

VALMIKI

- Dr. B. Rama Rao

Srinivasa Bala Bharati - 133
(Children Series)

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Telugu Version

Prof. Divakarla Venkatavadhani

English Translation

Dr. B. Rama Rao



Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams
Tirupati

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Editor-in-Chief

Prof. Ravva Sri Hari

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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 lifes of famous sages and great men written by various authors under the editorship of Dr. B. Raghunathacharyulu under "Balabharati Series". The response over 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 with English and Hindi rendering by T.T.D. For the benefit of boys and girls and the interested public.

These booklets primarily intended to the growing children and also generally intended to the elders to study and narrate the stories to their children, will go a long way to sublimate the aspirations of the children to greater heights.

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

VALMIKI

Who is Valmiki?

Maharshi (great sage) *Valmiki* is the great poet, who composed the first ever *kavya* (a grand poem) of the divine *Sanskrit* language. There are differences of opinion about how he came to be known as *Valmiki*. '*Valmika*' means an anthill. *Valmikat uthitah Valmikih* - one who arose from an anthill is *Valmiki*. A sage performed austere penance (*tapas*), for a long time, sitting in *padmasana* and meditating on God, caring little for food, water or shelter; then gradually anthill developed around him. At the end of penance, the sage came out of anthill (*Valmika*) and became known as *Valmiki*. Some are of the opinion that *Valmiki* is the son of a sage called *valmika*, but the first version appears to be more possible. A popular verse says, "God, who is to be known through the *vedas*, was born as *Sri Rama*, son of Dasharatha and the veda was delivered as *Srimad Ramayana* by *Praachetasa*"; it shows that *Valmiki* was also known as *Praachetasa*.

Some scholars say that "*Riksha*, *Bhaargava* and *Praachetasa*" mentioned in the *Vedas* actually refer to one sage, that is *Valmiki*. *Bhaargava* means one who is born in the family or clan of *Maharshi Bhrigu*. *Praachetasa* is the son of *Prachetas* and both *Bhaargava* and *Praachetasa* are different names of *Rishi Riksha* only. *Vishnupurana* says "*Rikshah*

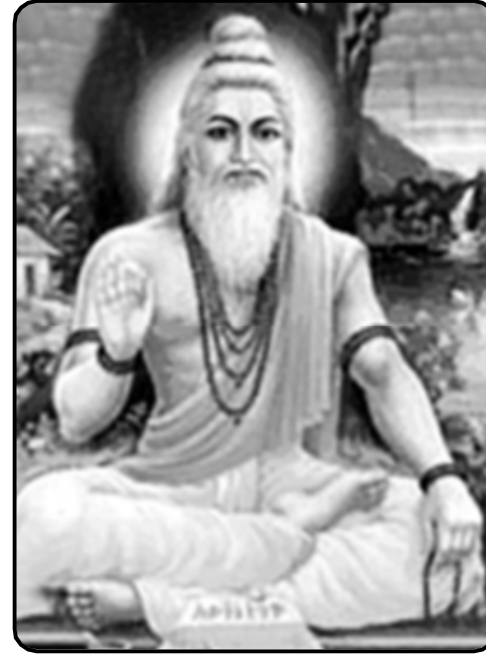
abhoodbhaargavah, tasmāt Valmikiryō abhidiyate” Therefore, it can be said that *Riksha*, that is *Praachetasa* himself is *Valmiki*.

It is held by some that *Valmiki*, who composed *Ramayana*, belongs to *kaliyuga* and modern historians assume that he dates back to 800 B.C.

Birth of Valmiki

Another story in *Padmapurana* is very popular and it says that *Valmiki* used to make a living by hunting animals in a forest and some sages gave him instruction to recite the name of ‘*Rama*’. Then he meditated on ‘*Rama nama*’ for quite a long time. Meanwhile, an anthill grew around him. As he came out of that anthill at the end of meditation, he became *Valmiki*. The story is like this.

Long ago, the *Saptarshis* (group of seven divine sages, namely *Vasishtha*, *Atri*, *Gautama*, *Kasyapa*, *Bharadwaja*, *Jamadagni* and *Viswamitra*) visited the ocean of milk, the divine abode of *Sri Mahavishnu*. There, they saw *Sri Mahavishnu* leisurely resting on *Adishesha*, the great serpent, who made himself as a couch for *Vishnu*, in *ksheera sagara* (ocean of milk). They offered obeisance to Him and praised His greatness and powers profusely. *Sri Mahavishnu* appeared before them and said, ‘O sages! I am pleased with your prayers. Just as *ksheera sagara* is my home, I reside in your hearts also at all moments. Be assured and go on.’



The sages were elated and they praised *Sri Mahavishnu* again and proceeded to visit many islands, rivers, hills, holy places and reached *Kashi*, the earthly abode of *Lord Siva*. At *Kashi*, they offered prayers to *Sri Viswanatha*. To visit more holy places, they proceeded further and reached river *Tamasa*. They crossed that river and entered into a terrifying and thick forest. As they were traveling through that jungle, they reached the outskirts of a village, where hunters live. The raw, bloody skins and bones found at that place disgusted them. As they were walking there, closing their nostrils, because of the foul smell, they encountered a hunter.

That hunter was ferocious with bloody red eyes and was flinging arrows furiously from his bow. He then saw the *rishis* and halted them with a commanding voice. “O Sages! If you move even a step ahead, I will kill you. Take out all money and valuables you have on

you and give them to me at once. Else I will kill you without mercy,” he boomed.

Sages were startled and remained silent. Then the hunter pulled at their hair roughly, beat them mercilessly, poured water on their heads from their water-pots (*kamandalam*), thumped on their backs and tortured them. He searched their clothes and bags thoroughly but could not find anything and was disappointed.

The *Saptarshis* were personification of peace. In a soft tone, they said, “O hunter! How can you be so cruel to beat sages like us? You have treated us like animals. It appears that some misfortune is likely to befall you. Will you lead the rest of your life committing sins like this? Don’t you have any feeling of kindness? Are you made of a rock by *Brahma*, the creator? Wouldn’t you stop committing such sins at least from now? Alas! Not realizing that this life does not last forever and may end at any moment like a bubble, you are committing sins endlessly. We cannot imagine what misery is in store for you, as a result of these evil deeds. We pity you a lot”.

The hunter noted that in spite of his cruel behavior towards them, they were kind to him and appeared to be truly worried about his fate. He calmed down a bit and said, “*O Rishis!* Let me explain my cruel behavior. I am wandering in this forest and robbing the passersby only to give food and a decent life for my family members. Isn’t it a man’s religious duty to feed and

support his family? Why should I be condemned and how will I attract sin when I am only performing my duty?” he asked thus.

The sages understood that he is ignorant of what is right and what is wrong and decided to bless him with knowledge. To make him think properly, they said, “Consider this. You say that you do all this for the sake of your family members. Do you think your wife and children will share the misfortunes brought about by your sins? Or you alone will suffer on account of your sins?” The hunter was silent for a while. He started realizing a few things about himself.

He mellowed a bit, greeted them with *namaskara* and said, “O great sages! The village I live in is nearby. I will go home and get this doubt clarified from my family members. Stay here till I come back. If you go away you know what I will do.” Though he was repenting within, he could not stop threatening. It is difficult to realize one’s own mistakes and it is even more difficult to mend oneself. Yet, it is possible and the hunter proved it later.

The hunter walked towards his village, without hunting any animal on his way and reached home. He sat on a deer skin and brooded over his violent past, remembered how he caused pain and harm to others on so many occasions and worried a lot.

After a while, he calmed down, saw his wife pounding rice and called her. She came nearer, and

then he asked her, “O dear! I have a doubt. Do I have to bear the fruits of my sins, all by myself or will you have a share in them? What do you think? Do not hesitate to tell”. His wife smiled and said, “O my dear! Whatever you bring home, I cook and serve and do my duty. By what means you earn, is not my concern. I do not know whether you beg, borrow, steal or gamble to earn. Being so, how and why should I share the fruits of your sins?”

He was disappointed and yet he called his children and put the same question to them. They too told him that he was solely responsible for his sins. The hunter felt depressed. He thought, “Alas! Because of my love for my family members, I had committed many sins. Now I realize the truth. They say that they have nothing to do with my sins, but they are ready to enjoy whatever I earn. All the toil and hardships I face are of no use. I am disgusted with this family life and I can no longer live with them”. Brooding thus, he returned to the sages, having lost interest in all relations and pleasures of life.

He prostrated before the sages and said, “O divine souls! I was truly blessed the moment I saw you. You have come to me only to help me in crossing this ocean of worldly life which no longer holds any interest for me. Kindly initiate me into recitation of some divine *mantra*.”

The sages were pleasantly surprised to see him as a changed man and thought, “He might have been a

pious man in his previous life. Otherwise, he would not have such a wise intention. The *mantra* which consists of only two syllables, which is fit to be recited with devotion by all classes of people, which is able to deliver all good results that can be given by all *mantras*, which is pleasing to the ears and recitation of which does not require observance of any rigorous religious customs, and which is one of the most powerful of all *mantras* - that is, the name of *Sri Rama* - has to be given to him as *upadesa* (instruction). For a layman like him it should be given in a reverse form, that is ‘*mara, mara, mara,*’ instead of ‘*Rama, Rama, Rama*’.” With this idea, they told him to have a bath in the holy river and come back. The hunter followed their instructions. Casting their benevolent eyes on him, they said, “*O Kirata!* You are blessed. Recite ‘*mara, mara*’, and meditate upon this one *mantra*. We bless you to have undivided attention and concentration required for your penance (*tapas*). They blessed the *Kirata* and proceeded on their pilgrimage.

God blesses a man who truly repents his past sins and makes an ardent wish to reform himself into a pious man and sends suitable guidance to that individual in an appropriate form. That was what happened in this hunter’s story.

The hunter stopped taking non-vegetarian food, satisfied his hunger with whatever roots and tubers (*kanda, moola*) were available in the forest; he used to

have bath in the holy river *Tamasa* daily and recite the divine mantra given to him by the sages, with pure devotion. After a few days, his family members and relatives searched for him and found him in the middle of the thick forest, meditating upon the divine '*Rama nama*'.

“It appears that this man is possessed by some evil spirit. He is not responding to any of us. He used to wear peacock’s feather on his head and now his long hair is twisted into plaits. No longer he wears that '*kasturi tilakam*' on his forehead. Holy ash (vibhuti) now adorns his forehead. He always used to roam around the forest and hunt animals. Now he sits unmoving, like a stone. Somebody appears to have misguided this poor man and he no longer appears to belong to our tribe. He does not even seem to remember his own family members”, they thought.

They tried to distract him from his deep meditation. They called him aloud and said, “O poor creature! See what you have done to yourself! You are starving yourself and have become very lean. What purpose will it serve for a hunter like you, if you sit throughout the day murmuring to yourself? Who will take care of your family? Don’t you know that your children are eagerly waiting for you, hoping that you will bring home delicious meats, honey, fruits and other eatables? It is not proper for you to desert your friends and relatives in this manner and be lonely. Get up from this slumber

and let us go to our village. Who did advise you wrongly to deviate from your own dharma (code of conduct) and tradition?”

The *Kirata* heard them and smiled. He said to his family members, “Didn’t you say that you have nothing to do with my sins? Why did you come to me now? I cannot be deceived any longer. *Rama* is my father and *Sita* is my mother. The devotees of *Rama* are my relatives. Who are you and who am I? You are free to go wherever you like to. I do not have anything to do with you. The wife, sons, daughters, friends, relatives - all are like logs floating from different directions in a river, coming together for a while and then moving apart to go on one’s own course. All relations are short lived and temporary. God alone is the true, everlasting relation for all of us. I realized this truth. Kindly do not bother and allow me to meditate in peace. Please go back to your home”. His family members and relatives lost hope and returned to their village.

Later the *Kirata* collected a few *rudrakshas* (holy beads), made a rosary (*japamaala*) and using that he started reciting '*Ramanama*' all the time. As he was reciting it as '*mara, mara*' every day, gradually and unconsciously he started pronouncing it in its original form as '*Rama, Rama*'. The incessant recital of '*Ramanama*' opened his mind and consciousness for spiritual knowledge.

He started having visions. At first his inner mind's eye saw a black cloud, then a young prince holding bow and arrows, then a great mass of resplendent light that outshines the brightness of countless number of Suns and Moons put together. The bright vision blessed him with a supernatural, elating experience. He was experiencing great happiness, having visions of the lotus of his inner self. Like a child and like a drunk, he was happy in his own inner world, not caring for the happenings around in the physical world and was practicing higher forms of austere meditation.

Due to severity of his '*tapas*' (penance), flames emanated from his head and the world around him was filled with dark clouds of smoke. Sages, *Gandharwas*, Gods and men were afraid and wondered whether the world is coming to an end. *Indra*, the king of Gods, met sage *Narada* and asked, "O great sage! Some mysterious, terrifying hot smoke spread all over this world. Did Lord *Shiva* open his third eye and burn everything around into ashes? Or, is someone performing austere penance with an eye on my throne? Kindly tell me."

Narada smiled and said, "A hunter is meditating upon *Sri Rama* with fierce devotion. You are not going to lose anything because of him. Go home and relax." *Narada* tried to make *Indra* feel at ease.

Meditation gives immense powers. So, *Indra* was not convinced and was suspicious that the hunter

wanted to usurp his throne. He then remembered the tussle between *Rambha* and *Urvashi*, the divine beauties of heaven, as to who is better of them in the arts of music and dance. He summoned them and said, "Even Lord *Vishnu* cannot decide who is better of you two. Yet, I advise both of you to visit the sage, who is meditating on the banks of river *Tamasa*. Try to distract him from his meditation. Whoever is successful in doing so, is not only more talented in music and dance but also is more beautiful." He complimented them with golden jewelry and ornaments studded with precious stones. *Rambha* and *Urvashi* were pleased and they promised that they would distract the sage somehow.

Accompanied by gentle breeze, the bright moon, spring season and mesmerizing *manmatha* (Cupid), they crossed river *Ganga* and reached the banks of river *Tamasa*. They tented near the place where the *Kirata* was meditating and stayed there for the night. They got up early in the morning and went closer to the sage, acting as if they were plucking flowers and tried to attract his attention towards them.

It was not *vasanta rithu* (spring season) but *Indra's* magical powers ensured that the youthfulness and freshness of spring season reigned there. *Rambha* and *Urvashi*, accompanied by their maids, sang mellifluous rhymes. As their anklets were making pleasant sounds, they approached the sage, offered him fruits and

flowers and with folded hands and said, “O Moon-like Sage! We are fortunate to see you here. Kindly cast your benevolent eyes on us and bless us”. They requested him again and again to open his eyes but of no avail. The sage was unmoved by their gestures and continued to be in deep meditation. The divine beauties were surprised at the devotion of the sage and his radiance.

But they did not lose heart and started dancing before him. The sage could not be disturbed. All their efforts were in vain. *Rambha* understood that she could not distract him, felt shy and stood still. *Urvashi* was hopeful yet and she started playing veena before the sage. The music was divine, melodious and powerful that even deer stopped grazing and were listening attentively. It looked as if the music could melt even the mountains. Even the withered trees sprouted fresh leaves, but the sage did not move. He was devotion personified.

Urvashi too felt shy and said, “This sage proved that neither of us is truly great. We should learn from this mistake and should not try to disturb the meditation of any sage hereafter. We should forego our ego and jealousy and be together like dear sisters.” Later, they returned to heaven. The sage was unaware of the appearance and exit of the divine beauties and was immersed in meditation. Gradually anthills developed around him. Plants grew on those anthills. The sage

was performing austere meditation within that anthill and was as glorious as the divine soul residing in a body.

Two years passed. The seven sages, who initiated the *Kirata* into recitation of ‘*Ramanama*’, visited the *Himalayas* and returned to the banks of *Tamasa* river. As they arrived, they noticed that the forest wore a festive look with a lot of green trees, creepers and ponds. The trees were with flowers of all seasons emanating fragrance all around. The deer were playing with tigers. The peacocks were wearing serpents as necklaces and were dancing with joy. The baby elephants were playing with lion cubs. The rats and mongoose were roaming together. This is ‘*nirvairam*’ which means absence of animosity between enemies - even natural enemies. Scriptures say that, if the people inhabiting any place practice ‘*ahimsa*’ (non violence) absolutely, for a long time, that place attains such quality. The sages observed this and wondered, “A great sage might be meditating here now. This is the place where we were tortured by a hunter two years ago. Where did he go?”

Then they heard “*akashavani*”, the oracle from the skies, saying, “O great Sages! That man is meditating upon *Sri Rama* in that ant-hill.” The *Saptarshis* were pleasantly surprised.

Then the *Kirata* dismantled the anthill that grew around him and came out glowing, like the Sun rising

from the eastern hills. He bowed before the sages and said, “O divine sages! Your kindness made me pure,” and expressed his gratitude. The sages realized that over a period of time, the hunter recited the mantra given by them in its original form as ‘*Rama Rama*’ and praised the power and glory of recitation of ‘*Ramanama*’. Whoever recites ‘*Ramanama*’ with devotion, will be blessed with all merits and good things of life. “*O Kirata!* You will be blessed like devotees *Prahlada* and *Narada!* Be devoted to God and get liberated.” They blessed him thus and returned to their heavenly abodes. As he emerged from an anthill (*Valmikam*), the *Kirata* came to be known as ‘*Valmiki*’. He followed the instructions of ‘*Saptarshis*’ and continued his penance for *Sri Rama*.

It appears from the above story that *Valmiki* knew about ‘*Sri Rama*’ and was devoted to Him, even before he composed the great epic ‘*Ramayana*’. But the first *sarga* (chapter) of ‘*Ramayana*’ mentions that *Valmiki* learnt about ‘*Sri Rama*’ only from *Maharshi Narada*.

In *Ramayana*, it is narrated like this. *Valmiki* was performing penance in a hermitage on the banks of river *Tamasa*. Once, Sage *Narada* visited him. *Valmiki* served him with devotion and offered all that is due for the divine sage, and asked, “*O Maharshi!* Kindly tell me, who, in today’s world, is blessed with all good qualities, is valorous, a knower of dharma (code of conduct prescribed in scriptures based on the *Vedas*),

one who is with gratitude, one who always speaks truth, one with impeccable character, one who is kind towards all living beings, is able, beautiful, graceful and idealistic, one who is without any negative qualities like jealousy, anger, greed, pride etc., and one who glows with divine grace? I am eager to know about such a great individual.”

Sage *Narada* was pleased with the obedience and hospitality of *Valmiki* and benevolently replied thus:

“*O Maharshi!* A person with all the distinguished qualities you have mentioned, is not easy to be found in this world. However one individual fits your description. He is the son of King *Dasaratha* and queen *Kausalya* of *Ikshwaku* lineage. He is the epitome of all good qualities you have mentioned. He is a great warrior with good physique, is steadfast, intelligent, an orator, vanquisher of enemies, is devoted to the welfare of all people, illustrious, efficient and is loved by all. He is as sober as a sea, as courageous as *Himavanta*, as powerful as *Sri Mahavishnu*, appears as pleasant as the Moon, as fierce as the Fire God (*Agni*) when he is angry and as patient as the Mother Earth. He is the embodiment of *Satya* (truth) and *Dharma*.”

He then narrated the story of Lord *Rama* briefly and went on his way.

The next day *Valmiki*, accompanied by his disciple *Bharadwaja*, went to river *Tamasa* to take a bath.

Water in the river is as calm as a pious man's mind. *Valmiki* was looking at the forest and the scenic beauty of the nature around him with admiration. He saw a pair of *Krauncha* birds singing musically and roaming freely around. As *Valmiki* was happily watching those birds, a hunter came and shot the male bird with his arrow. The male bird fell on the ground and bled to death. The female bird wept sadly, watching her partner losing his life. *Valmiki* felt very sad watching this and he expressed his sorrow for the female bird in the form of a *sloka* (a *Sanskrit* verse in a meter - *Chandas*).

*Ma nishaada pratishthaam tvamagamah shashvatissamah
Yatkrauncha mithunadekam avadhih kamamohitam.*

“O Hunter (*Nishada*)! As you have killed the male bird who was sensually in love with the female bird, may you not have fame for a long time (or may lose fame)!”

Though it appears that the above *sloka* was meant for the hunter who killed the bird, it had seeds of story of Ramayana in it. With ‘*slesha*’ (a literal way of rearranging words in a sentence or a verse to give a different meaning) in action, the above verse also means-

“O *Vishnu*, the abode for *Lakshmi* (*Lakshmi* dwells in the heart of *Vishnu*)! As you have killed the sensuous Ravana, the husband of Mandodari, you will attain fame for a long time to come!”

Ravana was blessed with many supernatural powers by Lord *Brahma* and *Ravana* misused his powers to torment gods and sages. On the request of gods and sages, Lord *Vishnu* incarnated himself as *Sri Rama* and killed *Ravana*. *Rama* was held in high regard as he granted protection and peace for gods and sages. The above verse reflects this meaning too.

‘*Nishaada*’ may also mean *adharm*a or unrighteous conduct that disturbs the world. Therefore, the above verse may also mean:

“O *Adharma*! As you have separated the wife and husband, who were leading an ideal life of a responsible householder, you will not last long! (*adharm*a will get vanquished soon by *dharma*).

Musicologists are of the opinion, that the words in the *sloka* ‘*ma nishada...*’ appear to be set to a pattern of one *udatta swara* (high note) followed by one *anudatta swara* (low note) in the *raaga* that is set with *swaras* (*sa, ri, ga, ma, pa, da, ni*) resembling the sounds made by a *krauncha* bird.

That was the first *sloka* uttered spontaneously by *Valmiki* and it was set to a meter and is replete with meanings. *Valmiki* himself was surprised at his poetical response to the killing of a bird. He asked *Bharadwaja*, ‘What I uttered appears to be a *sloka*, set to a meter and consisting of specific number of syllables in each stanza. Doesn’t it appear to be like a *sloka* and is also

musical?” His disciple agreed. Pondering over the strange incident, he had bath and returned to ashram with his disciple.

After a while, *Brahma*, the creator appeared before *Valmiki*. *Valmiki* honored him with *arghya*, *padya* etc., and served him with devotion. He narrated the whole episode to *Brahma*, repeated the *sloka* he uttered then and expressed his surprise as to how he could recite such a *sloka*. *Brahma* smiled and told *Valmiki* that it was his will that made *Valmiki* utter a *sloka*. He said, ‘didn’t sage *Narada* narrate the story of *Sri Rama* briefly to you? Compose a *kavya* (a grand poetical composition) based on that story. Do not hesitate. You will know everything and with my blessings all aspects of the story of *Rama* will become evident to you. The *kavya* composed by you will have no falsehood in it. As long as the rivers and mountains will be there on the earth, the story of *Ramayana* will be told and retold and be popular. As long as *Ramayana* will be popular, you will stay in *Brahmaloka* (the abode of *Brahma*, the creator).’ Thus *Brahma* guided *Valmiki* to compose the *Ramayana* and disappeared.

Valmiki was surprised and elated too. His disciples recited his first ever *sloka* again and again and were happy. *Valmiki* took up the divine task of composing *Ramayana*. His purified self and *Brahma*’s grace enabled him to complete the task without any obstacle

and thus was born the first ever *kavya* in *Sanskrit* language, *Srimad Ramayana*.

Ramayana is one of the two great national epics of our country and is available in approximately 24,000 slokas. It is divided into six *kandas*, namely, *Bala kanda*, *Ayodhya kanda*, *Aranya kanda*, *Kishkindha kanda*, *Sundara kanda* and *Yuddha kanda* and these are further subdivided into thousands of chapters (*sargas*).

Ramayana is immensely popular even today and there are reasons for its popularity. No other *kavya* equals *Ramayana* in the exposition of *rasa* and *bhava* (emotions and feelings), that is, in exciting various emotions in the reader like *shanta*, *karuna*, *shringara*, *hasya*, *raudra*, *bheebhatsa*, *bhayanaka*, *veera*, *adbhuta* etc.(pathos, romance, heroism, humor, passion, fearsomeness etc.)

In the narration of the story, characterization, creation of emotional and soulful scenes, in explanation of morals and *dharma*, *Maharishi Valmiki* excelled and made *Ramayana* a model *kavya* for future poets. In the history of world literature, one cannot find more than one or two parallels for *Ramayana*.

The language used in *Ramayana* is as easy to understand as it is graceful in word and meaning. It is as graceful as it is latent with the powers of *mantras*. Learned scholars revealed that recitation of different

sargas of *Ramayana* will relieve us of miseries, ill luck and planetary afflictions (*graha dosha* brought about by our misdeeds in the past) and guide us on the path of morally correct behaviour.

Valmiki rarely used compound words that are difficult to understand. He always employed simple, apt, melodious, harmonious and easy to understand words to express even complex issues. One need not be a great scholar to understand his *kavya*. Any person with literary interest can understand and enjoy reading *Ramayana*. Even those who do not understand *Sanskrit* also recite *Ramayana* as they find the experience to be uplifting, morally and spiritually! *Ramayana* bestows peace and happiness in this life and beyond this life.

Valmiki was an ardent admirer of nature and beauty. His graphic description of all elements of nature like rivers, mountains, rains, seasons, forests, gardens, great palaces, hermitages, individual appearances- point to his child like wonder at nature. He had an eye for detail in everything. His narration of events, including war, is so picturesque that the reader gets a vivid idea of the happenings. His depiction of human emotions is excellent and incomparable. He adorned his *kavya* with many beautiful *alankaras* (literary means of decorative description) that critics and laymen alike, enjoy his work. Simplicity evolves from higher wisdom. The

analogies (*upamanas*) he used in descriptions are very simple, easy to identify with and are highly creative. He influenced the poets of subsequent generations like *Kalidasa*, *Bharavi* and many others, with his fluent style. Above all, his love and compassion for fellow human beings and his concern for the material and spiritual upliftment of society on ideological lines is reflected throughout the *kavya*. His ideas are gentle, graceful and pious promoting welfare of all.

Scholars say that a *kavya* bestows aesthetic pleasure, wealth, fame and worldly wisdom, purges evils and misfortunes, teaches morally acceptable behavior and guides men towards enlightenment. *Kavya* advises and encourages us to lead a pious life, it is said, in the manner like a loving wife advises her husband.

There are many *kavyas* and all *kavyas* do not fulfill all of the above objectives. *Valmiki's Ramayana* is the foremost *kavya* that accomplished the goal of a good *kavya* and continues to influence Indians, generation after generation.

Ramayana will always be held in high esteem for its presentation of an idealistic way of life. *Ramayana* establishes the idea of an ideal householder (*grihastha*)'s life. The epic teaches an individual about how to be an ideal son, an affectionate brother, a trustworthy friend, a loving wife, a doting and guiding

mother, an ideal king, a responsible citizen, and a responsible *guru* (teacher) and an obedient *sishya* (student). It promotes friendliness and affection among all members of a family, of a society and of a nation. It guides an individual as to how to respond to pain or pleasure in different situations of life. It presents a picture of comparison between *Rama* and *Ravana* and advises an individual to lead life like *Rama*.

The strength of *Ramayana* lies in the characterization. *Sri Rama* and *Sita* are the protagonists of this epic. They are considered role models for all, in leading their lives.

Sri Rama, the *avataara* (incarnation) of *Sri Maha Vishnu*, declared more than once in *Ramayana* that he considered himself an ordinary human being. He faced more difficulties and trials in his life than any ordinary human. He was highly principled and he sacrificed the power and glory of the kingdom to keep the promise made by his father *Dasaratha* to *Kaikeyi*. He maintained the honour of word given by his father even after his father's demise. Obedience to his father (*pitru vaakya paripalana*) and leading life with one wife (*eka patni vrata*) were two of the many principles he staunchly stood for. He was praised as personification of *dharma-Ramo vighrahan dharmah* by *Maricha*, the follower of *Ravana* and the enemy of *Sri Rama*. *Valmiki* himself was a great devotee of *Sri Rama* and we find praise of *Sri Rama*

in *Ramayana*, as frequently as one breathes air. *Sita* or *Janaki* is affectionately referred to as '*Sita mata*', and is regarded as an epitome of an ideal '*Bharata Nari*' (Indian woman) and of all goodness that can be found in a woman. Supporting her husband in all situations of life, bearing with all the difficulties, was her ideal. It was her ardent love for husband that made her renounce all the pleasures of a kingdom and accompany her husband to the thick forest. She spent nearly nine months as a captive at *Asokavana* in Lanka, always remembering her husband. *Ramayana* is therefore described as '*Sitayaah charitam mahath*' - the great story of *Sita*. Both *Sita* and *Rama* conferred enduring honour upon the epic.

Valmiki sketched all the characters of *Ramayana* with equal devotion and detail. *Dasaratha's* intense love for his son, *Rama's* devotion to his father and *dharma*, *Lakshmana's* devotion to elder brother and *Bharata's* sacrifice, *Anjaneya's* devotion to his master and his supreme acts of valour, the strength of *Vali*, the power and glory of *Ravana*, *Mandodari's* devotion to her husband, *Taara's* political acumen, *Sita's* ideal womanhood and love for her husband, the demonic activities of *Rakshasas*, *Vibhishana's sattva guna* (pious nature), *Sugriva's* steadfastness as a friend, *Manthara's* maleficent nature, *Kaikeyi's* unstable, gullible nature, *Shurpanakha's* passion, *Vishwamitra's* unstinted efforts to attain enlightenment were all

depicted so graphically that the characters of Ramayana are household names even today. The diligent way in which even the 'not-so-important' characters were treated, surprises the avid reader.

'*Na gayatryaah param mantram*' - *Gayatri* mantra is regarded as the most powerful mantra. *Gayatri* means 'mantra that protects the singer or reciter of that mantra.' There are twenty four syllables in *Gayatri mantra*. *Mantras* are 'seen' or obtained by revelation by *Rishis* or divine sages. Sage *Vishwamitra* is the 'seer' (*Drashta*) of *Gayatri mantra*. It is said that *Valmiki* took letters of this mantra and at the rate of one thousand slokas for each letter of *Gayatri mantra*, he composed Ramayana in 24,000 slokas. It is our tradition that only those who are initiated into *Gayatri mantra*, through *upanayanam* (initiation ceremony) are entitled to recite *Gayatri* and others are not; whereas all can freely recite *Ramayana*, comprising of the twenty four syllables of *Gayatri mantra*. All of us can get the benefits of reciting *Gayatri mantra* from recitation of *Ramayana*.

Srimad Ramayana is not only famous as a great epic but is also revered as a religious holy book. *Srivaishnavas* (devotees who believe in the supremacy of *Sri Maha Vishnu* over other gods) praise it as 'dirgha saranagati (prolonged refuge).' Tormented by *Ravana*, the gods visited *vaikuntha*, and prayed to Lord *Vishnu* and requested him to kill *Ravana* and

protect them. *Sri Maha Vishnu* promised to kill *Ravana* and asked them to wait for some more time. This is the first *saranagati* or 'coming for shelter' in *Ramayana*. Later on, as the story unfolds, *Vishwamitra*, *Lakshmana*, *Bharata*, *Ahalya*, *Sugriva*, *Sabari*, *Guha*, *Sri Anjaneya* all of them seek '*saranu*' (refuge or shelter) of *Sri Rama*. *Sri Rama* blessed all of them. Lastly, *Vibhishana* sought shelter from *Sri Rama*. Even though the individual who sought shelter was from enemy's camp, *Sri Rama* gave shelter unhesitatingly. This is the mark of *Sri Rama* being an incarnation of God Himself.

Of all the characters of *Ramayana*, including those of the protagonists, the character of *Hanuman* holds special importance. *Hanuman* is introduced in *Kishkindhakanda*, without any fanfare, as one of the four ministers of the king-in-exile, *Sugriva*. However, from then onwards, the character is given such subtle yet significant treatment that it assumes divine proportion in *Sundarakanda* and *Yuddhakanda*. He was instrumental in the formation of a friendly pact between *Rama* and *Sugriva*. He helped *Sugriva* to regain his kingdom and brought back happiness to *Sri Rama* by finding *Sita* in *Lanka*.

He flew across the ocean of length of one hundred *yojanas* and reached *Lanka*. He roamed all around *Lanka* in a miniscule form due to his *anima siddhi*

(the magical power of becoming very tiny- as tiny as a grain of sand) and at last found *Sita* in *Asoka vanam* (garden); assessed the strengths and weaknesses of *Ravana*, the king of demons, displayed his own prowess by setting *lanka* on fire; announced the most awaited news of *Sita* to *Rama* and *Lakshmana* and rekindled their hopes; brought *sanjivani* twice to protect the life of *Lakshmana* in the war field; declared the return of *Rama* from exile to *Bharata* and prevented him from entering into fire to end his life. *Hanuman* played such a key role in *Ramayana* that he is praised as '*Ramayana mahamala ratna*' (the most precious stone in the garland called *Ramayana*). He was born of Lord *Siva*'s divinity and is therefore worshipped by *shaivaites*. As he is the devotee of Lord *Rama*, the incarnation of *Maha Vishnu* he is worshipped by *vaishnavaites* too. Thus, Hanuman is the favorite god of followers of different paths within Hinduism.

Hanuman is the epitome of wisdom, supreme strength, perfect control over senses, excellent executive ability, spotless, non-controversial character, fearlessness, heroic valour, good health, industriousness (never lazy), reputation, truth and clarity in speech and supernatural abilities. He is selfless and has no wants. He is a yogi, a pure devotee always meditating on *Rama* and is always pleased to be at any place wherever and whenever *Rama* is praised.

The story of such a magnificent personality is a part of *Ramayana*, making it even more religious.

To say that *Ramayana* is an important milestone in the history of *Sanskrit* literature is to repeat what is obvious. In fact, the theme of *Ramayana* and Lord *Rama* are a part of our national psyche. *Ramayana* has been retold many times in all Indian languages in the form of a *Kavya*, *drama*, *harikatha* (musical narration of mythological fables), *champu* (a form of *kavya* in prose and verse) and songs and is popular in every nook and corner of our country. It had also been translated into many foreign languages, owing to its distinction and popularity.

All of us who are proud of Indian culture and traditions should always recite *Ramayana*, imbibe the good values of life presented therein and put them to practice in our lives. *Ramayana* is a celebration of life in its full glory. *Ramayana* is about leading a happy and contented life in a morally acceptable way, in spite of trials and tribulations. It is about establishing the importance of 'family' as the basic unit of a society. It glorifies affection and love among all members of a family. It idealizes defending the virtuous and punishing the evildoers. It also teaches us to forgive and forget a wrong-doer, in the face of repentance. It advocates disciplined adherence to *dharma* and maintenance of law and order in social and public life. It mirrors the

moral responsibilities of a ruler and the ruled. It counsels us about the need to overcome selfishness and other vices of life. It is about self respect and love for one's family and country.

Ramayana is a revelation of what a great soul *Valmiki* was, and of his poetical abilities, wisdom, study of human psychology from all angles, his narrative felicity and clear presentation of dharma through various characters. All Indians are, indeed, indebted to such a great poet and visionary.

With folded hands, let us bow to **Maharshi Valmiki** :

*Kujantam Rama Ramethi madhuram madhuraaksharam
Aruhya kavithashakham vande Valmiki kokilam.*

I bow to the cuckoo called *Valmiki*, who is Singing 'Rama, Rama' melodiously in beautiful syllables, sitting on the branches of poetry.

*Valmiker munisimhasya kavithavanacharinah
Shrunvan Rama kathaadam ko na yathi paraam gathim.*

A lion by name *Valmiki* is narrating the story of *Rama* through his roar. How can anyone, who heard that roar, not attain liberation (*moksha*)? It means that whoever reads *Valmiki's Ramayana* will certainly be blessed to get *moksha* (liberation).

Om tat sat