However, a glimpse of Angada's inner struggle can be perceived when, six months after the establishment of Rama on the throne of Ayodhya, all the vanaras were requested to return to their homes. They had all been away from their homes and families for a long period. Even though none of them had yet expressed any feelings of homesickness and everyone appeared to be quite happy and contented, the all-wise Lord knew that it was inevitable and only a matter of time before such desires would arise in their minds. A similar situation had presented itself fourteen years earlier when the citizens of Ayodhya were so eager to accompany Bharata to Chitrakuta in

order to meet and be in the company of the Lord that they felt no attachment to their property, possessions and relatives and were willing to discard them all.

Jarau so sampati sadan sukhu, suhrid maatu pitu bhaai.

Sanmukh hot jo raam pad, karai na sahas sahaai.

"Perish that property, house, happiness, friend, father, mother or brother, who does not gladly help one turn one's face towards Sri Rama's feet!"

(Ramcharitmanas 2/185). When they reached the presence of the Lord, they experienced uncommon bliss, but after some days, they began to recall and yearn for their attachments at home. **"Now they conceived a liking for the woods and the very next moment they loved to be at their home."** (Ramcharitmanas 2/301/3).

The Lord therefore wished to save the citizens of Kishkindha from a similar dilemma by giving them leave to rejoin their loved ones before the yearning arose and manifested itself. The gracious Lord was also considering the families of the warriors who were with him, anxiously waiting for them in Kishkindha. Even though they were reluctant to leave Ayodhya at that time, they all accepted the Lord's order with the exception of Angada. Angada was in age comparatively younger than the others. He was also the successor to the throne of Kishkindha. In such circumstances, it is

unusual that Angada should want to remain in Ayodhya as a servant rather than return to Kishkindha and be reunited with his loved ones.

Tab angad uthi naai siru, sajal nayan kar jori.

Ati bineet boleu bacan, manahu prem ras bori.

Sunu sarbagya kripaa sukh sindho,

Deen dayaakar aarat bandho.

Maratee ber naath mohi baalee,

Gayau tumhaarehi koche ghaalee.

Asaran saran biradu sambhaaree,

Mohi jani tajahu bhagat hitkaaree.

More tumha prabhu gur pitu maataa,

Jaau kahaa taji pad jaljaataa.

Tumhahi bicaari kahahu narnaahaa,

Prabhu taji bhavan kaaj mam kaahaa.

Baalak gyaan buddhi bal heenaa,

Raakhahu saran naath jan deenaa.

Neeci tahal griha kai sab karihau,

Pad pankaj biloki bhav tarihau.

As kahi caran pareu prabhu paahee,

Ab jani naath kahahu griha jaahee.

"Now Angada arose and bowed his head; and with joined palms and eyes full of tears he addressed the Lord in words which were not only most polite but steeped as it were in the nectar of life: 'Listen, all-wise, all-merciful and all-blissful Lord, full of compassion to the meek and the befriender of the afflicted: it was in your charge, my lord, that Vali (my father) left me while departing from this world. Therefore, recalling Your vow of affording protection to the forlorn,

forsake me not, O benefactor of the devotees. You are my master, preceptor, father and mother, all in one; where can I go, leaving your lotus feet? Ponder Yourself and tell me, O ruler of men; severed from You, of what use is my home to me? Extend Your protection to this humble servant, a mere child, without knowledge, reason or strength. I will do all menial service in your household and shall cross the ocean of mundane existence by the mere sight of Your lotus feet.' So saying he fell at His feet, adding, 'Save me, my Lord, and tell me no more, my master, to return home.'" (Ramcharitmanas 7/17/, 7/17/1-4).

It cannot be denied that he had developed great love and devotion towards Sri Rama. But if this was the only reason for his wanting to remain in Ayodhya, then it would not have been possible for Sri Rama to deny his request. Sri Rama understood that the real reason was a psychological complex. It was to free him from this psychological complex that Sri Rama insisted that Angada return to Kishkindha. In order to understand this inner conflict in Angada, we have to retrace our steps. As long as there was a bond of love between Vali and Sugriva, Angada had no problems. It was natural for him to receive affection from both of them.

Unfortunately, due to the incident with the sorcerous demon, a conflict arose between them due mostly to a misunderstanding arising from Vali's suspicious nature. After emerging from that incident, he arrived to find Sugriva on the throne of Kishkindha and he viewed the whole event as a result of Sugriva's conspiracy. If on his return Vali were to see Angada on the throne of Kishkindha, then he would not have perceived any conspiracy on the path of Sugriva. The mistake made by Sugriva of accepting the throne of Kishkindha cost him dearly, resulting in his banishment. There is no evidence to show that Angada considered Vali's behaviour towards Sugriva to be inappropriate. Rather, it appears that Angada saw matters in the same way as Vali. The chain of incidents arising from this event resulted in Vali's death. The inner conflicts, which arose in Angada's mind in the last moments of his father's life, remained with him for the rest of his life.

He must have been sorely aggrieved by his father's death. The circumstances as well as the manner in which his father died must have heightened his indignation. Ordinarily, he ought to be more angry with Sri Rama for his unjustified intervention in the conflict of two

brothers. To make matters worse, Sri Rama struck Vali with the fatal arrow from behind whilst Vali was engaged in direct combat with Sugriva. In such circumstances, it would not have been unnatural for Angada to challenge Sri Rama. But his acquaintance with his father's mental state in his dying moments put him into a great dilemma. He had seen with his own eyes how Sri Rama had offered to restore Vali's life and how his father had refused. He had also listened very carefully to the discussion between his father and Sri Rama before that. He knew both of his father's accusation as well as Sri Rama's resounding reply. At that time it was not easy for him to decide what was proper and what was improper. It was natural for him to support his father's accusation. But Sri Rama's answer too was so appropriate that he could not deny the truth of it. In such a situation it was difficult for him to determine whether Sri Rama was merciful or unjust. At the same time, the murderer of his father also appeared as the bestower of life, who in a tender voice was offering to restore his father back to life. But the very next moment, it was even more surprising when his father refused the boon with humility. Furthermore, his dying father took his hand and surrendered it to Sri Rama asking the Lord to accept the service of his child.

This was indeed a very extraordinary type of dedication where the one being dedicated does not do so on his own free will but by another and that too being his own father for whom he had great love and respect. Then too, he was being surrendered to someone who appeared to him quite powerless and who appeared to him to possess such contradictory attributes such as justice and injustice, tenderness and harshness, human and divine. Neither could he deny this dedication which was his father's last wish, nor could he fully accept it, uncertain as he was about the one to whom he was being dedicated. In the end acceptance must have prevailed since nothing has been indicated to the contrary.

After the installation of Sugriva to the throne of Kishkindha, Angada was made the crown prince. But the question remains whether he was truly happy after receiving this position. This can only be answered in the negative. He was not strong enough to decline the position, nor did he find joy in accepting it. The question before him was how he should view this entire matter. Was this Sri Rama's generosity or his political shrewdness. If he had become fully convinced of Sri Rama's divinity, then his inner conflict would have fully subsided. But at that stage, he had no

evidence born of his own experience but could only accept this on his father's advice. He certainly had tremendous respect for his father, but could not fully accept his words as the gospel. That is why he accepted the position of crown prince with mixed feelings. In accepting the position of crown prince, he must have sometime been tormented with the thought that in the eyes of the world, it would seem that he had overlooked his father's death for the sake of his position. In any event, he could not have any gentle feelings towards Sugriva. In his view, Sugriva was a person who was the cause of his father's death. And then, after having been crowned king, Sugriva's conduct too was such that it could not generate any reverence towards him in Angada's mind. His life was not the life of an ideal king. A far cry from even mindedness or devotion, the life of Sugriva degenerated into one of lust and sensuality. When Lakshmana angrily entered the city to punish Sugriva, Angada thought only of his own safety and security. But when Lakshmana reassured him, he did nothing further to ensure the protection of Sugriva. Perhaps he would have been satisfied if Lakshmana proceeded to punish Sugriva. However, Sugriva took refuge in Hanumanji who ensured his protection and well being.

Angada was made leader of the party that was ordered to look for Mother Sita. In this group there were such valiant, experienced and wise personalities such as Jambhavana and Hanuman. To be made leader of that group was to bestow on Angada a great honour, but even in this, Angada perceived a plot to eliminate him. Sugriva had given a period of one month in which to find Mother Sita and added that should anyone return without doing so, he would be punished by death. In the beginning, because of the possibility of success in the mission, the idea did not clearly dawn on him, but later when failure stared him in the face, he clearly gave expression to this thought.

*Kah angad locan bhari baaree,
Duhu prakaar bhai mrityu hamaaree.
Ihaa na sudhi seetaa kai paaee,
Uhaa gae maarihi kapi-raa-ee.
Pitaa badhe par maarat mohee,
Raakhaa raam nihor na ohee.
Puni puni angad kah sab paahee,
Maran bhayau kachu sansay naahee.*

"Said Angada with eyes filled with tears, 'It is death for us both ways. Here we have failed to get tidings of Sita and if we go home King Sugriva (the lord of monkeys) will behead us. He would have finished me immediately my father was killed, had not Sri Rama protected me; hence I owe no gratitude to him.' Again

and again Angada told them all, 'Our death has arrived: there is no doubt about it.' " (Ramcharitmanas 4/25/2-3) .

On a previous occasion as well, whilst in search of Sita, Angada's fearful state of mind is revealed. They were at one stage dying of thirst when some birds were noticed coming out of a cave. Assuming there to be water in the cave, the monkeys resolved to enter it. As the leader of the group, Angada failed to lead the others into the cave. Although equal in strength and courage to his father Vali, as stated by Vali himself in his dying moments, Angada's psychological fear of caves was a result of his father's experience. Vali had entered the cave unhesitatingly to fight the demon, Mayavi, but the consequences of his doing so was remembered by Angada and he became wary of the results of such acts of heroism. On this occasion, it was Hanumanji who saved the situation and led the monkeys into the cave where they refreshed themselves thoroughly and were assisted out of that place by the female ascetic, Swayamprabha.

These two incidents reveal Angada's state of mind and the setback this presented to the development of his

character. But Angada was rescued from this sense of failure on the latter occasion by Jambhavana, who guided him to surrender to the Lord.

Jaamvant angad dukh dekhee,

Kahee kathaa updes bisekhee.

Taat raam kahu nar jani maanahu,

Nirgun brahma ajit aj jaanahu.

Ham sab sevak ati badbhaagee,

Santat sagun brahma anuraagee.

Nij icchaa prabhu avataṛai, sur mahi go dwij laagi.

Sagun upaasak sang tah, rahahi moccha sab tyaagi.

"Seeing Angada's distress Jambhavana (the old bear chief) gave a highly instructive discourse. 'Imagine not Rama to be a mortal, dear child; know Him to be the same as Brahma (the supreme spirit) without attributes, invincible and unborn. We, His servants, are all highly blessed in that we are ever devoted to the same Brahma endowed with a qualified form. Of His own free will the Lord descends on the earth for the sake of gods, earth, cows and Brahmins. Spurning all the varieties of final beatitude the worshippers of His qualified form (come down and) remain with Him even on earth.'"
(Ramcharitmanas 4/25/6-7,26).

This was a turning point in Angada's life. Jambhavana's words infused new hope and a fresh faith in the Lord. He was freed from his imaginary fears and he felt the burden of responsibility removed from his shoulders the moment he surrendered to the Lord the fruit of all his endeavours, whether it was success or failure. This brought to him the confidence that he lacked before and the secure knowledge that with the grace of the Lord, no achievement is impossible. Up to now, he was plagued with doubts about the divinity of Sri Rama. The fact that Ravana was able to take away Mother Sita from Sri Rama and the fact that the Lord sought help from Sugriva and his followers to locate and recover mother Sita made him apprehensive about the Lord. But now, being convinced by Jambhavana that by doing so the Lord was only enabling His devotees to serve Him, he was filled with appreciation for the opportunities of service provided to him by the Lord. All his doubts towards Sri Rama were resolved by the speech of Jambhavana and he fully accepted and dedicated himself to the service of the Lord.

This new found inspiration and resultant surge of self-confidence of Angada finds expression when Sampati (the vulture) threatens to devour the group who had

resolved, under Angada's leadership, to fast unto death rather than to return to Kishkindha and face execution. Here it was Angada's speech regarding the sacrifices made by Jatayu for the sake of the Lord which not only gave fortitude to the other members of the group but also inspired Sampati to help them in the quest for Mother Sita just as his brother Jatayu had assisted the Lord at the peril of his life. When Sampati revealed to the group the whereabouts of Mother Sita, then Angada alone indicated that he has the capacity to reach her. However, he was unsure of his ability to return thereafter. This task could only be performed by Hanuman. It was only after Hanuman returned from Lanka and related his experiences to his companions that Angada's faith in the Lord became complete. Now no further reasoning, persuasion or convincing was necessary. Thus, in the development of Angada's faith the seed planted by his father, Vali, at the time of dedication had grown into a tree and flowered by the inspiration of Jambhavana's words, bore fruit by the knowledge of the deeds of Hanumanji.

When Sri Rama reached Lanka with his army after constructing a bridge across the ocean, he resolved to make one last effort to negotiate a peaceful settlement

with Ravana. To complete this mission, it became necessary to entrust the task to such a messenger who would be capable in every respect. Sri Rama consulted his council of advisers on the choice of such a messenger and the name of Angada was suggested by the far-sighted Jambhavana who was well acquainted with Angada's psychological state. Jambhavan knew that Angada now fully believed in Sri Rama but that Angada was not sure whether the Lord believed in him. Sri Rama's ready acceptance of Jambhavana's proposal cleared Angada's doubt. The fact that the proposal came from Jambhavana also cleared Angada's doubt in another matter. When his father Vali had returned from the cave and saw Sugriva on the throne of Kishkindha, he banished not only Sugriva but also those ministers who supported his coronation. Now that Sugriva was king of Kishkindha, it was natural for him to reappoint those very same ministers as his closest advisors. However, it was natural for Angada to feel unsure of acceptance by them in such circumstances. But as the proposal came from Jambhavana and was unanimously agreed on by the rest of them, this doubt was also cleared.

Jambhavana's choice of Angada as messenger was a wise one from other points of view as well. Generally, it

is believed that the proposal for peace is advanced by the weaker side. Jambhavana was concerned that Ravana should not consider the proposal for peace to be a weakness on the part of Sri Rama. Angada was appropriate as a symbol of power as he was the son of that warrior who had defeated Ravana and thereafter extended a hand of friendship to him. The choice of Angada as messenger would send a message to Ravana that like Vali, Sri Rama too was negotiating from a position of strength. Whilst Angada might be perceived as a trusted envoy of Sri Rama on one hand, he must also be seen as a well wisher of Ravana being the son of his friend Vali. Furthermore, the choice of Angada as envoy was a political challenge for Ravana. Whilst as a political leader, Ravana did not even trust his obedient and well-intentioned brother Vibhishana, Sri Rama demonstrated his superior statesmanship by entrusting the son of an enemy with a vital mission. This was the greatest proof of the failure of Ravana's political philosophy. Thus, Jambhavana's choice of Angada as envoy was appropriate in every way.

Angada's heart leapt for joy at the group's unanimous decision in choosing him as envoy. Sri Rama lovingly called Angada to his side and said to him,

Baalitanay budhi bal gun dhaamaa,

Lankaa jaahu taat mam kaamaa.

Bahut bujhaai tumhahi kaa kahaoo,

Param catur mai jaanat ahaoo.

Kaaju hamaar taasu hit hoee,

Ripu san karehu batkahee soee.

"O son of Vali, repository of wisdom, strength and goodness! Go to Lanka, dear son, for My cause. I need not give you any elaborate instructions. I know you are supremely clever. You should talk with the enemy in such words as may advance My cause and serve his interest at the same time.'" (Ramcharitmanas 6/16/3-4).

This kindly instruction of the Lord was received by Angada with a heart full of faith and dedication. There was not a trace of doubt or ego left in him. It was no longer a consideration to him as to whether he was capable or not to fulfill the task ahead of him for he now fully believed that the grace of the Lord would accomplish all that was necessary. The dedication of Angada by his father Vali to the feet of the Lord was now truly complete.

Angada left for Ravana's court like a true devotee of the Lord, thinking all the while of the Lord's lotus feet and His greatness. His complete dedication to the

Lord rendered him fearless and his outward confidence struck terror in the hearts of the demons as he entered the city. He met and killed Ravana's powerful son, Prahastha, soon after entering the city and this further terrified the demons. As he entered Ravana's court, all of the demon king's ministers stood up in respect. This infuriated Ravana who immediately asked him to identify himself. Angada introduced himself, first as an envoy from the Lord and then as the son of a friend. He further informed Ravana that he had come for Ravana's own welfare. He spoke highly of Ravana's lineage and his great achievements. He then pointed out Ravana's great error in abducting Mother Sita and implored him to rectify the mistake by returning Mother Sita to Sri Rama and seeking his forgiveness. He assured Ravana of Sri Rama's compassionate nature. Quite clearly, Angada was carrying out the Lord's command wherein he was asked to advance the Lord's cause as well as serve Ravana's interest at the same time.

Ravana responded to Angada's simple and sincere words with sarcasm and ridicule. He demanded to know who Angada's father was and how he came to be his friend. Angada decided to speak to Ravana in a similar strain,

saying that he was Angada, the son of Vali, adding that he may have perhaps met him whilst he knew all along that Ravana was once defeated by Vali. Ravana then tried to use intrigue to turn Angada against Sri Rama by asking him where his father was now whilst he knew full well that his father had been killed by Sri Rama. Ravana thus tried to awaken bitterness and remorse in Angada by reminding him that he was acting as envoy for the one who had killed his father. He felt that if he could turn Angada against Sri Rama, then his intrigue or plot could succeed. His words were a challenge to Angada's sense of pride and self-respect and truly it was a situation which anyone would find difficult to overcome, let alone such a brave and strong warrior prince such as Angada. But Angada's reply pulled the rug from under Ravana's feet when he said,

Din das gae baali pahi jaaee,

Boojhehu kusal sakhaa ur laaee.

Raam birodh kusal jasi hoee,

So sab tohi sunaaihi soee.

"Ten days hence you shall go to Vali and embracing your friend personally enquire after his welfare. He would tell you all about the welfare that follows from hostility to Sri Rama." (Ramcharitmanas 6/20/4-5).

The sarcasm of Angada was an attempt to put Ravana to shame, but it may be asked here that in doing so, was Angada not also at the same time undermining the prestige of his father? Would any self-respecting son who held his father's memory in high esteem and honour speak such words? A superficial glance would indeed make it appear so, but his following statement to Ravana shows the depth of Angada's own view on the matter when he said,

*Sunu sath bhed hoi man taake,
Shreerahubeer hriday nahi jaake.*

"'Listen, O fool: the seeds of dissension can be sown in the mind of him alone whose heart is closed to the Hero of Raghu's line.'" (Ramcharitmanas 6/20/-5).

Angada had now reached the realisation that Sri Rama was indeed the Cosmic Being or Universal Self. His father's death at the hands of Sri Rama was not inspired by hatred or enmity, but was rather like a surgical necessity for the preservation of the general universal welfare. Angada had arisen above petty loyalties and clannishness. He was disappointed that Ravana could not learn from Vali's fate and that all his sincere attempts to redeem Ravana were rejected by him in its entirety. Ravana continued to boast of his

own might and achievements and tried his best to belittle and blaspheme the Lord. This infuriated Angada who then, **"gave a loud yell and furiously struck both his mighty arms against the ground."** (Ramcharitmanas 6/31/2). The earth shook and Ravana's ministers were thrown off their seats and in great fear they tried to retreat. Ravana too was about to topple down but recovered himself and stood up. But most of his ten beautiful crowns from his ten heads fell to the ground. He quickly picked up six of the crowns and set them on his heads. But before he could recover the remaining four, Angada sent them flying to the Lord. Angada's action of striking the ground with his fists and toppling Ravana and his ministers had far reaching significance. Earlier, when Hanuman advised Ravana to return Mother Sita to Sri Rama and thereby establish himself as the unshakable ruler of Lanka, Ravana laughed in scorn as he already considered his rule over Lanka as being unshakable. Angada now proved to Ravana the truth of Hanuman's words and his own foolhardy opinion. He demonstrated to Ravana and his entire court that when his administration was not able to bear a single blow from the fist of a monkey, then what would happen to that kingdom when struck by the Lord would be beyond imagination. Ravana ignored this implication and

thought that he had the upper hand in the situation by recovering six of his ten crowns. On the other hand, Angada, having seized the remaining four crowns did not even think for a moment of retaining them as mementos of his own power and success, but immediately surrendered them to the feet of the Lord.

Ravana then furiously called on his ministers to seize the monkey and slay him and thereafter to devour every bear and monkey they could find and finally to capture Sri Rama and Lakshmana alive. This instruction from Ravana appears ludicrous if we consider the prevailing scene in his court. It was however, a desperate effort on his part to maintain the stranglehold of authority he had over his kingdom. He realised that the terror he had invoked all around him to maintain that authority was grossly undermined by Angada's words and deeds. It was with desperation that he uttered these words to try and regain control of the situation. Angada, on the other hand, fearlessly and stoutly nullified Ravana's effort to boost his follower's morale by confidently stating that there was nothing that Ravana or any of his followers could do to harm him. He boldly exclaimed that through the grace of the Lord, he alone was capable of destroying Ravana and his entire kingdom.

Although Angada had initially gone to Ravana's court to sincerely seek a solution to the problem in such a way as to fulfill the Lord's cause and also benefit Ravana, he was now convinced that no amount of words could make Ravana see reason. He therefore endeavored, and to a large extent succeeded, in undermining the stranglehold of terror through which Ravana maintained his authority.

Ravana resorted to his final strategy to boost the morale of his followers by smiling at Angada and declaring him to be a liar with only big words and no deeds to match. Angada grew indignant and firmly planted his foot in the midst of the whole assembly saying,

Jau mam caran sakasi sath taaree,

Phirahi raamu seetaa mai haaree.

"If you can but stir my foot, O fool. Sri Rama will return forthwith and I shall forego Sita as a lost wager." (Ramcharitmanas 6/33/5). This pledge of Angada reveals such extraordinary faith and ethical skill which is unparalleled in the Ramcharitmanas. The greatness and importance of faith has been glorified throughout the Ramcharitmanas. A glimpse of this can be found in the words and actions of numerous devoted

characters. It was on the strength of this faith that Lakshmana challenged king Janaka in his assembly by declaring,

*Ko baapuro pinaak puraanaa.
Naath jaani as aayasu hooo,
Kautuku karau bilokia sooo.
Kamal naal jimi caap cadhaavau,
Jojan sat pramaan lai dhaavau.
Torau chatrak dand jimi,
Tav prataap bal naath.
Jau na karau prabhu pad sapath,
Kar na dharau dhanu bhaath.*

"What, then is this wretched old bow? Realising this, my Lord, let me have Your Command and see what wonders I work; I will string the bow as though it were a lotus-stalk and run with it not less than 800 miles. By the might of Your glory, O Lord, I will snap it like the stalk of a mushroom. Or, if I fail, I swear by Your feet never to handle a bow or quiver again.'"

(Ramcharitmanas 1/252/3-4, 253). It was also on the strength of this faith that Hanumanji was able to leap across the ocean and wreak havoc in Lanka setting fire to the entire city. But even these two great demonstrations of faith cannot compare to the pledge of Angada. This was such a pledge, which when read even

today, the hearts of countless devotees begin to tremble. They dread to think what could have been the outcome should Angada's foot be moved. Many people consider this pledge to be an unqualified gamble to which there is no parallel in history. Even in the Mahabharata, the terrible risk taken by the Pandava's in staking Draupadi was not as ominous as this because in that instance the Pandava's staked their own wife whereas here Angada staked the wife of another. Was he entitled to do so and could this audacity of his be justified? Superficially seen, this criticism of Angada may appear to be fully justified, but when examined in the light of devotion and faith, then such criticism becomes meaningless. In actual fact, Angada was not a gambler and neither was he taking any risks. The possibilities of gain and loss, birth and death, victory and defeat etc. only exist in the absence of complete faith in the Lord. The faith of Angada had ripened to the extent that there was no place left for any doubt. To view Angada as a gambler in that situation would be an act of disrespect to his indomitable faith in the Lord. The foot of Angada had in reality come to symbolise his unshakable faith in the Lord.

In as far as Ravana was concerned, this was decidedly a gamble - a gamble in which he himself had nothing to lose but everything to gain. The hidden fear of defeat which lay deep in his heart compelled him to take up the challenge as this appeared to him to be the easiest way in which to emerge the winner. He did not have the courage to declare to Angada that Sita was already in his captivity and if his Lord had the power, then let Him defeat him in battle and take her from him. He did not even consider Angada's authority in making such a pledge and whether Sri Rama would consider it as binding on him. It seems that in his greed and lust, the intelligence of Ravana came to nought and the truth of the matter is that Angada had succeeded in stripping him, not only of his crowns, but also his entire garb of self-confidence and hypocrisy and he stood revealed for what he was.

When all the demons failed to shake Angada's foot, Ravana himself was forced to rise from his throne and bow towards Angada's foot in order to grasp it. Angada then surprised everyone by withdrawing his foot and chiding Ravana with the words,

Mam pad gahe na tor ubaaraa.

Gahasi na raam caran sath jaaee.

"'You cannot be saved by clinging to my feet. Fool, why do you not go and clasp Sri Rama's feet?'"
(Ramcharitmanas 6/34/2). Ravana turned back in shame when he heard this. All his splendour was gone and he was robbed of his glory even as the moon fades away at mid-day. Angada withdrawing his foot when Ravana went to move it demonstrates such extraordinary devotion, humility and renunciation on the part of Angada which is difficult to find elsewhere in the history of the world. Here was an opportunity to gain unimaginable fame and glory. Had Ravana, who had once picked up Mount Kailasha with Shiva and Parvati seated on it, now failed to move Angada's foot, it would mean establishing Angada's fame and glory in golden letters on the pages of history. Angada resisted the temptation of this golden opportunity and used it to make one final attempt to inspire Ravana to the path of devotion. This sacrifice of Angada served only to enhance the greatness of the Lord. Such a devotee was he that he left no opportunity for anyone to say in the future that Sri Rama's victory over Ravana has no real value since he (Ravana) had even failed to move the foot of a monkey.

Angada's entire dealings in the court of Ravana; his thoughts, words and actions reveal an extraordinary synthesis of statesmanship, ethics, devotion and self-surrender. He succeeded in defeating Ravana in every respect. His attainments in this respect were far greater than that of his father Vali. Whereas Vali defeated Ravana only in the physical sense, Angada defeated him physically, intellectually, politically, morally and spiritually. Furthermore, Vali's victory served to enhance his own prestige, but Angada used his victory to enhance the prestige and glory of the Lord. Angada's victory of eloquence is matched by his victories on the battlefield where he demonstrated his great valour, fortitude and military prowess. If anyone in the Ramcharitmanas can come close to match the glorious and unparalleled deeds of Hanumanji, then that character must be Angada. Throughout the descriptions of the battle in the Lankakanda, we find Hanumanji and Angada in the thick of the fighting. Wherever the battle appears vulnerable on the part of the *vanara* army, these two inevitably make their way there to turn the tide of the battle.

*Lankaa dwau kapi sohahi kaise,
Mathahi sindhu dui mandar jaise.
Bhuj bal ripu dal dalmali,*

Dekhi divas kar ant.

Koode jugal bigat shram,

Aae jah bhagavant.

"Rampaging in Lanka, the two monkeys looked like a pair of Mandaras churning the ocean. Having crushed and battered the enemy's ranks by the might of their arm and perceiving that it was now the close of day, the two champions jumped down without any exertion and came where the Lord was." (Ramcharitmanas 6/44/4, 45).

Whenever it is seen that Hanumanji is in need of help, Angada unhesitatingly and determinedly makes his way there.

Angad sunaa pavansut,

Gadh par gayau akel.

Ran baakuraa baalisut,

Taraki cadheu kapi khel.

"When Angada heard that the son of the wind god had gone to the fort single-handed, the son of Vali, who was so valiant in battle, reached the fort in a single bound as a monkey would do out of sheer fun." (Ramcharitmanas 6/43).

Angada's feelings and attitude towards Hanumanji have unusual but deep significance. In a practical sense, it

may not be considered unusual for Angada to harbour feelings of doubt and suspicion towards Hanumanji. It was Hanumanji who united Rama and Sugriva which resulted in Vali's death. But Hanuman's virtues and deeds were so transparent that Angada was never misled by them. He was always convinced of Hanuman's good intentions and the complete lack of selfishness, attachment and delusion in him. He was satisfied that if Hanuman ever acted against Vali, it was out of a sense of justice and goodness and that Hanuman was not capable of bearing malice against any individual. In fact, Angada always held Hanumanji in great esteem and reverence. The development of Angada's personality is due to a large extent to the inspiration and guidance provided by Hanuman. In this sense, Hanuman was Angada's real guru.

However, the misunderstanding between Angada and Sugriva prevailed up to the end of the Ramcharitmanas. Angada cannot be entirely blamed for this condition as Sugriva's own weaknesses and sensuous nature contributed largely to Angada's suspicion of him. Perhaps the greatest factor that affected their relationship was Sugriva's attraction towards his mother.

"For instance, the very crime of which He had killed Vali (the monkey-king of Kishkindha) even as a huntsman was repeated in the misdemeanour perpetrated by Sugriva." (Ramcharitmanas 1/28/3). (Vali was killed by Sri Rama on the plea that the former had usurped his younger brother's wife). (Ramcharitmanas : 1993: 29).

Angada saw in this not only Sugriva's sensuous inclination but also an act of revenge in retaliation for Vali's abduction of Sugriva's wife. Angada found this action of Sugriva very painful and unforgivable. It was because of these hidden feelings that he was reluctant to return to Kishkindha with the rest of his countrymen after the coronation of Sri Rama. Stirring as his appeal was, Sri Rama in his infinite wisdom knew that Angada had to be somehow freed from this final obstacle to his psychological well-being. Therefore, He insisted that Angada return to Kishkindha and he persuaded him to do so. The gracious Lord placed his own necklace around the neck of Angada and sent him away after much consolation.

Angad bacan bineet suni,

Raghupati karunaa seev.

Prabhu uthaai ur laayau,

Sajal nayan raajeev.

Nij ur maal basan mani,

Baalitanay pahiraai.

Bidaa keenhi bhagvaan tab,

Bahu prakaar samujhaai.

"Hearing Angada's humble entreaty Lord Sri Rama, the perfection of tenderness, raised him and clasped him to His bosom. His lotus eyes streaming with tears. Investing Vali's son (Angada) with the garland that hung on His own bosom as well as with His own robes and jewels, the Lord then sent him away with many words of consolation." (Ramcharitmanas 7/18 a-b). The Lord placed the garland around Angada's neck in order to reassure him that if there was any feeling of hostility in the mind of Sugriva, the garland would set them at rest. The importance of this garland is perhaps best known to Sugriva. The Lord had placed a garland around Sugriva's neck to assure him of his protection and as a warning to Vali. Vali had ignored this warning at the cost of his life.

Angada then set out with a heavy heart on the road to Kishkindha. When they had gone a short distance from Ayodhya, Hanumanji pleaded with Sugriva for permission to return to Ayodhya and serve the Lord for a short

while. Sugriva appreciated the faithful and invaluable service rendered to him by Hanumanji in his darkest hour of need and the fact that he remained loyal to him even if it meant sacrificing his greatest joy of serving Lord Rama. This loyalty was pledged as a dakshina (fee) by Hanuman to his guru Surya Bhagwan (the sun god). Sugriva was so gratified with Hanuman's service that he decided to free him from his pledge and he granted leave to Hanuman to go and serve Lord Rama for as long as he pleased. Seeing Hanuman about to return to Ayodhya, Angada beseeched him with joint palms to convey his prostrations to the Lord and to remind the Lord of him from time to time. When Hanuman related Angada's love to Sri Rama, the Lord's heart was filled with ecstatic delight.

Amongst the great devotees characterised in the Sri Ramcharitmanas, Angada is perhaps the most gentle and emotional of them all. Even his great valour and unparalleled skill in combat could not diminish his love and humility.

7.4 Jatayu and Sampati

In the Ramcharitmanas, several outstanding human characters are portrayed together with many birds and animals. Ordinarily, birds and animals as characters are unimaginable because they do not possess the power of discrimination and are governed more by instinct. However in the Ramcharitmanas, birds and animals are not devoid of discrimination and are shown to possess human-like qualities. A human form alone is insufficient to distinguish between man and animal, for a man without discrimination is inferior to birds and animals. According to Tulsidasji, animals and birds like Hanuman and Jatayu, by their very actions and good nature, are revered in the world, whereas Ravana, who possessed a human form and who was born in a high class Brahmin family, is condemned for his evil deeds and actions. The skirmish between Ravana and Jatayu is an indication of this unique paradox. Ravana's abduction of Sita and Jatayu's attempt to save her is a perfect example of this extraordinary anomaly. Here, the animal nature of man and the human nature of a bird are clearly portrayed.

Before examining the courageous acts of Jatayu, it is essential to look into his earlier life. This revelation is given in the Ramcharitmanas through the reminiscences of Sampati to the monkeys. This occasion arose when the group of monkeys who were searching for Sita had reached the seashore. They were full of despair and awaiting their death as they could see no way forward. They then became terror-stricken when they heard the words of Sampati, who was delighted to hear their vow to give up their lives,

Mohi ahaar deenha jagdeesaa.

Aaju sabahi kah bhacchan karaoo,

Din bahu cale ahaar binu maraoo.

Kabahu na mil bhari udar ahaaraa,

Aaju deenha bidhi ekahi baaraa.

"'God has given me a feast: I will devour them all today. I have been starving for many days past and have never had a full meal; today God has supplied me with abundant food all at a time.'" (Ramcharitmanas 4/26/1-2).

In order to pacify and reassure the terrified monkeys, Angada began to praise the courageous acts of the vulture Jatayu. Upon mention of Jatayu's name, Sampati became eager to hear more about his younger brother.

He became overwhelmed with emotion when he heard of Jatayu's glorious exploits and the compassion of Sri Rama who had performed the last rites of Jatayu with his own hands.

Sampati then related the events of his youth to the monkeys. The two brothers, whilst flying towards one goal, suddenly found themselves in totally different directions. Initially both were flying towards the sun in order to test whether they could reach such a formidable height. Their aspiration was an uncommon one in comparison with the normal objective of vultures who normally soar to great heights and use their extremely keen eyesight to spot carcasses in order to satisfy their hunger. The culmination of such an awesome flight into the heavens, which results in the mere feasting upon a dead carcass, fills one with repulsion. However, this is the reality of life which is constantly being repeated in society. Man through his intelligence and talent reaches great heights but uses them to fulfil his personal desires. He seeks satisfaction in the mundane and cannot raise himself to greater deeds.

As Jatayu and Sampati got closer to the sun, the heat became too strong and Jatayu decided to turn back while Sampati flew on. At this juncture, it would appear as though Sampati possessed more prowess and was steadfast whereas Jatayu was weak and his act was one of cowardliness. However, this reasoning is proven wrong later when Jatayu came to the rescue of Sita and confronted the mighty demon Ravana. At that time Jatayu had reached old age. The invincible Ravana had not anticipated any confrontation when he abducted Sita as Sri Rama and Lakshmana were far from the hermitage. Sita lamented as she was being driven away. Hearing her cry for help and recognising her voice, Jatayu came to her rescue saying,

Seete putri karasi jani traasaa,

Karihau jaatudhaan kar naasaa.

Dhaavaa krodhvant khag kaise,

Chootai pabi parbat kahu jaise.

"Sita, my daughter, fear not; I will kill this demon."

The bird darted off in its fury like a thunderbolt hurled against a mountain." (Ramcharitmanas 3/28/5).

At this point, the form of Jatayu was not clear to Ravana and he began to wonder whether it was mount Mainaka or Garuda, the king of birds. Who was it that had the audacity to challenge him? When Jatayu drew

near, Ravana was surprised to see him and in his arrogance said that the aged bird had come to die at his hands. Jatayu then challenged Ravana saying,

Kah sunu raavan mor sikhaavaa.

Taji jaanakihi kusal griha jaahoo,

Naahi ta as hoihi bahubaahoo.

Raam rosh paavak ati ghoraa,

Hoihi sakal salabh kul toraa.

"Listen, Ravana, to my advice and return home safely, letting Janaka's Daughter alone. Otherwise despite your many arms what will happen is this: in the most terrible flame of Sri Rama's wrath your whole house will be consumed like a moth.'" (Ramcharitmanas

3/28/8-9). Ravana laughed in reply to Jatayu's warning. Jatayu then attacked Ravana with his beak and talons thereby wounding him and rendering him unconscious for a while. But as soon as he regained consciousness, he cut off the wings of Jatayu with his sword. Jatayu fell to the ground and Ravana then forcefully took Sita away. Jatayu had displayed immense heroism but he wanted to give Sri Rama the news of Sita's abduction before giving up his life. The pain in his body was unbearable and his endurance was fully tested as it seemed that his life was about to leave his body. He fixed his mind on the feet of Sri

Rama and waited for Him. Sri Rama was overcome with grief when He saw Jatayu in such a pitiable condition. He fondly stroked his head with His hands and all Jatayu's pain disappeared. Jatayu related how Ravana had cut off his wings and taken Sita away in the southerly direction. Sri Rama wanted to restore Jatayu's life but he replied,

*Jaakar naam marat mukh aavaa,
Adhmau mukut hoi shruti gaavaa.
So mam locan gocar aage,
Raakhau deh naath kehi khaage.
Jal bhari nayan kahahi raghuraaee,
Taat karma nij te gati paaee.
Parhit bas jinha ke man maahee,
Tinha kahu jag durlabh kachu naahee.
Tanu taji taat jaahu mam dhaamaa,
Deu kaah tumha poorankaamaa.*

"He whose very name, so declare the Vedas, redeems the most depraved soul even if it appears on his lips at the moment of his death, is present before me in a visible form! What more is wanting now, for which I should retain my body any longer?" With His eyes full of tears the Lord of Raghus replied, dear father, you have attained to an enviable state by virtue of your own noble deeds. Nothing is difficult of attainment in

this world to those who have others' interests at heart. Casting off your body, dear father, proceed now to My divine abode. What shall I give you, when you have all your desires already accomplished?"
(Ramcharitmanas 3/30/3-5).

From the above incident, it becomes clear that it was not because of cowardliness that Jatayu had decided not to pursue his journey towards the sun but because he was intelligent enough not to do so. Being the younger brother of Sampati, he was greatly influenced by him. Sampati was not satisfied in remaining within the confines of the earth and so he had decided to soar high into the heavens and reach the source of light. His actions were not motivated by devotion to the sun but by his ego. People who worship the sun do not think it necessary to reach it, but they are content with the light and heat given by it to feel its closeness.

Sampati was inspired by pride to conquer the sun and thereby to become the first one to do so. This type of pride cannot be condemned for, from the beginning of time, man has been motivated by ego and pride to become successful. He uses all his talents and capabilities

to rise above all limits and achieve great heights. He finds nothing impossible whether it be on land, sea or space. It is with this energy and drive that man has reached the moon and has been able to establish space stations. Therefore it would not be inappropriate to say that Sampati was like a modern day scientist. Today many questions are being raised regarding the expeditions into space. The question being asked is, what is the usefulness of such expeditions? The answer given is that many of earth's problems can be solved if we knew about other planets etc. Others, however, feel that these expeditions are an abuse of resources, energy and knowledge, which could be used to fight poverty and disease which millions of people on earth face from day to day. They feel that this is just an exhibition of power by a few wealthy nations in order to show their superiority. There is some validity in both these viewpoints. Perhaps it is necessary for man to know whether there is any connection between his problem and the world around him. Man's desires are greater than his capabilities and therefore he does not always reach his goal. Man has strength and energy but nature is by far mightier than man and thus man has to succumb to nature. He may be able to conquer nature to a certain extent, but in the final analysis nature is

always victorious. However, man never fails to strive. Even if he is stricken by disease, he does not accept defeat and tries by means of medicines to overcome it. Ultimately, nature in the form of death cannot be conquered. However, man can triumph, if he knows the true nature of the soul, for then, even on dying, he becomes part of the infinite.

Sampati's physical limitations had become an impediment in his journey towards the sun. His wings were burnt and he fell to the ground grief-stricken. He then related to the monkeys of how he was saved.

*Muni ek naam candramaa ohee,
Laagee dayaa dekhi kari mohee.
Bahu prakaar tehi gyaan sunaavaa,
Deh janit abhimaan chadaavaa.*

"A sage, Chandrama by name, was moved with compassion when he saw me. He taught me spiritual wisdom in many ways and rid me of my identification with the body."

(Ramcharitmanas 4/27/3). Sampati felt consoled by the sage's words but he still wondered what would become of him now that he was not able to fend for himself. The sage reassured him thus,

*Tretaa brahma manuj tanu dharihee,
Taasu naari nisicar pati harihee.*

*Taasu khoj pathaihi prabhu dootaa,
Tinhahi mile tai hob puneetaa.
Jamihahi pankh karasi jani cintaa,
Tinhahi dekhaai dehesu tai seetaa.*

"In the Treta age the Supreme Spirit will take the form of a human being and the demon king (Ravana) will carry off His Spouse. The Lord will send out spies to search for Her and you will be absolved off all sins by meeting them. Your wings will sprout again; worry not any longer on that account. You will have to do only this much: Show them where Sita may be."
(Ramcharitmanas 4/27/4-5).

Then Sampati used his keen eyesight and he detected Sita in the Ashoka grove and advised the monkeys accordingly:

*Giri trikoot oopar bas lankaa,
Tah rah raavan sahaj asankaa.
Tah asok upban jah rahaee,
Seetaa baithi soc rat ahaee.
Mai dekhau tumha naahee,
Geedhahi drishti apaar.
Boodh bhayau na ta karteu,
Kachuk sahaay tumhaar.*

"'On the summit of the Trikuta hill stands the city of Lanka; Ravana, who is fearless by nature, lives there. There in the Ashoka garden, is lodged Sita, who sits there, plunged in grief, even now. I see Her even though you cannot; for the range of a vulture's sight is unlimited. I have grown old now or I would have rendered some help to you.'" (Ramcharitmanas 4/27/6, 4/28).

The monkeys still had an enormous hurdle to overcome and that was the vast ocean that separated them from Lanka. Seeing their despair, Sampati whose wings had grown again, inspired the monkeys not to give up.

Mohi biloki dharahu man dheeraa,

Raam kripaa kas bhayau sareeraa.

Paapiu jaa kar naam sumirahee,

Ati apaar bhavsaagar tarahee.

Taasu doot tumha taji kadraaee,

Raam hriday dhari karahu upaaee.

"'Look at me and take courage in your heart. See how rejuvenated I feel in body (with a new pair of wings) by Sri Rama's grace. Even sinners who invoke Sri Rama's Name are able to cross the vast and boundless ocean of mundane existence. You, therefore, who are His spies, should never lose nerve but be up and doing

with the image of Sri Rama enshrined in your heart.'"

(Ramcharitmanas 4/28/1-2).

The fact that Sampati and Jatayu were birds is not of great significance but it is the philosophies they represent that are important. Ultimately both reached the goal but in his earlier life, Sampati, was greatly influenced by materialism. Jatayu too was similarly influenced, but he changed his path very early in life. Sampati realised his folly when it was too late and had to go through a long process before he could achieve his goal. The Ramcharitmanas does not advocate the satisfaction of the ego and fulfilment of ambition as the main aim of life. If one makes this his aim then he will definitely fall just like Sampati did. It is only by Satsang and right thinking that one can save oneself from such a downfall. The main purpose of life should be to realise God and serve God through His Creation. The lives of Sampati and Jatayu inspire us towards this goal.

CHAPTER EIGHT
DEMONS OF LANKA

8.1 Introduction

The Sanathan Hindu Dharma, like all religions, warns us of the dire consequences of leading an unethical and immoral life. The epics and the Puranas contain detailed descriptions of impious beings called Asuras or Rakshasas who sometimes became so powerful that they held the whole world to ransom through the perpetuation of their cruel deeds. The oppression of the pious by the impious then becomes the cause of divine intervention in the form of some physical manifestation of the Lord.

*Jab jab hoi dharam kai haanee,
Baadhahi asur adham abhimaanee.
Karahi aneeti jaai nahi baranee,
Seedahi bipra dhenu sur dharnee.
Tab tab prabhu dhari bibidh sareeraa,
Harahi kripaanidhi sajjan peeraa.*

"Whenever virtue declines and vile and haughty demons multiply and work unquity that cannot be told, and whenever Brahmanas, cows, gods and earth itself are in trouble, the gracious Lord assumes various

(transcendent) forms and relieves the distress of the virtuous." (Ramcharitmanas 1/120/3-4).

Thus, in the Ramcharitmanas, the descent of the Lord Sri Rama, is attributed directly to the atrocities of Ravana and his followers on gods, sages and earth.

However, Tulsidasji wanted to remove the perception that adharma or impiety is only perpetuated by specific indigenous groups known as demon clans. No doubt it is true that like attracts like and people of similar tendencies tend to group together, but it would be wrong to paint every member of any particular group with the same brush. There will always be exceptions. Therefore, stereotyping or profiling may have detrimental effects on society as well as individual spiritual development. A typical example of this is that whilst in Ayodhya (a place where piety was the norm) we will find a Manthara, we will similarly find in Lanka (a place where impiety was the norm), such pious and venerable personalities as Vibhishana, Mandodari and Trijata.

Secondly, Tulsidasji draws our attention to the transitory nature of human character. It often happens that a good person, under some impulse or the other,

does something that is bad and vice versa. Therefore we must direct our hatred to the principle of evil and not the evil-doer.

In the present chapter, the researcher intends to analyse Tulsidasji's characterisation of some of the members of the demon race of Lanka, and probe into his perception of how and when even a person with evil propensities can redeem himself.

8.2 Vibhishana

Two completely different viewpoints regarding the character of Vibhishana are prevalent. The Hindi proverb *Ghar Ka Bhedi Lanka Dhahe* ordinarily refers to Vibhishana. According to the proverb, his actions were improper and he was responsible for the destruction of Lanka. Some even refer to him as a traitor or one who betrayed his brother. On the other hand, some perceive him as an ideal devotee who loved Sri Rama exclusively and totally surrendered to him.

The Ramcharitmanas accepts the latter view and takes into account the previous birth of Vibhishana and Ravana. Ravana was then a worthy king named Pratapbhanu and Vibhishana his trusted minister

Dharmaruchi who was constantly engaged in looking after the welfare of the king. Even at that time he was given to devotion to the Lord.

Although Pratapbhanu had great respect for Dharmaruchi, he did not inform him of the plot hatched between himself and the fake Muni. Had he confided in his minister, a great catastrophe could have been averted. As a result of Pratapbhanu's actions, a curse was pronounced on his entire clan to be born as demons. Dharmaruchi was dedicated to the welfare of Pratapbhanu, and although he had no hand in the final downfall of the king, he must have felt guilty for not having gained the confidence of the king and it was this guilt, together with the affection that he had for Pratapbhanu, that became the cause of his bondage in his next birth. Although Dharmaruchi was unaware of the conspiracy, he was also subjected to the curse and thus he was born as Vibhishana. The younger brother of Pratapbhanu, Arimardana, was born as Kumbhakarana.

Vibhishana, as Ravana's younger brother, was again a well wisher of Ravana even though their thinking, nature and interests were totally different from each other. The three brothers, Ravana, Kumbhakarana and

Vibhishana shared a very special bond of affection. At the outset, they followed a similar pattern as far as their spiritual activities were concerned. After performing severe austerities, Brahma and Shiva appeared before them and granted them boons and it was here that the similarities between the brothers ended.

*Keenha bibidh tap teenihu bhaaee,
Param ugra nahi barani na jaaee.
Gayau nikat tap dekhi bidhaataa,
Maagahu bar prasanna mai taataa.
Kari binatee pad gahi dasseesaa,
Boleu bacan sunahu jagdeesaa.
Ham kaahoo ke marahi na maare,
Baanar manuj jaati dui baare.
Evamastu tumha bad tap keenhaa,
Mai brahmaa mili tehi bar deenhaa.
Puni prabhu kumbhakaran pahi gayao,
Tehi biloki man bismay bhayao.
Jau ehi khal nit karab ahaaroo,
Hoihi sab ujaari sansaaroo.
Saarad preri taasu mati pheree,
Maagesi need maas shat keree.
Gae bibheeshan paas puni,
Kaheu putra bar maagu.
Tehi maageu bhagvant pad,*

"All the three brothers practised austerities of various kinds, terrible beyond all description. Seeing their penance the Creator drew nigh and said to the eldest of them, 'Ask a boon, dear son.' The ten-headed Ravana suppliantly clasped his feet and addressed to him the following words. 'Listen, O lord of the universe; my prayer is that I should die at the hands of none save monkeys and men.' 'So be it; you have done great penance.' This was the boon Brahma and I granted to him (Said Shiva). The Creator then approached Kumbhakarana and was astonished to see his gigantic form. Brahma said to himself, 'Should this wretch have his daily repast, the whole world will be laid waste.' So Brahma directed Sharada, who changed his mind. Accordingly the demon asked for continued sleep extending over six months. Last of all Brahma went up to Vibhishana and said, 'Ask a boon, my son.' He asked for pure love for the lotus-feet of the Lord." (Ramcharitmanas 1/176/1-4, 1/177). Ravana's and Kumbhakarana's desires displayed Rajasic and Tamasic qualities whereas Vibhishana's desire was Sattvic. Having received the boon, Vibhishana spent his days performing worship to the Lord.

The bond of love between Ravana and Vibhishana remained strong even though their outlook on life was completely different. Ravana was constantly thinking of new ways to conquer the world whereas Vibhishana was satisfied in his devotion to God. Even though Vibhishana did not approve of Ravana's actions, he did not openly confront him and hoped that perhaps, some day, he would change his ways. Ravana was both tolerant and generous towards Vibhishana and did not oppose his lifestyle.

Just as was the case in his previous birth, Ravana did not consult with Vibhishana when he decided to abduct Sita after the disfigurement of their sister Shurpankha. He knew that Vibhishana would disapprove of his actions and try to prevent him from doing so. However, Vibhishana did not openly show his disapproval of the abduction of Sita immediately but waited for the appropriate time to do so.

In his quest for Sita, Hanuman searched Lanka throughout the night and finally reached the abode of Vibhishana. He was astonished to see the Vaishnava symbols painted on his house and the sacred Tulsi (holy basil) plant in his garden. He could not believe that a person could be a devotee of God whilst living

amongst the demons in Lanka. It is only a rare person who can maintain uninterrupted devotion under such adverse conditions and Vibhishana proved to be that rare person. At their very first meeting, Hanumana developed an immense fondness and a great deal of respect for Vibhishana.

An elder brother enjoys the same position as that of a father. Inspired by this belief, Vibhishana's respect and love for Ravana neither waned nor did he oppose him in any way. But after Hanuman addressed him as brother, he was probably inspired to rethink the definition of brotherhood.

Tab hanumant kahaa sunu bhraataa,

Dekhee cahau jaanakee maataa.

"Hanuman said, 'Listen, brother; I should like to see Mother Sita.'" (Ramcharitmanas 5/7/2).

An individual's actions are determined by his country, his race, his family or community and their social outlook. But if one has to look at things in a broader sense, one has to take into account his previous births; for in different births he is born to different parents, in different countries and in different races. If one only looks at the present,

then one loses the sense of what is eternal. If religion is an exposition of the eternal truth, then it cannot pander to the ever-changing selfishness of individuals and society. Thus one has to embrace the true meaning of religion and it is this meaning that Hanuman pointed out to Vibhishana. By inquiring about the whereabouts of Mother Sita he pointed out the motherhood of God which is an eternal truth. Mahashakti creates the universe and thus she is the real mother, and as a result, all Her devotees will regard each other as brothers. It is from this point of view that Hanuman addressed Vibhishana as brother. This meeting with Hanuman was an inspiration to Vibhishana and he decided to assist him in his mission. Following Vibhishana's advice, Hanuman was able to reach Sita. After Vibhishana met Hanuman, he made up his mind to side with righteousness and to openly oppose the inappropriate behaviour of Ravana. When Hanuman destroyed the Ashoka Vatika and he was bound and taken to Ravana's court, the latter wanted to have him killed.

Sacivanha sahit bibheeshanu aae.

Naai sees kari binay bahootaa,

Neeti birodh na maaria dootaa.

Aan dand kachu karia gosaaee,

Sabahee kahaa mantra bhal bhaaee.

Sunat bihasi bolaa daskandhar,

Ang bhang kari pathaia Bandar.

"At that very moment came Vibhishana with his counsellors. Bowing his head he made a humble entreaty: 'It is against all statecraft: an envoy must not be killed. He may be punished in some other way, my master.' All exclaimed to one another, 'This is sound council, brother.' Hearing this the ten-headed Ravana laughed and said, 'All right, the monkey may be sent back mutilated.'" (Ramcharitmanas 5/23/3-5).

Vibhishana was not a conniving person and his actions were all ethical. Later when he implored Ravana in his assembly to return Sita to Sri Rama, his words were filled with humility, righteousness and devotion. All he wanted was the well being of Ravana and to save Lanka from destruction. Not only does he condemn the inappropriate actions of Ravana but he also emphasised the divinity of Sri Rama. He knew that Ravana would say that the abduction of Sita was a way of avenging the insult to their sister Shurpankha. For an ordinary man, accepting defeat is a matter of self-respect, but in the presence of God, confessing one's shortcomings is an indication of self-surrender, one of the highest

form of worship. Vibhishana pleaded in many ways with Ravana to go to Sri Rama for his own good.

*Baar baar pad laagau,
Binay karau dassees.
Parihari maan moh mad,
Bhajahu kosalaadhees.
Taat caran gahi maagau,
Raakhahu mor dulaar.
Seetaa dehu raam kahu,
Ahit na hoi tumhaar.*

"'Again and again I fall at your feet and pray you, Ravana: abandoning pride, infatuation and arrogance, adore the Lord of Koshala. Claspng your feet I beseech you: grant this prayer of mine as a token of affection for me. Restore Sita to Rama so that no harm may come to you.'" (Ramcharitmanas 5/39a, 5/40).

A devotee sees the whole universe as an embodiment of God and therefore bears no ill will or animosity towards anyone. Vibhishana loved Ravana dearly and he tried his very best to redeem him. But when he realised that Ravana posed a threat not only to Lanka but also to the whole world, he decided to try and get Ravana to mend his ways. His actions were not based on

selfishness or any conspiracy. Ravana then kicked him and ordered him out of Lanka saying,

Khal tohi nikat mrityu ab aaee.

Jiasi sadaa sath mor jiaavaa,

Ripu kar paccha moodh tohi bhaavaa.

Kahasi na khal as ko jag maahee,

Bhuj bal jaahi jitaai mai naahee.

Mam pur basi tapsinha par preetee,

Sath milu jaai tinhahi kahu neetee.

As kahi keenhesi caran prahaaraa.

"O wretch, your death is imminent now. O fool, you have always lived on my generosity; yet, O dullard, you have favoured the enemy's cause. Tell me, wretch, if there is any one in this world whom I have failed to conquer by the might of my arm. Dwelling in my capital you cherish love for the hermits! If so, go and join hands with them, O fool, and teach wisdom to them.' So saying, he kicked his younger brother."
(Ramcharitmanas 5/40/1-3).

Expressing his opinion in the court of Ravana was not the politically correct thing for Vibhishana to do. Ravana could have imprisoned him or given him the death sentence. Vibhishana could have quietly left the assembly just like his grandfather Malyavana had done

and then later he could have left Lanka. But Vibhishana was firm and stood by his principles. He was not 'afraid of the consequences of his utterances for he had unshakeable faith in the divinity of Sri Rama. He clearly saw the imminent destruction of Ravana and Lanka. There could have been another reason for making his declaration. He wanted to evoke courage in the citizens of Lanka so that they too could rebel against the injustice of Ravana. He knew that the majority of the citizens had knowledge of Ravana's evil actions but remained silent because of fear. He also wanted to clarify his position lest any doubt arise in the minds of the citizens of Lanka regarding his departure.

It is impossible to imagine anyone remaining calm after having been insulted and rejected the way Vibhishana was. Under such circumstances, it is natural for a person to be shaking from anger and wanting revenge. However, the large heartedness of Vibhishana is clearly indicated in the Ramcharitmanas. The natural reaction is totally absent as he sees himself as being free from his past.

Saciv sang lai nabh path gayao,

Sabahi sunaai kahat as bhayao.

Raamu satyasankalpa prabhu,

Sabhaa kaalbas tori.

Mai raghubeer saran ab jaau,

Dehu jani khor.

"Taking his ministers with him Vibhishana departed through the air exclaiming so as to make himself heard by all: 'Sri Rama is true to His resolve and all-powerful; while your councillors are doomed. I, therefore, now betake myself to the Hero of Raghu's line for protection; blame me no more.'"

(Ramcharitmanas 5/40/5, 5/41).

Vibhishana then gladly proceeded to meet Sri Rama. His mind dwelt on the lotus feet of the Lord which were a delight to His devotees. He cherished many expectations of beholding those feet that redeemed Ahalya and hallowed the Dandaka forest; those feet that Mother Sita cherished in her heart; those feet that dwell as a pair of lotuses in the lake of Shiva's heart and those feet in whose wooden sandals Bharat's mind remained absorbed. Vibhishana instantly crossed over to the other side of the ocean where Sri Rama had encamped with his army. When the monkeys saw Vibhishana coming, they took him to be an enemy spy and detained him outside. They reported the matter to

Sugriva who then conveyed it to Sri Rama. The Lord asked Sugriva for his opinion regarding Vibhishana. Sugriva replied that the demons were very cunning and that this must be one of their tricks. He felt that Vibhishana was sent by Ravana as a spy to find out their military secrets. He therefore suggested that Vibhishana should be taken prisoner. Sri Rama thanked Sugriva for his wise advice but pointed out to Sugriva that He had taken a vow to dispel all fears from the minds of those who sought refuge in Him. Hanuman rejoiced to hear the words of the Lord because, when he met Vibhishana previously in Lanka, he had assured Vibhishana of the Lord's grace and compassion. Sri Rama said to Sugriva that, had Vibhishana been wicked at heart, he would never have been able to approach the Lord, for only men of pure mind could attain to Him. Sri Rama pointed out to Sugriva that even if Vibhishana had come to find out their secrets, there was nothing to fear, for Lakshmana alone was capable of disposing in a moment all the demons contained in the world. The Lord's words removed Sugriva's doubts and he became convinced of Vibhishana's sincere intentions. Sri Rama ordered for Vibhishana to be brought to Him. The moment Vibhishana saw Sri Rama, he stood still with his gaze intently fixed on the Lord. The sight brought

tears to his eyes and a deep thrill ran through his body. He composed his mind and said:

*Naath dasaanan kar mai bhraataa,
Nisicar bans janam surtraataa.
Sahaj paapapriya taamas dehaa,
Jathaa ulookahi tam par nehaa.
Shravan sujasu suni aayau,
prabhu bhanjan bhav bheer.
traahi traahi aarati haran,
saran sukhad raghubeer.*

"My lord, I am Ravana's brother. Having been born in the demon race, O Protector of Gods, my body has the element of Tamasa (inertia and ignorance) preponderating in it and I have a natural affinity for sins even as an owl is fond of darkness. Having heard with my own ears of Your fair renown I have come to You with the belief that my lord (You) dissipates the fear of rebirth. Save me, save me, O Hero of Raghu's line, reliever of distress, delighter of those who take refuge in you.'" (Ramcharitmanas 5/44/4, 5/45).
Vibhishana then fell prostrate at the feet of the Lord.

Recognising Vibhishana's saintliness, Sri Rama received him with a great deal of respect and love. Sri Rama expressed surprise at Vibhishana's adherence to

righteousness and his ability to maintain his piety whilst living in the midst of evil-minded persons. Sri Rama considered Vibhishana to possess the qualities of a devotee and a saint and that it was for saints such as him that he embodied Himself. Vibhishana clasped the lotus feet of the Lord again and again, his heart bursting with boundless joy. He asked from the Lord the boon of pure devotion which was immediately granted to him. Sri Rama said,

Jadpi sakhaa tav icchaa naahee,

Mor darasu amogh jag maahee.

As kahi raam tilak tehi saaraa,

Suman brishti nabh bhaee apaaraa.

"'Even though, My friend, you have no craving, My sight in this world never fails to bring its reward.' So saying, Sri Rama applied on his forehead the sacred mark of sovereignty and a copious shower of flowers rained down from the heavens." (Ramcharitmanas 5/48/5). Tulsidasji says that so wonderful is the Lord that He bestowed on Vibhishana, in return for his devotion, the same kingdom of Lanka which Ravana had got from Shiva after offering his ten heads to Him in sacrifice.

Sri Rama appointed Vibhishana as one of His ministers and this gladdened the hearts of all the devotees. Sri Rama then consulted with His ministers on how to cross the ocean and gain entry to Lanka. Vibhishana suggested that Sri Rama should approach Sagara, the deity presiding over the ocean, and request for a passage to Lanka. Sri Rama thanked him and decided to follow his suggestion. However Lakshmana strongly denounced this action and suggested that Sri Rama dry up the ocean with his arrow and proceed to Lanka for there was no need to delay any further. Sri Rama decided to follow Vibhishana's advice first since he had just joined them and he did not want to hurt his feelings.

Vibhishana had complete faith in Sri Rama. He realised that it was necessary for Ravana to be killed as this was not only for Ravana's good but also for the good of the world. As a brother of Ravana, he was well acquainted with Ravana's weaknesses. His advice proved to be extremely vital during the battle particularly against Meghnada (son of Ravana) and Ravana himself. After the death of Ravana, Vibhishana was installed as king of Lanka. Thereafter he accompanied the victorious Sri Rama, Lakshmana, Mother Sita and many of

the monkey chiefs to Ayodhya in Ravana's aerial car. He was present during the coronation of Sri Rama and spent a further six months in Ayodhya as a guest of Sri Rama.

8.3 Kumbhakarana

Whereas Ravana is generally associated with injustice and oppression, his brother Kumbhakarana is generally associated with a massive body and lethargy. One great difference between these two brothers is that when one is compared to Ravana, one feels greatly insulted, but when one is compared to Kumbhakarana, one experiences a sense of ridicule. Actually, the real difference between these two brothers is in their psychological make-up.

Inasmuch as Ravana's personality is dominated by his ambitions, this trait is completely absent in the case of Kumbhakarana. A study of the Ramcharitmanas reveals that Kumbhakarana loved eating. His ambitions were limited to his meals alone. Even though he had tremendous physical capabilities, he was not particularly fond of conflict. But he was so dedicated to his brother Ravana that he carried out his wishes like an automaton. If in war he is seen as a follower

of Ravana, he is similarly depicted in austerities. For him battle and austerity did not have separate meanings. He did not exercise his own discrimination but deemed the fulfilment of Ravana's wishes as the supreme goal of his life. As a matter of fact, he inherited this tendency from his previous life. In his previous life, he was known by the name of Arimardana, the younger brother of Pratapbhanu. Even then he is not depicted as exercising his own free will, but as a person who is excessively devoted to his brother. Though he is described there as an invincible warrior, he engaged in battle only according to the wishes of his brother Pratapbhanu. He was completely bereft of any deceit.

Ravana is depicted as extremely ambitious, just as in his previous life of Pratapbhanu. The only difference is that whereas Ravana could not conceal his ambitious nature, Pratapbhanu did not exhibit this tendency openly, but rather kept it deep within himself and only revealed this in the presence of Kapatmuni (a demon disguised as a sage). Whatever secret formula he received from Kapatmuni, he kept for himself and did not share with anyone. He had full faith in his brother's innocence and submission. However, not only

did Pratapbhanu suffer as a result of his ambitions, but his unfortunate brother, Arimardana, had to share his fate. Yet, Arimardana is not seen reproaching his brother at any time. This indifference is fully inherited by him in his life as Kumbhakarana. That is why when Ravana and Vibhishana engaged in austerities with specific goals in mind, Kumbhakarana only does so to follow his brother Ravana. This indecisiveness was exploited by Brahma at the time of granting him a boon.

Pleased with the austerities of the three brothers, Brahma and Shiva appear before them. Having granted boons to Ravana, when they came before Kumbhakarana, Brahma was dumbfounded at his physical proportions and He thought that if this person should eat every day, His entire creation would be consumed by him. In these circumstances he turned to mother Saraswati to solve the problem. At that time Kumbhakarana had not decided what boon to ask. Mother Saraswati then induced his thoughts towards sleep. Actually, Kumbhakarana's psychological make-up was deeply embedded behind this. He was not violent and aggressive by nature. But he had to take refuge in violence and aggression in the fulfillment of his reverence to his brother. Thus sleep itself became the solution to his predicament. In this

way, it may be said that the boon he actually asked for was in keeping with his innermost thoughts. Therefore he obtained from Brahma the boon of one day of wakefulness after each six-month period of sleep. Thus a person who was attracted so much towards food became attracted towards sleep by Brahma's inspiration. Whilst the result was on one hand a solution to the problem of creation in Brahma's view, it also resulted in Kumbhakarana's psychological need to sleep.

In this way, his life's activities were limited to sleeping and eating alone. After six months of sleep, the one day of wakefulness was spent in satisfying his hunger. He felt beholden towards Ravana in the knowledge that Ravana uncomplainingly carried the burden of his upkeep without his making any contribution towards his family or country. However, it is improbable that Ravana maintained Kumbhakarana purely out of brotherly love. Whilst he did have some affection for Kumbhakarana, he was also greatly pleased with the lack of ambition in his brother because there was no scope for conflict between them. On the other hand, this complete lack of ambition on the part of Kumbhakarana was greatly desired by Ravana for the fulfillment of his own ambitions. Perhaps it would not

have been possible for Ravana to tolerate resistance from Kumbhakarana. However, his brotherly love cost Lanka dearly. To achieve his selfish purposes Ravana had to one day interfere with Kumbhakarana's routine.

Due to the abduction of Sita, the terrible battle that was being fought in Lanka proved to be disastrous for Ravana as his army was being defeated and depleted with each passing day. In these circumstances, Ravana remembered Kumbhakarana. It occurred to him that possibly Kumbhakarana's strength alone could save the situation. In addition, he thought this an ideal opportunity for Kumbhakarana to reciprocate with service to his country which had carried the burden of hitherto maintaining him. So motivated was Ravana by his own selfish desires that he forgot about the condition laid down at the time of granting the boon prohibiting Kumbhakarana from being awakened before the expiration of his six month period of sleep. The seed to Kumbhakarana's destruction lay in this prohibition. After a great deal of difficulty, Kumbhakarana's sleep was broken and he sat up. On seeing the expression on Ravana's face, he was greatly surprised. He saw a gloomy expression on Ravana's face instead of the usual look of pride and confidence. On enquiry by

Kumbhakarana, Ravana detailed all the events which led him to decide to abduct Sita. Throughout the narrative, his ego was clearly visible. Ravana tried to create the impression that he had not engaged in any wrongful action. Ravana also explained that half the army of Lanka was destroyed and Kumbhakarana had been awakened to demonstrate his valour. Ravana was certain that Kumbhakarana would offer his full support. It was therefore natural for him to be surprised with Kumbhakarana's reply. His usually silent brother now severely criticized him.

Suni daskandhar bacan tab,

Kumbhakaran bilkhaan.

Jagdambaa hari aani ab,

Sath caahat kalyaan.

Bhal na keenha tai nisicar naahaa,

Ab mohi aai jagaaehi kaahaa.

Ajahoo taat tyaagi abhimaanaa,

Bhajahu raam hoihi kalyaanaa.

Hai dassees manuj raghunaayak,

Jaake hanoomaan se paayak.

Ahaha bandhu tai keenhi khotaaee,

Prathamahi mohi na sunaaehi aaee.

Keenhehu prabhu birodh tehi devak,

Siv biranci sur jaake sevak.

Naarad muni mohi gyaan jo kahaa,

Kahteu tohi samay nirbahaa.

Ab bhari ank bhetu mohi bhaaee,

Locan suphal karau mai jaaee.

Syaam gaat sarseeruh locan,

Dekhau jaai taap tray mocan.

"On hearing the words of his ten-headed brother, Kumbhakarana felt very sorry. 'Having carried off the Mother of the universe, O fool, you still expect good out of it! You have not acted well, O demon king. And now why have you come and woke me up? Yet, abandoning pride, worship Sri Rama and you will be blessed. Can the Lord of the Raghus, O ten-headed Ravana, be a man who has couriers like Hanuman? Alas, brother, you acted unwisely in that you did not break this news to me earlier. You have courted war with the Divinity who has for His servants gods like Siva and Viranci (the creator). I would have confided to you the secret which the sage Narada had once imparted to me; but the time has passed. Squeeze me, brother, in close embrace now, so that I may go and bless my eyes with the sight of the Lord who has a swarthy complexion and lotus-like eyes and who relieves the threefold agony of His devotees.'" (Ramcharitmanas 6/62, 62/1-4).

Truly, not only was Kumbhakarana physically, but also mentally awakened that day. In establishing the wrongfulness of Ravana's action, Kumbhakarana harshly chastised his brother. He prophesised the inauspicious outcome of Ravana's actions and his mind was absorbed for a moment on the glory of the Lord. At that moment, it appeared to Ravana that Kumbhakarana's attitude was like that of Vibhishana. In fact, instead of Vibhishana's humility, he detected a certain harshness in Kumbhakarana's voice. But Ravana, who could not tolerate Vibhishana's humble protest, now tolerated Kumbhakarana's harsh criticism. This could be attributed to circumstances. He had in the interim lost so much that he was not in a position to offend Kumbhakarana. But this was not all to the matter. Ravana recognised well the difference between Vibhishana and Kumbhakarana. Vibhishana's attitude was consistent like the sun whereas Kumbhakarana's was like a flash of lightning. He was not in a position to rise above body consciousness. Ravana knew very well that he could not get Vibhishana to change his position but he could succeed with Kumbhakarana in this respect, merely by bribing him with food and wine. He succeeded in taking advantage of this weakness in Kumbhakarana. Thus he was able to arouse Kumbhakarana from his deep

slumber with the aroma of food and wine. Upon awakening, he greedily began to gorge himself. Whilst momentarily his higher thoughts caused him to be absorbed in the Lord's form and virtues, he forgot about this as soon as the intoxication of the wine took its effect on him and he begins to roar aggressively.

Mahish khaai kari madiraa paanaa,

Garjaa bajraaghaat samaanaa.

Kumbhakaran durmad ran rangaa,

Calaa durga taji sen na sangaa.

"Having feasted on the buffaloes and drunk of the wine, Kumbhakarana roared like a crash of lightning. Heavily drunk and full of passion for war, he sallied forth from the fort without any troops." (Ramcharitmanas 6/63/1).

Kumbhakarana is representative of those innumerable persons who, even though having had a glimpse of the truth, are unable to practically live according to it. The streams of their lives touch upon the two banks of wisdom and fickleness, but are yet unable to erect the bridge of resolution in order to make the crossing. Thus this warrior, who in his wisdom mentally supported the Divine cause, was impelled by his nature to do battle on the side of evil. Kumbhakarana had no doubts

about the outcome of the battle, and in fact, he entered the battlefield without confidence of victory. He was merely entering the battlefield in order to repay Ravana for his favours. That is why he refused to take a chariot or an army with him.

On seeing the massive body of Kumbhakarana, the monkey army was aghast. Vibhishana stepped forward and prostrated to his elder brother. He put before his elder brother the circumstances that impelled him to leave Lanka and join the ranks of its enemies. Even at this stage Kumbhakarana's intellectual judgement was intact. He not only supported Vibhishana's actions but also congratulated him in an emotional voice, addressing him as the jewel of his clan.

Sunu sut bhayau kaalbas raavan,

So ki maan ab param sikhaavan.

Dhanya dhanya tai dhanya bibheeshan,

Bhayau taat nisicar kul bhooshan.

Bandhu bans tai keenha ujaagar,

Bhajehu raam sobhaa sukh saagar.

"Listen, my son; Ravana is in the clutches of death and would not listen even to the best advice at this stage. Thrice blessed are you, Vibhishana; you have proved to be the ornament of the demon race. Brother,

you have brought glory to our line by adoring Sri Rama, that ocean of beauty and felicity.'" (Ramcharitmanas 6/63/4-5). He advised him to forsake all deceit and to devote himself to the Lord in word, thought and deed. This aspect of Kumbhakarana does not fit in with his appearance and habits. It is apparent that in this body of terrible appearance was a sensitive mind which was acquainted with its own limitations. It was not possible for him to follow in the footsteps of Vibhishana. Here it is natural to recall the fundamental differences in the disposition of the three brothers. Ravana was never prepared to admit his failings. In order to justify his improper conduct, he resorted to his vast knowledge and powers of reasoning. He was a master in not only deceiving others but in successfully deceiving himself as well. But in Kumbhakarana's character self-deception is altogether absent. He understood the truth and naturally accepted it as well, but in his powerful body, there was not a powerful mind capable of making a firm resolution. That is why in the context of devotion he accepted his incapacity and unworthiness. But in Vibhishana's life, not only was there an unshakable allegiance to truth, but inspite of his comparative physical weakness, he was sufficiently determined to follow his conviction.

It was from this point of view that Kumbhakarana congratulated him. At the same time he requested Vibhishana to return immediately to Sri Rama because it was becoming clear to him that his death was imminent. Thereafter Kumbhakarana's invincible heroism was manifested. In spite of the fact that, unlike Ravana and Meghnad, he had not engaged in battle for a long time, the battle put up by him in just that one day was unequalled. Kumbhakarana by himself was successful in defeating all the great warriors in the vanara army. Even Hanuman, who was of unequalled strength, was not an exception to this. Even though Hanuman struck Kumbhakarana momentarily unconscious with his powerful blows, Kumbhakarana retaliated and Hanuman too was struck unconscious. Therefore, unprecedented panic spread through the vanara army. On seeing the vanara king Sugriva unconscious, Kumbhakarana gripped his neck under his armpit and began to haul him towards Lanka. This in his view was revenge for the way Vali had treated Ravana in a former battle. But Sugriva quickly regained consciousness and forced Kumbhakarana back to the battlefield. Sugriva, having freed himself, bit off the ears and nose of Kumbhakarana. Kumbhakarana could not return to Lanka with this mutilated appearance, as a life of indignity and ridicule was intolerable to

him. Thus he returned to the battlefield and once more displayed his valour. The monkeys retreated in fear, calling out to Sri Rama for protection. Then the Lord entered the battlefield. Initially, after having been apprised of Kumbhakarana's character by Vibhishana, the Lord did not engage him in battle. Neither did the Lord give permission to Lakshmana to fight Kumbhakarana. Quite evidently, the Lord was informed by Vibhishana of Kumbhakarana's inner tenderness, impartiality, and love for the Lord. It was natural for the all-merciful Lord to be moved by such characteristics of Kumbhakarana. The Lord could not treat as an enemy a person who was forced to stand against him by the force of circumstances and weakness. His hands do not rise to strike Kumbhakarana. But with the advance of Kumbhakarana in the battlefield and the development of events, the Lord had to intercede, not only to protect the *vanaras*, but also to appease Kumbhakarana's inner sentiments. The inner conflict in Kumbhakarana's mind was causing him intense agony. There was no alternative other than death to save Kumbhakarana from his dualistic state. In practical terms, death was the best solution for him. After being mutilated by Sugriva, returning to Lanka with dignity was out of the question for him. The solution to all his problems lay in his

death at the hands of the Lord. In the final stages of his battle, Kumbhakarana displayed such unparalleled valour which was not to be found even in Meghnad or Ravana. By entering the battlefield unarmed and unaccompanied by any army, he demonstrated his valour purely on the basis of his physical strength. Even as his limbs were cut off by the Lord one by one, he did not retreat one step, whilst such fortitude in similar circumstances was not shown by Meghnad or Ravana.

The gods as well as the sages were astonished to witness a luminous spirit depart from Kumbhakarana's body at the time of his death and enter the Lord. They were dismayed to see such a great demon being thus spiritually liberated. This liberation of Kumbhakarana can however be seen from different points of view. According to the Vedanta doctrine, liberation is not possible without divine knowledge. The procedure for the acquisition of such knowledge has been elaborately narrated in the Ramcharitmanas. Although such procedure for the acquisition of knowledge cannot be seen in Kumbhakarana's life, he cannot be said to be bereft of knowledge. While he did not engage in prescribed practices for knowledge, he appeared to have acquired this from others who went through the process. Amongst

those who imparted knowledge to Kumbhakarana was the great sage Narada. Even though he spent the major part of his life in sleep, a few moments of wakefulness were utilised by him very meaningfully. After six months of sleep, the one day of wakefulness was spent by him in eating and drinking. But, on a rare occasion of such day of wakefulness, when he chanced to meet a saint, that time was spent in discourse and the knowledge acquired in this way was stored in his memory. Whilst talking to Ravana, Kumbhakarana recalled those moments with great emotion.

Therefore Kumbhakarana's liberation should not be seen only as an act of grace by the Lord but also recognition of his knowledge. Although he could not be considered as a great devotee of the Lord like Vibhishana, when considered from the practical point of view, his philosophy of life may be considered superior to that of Vibhishana. Unlike Vibhishana, he cannot be accused of being a traitor to his brother and country. He did not abandon Ravana even though he disagreed with him. After clearly revealing his feelings, he was still prepared to face destruction of his body in the service of Ravana who nourished and maintained it. In this way, he endeavoured to fulfill both his earthly and

spiritual obligations. . From this point of view, his position can easily be compared to that of Karna in the Mahabharata. Not only is there a similarity in their names, but also in the situation in which they found themselves where they chose to fight on behalf of those to whom they were obligated, even in the face of death. Karna could have revealed his true identity and claimed his rightful legacy as the eldest of the Pandavas. Kumbhakarana too could have sought refuge in the Lord and thereby not only save his life but also gain the kingdom of Lanka. But they both spurned the temptation and revealed extraordinary heroism. The liberation of Kumbhakarana was in keeping with his selflessness. Both Kumbhakarana and Karna suffered death as a result of siding with injustice, but they both became immortal in the annals of history on the account of their loyalties and extraordinary heroism.

8.4 Shurpankha

Of all the women characters portrayed in the Ramcharitmanas, Shurpankha is totally different and unique. Shurpankha's malice towards Mother Sita should not be taken as a struggle between two female characters. Just as Mother Sita is the divine representation of Ayodhya and Ramrajya, Shurpankha

represents the decadent and indulgent nature of Ravana and the other demonic people of Lanka.

In Indian tradition a woman's identity is given as a mother, wife or daughter. But in spite of being the daughter of sage Vishrava Muni, her introduction is given as the sister of Ravana.

*Soopnakhaa raavan kai bahinee,
Dushta hriday daarun jas ahinee.
Pancbatee so gai ek baaraa,
Dekhi bikal bhai jugal kumaaraa.*

"Now Ravana (the notorious demon king of Lanka) had a sister, Shurpankha (lit., a woman having nails as big as a winnowing fan) by name, who was foul-hearted and cruel as a serpent. She once went to Panchavati and was smitten with pangs of love at the sight of the two princes."

(Ramcharitmanas 3/16/2).

This introduction reveals much about the character of Shurpankha. A wife, daughter or mother is bound by many rules and duties. A sister is not bound by any obligation in spite of being born in the same family. After a girl marries, she goes into another family and her ties with the family of her birth diminish. She now has duties and obligations to her new family and is

treated as a visitor in her former family. The depth of the relationship between father and daughter, husband and wife, and mother and son does not exist in the brother-sister relationship for the brother has his own wife and family. However in Shurpankha's case, the brother-sister relationship is paramount and this suits her very well. She had been married to Vidyujiva, a very strong and valiant demon who belonged to a prominent clan. Ravana in his mission to conquer the world attacked and defeated this demon clan. In his pride he did not even spare his brother-in-law who died fighting Ravana. After Vidyujiva's death, Shurpankha became extremely angry and she complained bitterly to Ravana. Henceforth, Shurpankha's life took a new direction. She could either spend the rest of her life as a widow or remarry and start a new life. Instead, she chose a different lifestyle for herself. Her grief at the loss of her husband was momentary and very soon forgotten. She decided not to marry again and chose to live a free life. In order to keep her happy, Ravana had given her total freedom to do as she pleased. At the time of her entry in the Ramcharitmanas, she had been living in the Dandaka forest with her cousin Khara who had been stationed there by Ravana.

Sri Rama, together with Lakshmana and Mother Sita, had come to the Dandaka forest in order to fulfil His pledge to destroy the demons who had mercilessly attacked and killed many innocent saints and sages. Shurpankha provided Sri Rama with a valid reason to wage war with the demons. Thus she became the cause of the destruction of the entire demon race. When she saw the two princes, she became infatuated with their physical beauty. Her demonic nature of snatching from others and causing sorrow to them in order to satisfy her own desires came to the fore when she saw the two handsome princes. She chose to approach Sri Rama with her declaration of love even though she had witnessed the affection between Sri Rama and Mother Sita and knew that She was His wife. It would have been more appropriate for her to approach Lakshmana who was on his own, but she chose to approach Sri Rama since, by taking Him away from Mother Sita, she would satisfy her ego as well as her lust. She was an expert at changing her form and appearance and she must have felt inferior when she saw the beauty of Mother Sita. Therefore assuming the form of a beautiful lady she approached Sri Rama saying,

Tumha sam purush na mo sam naaree,

Yah sanjog bidhi racaa bicaaree.

*Mam anuroop purush jag maahee,
Dekheu khoji lok tihu naahee.
Taate ab lagi rahu kumaaree,
Manu maanaa kachu tumhahi nihaaree.*

"There is no man like you and no woman like me. It is with great deliberation that God has made this pair. I have ransacked the three spheres but have found no suitable match for me in the whole universe. It is for this reason that I have till now remained a virgin; my mind has been set at rest a bit only after seeing you.'" (Ramcharitmanas 3/16/4-5).

Generally, a lady does not openly express her affection as this is contrary to her inherent quality of modesty. Shurpankha displayed no modesty whatsoever in her eagerness to satisfy her lustful desires. At the beginning, she said that both she and Sri Rama were equally matched, but later she inferred that He was inferior. She had no real love for Sri Rama. She just wanted to satisfy her passion and her ego. In order to satisfy her passion she proposed to Him and in order to satisfy her ego she tried to show that He was inferior to her. Sri Rama's rejection of Shurpankha's proposal was in keeping with both His nature and character. He politely told her that Lakshmana was a bachelor and

sent her to him. She immediately went to Lakshmana proving that her declaration of love and her belief that Sri Rama was the only man created by God for her was just a lie and pretext. All she really wanted was to satisfy her lust, and in this quest, she lost her sense of discrimination and shamelessly went to Lakshmana.

The question as to why Sri Rama referred to Lakshmana as a bachelor is an interesting one. Shurpankha had introduced herself as a spinster waiting for the right person when she was in fact a widow. Therefore Lakshmana, who was not with his wife at that time, could be considered a bachelor according to her reasoning. When she went to Lakshmana, he looked at Sri Rama and said to her:

Sundari sunu mai unha kar daasaa,

Paraadheen nahi tor supaasaa.

Prabhu samartha kosalpur raajaa,

Jo kachu karahi unahi sab chaaajaa.

"Listen, fair lady: I am His servant and a dependant; thus you will have no comforts with me. My lord is all-powerful and the sovereign king of Koshalpura (Ayodhya); whatever He does will be worthy of Him."
(Ramcharitmanas 3/16/7).

Shurpankha did not detect the sarcasm in Lakshmana's reply. His implication was that she really needed a husband who could satisfy all her desires. Since Sri Rama was to be king, it will be proper for her to wed him whereby all her wishes could be fulfilled. Lakshmana who had taken a vow of serving the Lord would not be a good choice. She then immediately went to Sri Rama. A selfish person generally tries to hide his selfishness but Shurpankha openly displays this characteristic and is the only person to do so in the Ramcharitmanas. She then went to Sri Rama who again sends her to Lakshmana. Her lust was so irrepressible that her actions did not seem to matter to her. Lakshmana had never come across such shamelessness before and said to her,

Lachiman kahaa tohi so baraae,

Jo trin tori laaj pariharaee.

"He alone will wed you, who deliberately casts all shame to the winds." (Ramcharitmanas 3/16/9).

Lakshmana's answer made her realise that the two brothers were poking fun at her. She became extremely angry. Her wrath was directed to Sri Rama who she felt had initiated the whole joke and Lakshmana was just

playing along. She now felt that Sri Rama had insulted her by sending her to Lakshmana who, before refusing her proposal, had looked at Sri Rama. This, to her seemed to be Sri Rama's approval of Lakshmana's behaviour towards her. She then directed her anger to Mother Sita who had been a silent witness to the whole episode. She felt that if it were not for Sita, Sri Rama would have accepted her. She abandoned her false appearance and once again assumed her frightening demonic form.

When Sri Rama saw that Mother Sita was terrified by the frightening form of Shurpankha, He indicated to Lakshmana to punish her. Lakshmana then cut off her nose and ears. Many critics feel that the punishment meted out was too harsh and both Sri Rama and Lakshmana were at fault for teasing her. However, one has to consider that it was Shurpankha who had misrepresented herself both by her words as well as by her appearance. Had she accepted their refusal and gone away then she would not have been punished, but she wanted to harm Mother Sita who was totally innocent in order to fulfil her own desire. This act of hers cannot be condoned. Her punishment can be seen as retribution for her past as well as her future actions. She had in the past

attacked many sages and in the future, by lying to her brothers about her actions, she brought about the downfall of the demon race.

Sri Rama knew that by punishing Shurpankha, Ravana would not remain silent for he would see it as a challenge to his rule. Shurpankha in reality represents Ravana and his way of life. If one forgets for a moment that she is a female and focuses on her behaviour and actions, then one can clearly see the similarity between the two. Thus she is the ideal character through which a challenge could be given to Ravana. Both Ravana and Shurpankha would use any means to satisfy their insatiable desires. Although Sri Rama and Ravana are opponents, Sita and Mandodari cannot be viewed as opponents for Mandodari possessed the sublime qualities of love and surrender. The only opponent of Sita is Shurpankha. Sita was exclusively devoted to Sri Rama and was an embodiment of modesty. Even though She had been captivated by the beauty of Sri Rama in the flower garden, She did not reveal Her feelings to Her companions. This quality was completely lacking in Shurpankha who shamelessly proposed to both Sri Rama and Lakshmana. It would have been natural for Mandodari to become jealous of Mother Sita after seeing Ravana's infatuation with Her beauty. Indeed, Mandodari owes

Mother Sita a debt of gratitude for not giving Ravana even a glance.

But it is Shurpankha who became jealous of Mother Sita and targeted Her. Thus both Mother Sita and Shurpankha became the cause of the battle between Sri Rama and Ravana. Ravana waged war against Sri Rama for the protection of the honour of Shurpankha while Sri Rama took up arms for the recovery of Mother Sita. In spite of being a faithful and devoted wife, Mandodari is unable to influence Ravana with her sincere and humble submissions.

After having been disfigured, Shurpankha went to her cousins Khara, Dushana and Trishira who immediately set forth to avenge her disfigurement. This indicates the immense influence Shurpankha had on them for they never thought for a moment that she could be at fault. To them it was her honour that was at stake and they put her in front as they proceeded to wage war with Sri Rama. They were extremely powerful warriors but they followed Shurpankha who represented lust and false pride. If valour is preceded by these qualities then the result must be destruction. Thus in the battle with Sri Rama, Khara, Dushana and Trishira, together with

their army of fourteen thousand warriors, are
vanquished. Yet Shurpankha felt no remorse at the death
of so many demons and she angrily set out for Lanka
where in the royal court she immediately began to taunt
Ravana:

*Bolee bacan krodh kari bhaaree,
Des kos kai surati bisaaree.
Karasi paan sovasi dinu raatee,
Sudhi nahi tav sir par aaraatee.
Raaj neeti binu dhan binu dharmaa,
Harihi samarpe binu satkarmaa.
Bidyaa binu bibek upjaae,
Shram phal padhe kie aru paae.
Sang te jatee kumantra te raajaa,
Maan te gyaan paan te laajaa.
Preeti pranay binu mad te gunee,
Naasahi begi neeti as sunee.
Ripu ruj paavak paap,
Prabhu ahi gania na chot kari.
As kahi bibidh vilaap,
Kari laagee rodan karan.
Sabhaa maajh pari byaakul,
Bahu prakaar kah roi.
Tohi jiat daskandhar,
Mori ki asi gati hoi.*

"Shurpankha approached Ravana and instigated him (against Sri Rama). In great fury she rated him in the following words: 'Discarding all thought of your realm and exchequer you drink and sleep day and night and take no heed of the enemy, who is now at your very door. Sovereignty without political insight, wealth divorced from virtue, noble deeds that have not been offered to Sri Hari (God) and learning which does not beget wisdom is nothing but fruitless labour to the man who has gained such kingdom or wealth, to the doer of the noble acts and to the student respectively. A recluse is quickly undone by attachment, a king by evil counsel, wisdom by conceit, modesty by drinking, friendship by want of love, and a man of merit by vanity: such is the maxim I have heard. An enemy, a malady, fire, sin, a master, and a serpent are never to be accounted trifles.' So saying and with profuse laments she set to weeping. In her distress she threw herself down in Ravana's court and with many a tear said, 'Do you think, my ten-headed brother, that I should be reduced to this state even though you are alive?'" (Ramcharitmanas 3/20/3-6, 3/21a,b).

Ravana silently listened to her outburst. Throughout his life, he never showed such tolerance to anyone who

even tried to advise him let alone berate him. Shurpankha's shrewdness did not allow anyone to question the reason for her disfigurement for she immediately began to accuse Ravana of being too complacent. Even though she was the offender, she made Ravana feel guilty and made it known that it was because of her vigilance that the enemy had been identified. In spite of being extremely intelligent, Ravana failed to see through Shurpankha's deceit. Because of his earlier victories, Ravana had really become complacent for he felt that there was no one who could defeat him. He had placed his cousins Khara, Dushana and Trishara in the Dandaka forest to carry out his work but they too had become so passive that they did not detect the arrival of Sri Rama, Lakshmana and Mother Sita. It was Shurpankha who first saw them but her intentions then were personal. Now she gave her encounter with them a political angle. Her intellectual speech was filled with ethics and righteousness and she even talks of self-surrender. This type of speech by one who has no discrimination can only lead to destruction.

At the end of her speech Shurpankha fell to the ground and wept. The ministers of the court were overcome with

pity and came forward to comfort her. Ravana did not move from his throne for he was too shocked by the events that had occurred. Being such a powerful and feared king, he had never imagined that his sister could be reduced to such a pitiable state. He knew that his powerful army headed by Khara, Dushana and Trishara were there to protect her yet she had come to Lanka alone. In total disbelief he asked,

Kah lankes kahasi nij baataa,

Kei tav naasaa kaan nipaataa.

"Tell me what has happened to you. Who has struck off your nose and ears?" (Ramcharitmanas 3/21/1).

Then Shurpankha went into great detail describing the events that had occurred.

Avadh nripati dasrath ke jaae,

Purush singh ban खेलत aae.

Samujhi paree mohi unha kai karanee,

Rahit nisaacar karihahi dharanee.

Jinha kar bhujbal paai dasaanan,

Abhay bhae bicrat muni kaanan.

Dekhat baalak kaal samaanaa,

Param dheer dhanvee gun naanaa.

Atulit bal prataap dwau bhraataa,

Khal badh rat sur muni sukhdaataa.

*Sobhaa dhaam raam as naamaa,
Tinha ke sang naari ek syaamaa.
Roop raasi bidhi naari savaaree,
Rati sat koti taasu balihaaree.
Taasu anuj kaate shruti naasaa,
Suni tav bhagini karahi parihaasaa.
Khar dooshan tisiraa kar ghaataa,
Suni dassees jare sab gaataa.*

"Two sons of Dasharatha, the lord of Ayodhya, who are lions among men, are out for hunting in the woods. The estimate that I have formed of their doing is that they will rid the earth of demons. Relying on the might of their arm, O ten-headed Ravana, the hermits roam about the woods without fear. Though quite young to look at, they are terrible as Death, the staunchest of archers and accomplished in many ways. Both brothers are unequalled in might and glory; devoted to the extermination of the wicked, they are a source of delight to gods and sages. The elder of the two who is an abode of beauty, is known by the name of Rama; he has with him a young belle. The Creator made that woman the very embodiment of loveliness; a hundred million Ratis (consort of the god of love) are trifles before her. It was his younger brother (Lakshmana) who chopped off my ears and nose and made a mockery of me when he

heard that I was your sister. When Khara and Dushana heard of it, they went to avenge the wrong done to me; but Rama slew the whole army in a trice!' The ten-headed demon (Ravana) burned all over (with rage) when he heard of the destruction of Khara, Dushana and Trishira." (Ramcharitmanas 3/21/2-6).

Shurpankha's speech describing the events of her encounter brings to the fore her deceptive skills. She portrays herself as being the saviour of her mighty brother's honour and for this she had to endure the loss of her nose and ears. It was because of her vigilance that the powerful enemy had been identified. This deceptive skill she tried against Sri Rama and failed but Ravana was totally taken in by her. She described the strength of both Sri Rama and Lakshmana as being very great, knowing full well that Ravana did not like listening to the praises of others. This infuriated Ravana and he became impatient to prove her wrong. She also knew Ravana's weakness for beautiful women and she provoked his desire by describing the beauty of Mother Sita. Ravana then comforted and pacified Shurpankha. She does not appear in the Ramcharitmanas again but it can be said that she was

responsible for the bloody battle that followed in Lanka.

Tulsidasji worships the character of Mother Sita who is modest, courteous and gentle. To him, these qualities, together with dependence, is not a sign of weakness. Even Ravana could not influence Mother Sita by his might and glory. Shurpankha's independence looks very attractive at first but it was her unrestrained behaviour that led to her own downfall and the downfall of the demon race. It is this form of women that Tulsidasji condemns.

CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSION

It is asserted by scholars that Maithilisharan Gupta wrote 'Saket' as Ramkatha under the pretext of telling Urmila's story. Whilst this may not be the entire truth, it was a worthwhile and inevitable outcome. All-pervasive Sri Rama just cannot be omitted from any of life's undertakings, with any prospect of success.

The foregoing research project, which reviews the portrayal of some major role-players of the Ramayana of Goswami Tulsidasji can scarcely be called a "Ramkatha" proper; neither is the characterisation of Sri Rama directly effected. Nevertheless, these characters have their being and acquire meaning only in the context of their relationship with Sri Rama or His Dharma: Thus this exercise, too, is to the greater glory of Sri Rama, whose name repeated devoutly made Daku Ratnakara into Adikavi Valmiki and the common Tulsi (like the common weed) into Goswami Tulsidasa. Indeed, it has the potential of making every living being into a powerful instrument of God's love and compassion to create a better world.

The Ramayana encompasses several millennia of human history. As epics, the Ramayana and Mahabharata are distinct from other epics of ancient cultures, such as the Aeneid, Iliad and Odyssey. Whilst the latter persist only as the fodder for classical scholars, Ramayana and Mahabharata have achieved the status of scripture because they embrace not only Manava Karma but Manava Dharma as well. In other words, the ethical, moral and philosophical conclusions found in them are as relevant and necessary today as they were in the time of their creation. If there is any significance in Brahma's boon to Valmiki's Ramayana viz. **"The theme of the Ramayana will continue to be popular in all the three worlds so long as mountains and rivers will continue on the surface of the earth."** (Valmiki Ramayana, Balkand II 36-37). it is that the eternal truths of the Ramayana are necessary for the guidance and elevation of humanity. The fact that Ramayana learning and devotion continue in both East and West, from the mighty portals of learning of Western Universities (University of California at Berkeley; Harvard etc.) to the spiritual sanctuaries of India and other countries, and hundreds of millions of ordinary people, indicate that Brahma did indeed make the Ramayana

and Valmiki immortal. The endurance of the mountains in the Shloka points to the continuation of the human race, which needs and benefits from the solace, guidance and the ethics of action that point to this supremacy of right over expediency (Shreya over Preya).

The delineation of characters in an epic work such as Ramayana, including Tulsidasji's Ramcharitmanas (which is an epic) has to be consistent, even in its inconsistency. Whilst characters constitute the prime elements of Ramayana, the plot, theme, poetic sentiment (Rasa) are indeed indispensable. The Ramayana has Karuna Rasa (pathos) as the predominant emotional mood, not only because it tells of Mother Sita's heart-wrenching story of tribulation and endurance under trying conditions, but more so because it is an image of the human condition. Doctor Samuel Johnson wrote in 'Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia', that **"Human life is everywhere a state where there is much to be endured and little to be enjoyed"**. If such a view were adopted as a norm, all humanity will become stoical or pessimistic. Ramayana portrays the human condition, but is distinguished by its prescriptions for contending with adversity and

transcending the vicissitudes of life. It is life-affirming because it shows its characters acting altruistically, selflessly, for Dharma which implies welfare of the world. The study, analysis, exegesis and critical evaluation of Ramayana, especially Tulsidasji's Ramcharitmanas which was written in the troubled climate of sixteenth century India, continues. Valmiki and Tulsidasji envisaged the same outcomes; the ennobling of human character and infusion of divine virtues in people. Their subject matter thus remains the same - the approach and style of portrayal and emphasis may diverge ever so little for purposes of illuminating points. One example may clarify this. Valmiki makes a detailed disclosure of Ahalya's transgression in order to emphasise the power of redemption through penance. Tulsidasji, however, merely makes sage Vishwamitra say that **"Gautama's wife, turned to stone through a curse, desires some dust of Rama's feet."** Here, the restorative power of God's grace is the objective, not the details of the transgression or transgressor; since Tulsidasji does not even mention Ahalya's name, although he makes Ahalya predict the conflict with Ravana even before the marriage of Sri Rama

and Sita by referring to Rama as "**Ravana ripu jana sukhadai**" (**Ramcharitmanas 1/210 Chand 2**).

One needs to view these divergences not only as neglect or condemnation of characters, but as matters of priorities of different poet-saints.

This study of characterisation in the Ramcharitmanas has been divided thus: Divine characters, Saints and Sages, the Royal Family of Ayodhya, Animal and Bird Devotees of Sri Rama and Demons of Lanka. Although each category may exhibit traits peculiar to their class or Swadharma, they are all subjected to the same objective standards of dharma emanating from Parabrahma Sri Rama. In the conflict between Shakti and Sheel, Parshurama concedes to Sri Rama. Vashishta and Vishwamitra suspend their Brahmin/Kshatriya differences and contest for superiority, and collaborate in the tasks to be performed by Sri Rama.

The Royal Family of Ayodhya, disturbed by the ripples created by Kaikeyi's boons, remains substantially united,

and even Kaikeyi joins the expedition to Chitrakuta to bring Sri Rama back. Members of the Royal Family, be it Kaushalya or Sumitra, or Sri Rama's brothers, all emphasise the righteous aspects of actions which indicate that Sri Rama is not only the rightful heir but the repository of virtues and source of man's welfare. If this cohesion of values and outlooks had not prevailed, there would have been socio-political strife, and the larger cause of Dharma relating to the Avatara would have failed. Tulsidasji emphasises the selfless action of devotees as the greatest Dharma and causing pain to others as the most execrable act:

Par hit saris dharma nahi bhaaee,

Par peedaa sam nahi adhamaaee.

"Brother, there is no virtue like benevolence, and no meanness like oppressing others." (Ramcharitmanas 7/40/1).

This theme pervades the Ramcharitmanas. The "monkey" and "vulture" characters also subscribe to the higher moral values espoused by Sri Rama. Sugriva is bound by the oath of friendship by the maxim;

je na mitra dukh hohi dukhaaree,

tinahi bilokat paatak bhaaree.

"One would incur great sin by the very sight of those who are not distressed to see the distress of a friend."

(**Ramcharitmanas 4/6/1**) and Jatayu sees the Divine Love and Compassion in Sri Rama through this utterance:

*Komalcit ati deendayaalaa,
Kaaran binu raghunaath kripaalaa.*

"The Lord of Raghus is most tender-hearted and compassionate to the humble and shows His mercy even where there is no occasion for it." (Ramcharitmanas 3/32/1) .

The demonic characters also exhibit values that demonstrate

the power of Divine Grace. Vibhishana, whose spirit is caged in a demonic body (tamas tan), nevertheless adores Sri Rama as the Supreme Lord. His admonition to his brother, Ravana, confirms that all categories of beings can transcend their physical limitations and become part of the Divine.

*Taat raam nahi nar bhoopaalaa,
Bhuvanesvar kaalahu kar kaalaa.*

"Sri Rama, dear brother, is no mere human king; He is the lord of the universe and the Death of Death himself.'" (Ramcharitmanas 5/38/1) .

This study has of necessity to be limited to some of the characters of the Ramcharitmanas. Tulsidasji did not write much about some of the characters whose contribution to the cause of Sri Rama Avatara has been tremendous. Thus Urmila and Mandavi, for example, are merely silent servants of the Lord. Maithilisharan Gupta did portray the life of Urmila, but he, too, ended up writing Ramkatha; and Urmila is also depicted by him saying:

*Rahe na hamme raam hamaare,
Mili na hamko maayaa.*

(Saket:Sarga 9)

Hence this analysis of characterisation follows Tulsidasji's objectives, and attempts to find the coherence, rationale and greater purpose in the characterisation. It is common cause that Tulsidasji attained his objectives through his particular treatment of characters, by stressing the sublime and righteous and merely noting that which was not essential to building the mores and morale of his society.

Goswami Tulsidas or Loknayaka Tulsidas (for these are the titles he earned) emphasised and dwelt on the welfare of

society attainable through surrender to Sri Rama. He believed that even the evil could be transformed if mentored by the enlightened.

Satha sudharahi satsangati paaee

"Through contact with the virtuous even the wicked get reformed." (Ramcharitmanas 1/2/5).

Tulsidasji's predilection for the positive and the auspicious motivated him to end his Ramcharitmanas in the Uttarkanda with the birth of Lava and Kusha. He does not deal with the abandonment of Sita, the execution of Shambuka or the last days of Sri Rama. The establishment of Ramrajya and the transformation of society into a God-loving, compassionate and moral entity satisfied his yearning to promote Rambhakti.

Raam raaj baithe trailokaa,

Harshit bhaye gaye sab sokaa.

"Sri Rama's installation to the throne brought joy to all the three spheres and ended all their sorrows." (Ramcharitmanas 7/19/4).

He therefore concludes his precious offering to suffering humanity, the Ramcharitmanas, on a note of hope.

*Punyam paapaharam sadaa shivakaram
Vigyaanabhaktipradam,
Maayaamohamalaapaham suvimalam
Premaambupooram shubham.
Shreemadraamacaritramaanasamidam
Bhaktyaavagaahanti ye,
Te sansaarapatangaghorakiranair
Dahyanti no maanavaah.*

"This glorious, holy, purifying, blessed and most limpid Manasa lake of Sri Rama's exploits ever begets happiness; nay, it bestows both wisdom and Devotion, wipes out delusion, infatuation and impurity and is brimful with the water of love. Men who devoutly take a plunge into it are never scorched with the burning rays of the sun of worldly illusion." (Ramcharitmanas 7/130/shloka 2).

The researcher has attempted to analyse the characters of Tulsidasji's Ramcharitmanas in order to understand better the worldview of the sixteenth century poet saint. It is hoped that this study will contribute to a better understanding of Ramcharitmanas, and allay uninformed criticisms of Tulsidasji, which are, indeed, not unexpected because of the magnitude and depth of the Ramcharitmanas.

SUMMARY

Chapter One: specifies the relevance of the study, explaining its aims and scope, as well as the methodology used. It also gives a general introduction to the study.

Chapter Two: focuses on the importance of characterisation in literature. In the introduction to this chapter the impact of genetics and environment in relation to human behaviour is discussed. Then the traditional norms of characterisation in Indian literature are briefly discussed and their most outstanding features are emphasised.

Chapter Three: deals with characterisation in the Ramcharitmanas. The most important features of Tulsidasji's delineation of the characters of the Ramcharitmanas is examined and the findings of numerous scholars on the subject are discussed. The possible reasons for Tulsidasji to portray his characters as he has done are also probed.

Chapter Four: probes into the delineation in the Ramcharitmanas of three principal divine characters, viz.,

Lord Shiva, Hanumanji and Parshurama and assesses the extent to which these characters contribute to Rambhakti and universal welfare.

Chapter Five: examines in detail the lives of the sages Vashishta and Vishwamitra and also assesses their contribution to universal welfare.

Chapter Six: examines the family values expounded in the Ramcharitmanas through a detailed analysis of some of the characters in Sri Rama's family and demonstrates how family ideals are essential for the promotion of human welfare.

Chapter Seven: shows how even non-human species such as animals and birds can serve the divine purpose for harmony and welfare in the world.

Chapter Eight: deals with some of the demon characters of the Ramcharitmanas and probes Tulsidasji's perception of how even people with evil propensities can, through Rambhakti, redeem themselves and contribute to the principle of human welfare.

Chapter Nine: focuses on the conclusions arrived at from the research. It also deals with the impact of Tulsidasji's Ramcharitmanas on society and its relevance to modern man in the context of his principal characters.

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