

Shodasi

Secrets of the Ramayana



Seshendra Sharma

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SECRETS OF THE RAMAYANA

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Seshendra : *Visionary Poet of the millennium*
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A Resplendent Icon of all Arts

This is an exemplary book which elevated the status of Indian Literary Criticism to the peaks of the world literature. *Shodasi* is a name associated with a great hymn. The title suggests that it's a book on spiritual discourse. A reading of this book suggests that the spirit of scientific temper is critical to comprehend Valmiki's Srimad Ramayana. Besides this, command on Vedic or Scriptural knowledge is essential. What does a layman has to say when a towering personality like Viswanatha Satyanarayana himself extolled the critical acumen and serious scholarship of Sheshendra Sharma.

Sharma has made it crystal clear that unless one has an apparent understanding of the plot's context, psyche of the characters, and the milieu of the bygone days supplemented by extraordinary scholarship, sound knowledge of phonetics and awareness on contemporary issues; one cannot easily comprehend the poetic diction of Valmiki. The debate on the phrase "*Netraturaha*" is a fitting example. The uniqueness of the title, Sundara kanda, Kundalini Yoga, Gayatri Mantra secretly hidden in Trijata's dream sequence, considering The Bharatha as an image of The Ramayana.... this book is a repository of many such critical discourses. It is replete with inconceivable and unfathomable issues. This magnum opus is an invaluable gift to the Telugu literature.

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SHODASI : SECRETS OF RAMAYANA

(A TANTRIC COMMENTARY ON VALMIKI RAMAYANA)

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One Thought to Begin With

Let us look at a paradox: Literary erudition can exist even in the complete absence of beauty, grace and propriety in the literature. But, there is no literature at all if two things are absent. What are they? Poet! And *Rasa*!!! Poet is the creator. And the created is *Rasa*. In the absence of a creator, there is no creation. In the absence of *Rasa*, all is futile.

Where from the two words, the Poet and the *Rasa* came into existence? Did they emerge from the literature itself? Or is it a definition of an individual who writes poetry? Does poetry consist of verses stating the similarity between camphor and salt and the like of it? Does not *Rasa* evoke an experience of poetry? It appears to be giving that experience. One would say, Ha. Yes. Poetry should be like that. Such an individual is a strong person today. How does one perceive the meaning of the words- Poet and *Rasa* - in a different manner in the society? For such creators of literature, there are close cousins who profess to be Pundits. These secondary characters are largely responsible for the present state of Kavyas. One does not find in them anything other than the cleverness acquired from superficial knowledge of words here and there. They do not have even a trace of respect for a genius. They are in favour of a philosophy of practical achievement than acquisition of Transcendental Knowledge. They take shelter under the words since they cannot reach higher levels of *Bhava*. If words alone can be a Kavya, then all dictionaries would become Maha Kavyas! In the land of Telugu, one finds in the end, that *Panditya* consists of remembering words spoken in the past but not understood at present. If any one can read four Kavyaas and elementary grammar, one becomes a Pundit and becomes eligible to higher positions in the society and be fortunate to become an authority to specify standards of learning. The status of Sanskrit is no better. A little of Kaumudi. A little of Kavya, a little of Alamkara, a little of hair dressing, a little of this and a little of that - all these constitute its general form. Whatever they have is little, but their arrogance has no limit. They would consider a brilliant person as a boy and wish to cajole him condescendingly by patting on his back. They are not capable of admitting a good thing as good. To make them admit

good things, one has to bow to their feet and beg them to do so. Who would have the patience to do such things? Even if one has patience, which sensible man would resort to such actions? But at the outset, it is a mistake to expect them to be otherwise. It is a mistake to believe that the ability to recognize the good as good, is a natural quality of an individual. It is a very special virtue characteristic of a saint. More than that, it is a result of many virtuous deeds. They should be blessed with such virtues. To expect such rare virtues in all can only be a mistake. It is said (in the first verse of Soundarya Lahari) : “*Kathamakrutha Punyah Prabhavati ?*” Even a wicked individual is aware of what is good. It is a natural law. But, because of absence of necessary virtues, it is not expressed in words. It stops at the throat and does not come through words, just as Saindhava impeded the path of Abhimanyu. It is necessary to realize that all individuals of this sort have done great harm to the scriptures, literature and traditions of this country

They have displayed to the people all the scriptures, language and traditions as horrible things. They have made it a difficult task of showing to the people that the true status of these is not as depicted and convince them. The status of Kaavya at present in the control of aforesaid literary creators and their followers is like that of the Gajendra caught up in the jaws of a crocodile in *the Bhagavata Purana*.

Under these circumstances, it is necessary to find out what was considered to be a Kaavya in the olden days, and to attempt to tell about it and hope that it would be accepted by all. These are not easily achieved. Whatever it may be it is a duty to tell about the facts.

The two words: Kavi and *Rasa* in the literature were not inventions. Valmiki was the foremost poet in the world. No Kavya was known before him. He also did not invent the word (Kavi). Both the words (Kavi and *Rasa*) were in Vedas. “*Anantamavyam Kavigum Samudrentam Visvasambhuvam*” ; *Sograbhugvibhajan tishthannaahaara majarah Kavih*” – These are seen in the Upanishads. The word Kavi occurs in several other places in different contexts, where the meaning of the word Kavi is taken as Jnani or Paramatma. Now, what about the word *Rasa*? Even this also has its roots in Veda. “*Raso vai Saha; Rasaggum Hyevaayam Labhdhvanandi Bhavati*” – Veda says thus, Paramaatma is indeed

Rasa. Achieving *Rasa* is enjoyment of bliss. Then, what is Ananda? “*Anando Brahmeti vyajanaat..... anandaddyevakhlvmani Bhutani Jaayante Anandeva Jaatani Bhutani Jeevanti Anandam Prayamtyabhi Samvisanti*” – The living beings are born in Ananda and are living only because of Ananda and also merging in Ananda in the end.. This is what is known as Ananda. When *Raso vai Saha* is uttered, the meaning is that ‘He is *Rasa*’. Then, what is *Rasa*? Earlier, it was said: “*Yadvai Tat Sukritam, Thadeva mah; Thadeva Rasah*”. (Here, the word *Sukritam* is in neuter gender, while *Sah* and *Rasah* are in masculine gender. Such disparity is not an error in Vedas because they are referring to Brahman which is beyond the grammatical rules.) The word *Sukritam* means: One that has what is already made. Here, what is already made, is the whole creation comprising the Name and Form. The One, which has created Name and Form, (Yat) is (Tat), Brahman. ‘That Brahman is *Rasa*’ is the essence of Vedic statement. The word *Kavi* is also used to indicate the meaning of *Kritii*. Therefore, it can be inferred that the word *Kritii* emerged from the entire meaning of *Sukrita* explained so far. Hence, the word *Kavi* denotes Creator which is Brahman. Even *Rasa* is said to be Brahman. The Ananda that would be achieved from *Rasa* would be called Brahman itself. “*Satyam Jnaanam Anantham Brahma*”, Hence Brahman is Jnaanam. Thus *Kavi*, *Rasa*, *Jnaana* and Ananda are equivalent in principle.

An extraordinary state of experience is spoken of in the context of one who is close to enjoy the *Rasa* which is described by the words: “*Yato Vaacho Nivartante Aprapya Manasa Saha, Anando Braahmano Vidvaan.*” “*Na Bibheti Kutaschaneti*”, which means: “He is a *Vidvan* who knows the state of Brahmananda that cannot be approached through the mind nor described by words because they are repelled and thrown backwards; and he is freed from fear.” Is this not what our Anandavardhana Acharya, Abhinava Gupta and others taught us as *Dhvani*? Did they speak without the knowledge of Anandavalli? If they have that knowledge, can there be any objection to the argument that this Vedantic truth appeared in a Consciousness activated by Veda itself?

The nature of *Dhvani* is Release while the nature of *Reeti* is Surrender. The role of Sound diminishes steadily in *Dhvani*. The role of Sound-generated meaning also vanishes ultimately. Thereafter, *Dhvani* is again experienced in a third transcendental

state, which is *Rasa*. Then, the *Manas* (Mind) is in a state bereft of sound and its meaning. The Mind needs always an object as its support for its existence. In the absence of anything for its support, the Mind ceases to exist (as an entity). When the Sound and Sound-generated meanings and the Mind cease to exist, the envelope of Ignorance, in which the Jiva is bound, goes away. The real nature of Jiva is revealed. It would be an integral experience in which the Knower, the Known and Knowing are inseparable. This is the state of *Rasa*. This is the state of experience which Abhinavava Gupta and others described by the words *Vigalitha*, *Vedyanthara* and *Atheethya*. Now, we can understand easily from where this language and this understanding were obtained by those great teachers in the past centuries.

Abhinavagupta and Anandavardhana were well versed in all the scriptures; especially Abhinavagupta was an ardent and accomplished scholar, who looked at literature from a transcendental point of view and succeeded to give the theory of *Dhvani* to humanity. The earlier scholars propounded a variety of theories of Poetry such as *Alankaara*, *Auchitya* and *Reethi*, etc. It resulted in long debates for several centuries confirming and refuting the theories with the result that no theory was finally accepted. It means that until the truth was discovered there would be several ways of arguing. When truth is known, there is no scope for debate. After the theory of *Dhvani* was propounded, it was only clarified, elaborated and embellished but was neither debated nor opposed. No new theory could be propounded. It means that as long as fictitious view is prevailing, there is no satisfaction. And satisfaction results only when the truth is known and leads to a state of Rest.

Whatever is the highest truth for Vedas, Puranas and Scriptures is also the highest truth for a *Kavya*. Hence *Kavi*, a Poet, brings into poetry the Vedic word *Rasa*. In this country the greatest ideal is *Ananda*. This is the land of *Ananda*. Since times immemorial, the sages, who are Mahatmas, dedicated their lives for Tapas. The supreme achievement of their effort is Ananda. Their message to the people is that each one must attain that Ananda. All the Kavyas, Scriptures, Puranas, Vedas were given to people for achieving this highest goal of life which is Ananda. Rejecting all this, to think that the Rishis who spoke of the highest goal of life were not intelligent,

and the people who followed them for many Yugas were foolish, is not rational. What is it that remains with us, if the highest goal of life sought after by all during several yugas is false, and if the sacred texts based on that supreme goal are also considered as false, and the entire culture of this country is considered to be false? It does not matter where we are. We can as well be in Uganda. Would not Bharata Desa become equal to that country? So much disbelief is not conducive for the welfare of living beings. "*Siddhamannam parityajya bhikshaamatathi durmathih.*" ("It is like the act of a foolish individual who rejects the food readily available and goes out with a begging bowl.")

Therefore, the One who taught the Veda also taught Purana. The same One also taught Kavya. These three are identical in Truth. These contributions are all same. The aim of their contributions is also same. This is the meaning of the word Kavi. If one has to accept this word, one should realize how much responsibility it implies. All attempted to break the bow of Siva! But, the earlier people were discriminative and were afraid of the resulting sound. The sage *Valmiki* also did not use that word. Sri Kalidasa knew the true meaning of the word *Sabda*. He said: "*Mandhah Kaviyasah Prardhee Gamishyamyapa Haasyathaam, Pramsu labhye phalelobhaath Udbhaahuhr iva vaamanaha*". – meaning- "The attempts made by all for the title of Kavi is like a dwarf stretching the hands to get a fruit from a tree just as a tall person would get it." Now-a-days several individuals all over the country, who may not be Kalidasas, are involved in the responsibility of literature in the democratic society. They aspire for high status and so the title Kavi has become inadequate and a new title Maha Kavi was invented. Even that was found to be inadequate and hence another title Maha Maha Kavi became necessary. It became necessary even to enhance that title, because whatever be the height one reaches, there is a higher place. Hence the word Kavi turned out to be a *Pushpaka Vimana*. "The River Ganga falls from the sky on the head of Siva. From there, it reaches Himalayas. From the holy Himalayas it descends to Earth. From there it flows into vast Ocean. From there it reaches the world of Snakes". Who can prevent this? "*Kalohi Durathi Kramah*" (*Time is insurmountable*).



Commentators on Valmiki

The Veda says: “*chathvaarisringa thrayo asya paada dve seershe saptha hasthaso asya tridha baddho vrishabho roraveeti*”. “It has four horns, three feet, two heads and seven hands. The bull, which is bound in three ways, is bellowing.” That is the meaning of what was said by Veda. What did you learn from it? “*Dvaa suparna sayujaa sakhaayaa samanam vriksham parishasva jaate tayorasyah pippalam soadvathva nasnan anyobhichakasithi*.” This means: “There are two friendly birds embracing a tree. One of them is enjoying the fruits of that tree and the other is simply seeing without eating.” What did you understand by this statement? Another statement: “*Ramaa raakenduvadanaa ratiruupaa ratipriya.....nityaklinna nirupamaa nirvana sukha dayinee-kulottirnaa bhaga raadhyaa maayaa madhumati mahee*” is from *Lalitha Sahasra Nama Stotram*. What is grasped from them? Another example: “*Sita sona bindu yugalam vivikta Siva Sakti samkuchatprasaram vagardha srishti hetuh parasparanupravishta vishpashtam*”, will not be understood even if it is translated into Telugu. If one says: ‘Siva wears Moon on His Head’, it seems to be very clearly understood. But, it is better to understand that you understood nothing! The meanings of all these statements are rooted in the scriptures.

The meaning of the *Ramayana* is difficult to grasp on the basis of apparent meaning of the words, just as it is impossible to understand the meaning of the above mentioned statements on the basis of the obvious meaning of the sentences. Rama is the husband of Sita. They went to forest. What is there which is not clear here? Saying so is like saying that all the sentences mentioned before, namely, four legs, three horns etc. were understood and *Ramayana* is nothing but the story of Rama. The Vedas, the Tantras and Puranas followed the same path. This is our tradition. There is no possibility of any objection, if anyone considers that *Ramayana* is a form of Veda, or a form of Tantra or a form of Purana. *Ramayana* hides the actual truth and gives a superficial view by the use of easily understandable words like all the texts mentioned above.

The form of the *Ramayana* is entirely an effort to keep the secrets of Rama and others hidden completely. Even though it is mentioned in Bala Kanda and other places that Rama is an incarnation of Vishnu, it is quite possible to conclude that it is an

occasional interpolation. The Sage Valmiki depicted Rama only as an ideal man and no where indicated that Rama is an incarnation of Vishnu. There is no man in the creation who suffered as Rama suffered. He lost the kingdom. He lost his wife. He had to go into the forest and live there and face enemies and suffer continuously. How many ever difficulties arose, he did not resort to exercise any superhuman powers to overcome them. Valmiki was totally absorbed in the narration and any poet other than Valmiki would have succumbed to the temptation under those circumstances to show that Rama was Parameswara who overcame all difficulties easily. It is here that we can see the poet and the sage Valmiki and his restraint and his success in depicting Rama as an Ideal Person.

The restraint and the capacity of Valmiki to hide the secrets is seen everywhere in Ramayana. In such a situation it is not proper to conclude that only Valmiki is the author of description of Rama as incarnation of Vishnu in Bala Kanda as well as the description of Brahma identifying Rama as Vishnu in Yuddha Kanda. If Valmiki had no restraint and wrote everything in directly understandable language, the Ramayana of Valmiki would have become another Adhyatma Ramayana only. If it were to be so, there would have been neither so many commentaries nor Upanishads. Valmiki retained the secrecy unrevealed. Only because of such secrecy, several attempts were made for clarification in various ways. Whenever Valmiki brought the name of Vishnu, it was done only to exemplify the glory of Rama. While narrating the story of Rama, His supremacy was barely hinted by Valmiki. It appears only occasionally in Ramayana and the increasing nature of Rama's glory was compared with that of Vishnu this subject needs a separate discussion. Whatever it may be in that great book, Rama is chiefly a self-controlled person. He is a glorious individual and most noble person visible to all. However, the special merit of Valmiki is that even though the narration is clearly understandable to all readers, there exists also an indication of Rama being the Lord of all, and the supremacy of Mantra, Yoga and Vedanta. The tradition of inserting short Mantras while narrating stories was prevalent among Upanishads and Tantras. However it appears that Valmiki did an extraordinary attempt to write one Maha Mantra. This is an unprecedented creation and later similar attempt was Devi Sapta Sathi and followed by others.

I said that Srimad Ramayana is like one treasure house of

End of Preview.

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