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RAMACHANDRA**  
P. Sankaranarayanan

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BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN, BOMBAY

आ नो भद्राः क्रतवो यन्तु विश्वतः।

*Let noble thoughts come to us from every side*

—Rigveda, I. 89. i

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**SRI RAMACHANDRA**

By

**P. SANKARANARAYANAN**

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# SRI RAMACHANDRA

P. SANKARANARAYANAN

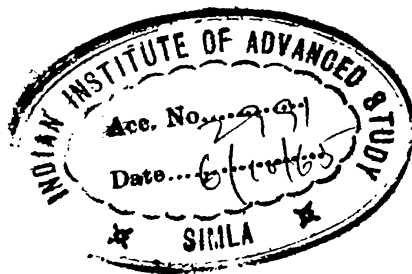


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## GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

The Bhavan's Book University volumes had rare success. About a million and a quarter volumes have been sold in about eleven years. However, there is an insistent demand for the stray volumes which the Bhavan has issued from time to time at a lower price. In order to meet this demand, it has been decided to issue the new One-Rupee Book University Series side by side with the Book University Series.

I hope this new One-Rupee Series will have the same good fortune which the other Series had, of being useful to those who are interested in the fundamental values of Indian Culture, and of reaching out to a wider audience.

Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan,  
Chowpatty Road, Bombay-7.  
*Vijaya Dashami*  
September 28, 1963

K. M. MUNSHI

## PUBLISHERS' NOTE

The following pages contain the Rt. Hon'ble V. S. Srinivasa Sastri Memorial Lecture delivered by the author to the Madras Sanskrit Academy in 1950 and re-delivered at the Annual Celebrations of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan at Bombay in December 1963.

The author makes a reverent study of Sri Ramachandra bringing out the inwardness of that incarnation and delineates Him as the embodiment of Truth, Goodness and Beauty—*Satyam, Sivam* and *Sundaram*—the triple expression of our great culture.

“WHEN MAN WALKS TOWARDS GOD,  
GOD RUNS TOWARDS HIM”.



॥ श्रीः ॥

श्री रामचन्द्रपरब्रह्मणे नमः

श्री सद्गुरुचरणाभ्यां नमः

---

SRI RAMA NAVAMI is observed in every part of India and wherever Hindus live as a sacred day to celebrate the nativity of God devoutly believed to have taken shape in human form. It is a national religious festival among us. On this day, every year we renew our spiritual inspiration by contemplating an exemplar of high resolve and noble action. When the biography of such a one is read in the record of mellifluent simplicity in which word and meaning are in such perfect unison that the divine Spirit delights to dwell in their confines to edify and ennoble the reader, one willingly tenders once again one's tribute of joyful gratitude to the illustrious bard who has immortalised himself by this immortal work. The rapturous language of the great poet renders its theme a living presence. It invests the golden petals of Sri Ramachandra's life with an ethereal fragrance wafted through the centuries by the dulcet breath of accordant chords that set it to marvellous music at their father's sacrificial court. That music still rings in humanity's ear delighting the mind and thrilling the heart.

तौ चापि मधुरं व्यक्तं स्वचित्तायतनिःस्वनम् ।

तन्त्रीलयवदत्यर्थं विश्रुतार्थमगायताम् ॥

ह्लादयत्सर्वगात्राणि मनांसि हृदयानि च ।

श्रोत्राश्रयमुखं गेयं तद्बभौ जनसंसदि ॥ I.4. 33-34

Through the ages, the Ramayana has been the religious text-book of the common man among the Hindus. The old and the young, the learned and the unlettered, the wise and the simple, the critical and the credulous have all derived from it, each after his manner and in his measure, inspiration, knowledge and entertainment. The Vedas are infinite, archaic in form and abstruse in content; the Vedanta is terse and abstract often trying the intellect and tiring the heart. These, surely, are not for those not appropriately qualified. The Mahabharata is vast like a sea without a shore. The Bhagavata is an amalgam of metaphysics and mysticism and its long metres oft baffle the utterance and challenge the understanding. The Bhagavad Gita is the most 'elusive' book which has been interpreted in a variety of ways and it is not for the uninitiated in the yogic arts of work, worship and wisdom. It is only he of chastened mind, the **सुधीः** who can drink and relish the quintessence milked from the Upanishads by the divine Cowherd. But, the Ramayana stands in a class by itself. Sublime in its thoughts, yet simple in their expression, its sweet cadences invite the novice in the sacred tongue to lisp its numbers with a rare delight and soon beguile him to a mastery of the language equalled only by the transport of the spirit that accompanies that perfection. Easy to read and easier still to understand, through the eye and through the ear, the Ramayana makes a direct appeal to the heart of man, so direct and penetrating as to make even the most hard-boiled intellectual among us, bent only on literary appreciation, confess: "There is not a page in it which does not bring tears to my eyes".

This is an experience not peculiar to the late Sri V. S. Srinivasa Sastri who made this confession, but it is verified and verifiable in every one of us, whether we read the great Itihasa in the privacy of our room or listen to it in public expositions. Alone among our literary treasures, the Ramayana makes at once an individual and a mass appeal. It annexes the mind of man by laying siege to his heart. Let the most uncompromising unbeliever in the things of the spirit supremely centred in himself but read through its pages with patience and persistence, ere he comes to the end of it, he will discover himself alchemised from scoffing lead into prayerful gold. To read the Ramayana is to get converted to ways of righteous life and devout worship. If Divinity is equated with the eternal verities of Truth, Goodness and Beauty, the story of Him who embodied them in Himself to unrivalled perfection must surely transmute intellectual assent into moral consent, investing the reader with high resolve and inviting him to noble endeavour. From wonder to worship, it is a natural and inevitable sequence. So charged is the work with spiritual potential that every Hindu believes that to listen to even a quarter of a sloka or to a word of it will liquidate even the most heinous sin. The reading of the epic has acquired the sanctity of a sacrament and is willingly observed as a daily duty made delightfully easy by the inspired rhetoric of its glorious composition. Even as Sita is inseparable from Rama, the Ramayana cannot be thought of apart from Valmiki. Lost in admiration of a work of art, one is prone to forget the artist. It is most appropriate, therefore, to make reverential salute to the first and greatest of the poets

of all time in admiration and thankfulness for the priceless treasure that he has bequeathed to us.

## II

The Rt. Hon'ble Srinivasa Sastri broke new ground in his *Lectures on the Ramayana* divesting the epic of its religious associations. Being a thorough and honest intellectual with nothing of the sentimental and make-believe in his nature, he studied it from a human angle. He fixed the attention of his audience 'on the main characters as human beings that play their parts as human beings in circumstances that assail and confront human beings at every turn'.\* According to him, 'it is not essential for the understanding of the story or to profit by it that one should believe in the divinity of Rama'. To Mr. Sastri, the Ramayana is not a religious text-book, but a human document. But to the generality of Hindus, the work has always remained a sacred Itihasa dealing with an avatara of God and intended to implant in its readers feelings of piety and devotion that usually go with the religious attitude. To most of us, it is literally true that

वेदवेद्ये परे पुंसि जाते दशरथात्मजे ।

वेदः प्रचेतसादासीत् साक्षाद्रामायणात्मना ॥

'When the Supreme Being to be known by the Vedas was born in the world as son to Dasaratha, the Vedas themselves took shape as the Ramayana'.

To a mind religiously inclined and steeped in tradi-

\* This and the quotations that follow are from Sri Sastri's *Lectures on the Ramayana*.

tion, there is little to be gained, but much that would be lost were it to study the Ramayana purely as a literary master-piece, as only a marvellous portrayal of the life of a superior person. But the epic had a different orientation for Mr. Sastri's understanding. He could not persuade himself that Sri Rama was divine. 'Robbed' as he was 'of that faith', 'yet', says he, 'I was able to get for the building of my own nature more from the Ramayana than many another student of that book who believes in the divinity of that character, but is not able from some reason or other to take in the real spirit in which the lives were lived'. He concedes, however, the profound influence for good that the great narrative exerts on its sincere students, edification of the mind, sympathy of heart and ennobling of the spirit that are surely wrought by it. The objective of religious approach is not different. Only the edifice is raised on another foundation of fervent faith within the scaffolding of devotional worship. Interposing his critical intellect, Mr. Sastri tries to convey that Valmiki was a marvellous biographer and the Ramayana itself a wondrous story with a super-excellent, albeit suffering, hero. And, Mr. Sastri avers that, by this approach, we shall lose nothing which will conduce to chasten our heart and exalt our spirit, but that our regard for the verities of life will be deepened by such rational understanding, without liability to lapse by precarious faith. In this context, we must remind ourselves of the declaration of Sri Krishna:

यो यो यां यां तनुं भक्तः श्रद्धयाऽचितुमिच्छति ।  
तस्य तस्याचलां श्रद्धां तामेव विदधाम्यहम् ॥

*Bhagavad Gita 7-21*

‘In whatever form one chooses to worship  
Me with earnestness and faith, I confirm  
him in that faith’.

Howsoever you proceed, you ultimately reach the same goal. The literary and critical approach to the Ramayana may differ in its manner and in its content from that of religious sanctity; but, both unite at the end as they did in Mr. Sastri’s final lecture to celebrate Sri Rama’s ‘real coronation in our hearts’ enthroning Him there ‘to govern our thoughts and regulate our lives’. Reaching the destination, we do not thereafter quarrel over the vehicle that took us to it. For, that is a matter of preference and capacity. The lessons of Sri Rama’s life are available as much to those who do not accept his divinity as to those who accept him as such.

And yet, one may be sure that almost every one would love to dwell on Sri Rama and Sita as divine personages though for that reason Mr. Sastri’s view need not be condemned as heretic or sacrilegious. Mr. Sastri admits that ‘throughout the story, Valmiki himself represents Sri Rama as an avatar of God.’ At the very commencement, it is clearly mentioned that Lord Vishnu decided to incarnate in the world and condescended to adopt king Dasaratha as His father.

इत्येतद्वचनं श्रुत्वा सुराणां विष्णुरात्मवान् ।  
पितरं रोचयामास तदा दशरथं नृपम् ॥ I.16.8

Hearing these words of the devas, Vishnu chose Dasaratha to be his father at his incarnation.

The superhuman exploits that He performed even as a lad of less than sixteen summers, killing a giantess, vanquishing a couple of fierce Rakshasas, reclaiming a penitent and snapping a mighty bow that was the despair of elder warriors bespoke Sri Rama a God whose true nature was veiled from mortal eyes, but was known to Viswamitra and Vasishtha and to others like them who were pre-eminent tapasvins, तपसि स्थिताः. Among the noble women of the Ramayana, only two knew Sri Rama as God, one by intuition, the other by inference. The artless, but shrewd Sumitra, who alone amidst the good ladies of Dasaratha's court retained her equanimity at the time of Sri Rama's exile, speaks of Him to Kausalya and says:

सूर्यस्यापि भवेत्सूर्यो ह्यग्नेरग्निः प्रभोः प्रभुः ।  
 श्रियः श्रीश्च भवेदग्ऱ्या कीर्त्याः कीर्तिः क्षमाक्षमा ॥  
 दैवतं दैवतानां च भूतानां भूतसत्तमः । II. 44. 15-16

Mandodari, Ravana's most virtuous queen, weeping over her mighty lord's prostrate body, bewails into his unhearing ears that for a long time since she had unmistakable proofs of his victor's transparent divinity:

यदैव च जनस्थाने राक्षसैर्बहुभिर्वृतः ।  
 खरस्तव हतो भ्राता तदैवासौ न मानुषः ॥ VI. 114.9.  
 यदैव वानरैर्घोरैर्बद्धः सेतुर्महार्णवे ।  
 तदैव हृदयेनाहं शङ्के रामममानुषम् ॥ 11  
 व्यक्तमेष महायोगी परमात्मा सनातनः ।  
 अनादिमध्यनिधनो महतः परमो महान् ॥  
 तमसः परमो धाता शङ्खचक्रगदाधरः ।  
 श्रीवत्सवक्षा नित्यश्रीरजय्यः शाश्वतो ध्रुवः ॥

मानुषं वपुरास्थाय त्रिष्णुः सत्यपराक्रमः ।  
 सर्वैः परिवृतो देवैर्वानरत्वमुपागतैः ॥  
 सर्वलोकेश्वरः साक्षाल्लोकानां हितकाम्यया ।  
 सराक्षसपरीक्षारं हतवांस्त्वां महाद्युतिः ॥ 14-17

To the assembled celestials who reminded Him of His true divinity, Sri Rama replies आत्मानं मानुषं मन्ये which is as much as to say: Though I am God Himself, yet, in this avatar, I am *acting* as a man whereby, I stoop to conquer human hearts and annex human souls. It looks quite convincing therefore, and surely it is very comforting to look on Sri Rama as an incarnation of God whose ostensible purpose was *sadhuparitrana*m through *dush-tanigraha*, but whose real and primary object was *dharmasamsthapana* in man's mind and heart.

### III

There is a special feature of Sri Ramavatara which is noteworthy. Every avatar was undertaken to punish the wicked and reward the virtuous. God took diverse shapes suited to the needs of each crisis. But these several avatars, Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, Vamana, Narsimha and the rest and even Krishna-vatara that was to come later were all short skirmishes against personified Evil, little 'police actions' swiftly accomplished in the twinkling of an eye by a God unassailed by an opposing arrow. The forms that He took in many cases were unhuman, incapable of tender feelings and emotions, and where He assumed human shape, He either contracted it to dwarfish proportions or made it co-extensive with the cosmos. There was no psychological problem or ethical situation in them. Whatever He

said or did in them all was so superhuman अतिमानुष्यम् that the mere man marvels at it in bewilderment and awe. But the Ramavatara was different. Here dushtanigraha was a long and laborious process. The Avatar and His allies (and, strangely enough, despite His omnipotence, He had to seek their aid), had themselves to endure misfortunes and sorrows, travails of the heart and tribulations of the flesh quite from the start till even after the final victory over Evil that it almost looks as if, cloyed by the surfeit of joy and peace in His transcendent abode, God took human shape resolving to live, by way of change, the life of a mortal and drain the cup of human suffering to the lees. Verily, there is a strain of Sophoclean tragedy running through the Ramayana, a tale of recurrent disappointment and frustration in which destiny seems to score against divinity itself. When, happy in his ideal sons, the doting king began to think of their marriage, in comes a Rishi who blocks further thought of it. The eagerly-looked-for coronation which raised exultant hopes in every breast is not to be. The darling of His people of whom they said:

इच्छामो हि महाबाहुं रघुवीरं महाबलम् ।

गजेन महतायान्तं रामं छत्रावृताननम् ॥ II.2.22

had to walk to His wife with halting steps ह्रिया किञ्चिदद्वाङ्मुख. And later,

यं यान्तमनुयाति स्म चतुरङ्गबलं महत् ।

तमेकं सीतया सार्धमनुयाति स्म लक्ष्मणः ॥ II.33.6

Kaikeyi herself is deprived of the pleasure of seeing her son seated on a throne that she had wrested from her hen-pecked husband. Unwillingly had Bharata to agree to a compromise which defeated

his resolve to bring Sri Rama back to Ayodhya. The anticipated joys of unbroken silvan life in anchorite fashion which Rama eagerly looked forward to, augmented by sharing them with Sita and ministered to by Lakshmana were dashed to the ground, causing him great anguish. Robbed of His wife and facing a mighty foe of extraordinary prowess, Rama was disconsolate to see His faithful brother prostrate under Ravana's deadly weapon. सीतायाश्चरितं महत् is quite appositely called by Mr. Sastri 'the tragedy of Sita'. Her *duhkha param-para* seems to have no end. In the midst of monsters and monkeys, with none of the human kind and of her own sex to stand by her and console her, and of her most cruel fate to hear from her own lord and husband an accusation which He knew, as well as she, was false in every particular. As if to cleanse herself from the taint and ignominy of that undeserved indictment and to burn out of her ears the sound of the most base and unworthy suggestion to stay with Lakshmana or Bharata, with Sugriva or Vibhishana, she decided to immolate herself in consuming fire. The सहधर्मचरी who was declared to be छायेवानुगता सदा and who was defiance at Ravana saying अनन्या राघवेणाहं भास्करेण प्रभा यथा had to undergo the pangs of physical separation from her lord again and yet again in her sequestered life. Who can read unmoved the plaintive words in which she bewails her lot in the Uttara-kanda:

सायकेयं तमुन्नं वृष्टा दुःखाय लक्ष्मण ।  
 धात्रा यस्यास्तया मेऽद्य दुःखमूर्तिः प्रहश्यते ॥

Who so dead as will not feel anguished over the tragic irony of her predicament conveyed to her lord in Kalidasa's words:

उपस्थितां पूर्वमवास्य लक्ष्मीं वनं मया सार्धमसि प्रपन्नः ।  
तदास्पदं प्राप्य तयातिरोषात्सोढास्मि न त्वद्भुवने वसन्ती ॥

*Raghuvamsa xiv-63*

'Years ago, when Rajyalakshmi came to consort thee on the Ikshvaku throne, thou didst spurn her and went to the woods with me. Now that she has got thee again secure in her possession, she takes angry revenge on me and will not bear to let me bide with thee'. Even Lakshmana was not to be exempt from having to taste the bitter cup. He, who always endeavoured to act up to his mother's parting behest: रामं दशरथं विद्धि मां विद्धि जनकात्मजाम्, and knew not to recognise any of Sita's jewels save the anklets on her feet, when he heard the fatal accusation, तप्तनाराचसन्निभम्

यस्त्वमस्यामवस्थायां भ्रातरं नाभिपत्स्यसे ।

इच्छसि त्वं विनश्यन्तं रामं लक्ष्मण मत्कृते ॥

लोभान्मम कृते नूनं नानुगच्छसि राघवम् ।

व्यसनं ते प्रियं मन्ये स्नेहो भ्रातरि नास्ति ते ॥ III. 45.6-7

in his hapless impotence, he had only to pass it on to the verdice of the denizens of the forest, crying to them उपशृण्वन्तु मे सर्वे साक्षिभूता वनेचराः. That same Lakshmana, who declared भ्राता भर्ता च बन्धुश्च पिता च मम राघवः and who, not long before, was embraced by his brother who spoke in loving gratitude:

भावज्ञेन कृतज्ञेन धर्मज्ञेन च लक्ष्मण ।

त्वया पुत्रेण धर्मात्मा न संवृत्तः पिता मम ॥, III. 15.29

in utter disregard of every extenuation, was told with relentless severity न हि ते परितुष्यामि त्यक्त्वा यदसि मैथिलीम्,

and when one reads the terrible charge couched in those four deadly words नाकरोः शासनं मम '*thou hast disobeyed me*', one pictures with choking grief Lakshmana writhing under the undeserved lash with inexpressible woe.

#### IV

All this was as it should be. It was all in keeping with the real spirit and purpose of an incarnation in which the Infinite determines to finitise itself. When God becomes man, He must live man's life, subjecting Himself to the ebb and flow of human fortune. It is usual to speak of God as transcendent and immanent. A transcendent God is outside the cosmic process. He exists in solitary splendour and lone perfection. On such a view, the Divine is inaccessible and incomprehensible, and the chasm between God and man must ever remain wide and open. But there is another meaning to transcendence. It connotes that the temporal process does not and cannot exhaust God's activity. It is a distinction of value or of quality, not a discontinuance of existence. It refers to the infinite greatness and richness of the superior Life as compared with anything as yet appropriated by finite creature. The depths of nature of a transcendent God must be beyond our powers to know or express with mundane images or analogies. At once the source and sustenance of the cosmic system, He cannot be within the system as an individual member. The theory of immanence, on the other hand, speaks of an omnipresent God permeating and activating every object of the world, living and lifeless as its

inner ruler, as the active and sustaining ground of all interaction between finite centres of experience. Immanence of God in the world guarantees communion with Him which will be impossible if He were only transcendent. The illuminative presence of God in every particle of the universe lights the path which the devotee can traverse with understanding steps.

Yet, transcendence and immanence do not preclude each other. Aristotle once said: 'If it be asked in which of two possible ways the nature of the universe contains the good and the best, whether as something separate existing independently itself or as the order of its parts, the answer is that, as in the case of an army, it must be in both ways at once. For, the excellence of an army lies in its order, and it is separately embodied in the General. It lies, however, more in the latter than in the former; for, the General does not exist because of the order, but the order because of him'. Likewise, God is both immanent and transcendent. He is in every part of the world and still apart from it. A purely transcendent God will be lost *to* the world and a merely immanent one will be lost *in* it.

The religious predicament is essentially a human predicament. Man who is self-conscious and stirred by discontent needs God to enter into living relation with Him, to become more than man. Born in the nexus between man and God, religion grows in content and volume by the fact and function of their mutual approach. *The life of God in the soul of man is religion in action.* Man turns his thoughts to God in contemplation and bends his

will to Him in His service to discover God for himself and to be united with Him. God, on His part, seeks to reveal Himself to man in ways not available in His far-off transcendent abode.

When man raises his hand seeking to be lifted from his finitude, the Infinite that is God must clasp it in *man's sphere*, in the region in which *man dwells*. He must come *down* to man's level and elevate him out of his littleness by precept and by example. God seeks man as much as man seeks God. As the Prophet of Islam so truly observed, 'when man walks towards God, God runs towards him'. God has no meaning to us out of relation to our lives. The supreme Absolute takes on the lineaments of visible God to give Himself to man and to receive from him the answering tribute of love and adoration. The difference between salvation and saviourship lies in this that by the process of salvation man *sheds* his finitude, but, in playing the saviour, God has to *assume* that finitude. In so doing, He shares the life of the finite creatures bearing with them the whole burden of their finite way of life, its sorrows and its sufferings. The *kinship* of God to man is as essential to religion as His *kingship* over him. The unperfected soul can experience the reality of intercourse with the Divine only if and when it is established to begin with, *in its world*, in ways that it has known and can understand. For man to receive God's stimulus and to make the proper response, God must become a Person in flesh and blood, human in His divinity, yet divine in His humanity. To us endowed with reason and faith, capable of high resolve and earnest

endeavour, yearning for a perfection of which we have distant visions and indistinct intimations, a God who does not enter into relation with the humans of the earth will have no more significance than He has to stocks and stones, to trees and beasts.

To infinitise man, God has to finitise Himself. Such an Infinite-in-finite is the Incarnation, the God-in-man who, of His own sweet will and in His abundant grace *steps down* into the world and mixes with mortals to draw them to Himself. The effectiveness of an incarnation is commensurate with the perfection of this self-finitising of God whereby He even forgets, as it were, His divinity, lives, moves and has His being among men subjecting Himself to the storm and stress of mortal life, its successes and its failures, its allurements and its achievements. He must get out of His divinity and think Himself to be but a man. He must be able to say आत्मानं मातृषु मन्ये underlining every implication of that statement. Looked at that way, it would appear that, different as it may be from received opinion, Sri Rama was a *Poornavatara* in a sense that the other avatars and even that of Sri Krishna were not. In every one of the earlier avatars, God was a visitant to the world and came whenever the ascendancy of vice made it imperative, like a suzerain monarch going to a feudatory state to quell an insurrection or destroy a rebel with all the panoply of His omnipotence which He often veiled from common gaze. He then returned to His Heaven satisfied that all's well with the world as inequity had been rooted out and right installed again. In none of them had God to *share* the joys

and sorrows of mortal kind. When He appeared as Sri Krishna, He did, it is true, enter into human relations of various sorts and shades, as child and playmate, as lover and beloved, as friend and teacher, as counsellor and warrior, as comrade and charioteer, as brother and benefactor, as prince and pastoral. Possibly, there was no manner of human bond that He did not constrain Himself in to enjoy fellowship with mortals. Starting His earthly life as a changeling and at the dead of night, He practised the thief's art to perfection. From stealing butter in His own home, He progressed to decoy women's hearts from other homes. In all this, He *enjoyed* human fellowship. Never, not even once by way of sample, did He *suffer* the smallest of the sorrows of life and He always received votive offerings, and tributes of love, veneration and worship. All attempts to encompass His death were foiled. Danger found Him more dangerous than itself. No occasion had he like ordinary man to experience the humiliation of defeat or the agony of frustration. He was not deprived of a promised crown. He was not banished from His native city. He had not to bewail a father's death and offer to his spirit but a forester's oblation. His was not the lot to rest His aching limbs in a hermit's hut and eat the hunter's meat softened over a fire kindled by hands unpractised in the art. His wife was not decoyed by a rakshasa. He had not to wail for her like mad when all the world was in the ecstasy of vernal joy. He had not to seek the aid of a mere monkey in His dire distress. He had not to endure the vicissitudes of a protracted war with a relentless foe. He had not to weep for a brother almost dead

and He had not to discard a virtuous wife, so dearly won, to silence slandering tongues. In so far as Sri Krishna had not the like of any of these experiences even in the tiniest measure, as He never knew any suffering in His earthly avatar, though He was a *perfect God*, He was not a *complete man*. His descent into humanity was not effected in full measure. In that sense, He was not a *poorna-vatara*. Throughout His history, He lived superior to His environment of man and matter and displayed His mastery over it. In fact, He even charges humanity with ignorance of His eminence, of His true transcendent nature and complains that He is taken to be a mere man:

अवजानन्ति मां मूढा मानुषीं तनुमाश्रितम् ।  
परं भावमजानन्तो मम भूतमहेश्वरम् ॥

*Bhagavad Gita IX. 11*

Nothing draws man to man so much as suffering. Flesh quivers with fellow flesh 'pierced by the thorny point of bare distress'. Heart speaks to heart in sympathetic solace and congruent spirits enter into a compact of love. The community of grief is spontaneous and sincere and leaves an impress of lasting beneficence. Sri Ramavatara was pre-eminent over all the rest, for, in it alone we meet with a *suffering God* whom *suffering man* can understand. In it alone was the finitising process necessitated by Brahma's promise to Ravana of immunity from death by other than human hands so complete that every one about Sri Rama, save a few, knew Him only for a man among men. So perfect was it that caught up in the eddies of His uneven life, He permitted Himself to be swayed by

every passion known to human breast, lofty and low and प्राकृता जना इव, He was elated by success, depressed by calamity, enraged by opposition, embittered by disappointment and pleased past measure by devoted service. Only, unlike ordinary men, and in that alone He was unlike, He displayed those emotions to the utmost perfection in a manner that only a God can do.

The originator of eternal Laws, the विग्रहवान्, धर्मः the goal of every form of penance, like any other mortal शरीरकलेशसंभूतं स धर्मं परिमार्गते. As if to show that no man can resist an importunate wife, or that He was not much different from His father in this behalf, or perhaps afraid that if He declined to kill the golden deer for her, Sita would hold Him to shame again saying

किं त्वामन्यत वैदेहः पिता मे मिथिलाधिपः ।

राम जामातरं प्राप्य स्त्रियं पुरुषविग्रहम् ॥

II. 30.3

He went after the fugitive animal, though He should have known as well as Lakshmana that it was a rakshasa in disguise. Engaged in a seemingly unequal fight with Ravana, like any other human warrior, He agreed to be assisted by superhuman aid and, on Sage Agastya's advice, consented to pray to the Sun to obtain an accretion to His martial prowess. No wonder, therefore, that a God who so well assumed the man and never affected to nod impressed Mr. Sastri, as only human and not divine. Understood against this background, it will be clear how necessary in the scheme of an avatar were the sufferings of Sri Rama and His brothers who, along with Sita, personified Divinity in various proportions. But it should be added

that these sufferings of Sri Rama were not like those of the 'Man of Sorrows' who took on himself the sins of humanity out of compassion for its lot and offered to obtain that way forgiveness for its transgressions. The sufferings of Jesus Christ were intended to be expiatory; those that Sri Rama underwent had nothing of the vicarious about them; they were intensely human and natural, and were His own and were valiantly borne and victoriously surmounted. It is in the arduousness of suffering such as Sri Rama's that we see the grandeur of the world. His life shows that the Spirit has the power to transmute every loss into a gain and that 'even the worst tragedies provide the means for an otherwise impossible triumph, a triumph which but for that wrong had not been'. It will not avail to complain of the severity of the process. For, in the unpredictable course of our lives, 'if we had the choice of pains, we would rule out our greatest opportunities.'

## V

To revert to transcendence and immanence, the one refers to a far-off Providence, the other to a permeating Presence, 'closer than breathing, nearer than hands and feet'. A transcendent God is beyond good and evil as we conceive them. Or, He is of the nature of unalloyed Good which we cannot conceive. As such, He is unmeaning to us and unattainable, conditioned as we are by our limitations of thought and action. An immanent God is present in every particle of the universe, in its good and in its evil. He resides in the heart of

the saint and of the sinner, He is the sacrifice and the sacrificer, He is the gambler and his dice. He is felt in the fellowship of 'love whose seeds are sown in every human breast', expressed in the 'beauty lodged in the compass of the humblest sight' and experienced in the 'cheerful intercourse with wood and field'. God, immanent in the glow of the dawning sky and in the dying embers of the setting sun, in the peal of summer showers and in the darkness of the winter mist, in the variety of verdant Nature and in the multitude of the dotted firmament, in leafy rustle and in feathered warble, in the lion's angry roar and in the lamb's coward bleat is a Presence invisible to the human eye, but to be felt and known by a heart whose receptive chords are attuned to that subtle symphony. But, to the generality of us, it is rarely given to commune with the Divine in this wise and we feel the need for a God whom we can see in human form, who will live and move with us, who will speak and can be spoken to. Such is the Avatar, the अव्यक्तं व्यक्तिमापन्नम् who is the synthesis of transcendence and immanence in whom the theistic idea of a personal God, of God as Person, gets concretised in flesh and blood, wearing the vestures of human lineaments and pulsating with the throb of human fellowship. The eternal and qualitiless transcendental, Absolute, the qualitiless Supreme, निर्गुण परब्रह्म unconfined by space and time, सांप्रतं, अस्मिन् लोके now and here, acquires qualities and becomes गुणवान् and वीर्यवान् in the language of Valmiki's eager query. That which is all-knowledge चिन्मयम् becomes धर्मज्ञश्च कृतज्ञश्च. The सत्यस्य सत्यम् of metaphysics becomes the सत्यवाक्यः, the Truth of the true stands true to the Truth. The

sustaining order of the Universe, its Rita, its eternal Dharma and enduring goodness take the form of a दृढव्रतः and his accordant word and deed answer the eager query, चारित्र्येण को युक्तः सर्वभूतेषु को हितः. The Absolute is not merely the True and the Good; it is also the Beautiful. That Beauty takes shape in the visible प्रियदर्शनः. The artless ascetic, Valmiki was converted by muttered penance from predatory impiety to such tenderness of heart as to writhe under the arrow's point which drew vital blood from an unsuspecting bird and widowed its loving mate. He queried of the sage Narada, welcome wanderer in Heaven and earth, who sees God in His lone ethereal splendour as much as in His earthly glory, and cataloguing a string of virtues, demanded if there was one on earth who embodied them in his person. The sage points to Sri Ramachandra as the personification of all the many and rare qualities बहवो दुर्लभाश्चैव that go with Divinity and mark an avatar.

## VI

Every avatar is a historic event. It is an eternal fact taking shape in a temporal act. It is a recurrent phenomenon whenever the posture of affairs in the universe demands it. Cosmic history does not repeat itself. Change and novelty are fundamental to it. Quakes and convulsions in planes other than the geological wrought by forces that set their backs on the True and the Good create a disequilibrium in the cosmos, rupture its unity and ravage its beauty. As often as this happens, there is need to vindicate the integrity of the moral order and establish the supremacy of

righteousness. Hence the divine affirmation and assurance of an incarnation whenever 'virtue vice obeys'. This conflict between good and evil is congenital to the cosmos, continuous with its course and concludes only when the finite self is freed from its constraint. Every time it appears, it assumes aggravated proportions; it takes new shapes and the fight employs new weapons. Repeatedly as God has to appear on the face of the earth to vanquish the wicked, He takes different forms. Even to Him, 'new occasions teach new duties; Time makes ancient good uncouth and He fulfils Himself in many ways'.

The proclaimed purpose of an avatar which is implored of Divinity by humanity in distress is protection of the good by liquidation of the evil. This is always done by punishment which visits death on the evil-doer. The penalty of a wrong must be paid and by an inexorable law that knows no exception, it is relentlessly exacted. No one, no man, or God or Son of God can expiate another's sins taking them upon himself nor can such an ancient and vicarious expiation by one however unique and great, and howsoever full of tenderness and mercy guarantee once and for all general amnesty for untold generations in the future in return for the ritual of a sprinkled baptism, and the weekly utterance of a confessional prayer. God demands the highest penalty for the greatest iniquity. But, in the spiritual scheme, such death is not annihilation of personality, but it is the annulment of its evil potential. 'Evil-doer' is a compound word with an adjective and a substantive. Punishment

is directed to the adjective and not to the substantive. It is intended to immobilise the wicked man by depriving him of his physical armoury. At the critical moment when he lingers between life and death, God shows Himself to him in a resplendent form, vouchsafes to him a momentary vision which cleanses his tainted soul and qualifies him for fellowship with the immortals. When he dies, he leaves the world penitent and purified, he realises his wrong and is restored to the good from which he lapsed inclined to evil of his own free will or condemned to it by an angry curse. So does divine punishment effect a reformation. Losing its sting, it becomes an instrument of mercy. God plies a surgeon's knife, and He does not hack with a butcher's blade. *Danda* is always motived by *daya*.

The enemies of the timeless Good that is the Absolute are also the enemies of the historic God that is the Avatar. That is why Sri Rama took upon Himself to punish the wicked of the Dandaka woods who molested the ascetics, set morality at naught and led unrighteous lives. His was the role of the रक्षिता जीवलोकस्य, स्वजनस्य च रक्षिता, the protector of the world and the guardian of kindred spirits. His was the self-imposed duty to punish evil out of the world. And so, when Sita प्रणयाच्च बहुमानाच्च gently told her lord:

न कथंचन सा कार्या गृहीतधनुषा त्वया ।  
 बुद्धिवैरं विना हन्तुं राक्षसान् दण्डकाश्रितान् ॥  
 अपराधं विना हन्तुं लोकान् वीर न कामये । III. 9. 24-25

and accused Him of विना वैरं रौद्रता, that He was pledging Himself to kill those who had not offended Him, He pacified her by saying that the enemies

of those who were intent on Dharma, धर्मनिरताः were His enemies too and that He had assured them, as He would tell Himself, that He would rid the forest of these hindrances to the peaceful pursuit of their penance. And to Him, a plighted word was inviolable, dearer to Him than His own breath, His bride or His brother.

In his dying speech compacted of sorrow and anger, in the presence of the Vanara host stunned by grief and dismay, Vali hurled contempt and contumely at Sri Rama's face for having violated all canons of decency and propriety, all rules of war and all laws of Dharma and worked up to a climax in words not to be excelled for the severity of their stinging reproach:

त्वया नाथेन काकुत्स्थ न सनाथा वसुंधरा ॥  
 प्रमदा शीलसंपन्ना धूर्तेन पतिना यथा ।  
 शठो नैकृतिकः क्षुद्रो मिथ्याप्रश्रितमानसः ॥  
 कथं दशरथेन त्वं जातः पापो महात्मना ।  
 छिन्नचारित्रकक्ष्येण सतां धर्मातिवर्तिना ।  
 त्यक्तधर्माङ्कुशेनाहं निहत्तो रामहस्तिना ॥ IV. 17. 40-43

Kambar makes Vali exclaim: 'Alas! that you were born Bharata's elder brother!' Here was a situation in which Sri Rama's underlying divinity and assumed humanity were put to a severe test. Sri Rama had to explain to Vali His apparent विना वैरं रौद्रता. In justifying His conduct, He speaks both as God and man urging eternal laws, the just man's desire and the world's expediency not merely in extenuation of what He did, but as demanding nothing less than what He meted out to Vali:

धर्ममर्थं च कामं च समयं चापि लौकिकम् ।  
 अविज्ञाय कथं बाल्यान्मामिहाद्य विगर्हसे ॥ IV. 18. 4

It is not to be wondered at that Vali, a mere monkey, prates without knowledge about Dharma which, being subtle, is supremely difficult to understand. For, 'He alone who resides in the heart of all beings, He alone knows the Good and the Evil':

सूक्ष्मः परमदुर्ज्ञेयः सतां धर्मः प्लवङ्गम ।

हृदिस्थः सर्वभूतानामात्मा वेद शुभाशुभम् ॥ IV. 18. 15

And it was Sri Rama's duty as man-that-is-God to purge the world of its evil. Obviously, He referred to Himself when He said देवा मनुष्यरूपेण चरन्ति महीतले: the Gods walk on the earth in human form. We are told that Vali was fully convinced of the justice of the fatal penalty exacted from him for his mighty wrong and died chastened in spirit and transformed into a devotee of his erstwhile enemy. Thus did the Prince among men play the Providence to the world and to Vali; and at one stroke, शरेणैकेन, He slew the evil but salvaged the evil-doer.

## VII

In all avatars, the predominant purpose was punitive, namely, the *vinasa* of the *dushkritas*. They have always been directed to the destruction of a specific embodiment of iniquity of superabundant might assured of immunity from ordinary ways of death known to men and gods and continuously engaged in multiform acts of affirmation of Evil and negation of Good. Every avatar had a therapeutic object to exterminate the arch-bacillus eating into the world's vitals. But, the divine Physician has another purpose too and that is to restore cosmic health rudely shaken and badly shattered by the

periodic plagues that harass mankind. *Dharmasamsthapana* is the ultimate end for which *dushkri-tavinasam* and *sadhuparitranam* are but the means. Of all the avatars of God, it was in those of Sri Krishna and Sri Rama that the establishment of righteousness was a visible purpose actively accomplished by the Avatar Himself by His word and deed, by His precept and example. And, between those two, the unsophisticated mind without pretensions to cleverness or wisdom is attracted by the simple, straight and artless life of Sri Rama and often feels unequal to comprehend the mystery of Sri Krishna's birth, the miracles of His childhood, the mysticism of His youthful sport with the Gopis and the mature metaphysics of His Gita. That is why it appears that Ramayana is the religious textbook of the common man in a sense that none other of our sacred literature can be.

The religion of *Dharmasamsthapana* personified by Sri Ramachandra is an ethical religion based on the strict discipline of a moral life lived in the scrupulous discharge of the Dharma of each station. The concept of Dharma is peculiar to Hindu thought and culture and holds together a rich variety of connotation. Like the word Atman, it has no synonym in any other language. Based on a foundation of inherent nature, it refers to an atmosphere of life associated with a halo of achievement making it a hall-mark of spiritual perfection.

Sri Rama was विग्रहवान् धर्मः. He would never swerve from the straight and narrow path of Dharma. His famous declaration to Kaikeyi:

नाहमर्थपरो देवि लोकमावस्तुमुत्तमे ।

विद्धि मामृषिभिस्तुल्यं केवलं धर्ममास्थितम् ॥, II. 19. 20

quickly springs to our thought and lips. That He had dedicated Himself to the steadfast and unflinching practice of Dharma, howsoever grave and trying the crisis might be, He has exemplified again and again in His life and He justified every precept of His to those about Him purely on grounds of Dharma. He consents to kill Thataka, not because a bearded Rishi bids Him do it, but because it is His duty to obey His father, पितुर्वचननिर्देशात् पितुर्वचन-गौरवात्. The dual Dharma cast on Him to help His father keep his plighted word, and to carry out Kaikeyi's wish *unwilled* by the old king, which constrained his conduct but restrained his utterance, determines Him to go to the forest and resist all the importunate pleading of Bharata writhing in misery and under the terrible crime to which he would be no consenting party. Sri Rama is धर्मस्य परिरक्षिता and Dharma protects its protector. Kausalya's parting benediction to Him was:

यं पालयसि धर्मं त्वं धृत्या च नियमेन च ।  
स वै राघवशार्दूल धर्मस्त्वामभिरक्षतु ॥

II. 25. 3

By the same token by which her Lord told His mother that her Dharma was to stay with His father, Sita claimed an identical duty to go with her husband to the forest. Lakshmana had no doubt in his mind about his *natural* Dharma to follow his brother in exile; for, as his mother put it to him later as he was leaving her presence, he had been begotten to live in the forest सृष्टस्त्वं वनवासाय and, for his part, he knew that his life's purpose was to stand by Sri Rama whose noble virtues had made him a willing captive in His service गुणैर्दास्यमुपागतः । Facing Indrajit and matching his deadly missile to

his mighty bow, Lakshmana sent it on its fatal purpose compacting into it all the power and prowess of Sri Rama as the very embodiment of Dharma:

धर्मात्मा सत्यसन्धश्च रामो दाशरथिर्यदि ।  
पौरुषे चाप्रतिद्वन्द्वः शरैर्न जहि रावणिम् ॥ VI. 91. 73

Sri Rama fulfilled the obligations of each station in His life attuning heart and mind to every external act and suiting every act to His inner thought. No sooner did He hear from Kaikeyi that His coronation was not to be than He immediately acquired detachment from the waiting ceremonial and divested Himself of every mark of royal pomp.

प्रतिषिध्य शुभं छत्रं व्यजने च स्वलंकृते ।  
विसर्जयित्वा स्वजनं रथं पौरांस्तथा जनान् ॥ II. 19. 34

He went round the coronation utensils in reverent resignation:

अभिषेचनिकं भाण्डं कृत्वा रामः प्रदक्षिणम् ।  
शनैर्जगाम सापेक्षो दृष्टिं तत्राविचालयन् ॥ II. 19. 31

In a moment of forgetfulness, He told His brother that by the same waters that had been gathered to pour kingship on His head, He would baptise Himself into a hermit:

एभिरेव घटैः सर्वैरभिषेचनसंभृतैः ।  
मम लक्ष्मण तापस्ये व्रतस्नानं भविष्यति ॥ II. 22. 27

He immediately corrected Himself and said: 'No, this is royal property to which I have *now* no right. My own hands shall lift the water for that holy bath':

अथवा किं ममैतेन राज्यद्रव्यमयेन तु ।  
उद्धृतं मे स्वयं तोयं व्रतादेशं करिष्यति ॥ II. 22. 28

The life of the anchorite that He lived in the forest with His wife and brother was a model of rigorous simplicity and austere Vairagya. His conversion from royalty to asceticism was as complete as it was quick and would admit of no compromise. He declined to take to the forest any equipment of comfort or convenience much as His father pleaded with Him to do so. He said:

यो हि दत्त्वा गजश्रेष्ठं कक्ष्यायां कुर्वते मनः ।  
 रज्जुस्नेहेन किं तस्य त्यजतः कुञ्जरोत्तमम् ॥ II. 37.33

He would not eat the food offered by a boatswain-friend however dear and devoted he be. His own hands or His brother's must seek the food that He could eat. The bare earth must be His nightly couch. The hermit-hut must be His abode and He would enter no city-gate till the twice seven years of Kaikeyi's ordinance were over. Matted locks and raiment of bark proclaimed his altered station. Next day's clothing washed by dutiful Lakshmana and drying on the branches of the trees was the finger-post to His hermitage of which the smoke of the sacrificial fire rising through its arboreal roof was the beckoning signboard.

His moral code was straight, simple and stern. Truth was His lifeblood, which would bear no admixture or dilution. Of the course of conduct at any moment of His life, He had absolutely no doubt. He was so sure and determined that He was never haunted by doubt or baffled by dismay. A plighted word was sacrosanct and would admit of no prevarication. संश्रुत्य च न शक्यामि जीवमानः प्रतिश्रवम्. The hand of friendship clasped across an attesting fire im-

posed an irrevocable obligation that must be fulfilled whatever the cost. But, the ingratitude of unrequited service filled Him with an indignation that bade Lakshmana remind Sugriva that the road by which the fatal missile hastened Vali to his doom still remained unbarred.

Withal, Sri Rama was like the Earth in forbearance. क्षमया पृथिवीसमः. None sought His succour in vain and whoever resigned himself to His dispensation received His aid and protection.

सकृदेव प्रयत्नाय तवास्मीति याचते ।

अभयं सर्वभूतेभ्यो ददाभ्येतद्भ्रतं मम ॥

VI. 18. 33.

This high resolve which Sri Rama announced in most solemn words to Sugriva recalls a like declaration that Arjuna was commanded in the next Avatara to broadcast to the world:

कौन्तेय प्रतिजानीहि न मे भक्तः प्रणश्यति ॥

‘Assure everybody, O, Kaunteya, never will My devotee perish’. Sri Rama bore no lasting grudge to even the foulest of His foes and was prepared to forgive him if he would mend and make amends. Sita counsels Ravana तेन मैत्री भवतु ते. He would admit any supplicant to His grace, even if he were Ravana himself, यदि वा रावणः स्वयम्. Hostility ended with death. मरणान्तानि वैराणि. He insisted on Vibhishana performing his brother’s obsequies and overruled his objection to do them for one ‘who had set the whole course of Dharma at naught.’

The world’s exemplar could not permit a lapse or exception in Himself. The *possibility* of a critical whisper obliged Him to denounce His wife in public and *its actual utterance* in a remote corner

of His kingdom later determined Him to renounce her for ever. So completely unselfish was the general climate of Sri Rama's life that, when He consented to be crowned as Yuvaraja, it was not for His own glory, but for the sake of Lakshmana dear. जीवितं च हि राज्यं च त्वदर्थमभिकामये । The same spirit of non-attachment and renunciation marked the errand on which He sent Hanuman in advance before He approached the outskirts of Ayodhya. Fourteen years of royal pomp might have wrought a change in Bharata's mind. Should he be loath to give the kingdom back, Sri Rama would have him retain it for ever, for, His own mind was never inclined to worldly goods. नाहं अर्थपरः । What did Hanuman find? Bharata, chip of the same block, shaped on the same ascetic anvil, was a picture of intense misery and eager expectation. Hanuman (saw:)

ददर्श भरतं दीनं कुशमाश्रमवासिनम् ।  
जटिलं मलदिग्धाङ्गं भ्रातृव्यसनकशितम् ॥  
फलमूलाशिनं दान्तं तापसं धर्मचारिणम् ।  
समुन्नतजटाभारं बल्कलाजिनवाससम् ॥  
नियतं भावितात्मानं ब्रह्मर्षिसमतेजसम् ।  
पादुके तु पुरस्कृत्य शासतं वै वसुन्धराम् ॥ VI. 128. 28-31.

That is a spectacle which reminds us of what Kambar makes Guha say of Bharata in another context: 'Would he, born brother to my Lord, ever be guilty of a failing?'

## VIII

To *be* good, one must *know* the good. To know it most effectively is to *see* it; for, seeing is believing. The highest good is God Himself. None of the

traditional proofs for the existence of God has carried conviction. To be sure that God exists, one must see Him and that one might see Him, He must show Himself to mortal eyes. So it is perhaps that in a particular context and with an ostensible purpose, God took shape in human form to exhibit the dynamics of virtue for men to see, to know and to follow. He assumed a heroic role to draw and rivet mankind's attention. Man always pays homage to whatever is beyond his reach; for, possession and use blunt the edge of wonder and awe. The concept of the heroic connotes storm and stress, the spirit of fight against odds, suffering bravely borne, and struggle carried to final triumph. All this and more we find in Sri Rama's story. That is one way in which the hero that was Sri Rama drew men's thoughts to Himself. But such a kind of hero-worship is not spontaneous or immediate. It is a slow growth from intellectual roots watered by continuous and observant study of the hero's life. That is the way of knowledge which appreciates the Good by apprehending the True. But, God is not merely the True and the Good; He is also the Beautiful. The aesthetic approach to divinity works almost involuntarily. There, the beholder that is the finite is suffused with the marvellous beauty that is God and the rapture of his enthrallment bespeaks a quickness and fullness with which the *Bhuvanandara* invades and takes possession of his soul. Beauty's conquest by capture of the heart besieging it through the eyes is instantaneous whereas Truth and Goodness are engaged in a combat of doubtful and delayed issue straining their powers to light the mind and bend the will.

To see Sri Rama was to love Him and to love Him was to adore Him. The world paid spontaneous homage when it saw that resplendent form: पुंसां दृष्टिचित्तापहारिणम्. Narada does not find words adequate to describe Sri Rama's superlatively handsome and well-proportioned features. He was:

विपुलांसो महाबाहुः कम्बुग्रीवो महाहनुः ।  
 आजानुबाहुः सुशिराः सुललाटः सुचिक्रमः ॥  
 समः समविभक्ताङ्गः स्निग्धवर्णः प्रतापवान् ।  
 पीनवक्षा विशालाक्षो लक्ष्मीवाञ्छुभलक्षणः ॥ I. 1. 9-11.

When He was born, He had on His person every mark of supreme beauty. कौसल्याजनयद्रामं सर्वलक्षणसंयुतम् and like the world illumined by the luminous sun, so did she shine, this blessed mother of this divine scion of the solar race. कौसल्या शुशुभे तेन पुत्रेणामिततेजसा । He was invested by a knowing rishi with a name मधुरं मधुराक्षरम् which was as euphonic to the ear as His form was a delight to the eyes. The royal baby grew up day by day into a valiant youth, and His mother's joys knew no surfeit as she feasted her eyes on Him. He was कौसल्यानन्दवर्धनः । To His father, He was ever the apple of his eye, रतिकरः पितुः । Dasaratha could not bear a moment's separation from his darling boy. So intense was his attachment that he swore to Kaikeyi to fulfil her desire in words whose ironic import was to burst on him presently with the sudden thunder of a summer cloud:

यं सुहृत्तमपश्यंस्तु न जीवेयमहं ध्रुवम् ।  
 तेन रामेण कैकेयि शपे ते वचनक्रियाम् ॥ II. 11-7

and when Sri Rama left his presence for *vanavasa* he uttered the piteous cry, रामं मेऽनुगता दृष्टिरद्यापि न

निवर्तते. Stunned by the matchless beauty of the young princes that came with Viswamitra to his court, King Janaka exclaimed:

इमौ कुमारौ भद्रं ते देवतुल्यपराक्रमौ ॥  
 गर्जसिंहगती वीरौ शार्दूलवृषभोपमौ ।  
 पद्मपत्रविशालाक्षौ खङ्गतूणीधनुर्धरौ ॥  
 अश्विनाश्वि रूपेण समुपस्थितयौवनौ ।  
 यहच्छप्रैव गां प्राप्तौ देवलोकादिवामरौ ॥ I. 50. 17. 18.

and, astounded that such entrancing beauty could *walk* the earth, he asks: कथं पद्मचामिह प्राप्तौ किमर्थं कस्य वा मुने. To know who they are, he plies the sage with the eager query:

वरायुधधरौ वीरौ कस्य पुत्रौ महामुने 1. 50. 19.

Dasaratha's subjects hail Him crying रामो लोकाभिरामोऽयम्. No wonder therefore that everybody in Ayodhya, in town and country, man and woman, the old and the young invoke blessings on Sri Rama for His safety and prosperity. They reckoned their life's purpose accomplished if they could behold the idol of their heart in His coronation procession.

इच्छामो हि महाबाहुं रघुवीरं महाबलम् ।  
 गजेन महतायान्तं रामं छत्रावृत्ताननम् ॥ II. 2. 22.

and again,

अलमद्य हि भुक्तेन परमार्थैरलं च नः ।  
 यथा पश्येम निर्यान्तं रामं राज्ये प्रतिष्ठितम् ।  
 ततो हि नः प्रियतरं नान्याकिंचिद्भूविष्यति ।  
 यथाभिवेको रामस्य राज्येनामिततेजसः ॥ II. 17. 10-12.

So intent were the people in catching a glimpse of

Sri Rama as He drove in state to Kaikeyi's palace that their eagerness made Valmiki exclaim:

यश्च रामं न पश्येत्तु यं च रामो न पश्यति ।  
निन्दितः स भवेत्ल्लोके स्वात्माप्येनं विगर्हते ॥ II. 17. 14-15.

Sage Valmiki, the hermit that he was, had apparently no fascination for royalty and its pomp and would rather drink with his eyes in leisured delight, the austere, yet pleasing beauty of the anchorite Rama in the Panchavati hut and would not jostle with the crowd in Ayodhya's streets to get but a fleeting look at the tired Prince weighed down by His coronation robes. He waits in the *parnasala* and sees Him returning after a different kind of *abhisheka* which no hunchback or haughty queen can obstruct or delay.

कृताभिषेको रामस्तु सीता सौमित्रिरेव च  
तस्माद्गोदावरीतीरात्ततो जग्मुः स्वमाश्रमम् ॥ III. 17. 1.

There, when Sri Rama was at perfect ease, surrounded by adoring rishis and engaged in happy discourse, Valmiki makes the advent of Surpanakha the occasion for a portraiture of his hero by which the lines and curves, the shape and shade of the angelic form seem to spring into life from his words set in jingling antithesis and fall into their proper place on our mental canvas.

Sorrow heightens beauty and invests it with a sedate grace that prosperity cannot endow. Afflicted beyond measure by the agony of separation, anxiously searching through leaf and stalk, behind bark and bush for the queen of his heart, vainly querying bird and beast, hill and dale, the waters of the streams and the flowers of the forest, crying

hoarse and calling to Sita not to try His love any longer, not to play further hide and seek, Sri Rama wandered distraught and disconsolate along Godavari banks to the Pampa Saras. There did Hanuman behold Him and His brother, अद्भुतदर्शनीयौ beaming with beauty through their sorrows. Arrested by the glory and grandeur of their entrancing features, विनीतवदुपागम्य प्रणिपत्य च राघवौ he pays full-throated homage to them in language which mirrors in its words, वाचा श्लक्ष्णया मनोज्ञया the pleasing charm of the lovely pair who appear to his dismayed eyes as celestials forgetfully treading the earth mistaking it for their heavenly abode. He marvels why their massive arms, so long and so round, so richly deserving of every adornment remain unadorned. But, no denial or disguise could hide their royal lineage from his knowing eyes and he acclaims them as fit to be rulers of the earth. Conjuring up in the mind the Rishyamooka hill, the Kishkindha woods, the Pampa lake, the studded trees and, in their midst, the anguished pair bent on wandering search facing a barrage of questions by a monkey-stranger and then, one recalls the speech in which Hanuman makes his acquaintance with Sri Rama, an acquaintance which immediately converted him into His devoted servant for the rest of his life. When He heard Hanuman utter this masterly thesis on the *Object of Beauty*, Sri Ramachandra then and there convened a convocation of unseen intellectuals and conferred on him a Doctorate of all Arts and Sciences, of all Laws and Letters delivering the citation which begins with the inimitable words: नानृग्वेदविनीतस्य नायजुर्वेदधारिणः नासामवेदविदुषः शक्यमेवं प्रभा-

षितुम् etc. He inscribed his name in the register of His own heart and admitted him to the Faculty of those most dear to Himself. He told His brother, 'Verily, such a one deserves to be our comrade and to be spoken to. Speak to him, Lakshmana, speak'.

Later, through the self-same Hanuman's eyes, we perceive the opposite number of this tragic beauty wailing to its mate across the waters. Clad in a dust-laden raiment, surrounded by terrific she-demons like a helpless deer amidst threatening wolves, emaciated by unceasing tears and with no jewel on her person appears Sita like the pale and thin lunar streak after the new moon night. And, that sight in the Asoka grove reminded Hanuman of what he gazed upon on the Pampa banks:

एवं सीतां तदा दृष्ट्वा जगाम मनसा रामम् V. 15. 54.

Putting the two side by side, he could not decide who excelled whom in the intensity of grief and in the excellence of form and feature. He broke forth:

तुल्यशीलवयोवृत्तां तुल्याभिजनलक्षणाम् ।  
राघवोऽर्हति वैदेहीं तं चेयमसितेक्षणा ॥

Beauty also glows in the glare of anger's scarlet flame. By nature gentle, Sri Rama could not be easily roused to anger. Forbearing to a degree, He was generally a pacifist. क्षान्तः सान्त्वयिता श्लक्ष्णः कृतज्ञो विजितेन्द्रियः. Yet, when goaded by grave offence, He becomes कालाग्निसहस्रः कोपे. Terrible must have been the aspect of the *Raghavasimha* roused to fury when earth, air, fire and water, all the elements and all the gods would not tell Him what had become of His beloved Sita. Every moment, His grief added fuel

to His ire. Girding up His loins and loosening His matted locks, He looked like fearful Siva Himself. With lips quivering with rage, He swore vengeance on all His auditors pledged to this conspiracy of silence:

इत्युक्त्वा रोषताम्राक्षः स्फुरमाणोष्ठसंपुटौ ।

वल्कलाजिनमाबध्य जटाभारमबध्नयत् ॥

तस्य क्रुद्धस्य रामस्य तथाभूतस्य धीमतः ।

त्रिपुरं जघ्नुषः पूर्वं रुद्रस्येव बभौ ततुः ॥ III. 64. 73. 74.

Taking His mighty bow from Lakshmana's trembling hands, He fitted it with the dread missile and burning like the fatal fires at the world's dissolution, thundered the threat of universal death:

पुरेव मे चारुदतीमनिन्दितां दिशन्ति सीतां यदि नाद्य मैथिलीम् ।

सदेघगन्धर्वमनुष्यपन्नगं जगत्सशैलं परिवर्तयाम्यहम् ॥ III. 64. 78.

There is a beauty in the lion's roar reverberating through the dismal wood; there is a beauty in the midnight tempest lashing the ocean's waves; but these would surely pale before the beautiful terror that was Rama which Lakshmana witnessed in trepidation and awe. Thrice again did Rama show Himself in the extremity of His rage. Adverting to the unhelpful ocean, He cried:

समुद्रं शोषयिष्यामि पद्भ्यां यान्तु प्लवङ्गमाः ।

Like an angry tigress infuriated by the capture of her cub, when His darling brother lay struck by Ravana's *sakti*, overwhelmed by grief and anger, He broke forth अरावणमरामं वा जगद्रक्षयथ वानराः and declared अद्य रामस्य रामत्वं पश्यन्तु मम संयुगे. His final fight with Ravana assumed such terrific proportions and the combatants exchanged such deadly strokes at every turn that, beholding the scene, Nature lay dumb and

motionless in bewilderment and dread. The very earth rocked, the sun grew dim and the wind stood still. Cosmic history knew no fight such as this. There never was another to bear similarity with it:

गगनं गगनाकारं सागरः सागरोपमः ।

रामरावणयोर्युद्धं रामरावणयोरिव ॥

VI. 110. 23-24.

Sri Rama wielding His mighty bow strung with Brahma's arrow aimed at the heart of His deadly foe appeared as the very Death dancing in rage on the battle-field. Rakshasa and rishi, man and monkey beheld the scene with bated breath and the Rakshasa host could scarce forbear an anguished cry.

*Jaya Rama* has a grandeur all His own. Covered with the glory of victory, with the dust of battle still clinging to His limbs, sweating with the strain of His fight, He stands a resplendent and rare warrior, the रिपुनिषूदनः known to the world as सत्यपराक्रमः and all Nature, the people of the earth and the gods of the sky who were all till now quaking in mortal dread gather round Him in supplication and delight.

स तु निहतरिपुः स्थिरप्रतिज्ञः स्वजनबलाभिवृतो रणे रराज ।

रघुकुलनृपनन्दनो महौजास्त्रिदिशगणैरभिसंवृतो यथेन्द्रः ॥

VI. 111. 34.

What an excellence of martial beauty would Sita have seen and enjoyed in the proud embrace of her Lord's person, when, earlier,

तं दृष्ट्वा शत्रुहन्तारं महर्षीणां सुखावहम् ।

बभूव हृष्टा वैदेही भर्तारं परिष्वजे ॥

III. 30. 39-40.

And, finally, as He makes His victorious entry into Ayodhya in His aerial car, all the world below with uplifted eyes and adoring palms hail Him back

in a transport of ecstasy. Now is His bewitching form installed on His diamond throne in the gilded hall and Vasishtha gently sets the Ikshvaku diadem on His head, with Sita by His side, attended by watchful Lakshmana, canopied under the white umbrella lifted by Satrughna's loving hands, Bharata waving the royal *chamara* and Hanuman ever ready at duty's call. That is the picture of divine Beauty that we all wish to linger on.

## IX

Such is the infinite greatness and supreme glory of this great Avatar. *Sri Ramachandra is our religion in flesh and blood* and the Ramayana is its elaboration, Valmiki being its expounder. The Rt. Hon'ble Sastri deplored that few of our youths now-a-days were acquainted with this priceless treasure of our sacred culture. This is a sad commentary on the way our young men are growing up. It is up to us to combat the ignorance and the consequent indifference that keep them back from this great inheritance which, if not checked and overcome betimes will lead to perversion of nature and impoverishment of the spirit. We are not tired of boasting of our spiritual tradition and, of late, we have begun to speak of our purpose to proclaim India's message in the market-places of the world's capital cities. Our spiritual teachings are all marked for foreign export only and do not seem to be intended for domestic consumption. And, we forget that a counter-current is flowing the while in the opposite direction, that our imports of western forms of thought and ways of life are increasing day by day

reducing our balance of spiritual sterling. Let us talk less of teaching the world. Ours is the duty to draw the world's attention to us by the way we live in our country. We shall have read the Ramayana in vain if this lesson is not borne in on us, that example is better than precept. Preaching divorced from practice is mere propaganda. Let us be true Hindus and Indians first before we proceed to 'Hinduise and Indianise' the world. Let us be devoted to truth, let us speak with no double tongue, let us be firm in the observance of the duties relating to our station, let us be kind and genial to our fellowmen prefacing every true speech with a winning smile, let us learn to share their sorrows with sympathy (which may be easy) and their joys without envy (which is not so easy), let us not cast furtive glances at what does not belong to us, let us learn to make Dharma the touchstone of every thought, word and deed that takes birth in our being. If we thus try to transform the daily recital of the Ramayana into a continuous exercise of these virtues of Sri Rama, then, surely, we shall not have to teach the world; the world will learn from us. May Sri Ramachandra endow each one of us with faith and understanding, strength of will and earnestness of endeavour to attain this consummation in our lives, slowly it may be, but surely, nevertheless.

## X

Sage Valmiki is adored as the *adikavi*, the first poet. He is also the first among poets. The recensions of the Ramayana in other languages are all

exquisite in their own way. But Valmiki's slokas have a grandeur and charm all their own. Pregnant with meaning and pleasing to the ear as they are, no one tires of reading or hearing them. It is our eternal treasure and we cannot afford to lose hold of it unless we decide to annihilate ourselves as a spiritual community. Itself an incarnation of the Vedas, it came from Valmiki's lips as the Vedas did from those of Brahma. And, it possesses a like eternity.

यावत्स्थास्यन्ति गिरयः सरितश्च महीतले ।  
तावद्रामायणकथा लोकेषु प्रचरिष्यति ॥

This unique book is the talisman of every believing Hindu. Its mere possession is said to ward off evil and promote prosperity. Many a fateful decision of human life is taken by the omens which are sought in it. To not a few, it has been their unfailing companion in life's fair weather and foul, and from it, they derive strength in their convictions, counsel in their confusions, solace in their distresses, courage in their failures, and hope despite many a disappointment. May Sri Ramachandra plant His dominion most firmly in the heart of each one of us and may it be given to us to fashion our lives with faith and fervour after His glorious model.



#### THE AUTHOR

PROF. P. SANKARANARAYANAN has been a teacher of Philosophy in several colleges of the Madras State for forty years before he assumed the Headship of the Department of Philosophy in the Bhavan's Arts College at Bombay. On retirement from that appointment, he is now Director of the Delhi Kendra of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan.

Born to the traditions of classical lore, Prof. Sankaranarayanan found an abiding interest in the study of Religion and Philosophy and in the exposition of the principles and practices of the Hindu Way laid out by the Pathfinders of yore.

The Professor has been :  
yana of Valmiki in which  
counsel in the critical mor  
he provides a study of his  
advancing the thesis that,  
of an incarnation, Sri R  
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