

LAKSHMANA

- Dr. B. Rama Rao

Srinivasa Bala Bharati - 132
(Children Series)

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Telugu Version

Dr. Iriventi Krishnamurthy

English Translation

Dr. B. Rama Rao



Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams
Tirupati

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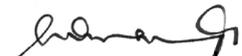
FOREWORD

If a beautiful garden is to be raised, one needs to take proper care of tender flower plants. In the same way in order to create a good society, great care needs to be taken of young children who are going to be future citizens of India. All their intellectual attainments will be futile if they fail to learn of their culture and its greatness. They need to be told of great men and women of this country so that they are inspired by their ideals. The essentials of our culture should be given to them in the form of simple and charming stories. They will cherish these ideals and be guided by them. They will promote good, and they will love the society they live in. They make their families proud and bring great prestige to their country when they grow up into good citizens.

Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams have brought out these booklets in Telugu for children under Srinivasa Bala Bharathi Series. Although meant for children, they are useful to the elderly too. They have found place in the book shelves of every family. The stories of legendary men and women are narrated in a simple way. We hope that more and more children will read them and profit by them.

I congratulate Dr. R. Sri Hari, Editor-in-Chief, TTD for his efforts in bringing out the English translations of SRINIVASA BALA BHARATI SERIES so well. We have received co-operation of many learned men and women in our efforts to popularize this series. I am thankful to them.

In the Service of the Lord



Executive Officer

Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams

Tirupati

FOREWORD

To-day's children are to-morrow's citizens. They need at tender age apt acquaintance with the life-histories of celebrated persons so that they get opportunity to lead their lives in an exemplary way. They will come to know that great things such as Indian culture, basic tenants of life and moral teachings are abundantly available in the life-experiences of great men. It is observed that there is no scope to teach such subjects in school curriculum.

Observing such circumstances the Publication Division of Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams has published about hundred booklets in Telugu about the lives of famous sages and great men written by various authors under the editorship of Dr. B. Raghunathacharyulu under "Balabharati Series". The response to these books is tremendous and it has given impetus to publish them in other languages also. To begin with, some of the books are now brought out in English and Hindi by the T.T.D. for the benefit of boys and girls and the interested public.

These booklets, primarily intended for growing children and also for elders to study and narrate the stories to their children, will go a long way in fulfilling the aspirations of children.

R. Sri Hari
Editor-in-Chief
T.T.D.

LAKSHMANA

Ramayana, Maha Bharata and Maha Bhagavata are the three great Indian epics in *Sanskrit* language. *Ramayana* was composed by *Maharshi Valmiki* and *Maha Bharata* and *Maha Bhagavata* were composed by *Sri Vedavyasa*. These epics are the storehouses of knowledge and wisdom. They teach us how to conduct ourselves in our lives in this world and also lead us on the path of spiritual growth. Every Indian should try to know about these epics, in whatever form they can be understood, appreciate the ideals enshrined in them and put them to practice in his or her life.

We may travel across the length and breadth of our' country, visit many beautiful places and know about the various languages spoken by the people and their varied tastes of food and dress. However, to learn the moral values cherished and upheld by our ancestors, to understand their aims in life, to know about the religious and social customs and traditions they followed and to increase our awareness of the rituals they observed at every stage of their lives, from birth to death, all of us, should read these epics which truly present what India, that is *Bharat*, was all about. These epics mould and refine the individual, awaken

love for one's *dharma* (code of conduct prescribed in scriptures based on the Vedas), inspire one to have sincerity of purpose in life and serve people around, in whatever manner one can.

If we do not know about our national idols like *Sri Rama, Sita, Lakshmana, Bharata, Sri Hanuman, Sri Krishna, Arjuna, Bheeshma, Vyasa, Valmiki, Prahlada, Narada, Parashara* and others, their achievements and their exemplary characters, it means that we do not know much about our tradition and culture. We may not be able to appreciate our idioms, proverbs, adages, folk stories, folk songs and traditions and the lofty ideas and ideals of our scholars, unless we read these epics.

Any Indian, who has not read *Ramayana*, cannot be considered to be truly knowledgeable. What a great sage *Valmiki* was! Scholars say that unless one performs an austere penance (*tapas*) and becomes a sage, one cannot compose a *Kavya* (a grand poem, a great work of literature). *Valmiki* was a great ascetic, an idealist and a humanitarian. The hero of this epic, *Sri Rama*, is venerated and worshipped as a god by our nation that achieved great progress in the fields of art and culture.

No other work of literature in the world is honoured so much as *Ramayana*. Though *Ramayana* was

composed thousands of years ago, the system of marriage, the affection among family members for one another, respect for elders, obedience to parents, loyalty, true friendship, the glory of a householder's life (*grihasthaashrama*), fury to punish the wrong doer to defend dharma and maintain law and order, sacrifices, service oriented nature, faithfulness in keeping one's promises and a ruler's avowed aim to please his subjects at any cost- are portrayed gloriously by *Valmiki* and are admired and honoured by the Indians even now. Even today, we treat those great personalities of *Ramayana* as the standards to compare with and reckon the worth of an individual in any walk of life. As long as the ideals presented in *Ramayana* are respected by the Indians, the epic will be loved universally by the children, elders, laymen, scholars, devotees and the aesthetically inclined, all alike.

One cannot hope to promote moral values among the people of this country, without reference to *Ramayana*. *Ramayana* is regarded not only as a great work of literature but also as a moral science and a repository of codes of conduct for men and women in all walks of life.

Ramo vighrahaan dharmah - *Rama* is reckoned as a personification of dharma (code of conduct

prescribed by scriptures based on the *Vedas*). Long ago, when *Valmiki*, a sage living in a hermitage on the banks of river *Tamasa*, was thinking of composing of a *kavya* based on the story of an excellent individual, sage *Narada* visited his asram (hermitage). *Valmiki* honoured the sage and requested him to tell about a heroic personality with many excellent qualities. *Narada* was pleased with *Valmiki*'s reception and told him that there indeed existed such an excellent individual called *Sri Rama*, the eldest son of King *Dasaratha* and *Kausalya* of *Ikshvaaku* dynasty. He narrated the story of *Sri Rama* briefly and praised *Rama* as a powerful warrior, knower of all scriptures and dharma, grateful, truthful, steadfast, adherent of good customs and traditions and as one who wishes the welfare of all creatures, a great scholar, devoted to his duties and a man of lovely and noble appearance. *Ramayana* is the story of that divine *Rama* and it should be read by all of us.

Each character in *Ramayana* is symbolic of one distinct quality, merit, virtue or a psychology. This makes the idealism, beauty and dharma presented in *Ramayana* to be more important than the story of *Ramayana* itself. Such stories naturally become very popular at all places. "Struggle to uphold virtue, willingness to face any difficulty 'to be good and to

do good', being ready to sacrifice personal comforts for welfare of all" are the permanent values, cherished all over the world, at all times.

Besides *Rama*, who is the hero of *Ramayana*, there are many characters in that epic that stand for sacrifice, truth and valour. Next to *Rama*, the foremost to be mentioned is *Sri Lakshmana*, one of the three younger brothers of *Sri Rama*.

Sri Rama described *Lakshmana* in these words- 'pranairishtatamam mama' and 'priyam praanam bahischaram'. *Rama* treats *Lakshmana* as 'dearer than his own life'. For him *Lakshmana* is 'his own life (prana) moving outside his body.' Why is *Lakshmana* loved so much by *Rama*? What is his merit?

To understand *Lakshmana* better, one must know the story of *Rama*. All of us may be aware of *Ramayana* but briefly the story is like this:

Long ago, *Kosala* was ruled by King *Dasaratha*, of *Ikshvaaku* dynasty. *Kausalya*, *Sumitra* and *Kaikeyi* were his three wives. They had no children for quite a long time. On the advice of their guru, *Maharishi Vasishtha*, *Dasaratha* performed 'Putra Kameshthi' (a sacrificial ritual performed with a desire to beget children) and as a result of the *yaaga*, *Kausalya* gave

birth to *Sri Rama*, *Kaikeyi* to *Bharata* and *Sumitra* to *Lakshmana* and *Satrughna*.

Guru Vasishtha, the preceptor of the family, taught the four brothers all *sastras* (scriptures), gave instruction about many *astras* (divine weapons) and *shastras* (ordinary weapons), political science and other subjects related to administration of a kingdom. One day, sage *Viswamitra* came to Ayodhya and requested King *Dasaratha* to send both *Rama* and *Lakshmana* with him to kill demons *Maricha*, *Subahu*, and *Thaataki*, who were disrupting the *yajna* performed in their ashram and were creating terror. Reluctantly, *Dasaratha* allowed *Rama* and *Lakshmana* to accompany Sage *Viswamitra*. *Rama* and *Lakshmana* killed *Thaataki* and *Subahu*, drove away *Maricha* and protected the *yajna*. *Viswamitra* was pleased and he blessed *Rama* and *Lakshmana* with some of the divine *astras*. He took them to *Mithila*, where King *Janaka* was conducting *swayamvara* (bride selecting bridegroom on her own, from among a group of eligible men,) for *Sita*, his daughter.

The condition for *swayamvara* was that the prospective bridegroom should lift the great bow of Lord *Siva* and tie the bow string. No king or warrior was able to do that. Then *Viswamitra* gave permission to *Rama* to try his hand at that. *Sri Rama* lifted the

bow very easily and while trying to tie the bow string, the old bow gave away and was broken. *Rama* thus married *Sita*. *Lakshmana*, *Bharata* and *Satrughna* married *Urmila*, *Maandavi* and *Srutakeerthi* respectively.

Sage *Parasurama*, the disciple of Lord *Siva*, got angry when he heard that *Rama* had broken the bow of Lord *Siva* so he arrived there to punish *Rama*. *Sri Rama* disarmed him with his charm and prowess and reached *Ayodhya*.

After a few years, King *Dasaratha* planned to crown *Sri Rama* and appoint him as King of *Kosala*. *Manthara*, a house maid of *Kaikeyi*, made her believe that if *Rama* became the king, she and her son *Bharata* would be treated like slaves. She instigated *Kaikeyi* to seek the two boons, which were granted long ago by *Dasaratha* to *Kaikeyi*, when she helped him in the battle with *Shambarasura*.

Kaikeyi believed in what *Manthara* told and pressurized *Dasaratha* to give her two boons. Firstly, *Rama* should go to live in forests for fourteen long years and secondly her own son *Bharata* should be crowned as King of *Kosala*. *Dasaratha* could not imagine *Rama* staying away from him even for a while and he requested *Kaikeyi* repeatedly to reconsider her demands. *Kaikeyi* did not yield. *Dasaratha* was

dejected. He prostrated himself on the floor like a felled tree and did not utter a word to *Rama*. *Kaikeyi* told *Rama* that his father ordered him to go to forests for fourteen years and that *Bharata* would be crowned.

Rama heard this. For anyone else who was to be crowned the very next day it could have been shocking, but not for *Rama*. He did not bat an eyelid, did not get angry and nor was he discontented. With equanimity, he obeyed the orders and prepared to go to forest. Such was his obedience to his father and selflessness. *Kaikeyi* asked *Rama* alone to go to live in forest. However, *Lakshmana*, his dearest brother, who always had a great regard and admiration for *Rama*, came forward to accompany *Rama*, on his exile to forest. *Rama* tried to dissuade him but *Lakshmana* did not budge. *Sita* also accompanied them and three of them went to forest.

All of this had happened when *Bharata* was away from *Kosala* at his maternal uncle's place. *Dasaratha* died of grief and shock. *Bharata* scolded *Kaikeyi*, put on the apparel suitable for a hermit and went to the forest to meet *Rama*. He requested *Rama* to return to *Ayodhya* and rule the kingdom, but *Rama* did not agree. *Bharata* then took *Rama*'s wooden sandals, placed them on his head and went to *Nandigram*, a village in the outskirts of *Ayodhya*, treated the sandals as

representative of *Rama*, placed them on a pedestal, offered daily prayers to them and ruled over *Ayodhya* for the next fourteen years.

Rama travelled through the forests, on the banks of holy rivers, killed many demons and protected hermits on many occasions. *Lakshmana* served his brother and sister-in-law with utmost devotion and it was said that he did not even sleep for those fourteen years, to guard the hermitage and give protection to his brother and *Sita*.

Rama killed *Viraadha*, *Khara* and *Dushana* and *Lakshmana* humiliated *Surpanakha*, sister of *Ravana*, when she tried to harm *Sita*. *Surpanakha* instigated her wicked and cruel brother *Ravana*, the king of demons (Rakshasas) and of *Lanka*. Advised wrongly by his sister, *Ravana* engaged *Maaricha* to entice *Sita* and *Rama*, in the form of a golden deer. *Sita* requested *Rama* to bring that golden deer to her. *Rama* was also deceived by the beauty of that golden deer and ran after it. *Rama* hit the golden deer with an arrow and *Maaricha*, in the form of golden deer, cried out helplessly and loudly, imitating the voice of *Sri Rama*. *Sita* heard that cry and was agitated and forced *Lakshmana* to go and protect *Rama* from demons. When *Lakshmana* went away from the hermitage,



Ravana appeared there in the form of a *sanyasin*, deceived *Sita* and forcibly took her away to *Lanka*.

Rama and *Lakshmana* searched for *Sita* for a long time but in vain and were very sad. On their trail in search of *Sita*, they reached *Kishkindha*, the kingdom of *vaanaras* - monkeys. *Sugriva*, the king of apes, who was exiled wrongly by his elder brother *Vali*, made friendship with *Rama*, on the advice of *Hanuman*, his minister. *Rama* killed *Vali* and *Sugriva* was enthroned as the king. As promised, *Sugriva* employed thousands of his *vaanaras* (monkeys) in search of *Sita*. *Hanuman* found *Sita* in *Lanka* and informed *Rama* about this.

Rama, with the help of the army of *vaanaras*, got a bridge constructed across the sea and attacked *Lanka*. He killed *Ravana*, made *Vibhishana* the king of *Lanka*, set *Sita* free and returned to *Ayodhya*, got coronated and ruled *Kosala* for a long time, so justly and gracefully that '*Ramarajya*' (the reign of *Rama*) became the role model for good governance.

One day, a drunken citizen of *Ayodhya* babbled, finding fault with *Rama* for living with *Sita*, who was kept as a captive in *Lanka* for nearly nine months. *Rama* took it as the opinion of his subjects and directed *Lakshmana* to drop *Sita* in the forests forever.

Lakshmana was very unhappy about that but obeyed his brother's orders.

Lakshmana's exit from this world was also marked with sacrifice and duty-mindedness. He was standing as a guard at the palace of *Rama*, when *Yama*, the god of death, was in a conversation with *Rama*. *Lakshmana* was told not to allow anyone to enter *Rama's* palace at that crucial moment. Then unexpectedly, sage *Durvasa*, known for his annoyance, arrived there and was stopped by *Lakshmana*. *Durvasa* got angry and threatened *Lakshmana* that if he did not allow him to enter *Rama's* palace, his dynasty would be finished. *Lakshmana* thought that if he disobeyed *Rama* and allowed *Durvasa* to get in, he alone would lose his life and if he did not allow *Durvasa*, it means harm for his entire dynasty. So, *Lakshmana* decided to forego his life for the sake of dynasty and allowed *Durvasa*.

Rama had to punish *Lakshmana* for his disobedience. He consulted his ministers and exiled *Lakshmana* as that punishment was considered to be equal to a death penalty. *Lakshmana* left *Ayodhya*, entered into river *Sarayu* and ended his life.

All of the characters in *Ramayana* are distinct and admirable. *Ramayana* would not have been as noble as it is, without the character of *Lakshmana*.

Lakshmana is one of the twins born to *Sumitra*. *Rama* was dusky and *Lakshmana* was of milky white complexion. His nature was also as effervescent as milk. He would get easily excited in anger or in benevolence. Howsoever angry he might be, he would get easily pacified with his elder brother's graceful words.

From childhood, *Lakshmana* was always devoted to *Rama*. He could not stay away from *Rama* for long. Perhaps, that was why, *Vishwamitra* took *Lakshmana* along with *Rama* for protection of his *yajna*. *Lakshmana's* devotion to *Rama* resembles 'saguna-bhakti' (worship of God in physical form) and *Bharata's* devotion to his brother is 'nirguna-bhakti' (worship of formless God). *Lakshmana* always felt the need for being in the company of *Rama*, whereas *Bharata* could stay away from *Rama* and satisfy himself with meditation upon *Rama*. *Lakshmana* left his wife *Urmila* and all the comforts of a royal life behind, for fourteen years and lived in forest with his brother, without sleep. One cannot find any parallel for such brotherly love in the history of world literature.

'*Jyeshtha bhraata pitrisamah*' - Manusmriti says that elder brother is equally respectable as father. *Lakshmana* regards *Rama* as his God. *Rama* is his

guru. He owes this great quality in him to his mother *Sumitra* who taught him thus: “O my son! Forest is *Ayodhya* for you. Treat *Sita* as your mother. *Rama* is your father.” *Lakshmana* imbibed this instruction and followed it for the next fourteen years and served his brother and sister-in-law with great devotion.

It is told in some *puranas* that *Lakshmana* is an incarnation of *Adi Sesha*, the great serpent god and the couch for *Sri Mahavishnu*. *Lakshmana*'s short tempered nature might be attributed to his origin from *Adi Sesha*. When *Rama* revealed *Kaikeyi*'s orders, *Lakshmana* became very angry and wanted to kill *Kaikeyi* and *Dasaratha* for the injustice meted out to *Rama*. *Rama* pacified him soon. His elder brother's patience and principled nature tempered his anger.

Surpanakha, the sister of *Ravana*, appeared as a beautiful woman before *Rama* and *Lakshmana* and tried to entice *Lakshmana*. *Lakshmana* was so composed that *Surpanakha* could not allure him. She got irritated and tried to harm *Sita*. Then *Lakshmana* cut off her nose and ears and disfigured her face. Humiliated thus by *Lakshmana*, *Surpanakha* poisoned her brother's mind towards *Rama* and *Lakshmana*, which led to the abduction of *Sita*. When *Sita* started accusing him of having ulterior motives in not going to help *Rama*; *Lakshmana* could keep his cool only for

a while. He was hurt by *Sita*'s accusation and instead of staying back to protect *Sita*, he left that place in search of *Rama* and this helped *Ravana* in kidnapping *Sita*. Had *Lakshmana* controlled his anger and ignored his ego at that moment, *Sita*'s abduction would not have taken place. However *Lakshmana*'s impatience led not only to *Sita*'s kidnap but also to *Ravana*'s death.

When *Rama* returned to asram with *Lakshmana* and could not find *Sita* there, he was agitated and felt very sad. It was *Lakshmana* who supported *Rama* all through, in those crucial times of agony. He served *Rama* when he lost his consciousness. He stood by *Rama* and helped him to kill *Kabandha* and also during the battle with *Ravana* and his armies.

Sugriva was indulging in sensual pleasures even after the rainy season was over. *Lakshmana* was furious when he met *Sugriva* and his ministers. His emotional outburst helped in quickening the search for *Sita* and the downfall of *Ravana*. A righteous person's fury to defend the good, will always result in welfare of the mankind.

When *Ravana* was forcibly taking *Sita* away in *pushpaka vimana* by air, *Sita* dropped a bunch of ornaments and jewellery, wrapped in a piece of cloth. Those ornaments were collected by monkey warriors and were kept safely. When *Rama* and *Lakshmana*

arrived in *Kishkindha*, searching for *Sita*, *Sugriva* showed those ornaments to the brothers and requested them to identify the jewellery. *Rama* was anxious and his eyes were brimmed with tears. He could not see those ornaments clearly and asked *Lakshmana* to identify them. *Lakshmana* observed those ornaments closely and said -

*Naaham Jaanami keyure Naaham jaanami kundale
Nupuretwabhi jaanami nityam paadabhi vandanaat*

“O Brother! I do not know whose ear ornaments are these. To whom these necklaces belong, I do not know. I have never seen these bracelets before. But I can definitely identify these anklets as I used to see them every day when I bow before my sister-in-law’s feet. These are her anklets.”

This reply reflects *Lakshmana*’s highly principled nature and prudence. He used to see only the feet of *Sita*, every day, at the time of bowing to her with respect and he was not familiar with any of the ornaments she wore in other parts of her body as he was not used to seeing her closely. His respect for his sister-in-law is exemplary. It may appear to be exaggerated now, but we get a glimpse of the high standards of individual behavior held in those days, and how the women were venerated in ancient India. *Valmiki* presented an

example of a great value system to the world literature through this episode. Even today, Indian women wish to have a brother-in-law like *Lakshmana*, who supports them with devotion and affection.

In a story in *Gathasaptasati*, when a brother-in-law tries to flirt with his sister-in-law, she points to a portrait of *Sita*, *Rama* and *Lakshmana* together and reminds her brother-in-law of his maryada or rule of decorum. It can be said that the above sloka in *Ramayana* inspired the poet to pen such a story in *Gathasaptasati*.

Lakshmana was a valorous warrior and we can witness it in many parts of *Ramayana*. *Rama* himself was surprised to see *Lakshmana*’s prowess in the war waged against *Ravana* and his armies. *Indrajit*, the son of *Ravana*, was a great warrior with magical powers; he could defeat *Indra*, the king of gods. *Lakshmana* fought fiercely against *Indrajit*, disarmed him and killed him in the war.

As *Ravana* was displaying his powers of archery at his best in the war, *Rama* and *Lakshmana* fainted for a while. *Rama* regained his consciousness early and fought back. He saw his brother lying unconscious in a pool of blood and felt a bit depressed. He wept profusely and was saying to himself :



*Dese dese kalatraani dese dese cha baandhavaah
Tantu desam na pasyaami yatra bhraata sahodaraha*

‘One may get a wife in any country. New relations may also develop in any country. But one cannot get a loving brother like *Lakshmana* anywhere’.

He remembered that *Lakshmana* never spoke to him harshly or displeasingly even in moments of rage. He was very sad to see *Lakshmana* lying unconscious and remembered how *Lakshmana* consoled him during the times of sorrow caused by the abduction of *Sita*. He also felt at that moment that even if *Sita* returned to him then, he would not be happy unless *Lakshmana* regained his consciousness and strength; that his affection for *Lakshmana* was deeper than his love for *Sita*. In despair, he felt that it was of no use to continue with the war and even to live any longer, as *Lakshmana* was lying unconscious there. *Lakshmana* was truly blessed to be loved so much by *Rama*, the epitome of divinity in a man.

Lakshmana set an example for the devoted efforts to be put in by anyone for performance of one’s duties. It is said that he did not sleep even for a day in those fourteen years of exile, stayed awake to guard his brother and sister-in-law. One has to be detached and be not influenced by any considerations of friendship, relations etc., in performing one’s duty. When

Lakshmana saw *Bharata* approaching their asram in the forest, he got alerted and suspected the motives of *Bharata* who was coming with army. He prepared himself to fight against *Bharata* and his armies to protect *Rama* and *Sita*. But when *Rama* advised him to keep his cool and listen to what *Bharata* had to say, he controlled himself. When *Bharata* embraced him with affection, *Lakshmana* was pacified completely and felt sorry for misunderstanding his brother. In spite of his short-tempered nature, *Lakshmana* was a great executive, always rising to the occasion to do what was required to be done at any given moment. He was always open minded and was willing to accept his mistakes and repent. His anger never lasted long and this indicates his good nature. He never harboured ill feelings against anyone.

Lakshmana was happy being *Rama's* devoted younger brother and he did not prefer to assert himself on any occasion. As he regarded *Rama* as the personification of dharma, he had no personal aim in his life, other than serving *Rama* at all times.

After *Ravana's* death, *Rama* returned to *Ayodhya* along with *Sita*, *Lakshmana* and many of his friends like *Sugriva*, *Vibhishana*, *Hanuman* and others. He was crowned and he ruled over *Kosala* kingdom for many years with the assistance of his



younger brothers. *Sita* was pregnant. At that happy moment in their lives, unfortunately, an official spy, who was moving around in the streets of *Ayodhya*, overheard the conversation of a drunkard couple. The husband was suspecting the faithfulness of his wife and remarked that he was not a silly fellow like *Rama* to give shelter to wife who stayed for months in an enemy's palace. The spy was shocked and he reported the matter hesitatingly to *Sri Rama*.

Unlike the rulers in our times, *Rama* was not insensitive to what his people thought of him. Knowing well that *Sita* was chaste, he gave importance, rather unduly as some may like to judge, even to what a drunkard, common man said about him and ordered *Lakshmana* to leave pregnant *Sita* in the forest for ever. It was unkind but it was the decision of a king who really cared for what his people thought of him. *Lakshmana* initially tried to argue with *Rama* and requested him to reconsider his decision. As *Rama* was unyielding, *Lakshmana* stuck to his ideal of obedience to his elder brother.

Without revealing the reason, he told *Sita* that he was directed by *Rama* to drop her in the forest. *Sita* was unsuspecting as only a few days prior to that, she herself told *Rama* that she remembered those sweet memories of their togetherness in the forest during exile

and wished to stay for a while in forest. *Lakshmana* dropped her in the forest, on the banks of river *Ganga* and was weeping silently. *Sita* was perturbed and requested *Lakshmana* to tell her why he was crying helplessly. *Lakshmana* knew that what he did in obedience of his brother's orders was not justifiable. But he did not utter a word against *Rama*. He bowed respectfully to *Sita* and returned to *Ayodhya*. He ignored his personal feelings and adhered to discipline. This episode exemplifies *Lakshmana's* devotion to duty and self discipline.

To say simply that *Lakshmana* is selfless, will not suffice. His sacrifices were unimaginable and unparalleled. He spent fourteen years of his youthful life in the forest, accompanying and serving his elder brother, though *Rama* alone was exiled by the king. He left his wife behind at *Ayodhya* and observed celibacy. He had foregone all the luxuries of a prince and was happy in the service of his brother and sister-in-law. It may sound exaggerated but it is said that *Lakshmana* did not sleep in those fourteen years of his life to provide security to his brother.

How could he achieve all this? Scholars may explain saying that he is the avatar (incarnation) of *Adishesha* and not an ordinary human being. But the village folks who worshipped *Rama* understood

Lakshmana in a different way. The beauty of their innocent stories about *Lakshmana* is adorable. They poured their affection on him. A rustic tale is like this:

It was the time when *Ayodhya* wore a bridal look and there was festivity all around on the occasion of *Rama's* coronation. *Sita* and *Rama* ascended the throne. The three brothers were standing by the side of the throne, fully alert. *Hanuman* was sitting at the feet of *Rama*. *Sugriva*, *Angada*, *Vibhishana*, *Vasishtha* and other celebrities were in the assembly. All gods were witnessing the grand ceremony. At that solemn moment, suddenly *Lakshmana* laughed aloud.

It appeared to be out of place and out of context. Yet the man who laughed was not a layman. So everybody was brooding about one's own mistakes and defects and attributing them to be the reason for *Lakshmana's* laughter. *Vibhishana* thought of his alleged betrayal of his brother. *Sita* remembered how harshly and suspiciously she humiliated *Lakshmana* without any valid reason and felt shy. *Sugriva* felt pangs of guilt remembering that he was behind his brother *Vali's* death. Lord *Shiva* wondered whether *Lakshmana* laughed at him as he allowed *Ganga*, a fisherman's daughter, to reside on his head (according to a folk song). All of them were silent and downcast. *Rama* observed that his guests felt belittled. He was

angry and he drew out his sword to punish *Lakshmana*. The courtiers stopped him. *Rama* calmed down and demanded explanation from *Lakshmana* for his unseemly laughter.

Then *Lakshmana* apologized. He explained that when they were in forest, 'sleep' appeared before him in the form of a woman and offered to possess him so that he can go to sleep. *Lakshmana* politely refused saying that he should not sleep as long as he was guarding his brother. He requested that lady to come to him only after *Sri Rama's* coronation. After the coronation was performed, *Lakshmana* suddenly yawned and realized that sleep returned to him after a long while. He remembered the past episode and laughed to himself.

Everybody in the assembly, including *Rama*, suddenly remembered and appreciated how hard it had been for *Lakshmana* and then *Rama* honoured him cordially. We cannot find this story in *Valmiki Ramayana* but it is the creativity of rustic folks who admired *Lakshmana*. The imagination was so apt that it was appreciated even by the scholars.

Ramayana dates back to thousands of years ago. Yet, even now, if two brothers are quite amicable to each other, they are referred to as '*Rama* and *Lakshmana*'. If a younger brother sacrifices a lot for

his elder brother, he is fondly referred to as ‘*Lakshmana swamy*’ or ‘*Lakshmana*’. When milk boils, cream is formed, when *Lakshmana*’s anger boils, it results in victory for dharma. *Lakshmana* is otherwise known as *Ramaanuja*-one who is born after *Rama*. Both *Lakshmana* and *Srimad Ramanujachaarya*, the founder of *Visishtadvaita* doctrine and who taught the primacy of bhakti (devotion of God), are held to be incarnations of *Adi Sesa*.

Lakshmana’s exemplary character is an ideal cherished by Indians. *Lakshmana* represents *daasya bhakti* (expressing one’s devotion to God in the form of service) among the nine types of expressions of devotion to God, (*nava vidha bhakti*), the others being listening to the praise of God (*Sravanam*), praising God (*kirtanam*), remembering the divine acts of God (*smaranam*), touching or having a *darsan* of the feet of God or idol (*pada sparsanam*), performing worship of God (*archanam*), praying with folded hands and bowed head (*vandanam*), serving God like a friend (*sakhyam*) and submitting oneself absolutely to God (*atma nivedana*). It is declared in *Ramayana* that *Sri Mahavishnu* incarnated himself as *Sri Rama* for the welfare of all. *Sumitra*, while giving permission to *Lakshmana* to accompany *Rama*, she said, “O *Lakshmana*, my son! *Kausalya* gave birth to *Rama*

for the benefit of the world. I gave birth to you for the sake of *Rama*.” *Lakshmana* inherited selflessness from his mother. Life becomes blessed, when it is dedicated to God. That was the ideal of *Lakshmana* and he dedicated his life to *Sri Rama*. That is why, *Lakshmana* is worthy of emulation and adoration and it is auspicious to remember him every day in the morning.

Valmiki, who aesthetically portrayed the life of such a great personality, is blessed. His *kavya* will be revered as long as there are mountains and rivers on this earth. There is no falsehood or demerit in *Ramayana*. Whoever reads or listens to *Ramayana* will be cleansed of his sins. *Ramayana* is a river with two banks, one being *Rama* and the other being *Lakshmana*. *Rama* is the follower of *Jnana yoga* (the path of realization of God through knowledge of self and equanimity) and *Lakshmana* stands for *karmayoga* (the path of realization of God by attending to one’s duties selflessly and without expecting any result).

Om Tat Sat