

Maharshi Valmiki's *Ramayan*: The Epic of Ancient India

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ABSTRACT

Valmiki was a legendary poet who is celebrated as the traditional author of the epic Ramayana, Ramayana is an epic poem of India which narrates the journey of Virtue to annihilate vice. Sri Rama is the Hero and aayana His journey. The paper explores the concept of Dharma is depicted well through the conduct of various characters. The Ramayana is a classic tale of the triumph of good over evil. The paper highlights the story of King Rama who must save his kidnapped wife, Sita. This quest for perfection of the poet has resulted in the epic poem; Valmiki played a significant role in narrating the story of Lord Rama. The story ends with her assimilation into her mother, the earth, and her eventual acquittal.

Keywords: Assimilate, Sage, Human, Expression, Divine And Perception

INTRODUCTION

Valmiki universally accepted and acclaimed as Adikavi, the first among the poets at least in India and particularly in Sanskrit was the first to discover a metrical expression of epic dimension and vision to match the emotional ecstasy of an elevated soul endowed with compassion and concern for all living beings. It was in such a state of identification of the individual with the universal that his immortal epic, the *Ramayan*, originated from his heart. Earlier he had equipped himself enough to produce an epic based on the qualities of an ideal man narrated by the celestial sage, Narada. Valmiki himself was a great sage, Maharshi by virtue of the penance he performed for a long time, but he was keen to have his terrestrial experience endorsed by a celestial authority adding right perception to his deep penance. On hearing from Narada that there existed a man right in front of their eyes who had all the virtues that a human being needs to benefits the entire humanity, the sage Valmiki started thinking of narrating the story of the man of his vision in a fitting and touching manner.

Valmiki in his forest hermitage is preparing to describe the fortunes of Rama. He goes to take his sacred bath in the river Tamasa. While rambling on its banks, he sees a cruel hunter kill with an arrow the male kraucha(crane) which was in felicity with its mate. The sight of the dying bird and his crying consort deeply touches the sage. From the pathos-filled depths of his heart spontaneously arises an utterance, threatening vengeance on the callous hunter. As he wanders, lost in thought, towards his hut, Brahma appears and announces to the poet that he has unconsciously created, as per His own desire, the rhythm of the shlokas metre, and then bids him compose in the same measure the divine poem on the life and deeds of Rama. The above story, curiously enough, coincides with theory maintained in modern days that a metrical composition must originality be prompted by intense feelings. The story may have a historical significance also, for it indicates with some probability that classical form of the Shloka was first fixed by Valmiki. In other words, Valmiki was the Rishi who adopted the Vedic Chhandas to the composition of poems in classical Sanskrit and became the first poet. Thereupon, when he finished his composition and was waiting for its recital, There came two itinerant singers (kushilavau) whom sage taught his poem and the two, as wandering balladists, recited it everywhere. The Uttarakanda gives some more biographical material on Valmiki. In the scene in which Lakshman conducts Sita, the abandoned queen of Rama, to the vicinity of Valmiki's hermitage across the river Ganga, he says that she will find shelter with the famous Valmiki, the Brahmin (vipra) the high souled (Mahatamaha).

Further it is stated that Sita gave birth to twins who learnt from Valmiki the Poem Ramayana, which the princely singers recited at the royal court during the horse – sacrifice of Rama, drawing the tears of those assembled. Then, Valmiki brings Sita to Rama and testifies to her innocence, purity and chastity by saying that Valmiki is the tenth son of Prachetas, he has never told a lie, he has practiced tapas for thousands of years and has committed no sin whatsoever in thought, a word or deed. Thus the vulgate Ramayana presents Valmiki as the tenth son of Prachetas(or Varuna) and a great ascetic a

contemporary of Rama apart from being a Brahmin, closely associated with the royal house of Ayodya, and also a friend of Dasharatha.

In order to assimilate the noble thoughts transmitted so kindly by the divine master, Valmiki took a stroll on the bank of the river Tamasa along with his disciple Bharadwaja. The river-water attracted his attention. The pleasant and placid movement of the waves seemed to remind the seer of the mature and the modest qualities of his hero. He visualized the purest ray serene of a pious man's mind reflected in the flowering water.

But the very next moment he saw a startling scene of a female bird suddenly separated from her partner who was mercilessly shot by a cruel hunter. He could not believe his eyes particularly because of the contrast he perceived between the crystal clear water reflecting a gentle heart and the act of a heartless hunter who shot at the pair of innocent birds engrossed in the legitimate pleasure of life for no fault of theirs and to no advantage for him either. His heart melted a spell itself in metrical form which turned out to be the primordial sound for the world of poetry for generations to come.

The wording is as follow: "No- Though shall not command any respect in society for years to come as you have not dead one of the innocent birds engrossed in love" (Srimad Valmiki Ramayana). The sage had turned into a poet. It was a pleasant surprise for the articulating ascetic himself that his feelings were so powerful that they found equally powerful medium for their manifestation. He was a little disturbed for a while that he was led away by his emotions and subjected himself to anger. He exclaims in a retrospective mood: "What have I uttered?" (Srimad Valmiki Ramayana)

But he reconciled himself to the situation as it was a spontaneous outburst of the inner voice and hence motivated by some divine will. The creator in him supported the stand and encouraged him to rise the occasion and go ahead with his epic enterprises which he had at the back of his mind ever since he heard the glorious account of Rama and his march in search of harmony in life. He was also assured that Saraswati, the goddess of human expression, would stand by his side and guides him in visualizing the events and eulogizing them in proper form with epic dignity and secular simplicity. Thus the mission of immortalizing the man of his vision gathered momentum and time-honored epic, the Ramayana- the adikaya of Indian literature, found expression in a memorable moment in the history of mankind when the master- mind was deeply absorbed in projecting the two basic human values- man-making and non-killing for the betterment of humanity at large.

It is unfortunate that world of letters knows very little about this celebrated poet of worldwide repute except his epic composition, the Ramayana. The poet did not say much about himself in his work nor could history record any authentic account of his life. Not even the time he lived in. he figures on two occasions in the course of the story as one of the characters and on both the occasions he was very brief and modest. When Rama visits his hermitage along with his wife and brother, on his way to chitrakoota just to pay homage to him, Valmiki welcomes them with love and affection coupled with respect and reverence and utters just one and only word asyatam. He feels honored when Rama sits for a while in his hermitage.

The other occasion when Valmiki appears and speaks as a character in his epic is the Uttara Khanda. On hearing the entire epic sung by Lava and Kusha in his royal court, Rama invites Valmiki to his court and requests him to bring Sita also along with him so that she may prove her chastity in the presence of senior citizens and great Sages. Valmiki accepts this invitation with a significant observation that Sita would certainly comply with whatever Rama expect her to do as her husband was her sole subject of worship. Finally, while presenting Sita in the Mandapa(Prayer hall) what Valmiki says about himself is of much relevance to us in understanding his magnificent background. He says: "I am the tenth son of the sage Prachetas. You belong to the great dynasty of Raghu. I do not remember to have uttered any lie so far in my life. I say that these two boys are your sons I performed penance for thousands of years. I shall not accept the fruit of all my penance if there is any blemish in Maithili I never entertained any ignoble thought I never wronged any person and I never spoke any vulgar word- I shall derive the benefit thereof only if Maithili is void of sin" (Srimad Valmiki Ramayana)

These lines give us an insight into the penance and perseverance that Valmiki was practicing throughout his life in order to present a valuable specimen of an ideal man and woman to be understood, assimilated and followed to the extent possible by the vast mass of humanity. Incidentally, the proclamation throws light on the confidence that Rama and other sages reposed on the sage Valmiki whose verdict had Vedic sanctity for them. In fact the immediate and invaluable outcome of his penance was the transformation of the Vedic vibrations into poetic excellence giving rise to an immortal epic like the Ramayana. This is the Valmiki we get from his own narration very humbly but effectively worded and addressed to the sublime soul like Ramana whose worded and addressed to the sublime soul like Rama whose march (ayanam) is the main thrust of the Ramayana. The later versions of the Ramayana have, however, different stories to tell about Valmiki. The Puranas depicted the early life of Valmiki in a distorted manner which, though fascinating to read, does great damage to the great personality of Valmiki, an embodiment of penance. He was meditation personified and the sole object of his

dedication and contemplation was man, a man who does not live all for himself but lives for others identifying him with the composite culture of the cosmic creation. To say that such a great sage with an epic insight into life, scientific bent of mind and a blend of aesthetic beauty and poetic excellence was, in his early days, a robber converted later by the seven sages into an ascetic may no doubt make an exciting story but there is no evidence in history to support it. But all the Puranas including Padma Purana, Skanda purana and even adhyatma Ramayana popularized this version and the common man today places valmiki in the same perspective.

The word Valmikia literally meaning an ant hill stands for deep meditation and poised state of penance Valmiki the poet is a product of this penance Kalidasa a great admirer of Valmiki glorifies this aspect in his famous line in Meghasandesa the Yaksha asks the cloud messenger to look for a fantastic rainbow enroute:

“Have a look at that yonder ant hill from which sprouts a colorful arch projected by Indra” (Srimad Valmiki Ramayana)

This rainbow is obviously a figurative image of Valmiki’s poetic vision and epic grandeur the seven colors of the rainbow so formed represent the seven Kandas of Valmiki’s Ramayana

But the Puranas have their own justification they have to establish the efficacy of the very name of Rama the chanting of which changed a dacoit into a saint this could be true but what is more important is to understand Valmiki as penance personified the very first stanza in Valmiki’s Ramayana depicts Valmiki as Tapaswi tapas or penance was his main virtue while the celestial sage Narada had an additional advantage of a thorough grasp of all that happens anywhere in the universe by virtue of this extensive touring and intensive study this deep study of human nature appropriately termed Swadhyaya makes him an expert in exposition Vagvidamvara and also an accomplished observer of silence Muni Pungava these are the qualities that attract and benefit Valmiki in identifying a man Nara whose march ayana can grant grace and grandeur to humanity.

CONCLUSION

Valmiki has won a permanent place in the heart of all his readers, even since he composed his celebrated Ramayana, as master of poetry and aesthetics, as a poet of nature, beauty and love, and as a poet of lucid and charming style. Not only did he gave us the most beautiful and moving of all stories in literature, he gave us also full-formed, full –blooded conception of men and women of ability and great superior moral stature. His mind is clear like the slushless water of the Tamasa and it mirrors forth all abiding virtues of human nature.

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