

RAMAYANA,.

The greatest legacy of Hindus (Indians) are the three great epics Ramayana, Mahabharata and Bhagavatam undoubtedly. These three are different in content and classification but carry only a single message. The common theme exemplifies the Vedic Dharma while adhering to the smriti of the age -Tretayuga. Similarly Mahabharata and Bhagavatam are the propounders of the Vedic Dharma but follow the Smriti of Dwaparayuga bordering Kaliyuga.,

Over the centuries, these three are revered by one and all from different points of view, some for their poetical beauty, some for the message they give, some the common theme which was elucidated through stories, and above all their purpose. The fact that people of all ages find these very alluring testifies the efficacy with which they serve the intension of the Great Rishis.

It is apparent that the "knowledge" (- Veda) is accessible only for a few while a majority is left out in all ages because of the dexterity the study demands on one hand and the time required for such a study. To master the Veda, one takes at least 12 years and this time considerable in a human beings' life span, even it is considered to be 100 years. Besides, the study and mastery of Veda is not merely an intellectual exercise but it is a gateway for realization of Parabrahman. The human birth made the Jiva responsible for all his/her action with the result there is a great burden on the human being, even though the human birth facilitates and makes it possible to attain the Brahman. While addressing the needs for the life span of a human being it was advised that care should be taken to see that all actions for the purpose of living shall be in the name of Brahman. The most important purpose of the human being is merger with Brahman through getting rid of Avidya or through getting Vidya.

Every Jiva has a right to get merged with Brahman more so a human being because of the special endowed mind. So every human being, irrespective of the fact that one is capable or not to get Vidya must have equal chance to try to merge with Brahman. The capable have access to Vidya through the Veda but the incapable ca not be left in the lurch. They must also be able to get a way to merge with Brahman, if not in this birth but in the subsequent births. For example, when a child is taught, recourse to pictorial display or a story is adopted because of the comprehension power of the child. Similarly, Vidya is designed to be imparted to the less capable through a story where the players are shown with their different attitudes. Each story shows how Dharma wins in the long run even though the Adharma seems to have immediate gains. The human being when attached to Dharma through the stories regulates his life and becomes capable of gaining the ultimate object. Considering that the tastes even for stories are different for different individuals, the Rishis decided to give Knowledge in different forms to suit the tastes.

The message given through these epics is that

- 1 .the human birth is a much cherished gift to a jiva,
2. the human being, therefore should make an effort to explore why such a gift was given . And
3. regulate the human life to achieve the goal.

The goal of every jiva in whatever form it is in, more so the human form is to merge in the Brahman from which it was separated. This Brahman or Parabrahman is made known only by “Knowledge” (Veda) and the regulation of human life is strictly subjected to Veda and Smriti, together called Dharma.

Veda had declared that

1. Everything is Brahman and Brahman is everything
2. Jiva is not different from Brahman but feels different because of Maya. And
3. Jiva realizes Brahman by getting rid of Maya.

Veda also gave different methods to be freed from Maya. The Smriti of the times gives the guide lines for regulating the lives as accepted for the day to day living of human beings in an organized society under the sanctions of Veda.

If what is said above is of the content Veda, then what is the necessity to say that it is not accessible for one and all? Merely because it is known that the Jiva when it is free from Maya is Brahman does not make every human being free from Maya. The actual state where a Jiva is free from Maya has to be experienced and Veda not only tells what Brahman is, what Maya is but also gives various ways to be free from Maya. When the individual human being follows the Veda and chooses one of the ways to be rid of Maya and practices the steps provided, it becomes possible to merge with Brahman. This process may take one birth or several births depending on the individual. But, the process has to be started at some point or other during the life span of the human being. The endeavor is to make every human being realize and make a beginning for this quest.

Jiva in human body has to spend the life span of the human birth in happiness and also find time to contemplate on Parabrahman in one of the many ways suggested by Veda. Therefore the human life span was divided into four parts. 1. Balya (up to the age of 16 years), 2. Youvvana (up to the age of 40 years), 3. Kaumara (up to the age of 55) and Vardhakya (beyond the age of 55 years). The childhood is to be spent on getting the knowledge of Veda or learning a skill useful for life, the youvvana for becoming a householder to take responsibility of

a family, participate in social life, derive happiness in worldly affairs and contemplation about Brahman, The Kaumara for slowly receding from the worldly matters and spend most of the time for contemplation in Brahman and lastly the Vardhakya, for contemplation on Brahman only. The human life thus spent with Dharma becomes a time of happiness leading to eternal happiness, which is merger with Brahman.

All the three epics are told in different forms to fulfill the goals prescribed for the above objectives.

RAMAYANA

Ramayana is the oldest of the three epics, belonging to tretayuga which approximately is 2 million terrestrial years old. The tretayuga is said to be a Yuga during which the Dharma (Both Sruti or Veda and Smriti of the Yuga) was followed to the extent of 75 percent. It implies that the human mind was mostly bent towards Dharma so that the people were dutiful, law abiding and above all respected and practiced the rituals of Veda irrespective of their being either human or Rakshasa. Still there was 25 percent of Adharma, though very small compared to the Dharma, but nevertheless noticeable and consequently could not be ignored. In that Yuga Rakshasas (Embodiment of Rajo and Tamo guna with little or no Sattwa guna had Upadhi(Vehicle) and were classified as a race, and as mighty as the Devas(Embodiment of Sattwic and Rajo gunas with little or no Tamo guna). In fact, Devas and Rakshasas were sons of the same father but different mothers, the mothers being sisters. From what is learned of that age, human being was given a third place, the first place going to Devas and their allies, the second to Raakshasas . The gap between Devas, Rakshasas and Human beings was, one must infer was from the Karma, which caused different proportions of Sattwa, Rajo and Tamo gunas among the Devas, Rakshasas and Human beings. All the three were following the Veda but the Smriti must be different for each group. Then only the behavioral pattern and social structures of these three groups as presented in the epic could be properly understood.

The Rakshasas with their physical prowess had a definite advantage over the Devas, but the Rakshasas were always facing defeat ultimately despite the initial gains, owing to the mental prowess gained by Devas through the austerities and the power of Sattwa guna. The human beings, on the other hand had a short life span with exceptions and the purpose of human birth has to be understood to be to reach the ultimate goal of merger with Brahman.

The Veda says that getting rid of Tamo and Rajo gunas and becoming satwic brings the Jiva close to Brahman. When the Satwic guna is also annihilated, the Jiva gets merged with Brahman because Brahman is without any gunas in its original form. The human birth, which is

considered the best among all the births, is well suited for the effort to get merger with Brahman.

Ramayana, known through Maharshi Valmiki and became famous was neither the first nor the last of the Ramayanas. Even before Maharshi Valmiki, several great Rishis like Vasista were authors of Ramayana. Maharshi Vedavyasa also wrote Ramayana and called "Adhyatma Ramayana" which was part of Brahmanda Purana. Nevertheless, the Ramayana authored by Maharshi Valmiki is considered the standard and sacred of the Ramayanas for multiple reasons. It is known all over South East Asia where the Hindu influence spread during the 12 and 13 centuries and even today people in these areas have tradition of remembering Ramayana through stories, dance dramas and other forms of folk lore. It is not exaggeration if a statement is made that there is not a part in the world that does not know Ramayana.

Valmiki Ramayana as it is popularly known has many facets may be to appeal several kinds of people. It is the "Adi Kavyam" in Sanskrit literature. Poetry for literature started with Ramayana. What Maharshi Vaalmiki uttered as an outburst of his consternation to the nishadha who killed a bird from the couple became a sloka, the first poem in Sanskrit literature. It is said that Maharshi Valmiki was sad that in his anger he cursed the nishadha, particularly when he was contemplating to write Ramayana. He was surprised that the sloka he uttered was totally different from the Vedic sloka but can be played on a stringed instrument like Veena. What is to be understood from this episode is that the words have the potency either to cause harm or cause benefit. The words became powerful because of the acute anguish of Maharshi Valmiki. Similarly the benevolence of the Maharshi would do only good through the blessings. The words become powerful even in the case of ordinary human beings also when they are uttered either in anguish and pain or in absolute tranquility; more so in the case of pain and anguish because the human being gets charged at once in the face pain and anguish.

To get access to Veda, one must be proficient in the Vedanga(Siksha, Vyakarana, Chandas, Nirukta, Kalpa and Jyotish), but the access to Kavya does not need the Vedangas. Therefore the approach to knowledge through the Kavya is widened with the introduction of the Ramayana. However, the utility of Kavya has to be judged from the point of view of Knowledge that is Veda vis-à-vis kavya. Unless the Kavya is a new medium containing everything of Veda, it is no use to the seeker of Brahman.

Kavya, as per the definition of the Rishis is meant for the welfare of the universe. The lofty idea attached with the Kavya is something to be cherished for it gives the purpose of literature. Rishis were aware that just like the spoken word, the written word has power either to do good or bad. They wanted only welfare from anything written or spoken. This aspect was amply exhibited in the first sloka that came out of the mouth of Maharshi Valmiki. The potency of the written word can be verified from the way Ramayana is adored through all the ages and

with the inclusion of Ramayana in Purana by Maharshi Vedavyasa. They were indicating that the spoken word and the written word have the power to construct a good structure or destroy a structure. It is common knowledge that when a positive usage of language in conversation brings out happy and desired results while acrimony and abusive language brings nothing but unhappiness and enmity. Similarly a good piece of literature brings happiness and tranquility to the mind while the reading material brings disturbance to the mind.

Kavya is a piece of literature where there is a story centered about a principal character. The other characters involved in the story along with the principal character face the day to day problems of the human beings and the author brings out the reactions of the players at each situation and the solutions for the problems. Most of the problems faced by the human beings arise out of selfishness, greed and jealousy. The Kavya indicates the best solution, one that is acceptable and within the precincts of the civilized society and its tenets. The human beings, if they are sincere and intelligent can get solutions for their problems from these pieces of literature. For example Mahatma Gandhi used to say that whenever he was stuck with a problem, he would immediately take refuge under "Bhagavadgita" which never failed him to provide the correct direction. Bhagavadgita is not a Kavyam but what Bhagavadgita did to Mahatma, a kavyam is also capable of doing. Some people do look to Ramayana for solutions to their problems.

Ramayana, being the first ever Kavyam written had to lay a firm and healthy foundation for future literature. It has to satisfy several aspects such as aesthetics, beauty of composition, ground rules for the poetry and above all the purpose. It shall have to give guidance for happiness in the human life and provide a direction for the achievement of the ultimate goal of a human being, strictly under the precincts of the Sruti and Smriti. The story of Ramayana was told by Sage Narada to Sage Valmiki in response to the following question;

"Is there a man who is handsome, strong, well educated, well disciplined, kind, compassionate, valorous, bound to truth, strong in determination, respected by all and loved by all?"

If these qualities are examined, then the conclusion is that every human being should strive to acquire those of the qualities that are possible.

Sage Narada said such a person is to be born and would take the name of Rama. He then told the story to Sage Valmiki and asked him to write Rama's biography as a kavyam. Sage Valmiki, bothered as to what he should do and how to make a beginning, went into meditation. Brahma appeared and said that the story is meant to be written by Valmiki himself and gave him the power of intuition where by not only the actions of people connected to the story but also their thoughts become evident. Then Sage Valmiki, it is said to have gone to take a bath

along with his disciple Sage Bharadwaja and saw the Nishadha killing one bird of a pair, which made him to curse the Nishadha. The form of the curse was a sloka , so beautiful that both Sage Valmiki and Sage Bharadwaja were astounded and the Sage Bharadwaja immediately memorized it. Thus Ramayana was born even before Rama was born.'

Brahma, as per Ramayana told Maharshi Valmiki that Ramayana will live as long as the hills, the mountains, the oceans and all the creations live, thus indicating the eternity of Ramayana. For children Ramayana stories must have given immense pleasure. The killing of Tataka, throughing Mareecha thousands of miles by a single arrow, Jatayu's fight with Ravana, Hanumanta's flight over the sea, Hanumantha's various activities in Lanka and particularly burning Lanka with the fire kindled at the tip of his tail and several others must have and continue to have a salutary effect on the minds of children to such an extent that they put themselves in the position of those heroes As the grownup, some take to Ramayana for its poetry, some for the beauty of the story, some for the ideals brought forth in Ramayana through the various characters and all for the message Ramayana gives. They bigin to remember Sri Rama with intonation for everything good and bad and becomes a habit in the society. As old age takes over people realize the efficacy of the Taraka Mantra and try to do as much Japa as possible to attain liberation for Tyagaraja and before him scores of others such as Kabir, Ramadas, Tulasidas have shown the merits of Taraka mantra Japa.

Since Ramayana has a charm of its own and there being no copyrights, everybody thought that he owned the authorship and made changes to the story through additions making it a piece of contention and inconsistencies. The episodes relating to the killing of Vali, making Sita go through the purification by entering fire and the Uttara Ramayana are examples to name a few, which provide endless scope for controversy thereby distorting Sri Rama's character. An intelligent reader will definitely see the implant of such episodes. But the common reader gets confused and those readers who think that Ramayana is a mere story question the character of Sri Rama. The epic as written by Maharshi Valmiki was the result of a thorough research through meditation and the advices of several Maharshis. It shall have no episodes that undermine the very purpose of Mahrshi Valmiki's line of thinking.

Dasaratha, the father of Rama was famous by his own right and not only because of Rama, we are told. The environment into which Rama was born was such that his father was known to be an upholder of Dharma, guided by the famous Maharshi Vasishta as the royal preceptor and supported by Maharshi Jabali and others in all matters; in temporal matters, he was ably assisted and guided by ministers headed by Sumantra whose name itself suggests that he was a man devoted to giving good advice. Of his three wives, Kausalya, Sumitra and Kaikeyi , Kausalya was then queen and Kaikeyi being the youngest and the favorite was jealous of Kausalya for the position and respect she commanded. Obviously the wife that gives a son to

King Dasaratha would be occupying the elevated place but none of them got a son and so the position of Queen Kausalya was supreme.

King Dasaradha, at the counsel of the preceptor, Maharshi Vasisshta, performed "Putra Kameshti Yagna" to beget a male child. King Dasaradha along with his three queens performed the yagna and was given a pot of payasam by the yagnapurush with a direction that it should be distributed among the wives. King Dasaradha divided the payasam into two equal parts and gave one half to Queen Kausalya. Of the remaining half, he divided it into two equal halves and gave one portion to Queen Sumitra. The remaining portion was again divided into two equal parts and King Dasaradha gave one part to Queen Sumitra again and the other part was given to Queen Kaikeyi. Thus Queen Kausalya, the principal and the eldest Queen received half the payasam, the elder Queen Sumitra got two portions, one equal to 1/4th of the total and the other 1/8th of the whole. There was no objections for this distribution and the assembly of the great Maharshis headed by Maharshi Vasisshta had approved it. King Dasaradha, known for his steadfast adherence to Dharma and truth was not partial towards his youngest and the favorite Queen Kaikeyi.

When the payasam was presented to the King, the direction was that it should be distributed to the Queens, but it was not said that it should be distributed equally. King Dasaradha used his discretion and distributed the payasam in unequal parts in such a way that the senior Queen received half, the next Queen 1/4th and 1/8th parts separately and the last Queen got 1/8th part. This unequal distribution, though just in the eyes of King Dasaradha and his preceptor and advisors seems to be unjust. The recipients got unequal shares of the payasam as per the Karma they were born with. The Ramayana tells that King Dasaradha and Queen Kausalya were destined to be the parents of Rama. This principle of Karma is in full agreement of Veda.

Some people try to say that Rama who was born after taking 1/2 of the payasam is endowed with more of Lord Vishnu's amsa than the other brothers of Rama. As an incarnation Rama was definitely Lord Vishnu's incarnation while Lakshmana was Adi Sesa's incarnation, Bharata was the incarnation of the Sankha (conch) used by Lord Vishnu and Sathryughna was the incarnation of Chakra (Disc), the unique and invincible weapon of Lord Vishnu. Vedas say that Brahman is everything and everything is Brahman. Thus, Adishesha, Sankha and Chakra are part of the same Brahman and it would not be possible to find distinctions among them.

The Upanishads say;

"Poorna madha Poorna midham, Poornadpurna vidhichyate

Poornasya poornamadhaya Poornavasishyate"

It is infinite Brahman and any part of Brahman is still infinite. But when that infinite Brahman takes the human body as the vehicle for that matter any body as a vehicle, comparison is possible. Rama, being the eldest son of the King, he was entitled to ascend the throne after the King as per the law. With regards to valor, all were equally valorous.

Even before Rama was born, several people knew about the event such as Maharshi Gouthama, his wife Ahalya, his son Satanika, Ravana, Sabari, sage Sukhatikshana, sage Sarabhangha who were waiting for Rama's birth for the purpose of redeeming either their curses or wishes besides several Maharshis including Maharshi Vasishta, Maharshi Viswamitra, Maharshi Agastya, Maharshi Bharadwaja and Maharshi Atri.

Rama had an agenda prepared for action even before he was born. He was to bring back Ahalya from the curse, take Sabari's hospitality and give her salvation, visit Suthikshana in order to give him salvation, visit Sarabhangha in order to allow him to end his life and go to heaven. He was to kill Ravana and Kumbhakarna on order to fulfill the promise made by Lord Vishnu. Above all, all the Maharshis were waiting for Rama to get rid of the menace created by the Rakshsas in Dandakaranya because of the support they had from Ravana and who were ever creating troubles for the Munis and Maharshis residing in Dandakaranya and engaged in meditation. This aspect of Rama, as an incarnation of Lord Vishnu was hinted at by the Maharshis but was not accepted by Rama for all the time he was maintaining that he was the son of King Dasaradha and a human being.

Even considering Rama as a human being he was to rid of the Rakshsas in Dandakaranya as a part of the Dharma as a king which he was meant to be. The other incidents for which he was born had to have some reasons to attend to and they were provided from time to time by either the Maharshis or circumstances. Rama redeemed Ahalya's curse on his way to Mithila accompanying Maharshi Viswamitra, visited Sabari to get directions for Sugriva, a place and was asked by the munis to visit Suthikshana and Sarabhangha. Ravana and Kumbhakarna were killed because Ravana kidnapped Sita and as the husband he had the responsibility to get her back. He had to wage a war against a mighty warrior Ravana and so he had the necessity of having an army for which he had to seek friendship with Sugriva.

The word Rama is a combination of two letters ra and ma. It is said that the letter ra is taken from the ashtakshari mantra o namo narayanaya and ma is taken from the panchakshari mantra namah sivaya. The first mantra is in praise of Lord Vishnu and the second mantra is in praise of Siva. These two letters from the mantras are the key words and Rama is the mantra got by the fusion of two different key words taken from the mantras of Lord Vishnu and Lord Siva. This mantra indicates that Vishnu and Siva is one and the same Brahman and therefore called "Taraka Mantra" meaning the one which is capable of giving salvation (Moksha). The word Rama is also indicative of beauty. This mantra which is simple to recite and not being a

Veda Mantra is available to everybody. Those who do not have access to Veda could take the mantra for achieving the goal of the human life. If it is not possible to recite this mantra by any chance, the advice given is to hear Ramayana which is a kavya in which each sloka gives the story and also composed as a mantra. This hearing of Ramayana will put the individual on the road to Moksha, it is said. This fact was amply proved by the great Saints Kabir who had no access to Veda, Tulasidas, Ramadas and Tyagaraja who were all well versed in Veda.

At a proper time, all the four children were entrusted to Maharshi Vasishtha for the purpose of learning Veda, Rajaneeti and the other subjects needed for a prince. Besides they were all trained in handling arms of different nature and also in warfare. This education continued up to the age of 13 years for all the children and they became proficient in all areas of knowledge required for princes. Rama started brooding over things, not satisfied with all he learnt. Maharshi Vasishtha was able to see the change in Rama but he did not offer any suggestions for he knew everything that was going on in the mind of Rama. One evening, Rama unable to resolve the problem himself went to Maharshi Vasishtha and knocked at the door.

Maharshi Vasishtha was in meditation and so he asked, "Who is it?" Rama immediately replied, "That is what I wanted to know from you."

This question should in fact be put by everybody at that age after going through the education.

The outcome of this question was a discourse by Maharshi Vasishtha, which today is known as "**Gnana Vaasishtha**". Or "**Vassishtha Gita**". This is the first Gita that discussed about the individual, Parabrahman and the relationship between them. The essence of Vedas and Upanishads was taught to Rama by Maharshi Vasishtha. The most important principle that everything is Brahman and Brahman is everything was enunciated by Maharshi Vasishtha.

Now, Maharshi Viswamitra enters Rama's life for a brief spell. Maharshi Viswamitra started his life as a king and rose to the position of Brahma Rishi by sheer determination against several failures which made him more determined to succeed. He was maternal uncle to the great Parasurama. During his struggle to achieve Brahma Rishi status he acquired all the astras and sastras, thinking that they would help him to annihilate Maharshi Vasishtha. Astras are those weapons that are governed by mantra while sastras are physical weapons like sword, mace. The purpose of Maharshi Viswamitra was to initiate Rama into the astras of which he was a repository, take him to Maharshi Gowthama's deserted asrama to redeem Ahalya from the curse and lastly to see that Rama is married to Sita, becoming Sri Rama. Rama needed to be given all the astras for the purpose of defeating the Rakshasas, whose leaders acquired great powers and astras with their tapas. Rama, being a human being needs to be fortified with all the astras and sastras, and also should not face any danger from the opponents' arms. When

Maaharshi Viswaamitra transferred all the astras and sastras, he did exactly the same. From the point of view of the story, Viswamitra feigned a threat from Rakshasas while he was engaged in Yagna for the good of the world and so asked Rama to be sent with him for the sake of destroying the Rakshasas responsible. In fact it was the Dharma of the King to safe guard the Rishi from all sorts of threats and make them live a life of meditation and engage in teaching knowledge. The point was made clear, when King Dasaradha offered to go instead of Rama by Maharshi Vasishtha, who told King Dasaradha that Maharshi Viswamitra was capable of taking care of the Rakshasas himself, but asking Rama's help had deeper purpose.

Maharshi Viswamitra made Rama famous and ever remembered through the invocation "Kausalya Rama Poorva Sandhya Pravarthathe, Uttishta Narasardula Karthavyam Dyvamahnikam". The Maharshi indicated to Rama his duty at the break of the day and perhaps this indication is meant for everybody.

When Rama was entrusted to Maharshi Viswamitra by King Dasaradha, Rama was asked to obey the Maharshi at all the times. This word of his father was remembered by Rama and his obedience to the Maharshi was complete. When he was hesitating to kill Tataka because she was a woman, the Maharshi asked Rama not to hesitate and kill her without mercy. Rama immediately killed her thus showing regard to his father's word.

Maharshi Viswamitra lead Rama and Lakshmana to Mithila to see the great Bow of Lord Siva and the swayamvaram of Sita. En route to Mithila, they were passing through the deserted Gowthma's asramam where Rama redeemed the curse of Ahalya and witnessed the union of the Maharshi Gowthama, their son Satananda with Ahalya.

Rama and Lakshmana then went to Mithila in the company of Maharshi Viswamitra at the instance of the Maharshi to view the Great Bow of Siva. When they arrived at Mithila. they were received by king Janaka along with the royal preceptor Satanandsa, son of Maharshi Gouthama and Ahalya. Maharshi Viswamitra introduced Rama and Lakshmana as the slayer of Tataka and Subahu and said that Rama was responsible for his to be completed without any interruption. He also told that Marcha was thrown over to the sea shore by a single bana (Shaft) of Rama. Then Maharshi Viswamatra showed interest in the great SivaDhanus (Bow of Lord Siva). King Janaka then narrated the story of the Bow and how he came into the possession of it. He further said that not possible for a single individual to lift it and even to bring it several able bodied persons are needed. When the Bow was brought, at the instance of Maharshi Viswamitra, Rama went forward, offered his oblations to the Bow, lifted the Bow with his right hand and transferred it to his left hand with great ease. He fixed a Bana(Shaft) and when he pulled the string of the Bow, it broke into two halves making an enormous sound.

King Janaka, amazed at the might of Rama said. "I am blessed to see such a great feat by Rama because he lifted the Bow which could not be lifted by anybody else so far. My daughter Sita, whom I found when I was tilling a field for performing an Yagna and reared was the only person who could move the Bow. Rama undoubtedly is the fit person to marry my daughter Sita". Rama said," I lifted the Bow at the instance of Guru Maharshi Viswamitra to whom I was entrusted by our father with orders that I should obey the Maharshi. Regarding the marriage, however you should seek the permission from our father. "King Janaka at once send messengers to King Dasaradha requesting permission for the marriage and also requesting to come with family and retinue for the marriage.

King Dasaradha was glad to hear the news and the marriage was performed in the presence of both the families and also the Maharshis. When the marriage party was on its way to Ayodhya, Parasurama(Bhargava Rama,) credited to be the avatar of Lord Vishnu and the slayer of Kshatriyas suddenly appeared and challenged Sri Rama ignoring the pitiful entreaties of King Dasaradha not to kill Sri Rama. Then, with a smile Sri Rama took the Vaishnava Bow from Parasurama and aimed a dart at him and asked Parasurama , " O! Mighty Brahman, tell me what I should destroy? Do you want the fruits of your tapas or your ability of movement, for my arrow will never be wasted once aimed?" Parasurama suddenly realized that his Kshatriya valor has left him and that he could not face Sri Rama. Then he requested Sri Rama to destroy the fruits of his tapas and his request was acceded to.

Sri Rama is also an avatar of Lord Vishnu, one of the ten avatars. It is strange that two avatars of the Lord Vishnu came face to face to fight. It is argued that Parasurama , born as a Brahmin chose to arm himself to annihilate the Kshatriya Race for a purpose. After the purpose was fulfilled, the next avatar, that of Sri Rama who needed all the valor of the Kshatriya had absorbed the Kshatriya valor of Parasurama leaving him to be only a Brahmin sage for, Parasurama is a chiranjeevi (One who lives a long time). Yet some important questions arise. How could Sri Rama say that his arrow will not go waste and it has to demolish or destroy something? How was that accepted by Parasurama? How was the act accomplished? The answer lies in the fact that the two avatars recognized that they were the same Brahman and there is neither vanquishing nor losing but only strengthening of the avatar of Sri Rama through his determination that his arrow shall not go waste.

After vanquishing Parasurama (vanquished his ego), Sri Rama and others returned to Ayodhya. Maharshi Viswamitra vanishes from the scene and also from Ramayana thereafter. This clearly indicates that everybody has a role to play and the moment the job is done, the person vanishes from the scene. Maharshi Valmiki was such a skillful story teller and master

craftsman that he could weave into his poetic fabric the eternal truths so subtly by sheer symbolism.

Sri Rama along with his brothers spends their time in Ayodhya helping their father in ruling the country. Sri Rama endeared himself to one and all with his compassion, rule mindedness and fair attitude. A stage had come when King Dasaradha felt that the duties of kingship could be safely handed over to Sri Rama. He immediately consulted his ministers, his preceptor Maharshi Vasishtha and his courtiers in this matter and they unanimously concurred with the opinion of the king. Maharshi Vasishtha, who was requested by the King Dasaradha to look up and fix an auspicious day and time for the coronation of Sri Rama, said that the very next day was the most suitable for that purpose.

Bharata and Satrughna were both at the place of Bharata's maternal grandfather. The time for coronation of Sri Rama was so short that King Dasaradha decided to go ahead with the coronation next day in spite of the absence of the two brothers of Sri Rama. King Dasaradha sent for Sri Rama and told him the decision and asked him to get ready for the event. Sri Rama ever dutiful to obey his father went to inform Sita and spent that night sleeping on a mat of grass on the floor and fasting.

Meanwhile, Manthara the nurse and intimate servant of Queen Kaikeyi heard the news of coronation of Sri Rama and rushed to the queen. When Kaikeyi heard the news, her immediate reaction was happiness and so she gave an ornament to Manthara for giving such good news. Manthara immediately addressed the weak point of Kaikeyi and that is the jealousy towards Queen Kousalya. Manthara told Kaikeyi that with the coronation of Sri Rama, Queen Kousalya will be the queen mother and Kaikeyi, though the favorite of King Dasaradha would remain an obscure queen of King Dasaradha. She advised Kaikeyi to insist for the two boons promised by King Dasaradha to be immediately implemented. One of them was to send Sri Rama to forest for 14 years and the other to make Bharata the king.

Though Kaikeyi had shown lot of affection for Sri Rama, and Manthara has no complaint against Sri Rama, the jealousy the women brooded over the years gained an upper hand and Kaikeyi was convinced that she should put the plan into action ignoring all the affection she had shown to Sri Rama earlier and also the hurt King Dasaradha would get.

When King Dasaradha came to the palace of Kaikeyi to inform her about the coronation of Sri Rama, Kaikeyi enacted all that was necessary to get the King agree to give her the two boons promised to her earlier which was not really necessary. Then she said that one of the boons was to send Sri Rama to forest for 14 years and the other was to make Bharata the king. Any amount of persuasion was of no use and Kaikeyi would not give in. The poet Maharshi Valmiki alone could narrate the scene where King Dasaradha fell on the ground at the mere thought that Sri Rama would be parted from him and Kaikeyi's resolve to get what she wanted at any cost. The night went and at dawn, Sri Rama came to Kaikeyi's

palace to meet his father. He enquired from Kaikeyi for the reason his father was lying on the floor and was not even talking to him. Kaikeyi told him about the boons she wanted from the king and the king could not refuse nor could do anything to avert Sri Rama's exile to the forest which was one of the boons, and so fell down and was lying there. She further said that the king could not ask Sri Rama to go to forest. After hearing Kaikeyi, Sri Rama said that he would keep his father's word and go to the forest directly. There was not even a trace of remorse in Sri Rama's face and the poet says that he took this news in the same fashion as he took the news of coronation. Sri Rama then went to Kausalya and told her that he was leaving to the forest to keep his father's wish. He told Sita also the news and Sita immediately got ready to go to the forest saying that when she married Rama, it was to share the life wherever they are and what ever may be the conditions. Lakshmana immediately decided to follow his brother and so went to his mother Sumitra for permission. Sumitra said that she was glad to hear the decision of Lakshmana and that he should take the forest as Ayodhya, Sri Rama and Sita as his parents.

After the three left for the forest, King Dasaradha died crying for Sri Rama.

The lessons that were conveyed: 1. that jealousy makes people blind and ultimately leads to misfortune. Though Kaikeyi had affection for Sri Rama, her jealousy towards Kousalya brought nothing but misfortune to Kaikeyi in the form of loss of her husband, and in the form of humiliation through her son Bharata who refused the throne and preferred to be a servant of Sri Rama. 2. that marriage is a fusion of souls and couple should live together in thick and thin. Sita had shown that living in forest with her husband was her duty. 3. Sumitra's advice to her son Lakshmana shows her wisdom the way the brothers should conduct themselves.

Sri Rama's resolve to obey his father's decision that was forced on King Dasaradha and which was against his will shows the determination in Sri Rama to obey his father at all costs, first to keep the name his father earned as the follower of truth and second that he was a dutiful son. The way he took the news of the coronation and the news of his banishment shows that Sri Rama took pleasure and pain as something that did not affect him. Such a person is said to have gained victory over Maya. Veda says that when Maya is overcome the individual jiva is the Parabrahman. Thus Sri Rama, a good student, not only understood the teachings of Maharshi Vasishtha but became a realized soul making him none other than *Parabrahman*. That was the reason for his ability to lift the great Siva's Bow, the challenge he faced squarely from Parasurama and his declaration that his arrow must destroy something but would not go waste.

Ramayana shows that a jiva when it gets rid of Maya becomes the Parabrahman, which is the essence of Veda,

King Dasaradha, who was fortunate to be the father of Sri Rama and was famous as follower of truth, had died crying for his son because of the curse he got when he killed the son of a muni by accident. This is evidently the result of his karma.

Karma, according to Veda is responsible for a jiva to get what is got.

The first message Ramayana sends is that Prarabhdha karma is responsible for the jiva to get the body whether it is human body or other and the jiva in the human casing can become Parabrahman by getting rid of Maya. The second message is that marriage is an institution through which two individuals of opposite sex are unified for life and obviously they share everything in life. The first message is that of Veda and the second is from the Smriti of that time.

Sri Rama exhibits the actions of a jiva in the body of a human being and also exhibits the Parabrahman to which position a jiva in human body can rise to. From his life the human being can find answers to his doubting mind and the consequent questions that arise particularly with regard to the discipline the human being should subject to in order to live a perfect life and also attain the position of Parabrahman.

Maharshi Vyasa has included Ramayana in Brahmanda Purana as Adhyatma Ramayana depicting Sri Rama as pure Parabrahman while Maharshi Valmiki had shown Sri Rama as that human being of his imagination about whom he made inquiries to Maharshi Narada. People tend to get confused between these two Ramayanas if they don't understand the relationship between the jivatma and Paramatma.

Sri Rama accompanied by Sita and Lakshmana cross the Sarayu River with the help of Guha and reaches the asrama of Maharshi Bharadwaja. He is one of the saptarishis of the Vaivaswata Manvantara, the present one. He was the son of Brihaspati and a renowned muni of the Vedas. After taking the hospitality of Maharshi Bharadwaja Sri Rama moved to Chitrakoot on the advice of the Maharshi.

Bharata, having summoned by the Maharshi Vasishtha reaches Ayodhya along with his brother Satrugna. Learning from his mother the events that lead to the banishment of Sri Rama to forest and the death of King Dasaradh, he at once rejects the throne and abuses his mother Kaikeyi for bringing such calamity on the family. Taking counsel from Maharshi Vasishtha, he performed the obsequies to the departed father and immediately decided to bring back Sri Rama from the forest to become the King.

Bharata, dressed the same way Sri Rama dressed when he left for the forest, started with all the courtiers, ministers headed by Sumanra, mothers, preceptor Maharshi Vasishtha and his army for the forest. When they reached the banks of river Sarayu where Sri Rama, Sita and Lakshmana crossed the river, they were met by Guha who after ascertain the good intentions of Bharata, gave him the directions and helped them to cross the river. When they reached the asrama of Maharshi Bharadwaja, it was already evening and so they took the hospitality of the Maharshi who told Bharata that Sri Rama, Sita and Lakshmana had decided to camp at Chitrakoot mountain where there were plenty of forest roots and honey.

Next morning Bharata with his entourage started for Chitrakoota. Lakshmana, ever vigilant about the welfare of Sri Rama and Sita observed a great cloud of dust at a distance and a great sound emanating from that place. He immediately got up on top of a tall tree and finds an army belonging to Ayodhya was approaching obviously with Bharata at its head. The enraged Lakshmana jumps down and told Sri Rama about the approaching army lead by Bharata and vows to destroy the army and Bharata. Sri Rama told Lakshmana not to judge Bharata in haste. Bharata, leaving the army behind and with folded hands approached Sri Rama and fell at his feet in great distress. Sri Rama observed the attire of

Bharata and lifted him up. He then began asking him about the welfare of all the people in Ayodhya first and then about the discharge of duties of King. Sri Rama came to know of the death of King Dasaratha and began crying like an ordinary human being, Meanwhile Maharshi Vasishtha and others reached the place and Sri Rama and Lakshmana performed the obsequies to the departed father.

Bharata then told Sri Rama that the throne rightfully belongs to Sri Rama and he would not accept it at any cost. He, then requested Sri Rama to return to Ayodhya and set the matters right. Sri Rama said that he came to the forest to fulfil their father's word and so it is the responsibility of Bharata to rule the kingdom for 14 years as per the wishes of their father. Bharata entreated Sri Rama supported by Maharshi Jabali that Sri Rama to return to Ayodhya as he would not be breaking any of the promises of their father. Sri Rama refuses to change his decision and said that it was his duty to be in the forest for 14 years while it was the duty of Bharata to rule the kingdom for 14 years. The impasse was broken and Bharata said that he would take the Padukas of Sri Rama to Ayodhya and place them on the throne and rule the kingdom on behalf of the Padukas, the Maharshis headed by Vasishtha having agreed for the arrangement. The Bharata took the Padukas from Sri Rama and placed them on his head with all respect and told Sri Rama that he would be waiting for Sri Rama to complete the 14 years and come to Ayodhya and added that if Sri Rama fails to come on the next day after completion of 14 years, he would enter fire and immolate. Sri Rama agreed for the stipulation and bade a tearful good bye to Bharata and the party

This episode indicates the determination of Sri Rama to stick to the decision and the sense of compromise when there is a chance. The devotion of Bharata to Sri Rama was never a question to Sri Rama and he showed to Lakshmana that hasty conclusions should be avoided. These points are to be considered by every human being because these are the situations that arise in everybody's life.

Sri Rama, who was surrounded by many tapasvis found gloom on their faces and was worried that it was due to the disrespect shown by him or his wife Sita or his brother Lakshmana. On inquiry, he was told that they were all troubled by the menace caused by the maundering rakshsas who were fond of disturbing their meditation and often times resorted to killing the tapasvis and eat them. The Maharshis present requested Sri Rama to provide protection from the rakshsas. Sri Rama promised them all protection and vowed to destroy the cannibal rakshsas and make the forest safe for the meditation of all those tapasvis.

Sita immediately reacted to Sri Rama's promise by questioning the need for such a vow to kill the rakshsas when they had not done any harm to him. Sri Rama responded by saying that the question was worthy of a woman like Sita and added that it was his Dharma to protect the tapasvis as a Kshatriya and particularly so when he made it his mission to protect all those who sought protection.

Two things emerge from this discussion. Is it not possible for the tapasvis to protect themselves when they were meditating and acquiring that type of halo which automatically protects them? The second question is that Sri Rama, being a human promising protection to those who seek sounds like a super human. For the first question, not everybody was at an advanced stage of meditation to have halo and even if they had got it would not use it to protect the body. But the tapasvis needed uninterrupted

calm and tranquility for meditation for which they chose the forest. On the other hand the Dharma of the Kshatriya is to offer protection to those who seek it which Sri Rama was stressing. Sri Rama was behaving like a human and Kshatriya when he promised protection. Also if Sri Rama is considered Parabrahman, as recognized by all those realized Maharshis, it is all the more suited for, the Parabrahman alone can give protection to the seeker.

Here one should understand what a rakshsa stands for. Rakshasa is essentially the one who thinks that everything available in the nature is meant for his own pleasure and should be taken by force or by killing those who oppose such a principle. He would indulge in needless killing of the unarmed and defenseless, peace loving people for vanity and to create a sense of terror. He would not agree for the order in the society and would like to have order of his own. The first thing a rakshasa does is to destroy learning, places of knowledge and the rituals like homa because they are the only things that challenge his authority in silence.

Sri Rama, as a Kshatriya and an agent to the ruler has the responsibility to save knowledge and places of knowledge and also the sources of knowledge without which the society degenerates.

After leaving Chitrakoot, Sri Rama, Sita and Lakshmana paid a visit to the asram of Maharshi Atri and his venerable wife Anasuya. The Maharshi and his wife offered them hospitality and Anasuya particularly took Sita inside the asram and gave her ornaments and apparel with her blessings and said that those ornaments and apparel are divine and would make Sita look always the same to her husband. She also blessed Sita that she and her husband would always be devoted to each other and would return back after the expiry of 14 years in the forest.

The important thing to be noticed is that all the Maharshis that were met by Sri Rama, Sita and Lakshmana were always treating Sri Rama as the Parabrahman, though offering hospitality as ordinary mortals offering hospitality to other mortals as part of duty of a householder because they were all realized souls who were not in the clutches of Maya. Sri Rama never exhibited the traits of Parabrahman all along, showing himself as a human being. Sri Rama was showing that a realized soul should have to follow the Dharma of a human being as long as the body lasts.

On their way into the Dandakaranya, they faced a threat from Viradha who tried to snatch Sita and kill Sri Rama and Lakshmana. Sri Rama killed Viradha who turned out to be a Gandharva under curse and who advised Sri Rama to proceed to the asram of Maharshi Sarabhanga. As they were approaching the asram, Sri Rama noticed a divine chariot on which was a divine person whom Sri Rama recognized as Devendra, and who was requesting the Maharshi to get into the chariot. The Maharshi refused the offer saying that he was waiting for Sri Rama, and he would free himself from the mortal coil only after he had a look of Sri Rama.

Maharshi Sarabhanga's decision to refuse Indra's offer in preference to a mere look of Sri Rama has a profound meaning. Indra was offering a place in Swarga where he could enjoy the fruits of his good deeds but ultimately take birth on earth for getting moksha. The mere look of Sri Rama gives him the moksha. So Maharshi Sarabhanga, who understood the work of Maya chose the latter

Being a mortal, Sri Rama was able to see the chariot and also Devendra . This was possible because Sri Rama, a realized soul was Parabrahman and so there is no wonder in his recognition of the chariot and Devendra. It is to be inferred that a realized human being will have this faculty.

Maharshi Sarabhanga then created yogagni(Fire created by Yoga) and burnt his body in it and attained moksha with the benefic presence of Sri Rama.

Sri Rama, Sita and Lakshmana then started their journey deep into the forest in search of a suitable place to live in. They found a place where there were conditions of peace and the nature around was pleasant. That t was Suthikshna's asrama and actually Suthikshana was waiting for the arrival of Sri Rama as he was told by his guru, Maharshi Agastya. Sri Rama, Sita and Lakshmana were given hospitality by the muni. When Sri Rama said that they were looking for a suitable place to spend the rest of 14 years, Suthikshana offered his asrama and Sri Rama politely declined and said that they were intending to visit Maharshi Agastya. Suthikshna immediately said that he too would like to meet his guru whom he did not meet for a long time and they all started to Maharshi Agastya's asram. Sri Rama inquired what the cause was for so many human remains and bones were spread everywhere. Suthikshana told him that the Rakshasas living in the forest were all cannibals and they killed the ascetics while they were in their meditation. The determination of Sri Rama to make the forest free of the cannibals and provide much needed security for the tapasvis became a mission.

Maharshi Agastya, on hearing that Sri Rama accompanied by Sita, Lakshmana and Suthikshana were at his asram was overwhelmed and invited the party as a host. Sri Rama exhibiting his character as a human being sought permission to enter and promptly prostrated at the feet of the Maharshi and the other members of the party followed his example. After providing hospitality to Sri Rama and his party, The Maharshi gave a great Bow, a pair of quivers capable of inexhaustible supply of arrows and a great sword saying that these arms would help and said they are useful for Sri Rama's mission. As a human being Sri Rama acquired all the necessary arms and astras that are required for putting down the rakshasas meandering the forest killing the tapasvis. Maharshi Agastya advised Sri Rama to set up his asram at Panchavati (the place surrounded by five banyan trees) on the banks of river Godavari and spend the balance of 14 years, where there was an abundant supply of roots and fruits.

Here we should observe that Maharshi Suthikshana gained salvation after meeting and bringing him to Maharshi Agasthya's asramam. Here the effect of karma was shown. Even though Maharshi Suthikshana was a disciple of Maharshi Agasthya, he has to wait for the arrival of Sri Rama in order to get salvation as was told by Maharshi Agasthya himself in reply to the request of Maharishi Suthikshana for salvation.

Lakshmana built a beautiful hermitage at Panchavati and Sri Rama and Sita started to live there with ever vigilant Lakshmana providing security and the basic needs for day to day life.

Till this time the only rakshsas killed by Sri Rama were Taataka and Subahu at the instance of Sage Viswamitra and Sri Rama was adequately equipped with all the arsenal and was ready to face all the rakshasas of Janasthana who were responsible for the murder of several tapasvis . He would not wage a war on these rakshasas without a cause. Sri Rama exhibits nishkama karma in the next

confrontation with the rakshsas because He was not gaining anything personally out of the killings but it was his duty to make Janasthana free from the menace of the rakshsas as the king's representative to make the place safe for tapasya. Besides, killing any type of organism including the rakshasa is against the Sruti. Causing death to any in any situation other than a battle is sheer killing attracting punishment from the ruler.

The necessary cause was provided by none other than Surphanaka, the younger sister of Ravana and Kumbhakarna and elder sister of Vibheeshana and who was widowed at a younger age and was asked by Ravana to move about freely in Janasthana supported by Khara and Dushana cousins of Ravana for Ravana felt guilty for having killed Surphanaka's husband unintentionally. She was roaming around in Janasthana with lot of freedom and was causing wanton destruction of every kind including killing and devouring the ascetics. She happened to see Sri Rama, Lakshmana and Sita and was immediately attracted to Sri Rama.

After being disfigured by Lakshmana, Surphanaka made Khara and Dushana fight with Sri Rama. Khara and Dushana accompanied by 14,000 rakshsa army attacked Sri Rama and the battle was fierce. Sri Rama destroyed the rakshasa army along with Khara and Dushana. It is not possible for a single human being to achieve such a great feat but how could Sri Rama achieve? Sri Rama was a human being who had evinced interest for knowledge at the age of 13 years and had put in practice all the principles as taught by Maha muni Vasishta. He had absolute control over his sense organs, got over the arishadvargas and attained that status of Parabrahman in human form, besides acquiring all the sastra and astras from Maharishi Viswamitra as a human being should do. This is an example as to how a human being can attain the status of Brahman in human body. What was possible for Sri Rama is possible for any human being, which is the essence of the Veda.

Sri Rama had shown how a human being should conduct himself in a human society with all the multiple problems and difficult situations and attain enlightenment.

Surphanaka, having been punished by Lakshmana was enraged with the feeling of humiliation on one hand and helpless on the other because of the total destruction of the mighty Rakshasa army along with the generals the great Khara and Dushana. She went to Lanka and instigated Ravana to abduct Sita and take her as a wife knowing fully well that Ravana could be easily exploited for his weakness for woman. Ravana fell into the trap and sought the help of Maricha to abduct Sita. Maricha, having tasted Sri Rama's prowess and thoroughly chastised advised Ravana against such a move which he said if carried out, results in total annihilation of the Rakshasa clan along with Ravana. Maricha preferring death at the hands of Sri Rama than Ravana, helped in the heinous plan and lost his life. Ado

Why did Ravana adopt such a dubious plan to abduct Sita in a clandestine way when both Sri Rama and Lakshmana were absent?

Ravana was a Brahmin; his father being a Brahmin Rishi and a direct descendent of Lord Brahma and mother was a Rakshasi by name Kekasi. The Rakshasa clan was descendants of Pulastya Brahma, a manasa son of Brahma. Ravana's father was Visravas, a son of Pulastya Brahma. Lanka was the kingdom of Rakshsas and was ruled by Sumali, father of Kekasi and consequently maternal grandfather of

Ravana. Ravana's father Visravas begot Lord Kubera with a Brahmin woman in an earlier marriage. Kubera was the Lord of Yakshas and half-brother of Ravana. He was the Lord of Yakshas. Sumali, grandfather of Ravana had to abandon Lanka and reside in Patala for fear of Lord Vishnu, who subjugated the mighty Bali and ordered him to rule Patala. When Kubera approached his father and requested him to show a place to live with his clan of Yakshas, he was advised to take over the vacant Lanka and rule it. Kubera with his austerities obtained Pushpaka Vimana, an airship which was capable of accommodating any number and move about over the earth.

Sumali, in fact was instrumental in making his daughter a wife of Visravas because he knew that the children of his daughter with the Brahmin Rishi Visravas will emerge mighty due to the greatness of the rishi. Kekasi wooed the rishi in the evening time and got Ravana, Kumbhakarna and Surphanaka. The Rishi professed that these children will bring untold misery to all right thinking persons and would ultimately become responsible for the destruction of the Rakshsa race. Kekasi was very unhappy and prayed the rishi who told her that the next son Vibheeshana will be pious and will save the Rakshasa race that was left after destruction caused by Ravana.

As the boys born in the Brahmin family, Ravana, Kumbhakarna and Vibheeshana were made to go through all the samskaras including the initiation of gayatri mantra by their father. They learned Veda and other sacred lore from their father. All the three became very learned and Ravana excelled in every area; in learning, music, expertise in use of arms etc. Not satisfied with what he had learnt, he wanted to do tapas to gain immortality, invincibility from all, perhaps with the encouragement of his maternal grandfather Sumali, who was smarting under humiliation for forced exit from Lanka and was hoping to gain Lanka through his grandson.

He, along with his brothers Kumbhakarna and Vibhishana did Tapas invoking Lord Brahma. When Lord Brahma appeared and asked Ravana boons what he wanted, Ravana promptly asked for immortality, and invincibility from every type of species except humans and monkeys for he believed that humans and monkeys were far inferior to Rakshasas and could never have threat from these species. Lord Brahma said that immortality was impossible but invincibility as desired would be granted. Kumbhakarna wanted the boon to have the facility to sleep for six months and wake for a day before going for sleep again for six months. Vibheeshana wanted a boon whereby he would never swerve from Dharma. Lord Brahma granted the boons.

Rakshasas were generally referred as Asuras or Daityas. Asura is one who is not a sura or the devas comprising of Gandharva, Yaksha, Kinnara etc., Daitya denotes those who were the progeny of Diti, mother of Hiranyakasipa and Hiranyaksha and wife of Kasyapa Maharshi. So Rakshasas were placed with Devas and they are superior to Human beings, Monkeys just as Human beings are superior to animal and other species. Ravana belongs to Rakshasa group while his half-brother Kubera belongs to Yaksha group of the Devas. Devas and Daityas are considered to be two groups with a brotherly relation. Humans and other species do not hold any such relation either with Devas or Daityas.

What sort of boons was requested? Ravana asked for boons of Rajo guna, Kumbhakarna asked for boons of Tamo guna and Vibheeshana alone asked for a single boon of Sattwa guna befitting a Brahmin.

Ravana, according to the description given by Hanuman was eating choicest non-vegetarian food, drinking choicest wines and enjoying the sexual pleasures with several women. These would be the qualities of Rajo guna. Kumbhakarna was a voracious eater and would eat anything without discrimination. When he was roused from sleep during war, he began eating even without opening his eyes. During the war, when Vibheeshana accosted him, he said he was hungry and would eat everybody be it a monkey or be it a rakshasa and he further asked Vibheeshana to be away from his path lest he might also be devoured. These habits are the results of Tamo guna. Both of them belonged to the same family as that of Vibheeshana and yet their behavior changed radically from that of one wedded to Dharma. To live in Dharma is safe from all aspects considered though the life may not be as pleasant as the life in adharma. This is because life in adharma is restricted to physical life while life in Dharma is transcendental. Though life in Dharma may be found to be inconvenient momentarily, the benefits outweigh the inconvenience. Life in adharma causes ripples in the society and disturbs equilibrium though personally they look convenient.

Vibheeshana, after the fall of Ravana in the battle lamented that he was a great person in every respect but died in the hands of Sri Rama in such a pitiable way because he chose the path of Adharma despite repeated advices from all the well-wishers.

In contrast, Sri Rama was a Kshatriya, a varna inferior to Ravana's brahmana varna and yet he is revered and will be revered forever because he chose the path of Dharma and became an enlightened man in human body. Not only that, Sri Rama has become synonymous with Dharma.

Ramayana tells us that birth in a particular Varna is because of past karma and that does not stop a human being from being enlightened by a right choice of path to live- life in Dharma.

The path to enlightenment is through acquisition of Sattwic guna and getting rid of Rajo and Tamo gunas. The Sattwic guna demands that the food habits have to be regulated so that the foods that induce Rajo and Tamo gunas have to be rejected. Besides the one important principle of sattwa guna is ahimsa and so the animal based foods by default have to be given up. Though Ravana was a Brahmin with all the learning and training, he chose the path that took him away from Sattwa guna by indulging in eating animal based foods and wine.

Somehow, Brahmin is associated with vegetarianism so much that Brahmins as a caste are ridiculed if a Brahmin eats meat. In several parts of India Brahmins do eat meat and that did not prevent them from being called Brahmins. One should understand that Brahmins as a caste are such individuals who took birth as Brahmins by their previous Karma. Everybody has a choice to lead such a life that gives the karma needed to be born as a Brahmin. Also, those born as Brahmins have a choice to make use of the environment they are born in to promote to the next stage in the path of enlightenment. Some Brahmins unfortunately choose to be otherwise by choosing the path of Rajo and Tamo gunas which is a regressive step. Ravana is shown as an example.

The only group that is vegetarian for the past 2500 years is the people belonging to Jain Dharma. So much so that Jain has become synonymous with vegetarian. Even Buddhists who are committed to non-violence are not all vegetarian.

Ravana got boon of invincibility from every type of species except human beings and Monkeys. Drunk with the acquisition of the boon, he went and attacked Kartaveera Arjuna of thousand arms, a human being and was defeated and jailed. He was released from jail by Arjuna at the behest of Pulastya Maharshi. Ravana's arrogance took him to slight the mighty Vali, the king of Vanara tribe and seeing Ravana's valor, Vali agreed to befriend him.

Summing up we see that Ravana chose the path of Adharma though he was a Brahmin belonging to the family of Pulastya Maharshi, a great devotee of Lord Sankara, well learned in Vedas and sastras and resorted to animal foods, drinking of wine and womanizing. When Kubera, his half-brother tried to advise him, Ravana drove away Kubera from Lanka, seized the pushpaka vimana with silent support of his mother and maternal grandfather Sumali. He waged wars against everybody and subdued with the result he got whatever he wanted.

Ravana knew that Sri Rama won Sita in Swayamvara by breaking Siva's mighty bow, killed Tataka and Subahu, whirled and thrown away Mariachi several hundreds of miles by his shaft and routed out the entire Rakshasa army including the generals, the mighty and valorous Khara and Dushana. Sri Rama was a human being and in a frontal attack the chance of winning was bleak.

When Ravana asked Maricha to help him in the plan of abduction of Sita, Maricha who had earlier tasted the arrow of Sri Rama advised Ravana that he should desist from such a move for it was leading to annihilation of rakshasa race along with Ravana and his relatives. Ravana was adamant and Maricha was forced at the threat of death to help Ravana, he having preferred death at the hands of Sri Rama than Ravana.

For Ravana, end result justifies the means. What he wanted was to abduct Sita and he chose the path of deceit and stealth.

Sri Rama returned to the Parnasala and found that Sita was not there. Sri Rama and Lakshmana started the search for Sita and found the Great Bird Jatayu in death throws who told Sri Rama how Ravana abducted Sita and how he fought Ravana to save Sita and how he was reduced to the position he was in. Jatayu died and Sri Rama gave cremation to the bird.

How can a bird speak to Sri Rama? One incidence reported from Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi's life will be able to answer this question. One day the Bhagawan chided a resident of the Ashram for disturbing the nest of a bird. The person in question removed the nest because it was directly above the place where the Bhagawan usually squatted in the evening for fear that it may drop excreta. He was sure that there was nobody present at the time of removal of the nest. He, therefore asked the Bhagawan as to how he knew the matter. Then the Bhagawan said that the bird itself complained to him.

Dharma says that corpse unattended should be given the funeral rights. Sri Rama did exactly the same; not bothering it was a bird. Rama was able to treat even a bird as an atma which only a realized soul could.

Sri Rama now knew what happened to Sita and what the nefarious plan of Ravana was even though he suspected it and also was warned by Lakshmana earlier. But Sri Rama was a human being and could do little and so started to move in the forest for a way to find more information about the place of Seta's incarceration. During this stage, Sri Rama and Lakshmana were caught in the huge hands of immense strength and were on the point of being crushed when Sri Rama and Lakshmana at the instance of Sri Rama cut off the hands. Then Kabandha, whose hands were those severed by Sri Rama and Lakshmana immediately requested to be given cremation so that he could be absolved of the curse and also could possibly advise Sri Rama in his present condition. After gaining the original form of a Gandharva, Kabanadha told Sri Rama to seek the help of Sugreeva, a vanara near Pampa Lake .Kabandha gave directions to Pampa Lake and also Rishyamuka Mountain and also the identification marks for these two important places and leaves the place after taking the permission of Sri Rama.

On their way to Pampa Lake, they found a beautiful hermitage to their surprise and were welcomed by an old lady called Sabari (obviously a tribal residing in the forest) , who was in tears with ecstasy for having got the fruits of waiting for Sri Rama in having the presence of Sri Rama. She left her body and gained that position from which there is no return. She was told that she would get the salvation when she beholds Sri Rama and she was waiting for that moment.

This is again showing that a person belonging to whatever position or background concentrating on Brahman through an idol will be able to get the enlightenment. Here the idol was Sri Rama for whom Sabari was waiting for so many years thinking of only Sri Rama. Before leaving the mortal coil, Sabari gave the directions to Rishyamuka Mountain.

Today, there is a rivulet with the name Sabari and is a tributary of River Godavari

Sri Rama and Lakshmana arrived at Pampa Lake and were wondering as to how to find Sugreeva, the Vanara chief as per the advice of Kabandha after taking a refreshing bath in Pampa Lake. Meanwhile Sugreeva along with his ministers was closely watching Sri Rama and his brother from the top of Rishyamuka Mountain for he dared not to step out of the mountain for fear of Vali. He was at once jumped to the conclusion that these two were sent by Vali to kill him. Hanuman, the wisest minister of Sugreeva advised Sugreeva not to lose reason and decided to find who they were as suggested by Sugreeva.

Hanuman, having changed his from to an ascetic approached Sri Rama and Lakshmana and started to inquire in a language most pleasing and appealing. Sri Rama directed Lakshmana to answer Hanuman as an emperor does not answer an envoy directly and should conduct the business through an able intermediary.

Sri Rama, after hearing both of them said that Hanuman (in disguise) was truly a scholar of all the Vedas and also the grammar needed for the study of Vedas as an anga(limb) and any king who had such a minister will never come to grief.

Hanuman is a Vanara and today we equate a vanara to a monkey. The philological study indicates that Vanara could be a human being residing in a forest while the morphological study indicates that Vanara must be a monkey due the existence of the tail. Hanuman, a vanara is well versed in Vedas, excellent in negotiation and soft spoken without wasting even a syllable in the language he used in conversation. Besides he was able to change his natural vanara body to that of an ascetic in human form. The study of Vedas was available only to the three varnas called Dwija. So Hanuman must be a dwija. He has a tail and so he must be a monkey and therefore an animal. Sri Rama had also considered Vanara to be an animal. The westerners refer to Hanuman as monkey- God. The other personalities in Vanara race, Sugreeva, Vali, Angada, Tara, and other generals of Vanara army were all using the same language as that used by Sri Rama and also Ravana. The ability to change form (Kamarupa- change to desirable form) was available to Devas and Rakshsas but not to human beings and certainly not to even Sri Rama. This facility was not available to other Vanaras as per the Ramayanama.

The exploits of Hanuman are such that they leave one to wonder whether such could be performed by one individual. He crossed the ocean to Lanka facing several odds and impediments, entered the formidable city. He was an one man army that destroyed considerable part of Ravana's army including his son Aksha , all the sons of his commander –in-chief, each one was considered invincible; burnt down the city of Lanka, the pride of Ravana and rakshsas thereby inflicting a great wound to Ravana's pride. He brought the Sanjeevani Hill all the way from Himalayas to Lanka twice with in incredibly short time and replacing it back in Himalayas, each time for the purpose of saving the lives of Lakshmana and Sri Rama when they were severely hurt by the astras of Ravana and were unconscious.

Vanaras had constructed a bridge across an ocean, an almost impossible feat and used the herbs of Sanjeevani Hill to bring back Sri Rama and Lakshmana from unconscious state. Construction of a bridge needs great engineers and only well-versed doctors alone could save lives. The generals of Vanara army of Sri Rama had lead the army to fight battles with the mighty rakshsas.

Ramayana is a biography written in the form of a kavya by a contemporary who wrote it even before Sri Rama was born. In this backdrop, and considering the message of Vedas expected to be carried by it through the karma principle, the existence of a race of Vanaras has to be examined. When Ravana asked boons from Brahma, he ignored Nara and Vanara from those whom he feared and asked invincibility from everybody except Naras and Vanaras. It means Ravana was aware of the race of Vanaras when he was asking for the boons. Subsequently he had a tiff with Vali which resulted in humiliating defeat for him and which made him to seek friendship with Vali.

Maharshi Valmiki was writing the story of an exemplary human being Sri Rama. Sri Rama never conceded that he was an avatar but was always introduced himself as a son of King Dasaratha, a human being.

Another point to be remembered is that Ramayana is 2 million years old.

Those of the people who were mesmerized by the story, character of Sri Rama and became ardent devotees to gain enlightenment did achieve their goal through meditation of Rama mantra, by singing the glory of Sri Rama, by writing Ramacharitmanas and by several methods. Those who reposed faith in Ramayana resorted to parayana for gaining mental peace. Those who are told the greatness of Ramayana and showed sradda(diligence)in parayana will get joy and would be able to shape their life pattern. There is no problem with such people. Yet, there is a set of people who do not wish to have anything to do with Ramayana on the grounds that it is a myth does not pose a problem either. Those who are in the mode to find authenticity from every angle-such as the age of Ramayana, did Sri Rama ever traversed the earth, were there any devas and rakshasas, were there any vanaras conversant with language, is it possible for Hanuman to have crossed the ocean by flying or jumping, is it possible to have constructed a bridge between Lanka and Bharat over the ocean and several others- pose a problem because they would like to verify either by scientific methods, written authentic records or personally.

When dealing with aspects of history of the bygone era, there do not seem to be any tools to authenticate precisely. The artifacts can be verified by carbon dating approximately, if the artifacts can be associated with the history. For example it is possible to estimate the age of Mohanjadaro and Harappa civilization by carbon dating of the artifacts found in the city. How can the existence of a race like Vanaras be proved or disproved? All the matters related to history can only be inferred by circumstantial evidence. So far no event in history beyond 10,000 years seems to have been verified by scientific methods.

The great wonders of the world, the pyramids, and the light house of Alexandria are still a mystery. The pyramids can be seen even today but the light house of Alexandria is not there. The Stonehenge in Briton is again a marvel. Similarly the Maya constructions in South America and the extinct civilization that built those pyramids leave one to wonder the engineering skills of those communities. The boulders weighing several hundreds of tons used in the construction of Pyramids of Egypt and the Stonehenge in Briton could not have been lifted by ordinary people of today. This is particularly significant because there were no mechanical or electrical devices at that time to lift such heavy stones. The only source on which the events of ancient times are understood is the literature.

Ramayana literature is abundant and is available in all South Asian countries. The remains of the bridge got constructed by Sri Rama is now commonly referred as Ramasethu and is still visible.

The research on ancient man and Neanderthal human provides interesting points. The ancient man was an excellent engineer and was responsible for the construction of those monuments which stand even today. The Neanderthal human being was a hairy person of immense strength. Why can we not take the Vanara as a Neanderthal-ancient man with extraordinary strength with skills in engineering and medicine? The only objection could be that neither the ancient man nor the Neanderthal human being discussed by the researchers has a tail. When we know several species like dinosaurs became extinct over a period of time, the Vanara race could have been extinct in the original form and reduced

to the present day monkey due to need to adopt to changing environment. As a matter of fact the Vanara of the Ramayana time and the vanara(monkey) of today are both come under animals.

Ravana was told by Lord Brahma that death was inevitable and so he refused to give the boon of deathlessness to Ravana. He was then given the boon of invincibility from every organism except Nara and Vanara race as per his wish. If we put these together, we see that Ravana already chose the source of his death. It is obvious that whatever boons one may get to ward off death, there will be always a source beyond the efficacy of boons that gives death.

If we explore the karma principle as discussed in the Veda. Sri Rama was born as an avatar of Lord Vishnu with the main purpose of killing Ravana and Kumbhakarna for it was the curse of the Munis Sanakasa et al which made the door keepers of Lord Vishnu, Jaya and Vijaya to take birth as Ravana and Kumbhakarna.

Thus Ravana, having given up the eternal dharma, drunk with all satisfaction with his fortifications against death and having tasted all round success barring a few mishaps decided that he was law and intended to abduct Sita ignoring the sane advice given by his well-wisher Maricha stealthily.

Was he not a favored devotee of Lord Siva? Was he not the father of the great Meghasnadhya or Indrajit?

From the point of his Karma, it can be surmised that Ravana knew the impending doom and wanted to hasten the process of effects of the curse so that he could get back to Vaikunta.

Any person who gives up the eternal dharma, possessing bloated ego because of the riches and power and tries to be law unto him will meet an ignominious end. In the present day world, don't we see Ravana's everywhere? Ramayan tells how to live in Dharma and it also tells what happens if we do not live in dharma.

Hanuman, as testified by Sri Rama was a scholar par excellence in Vedas, Sastras and also the required grammar for learning Vedas. How can this be possible when Vedas are supposed to be learnt only by dwijas or twice born and are not allowed to be learnt by women and sudras, as per the common understanding? In literature a woman named Gargi was reported to be proficient in Vedas and Vedanta to such a degree that she was able to participate in discussions with other Rishis notable among them being Yagnavalkya in the Upanishadic age, Satyakama Jabala was made to go through rigorous tests and purification before he was given the knowledge of the Brahman,. All those who took sanyasa, irrespective of their origins of caste had been known to have learned Vedas. An example for this is Swami Chinmayananda who was revered by the learned and Brahmins. All this evidence shows that to learn Vedas, certain purifications (samskaras) and qualifications are necessary; and they are generally found in dwijas.

It has to be concluded that Hanuman, though classified to belong to animal class went through all these requirements and learned Vedas. Not all Vanaras were allowed to learn nor learned Vedas. Another thing that is to be observed is the Yuga or period to which they belong. What was possible at a

certain period may not be possible in certain other period. As an example, no specific qualifications were prescribed for a profession two centuries ago except some apprentice training and today definitely qualifications are insisted for any profession.

The principle of Karma has a say in these matters. Ravana has to die and the death must be at the hands of a human or Vanara. Ravana, a mighty personality in every respect including his weaknesses cannot be killed by an ordinary human being or an ordinary Vanara which is evidenced by the fact that he chose to ignore these two classes while asking for boons fully confident that these classes pose no danger for him.

To kill Ravana, a special human being or a special Vanara was needed. Sri Rama was such a human being. In physical stature he was described to be tall measuring 96 inches, tall even for that age with long hands going all the way up to knees, a person trained in arms by none other than Brahmarshi Viswamitra, an enlightened soul trained by another and senior Brahmarshi Vasishta. Similarly the vanaras that have to help Sri Rama were also special and there were engineers, doctors and warriors in those vanaras. In Ramayana they were all portrayed as amasas (a small part) of the devas.

Hanuman is said to have born with the boon of Vayu, with the amsa of Siva and was a friend of none other than Surya. He is the Brahma designate and would take over after the period of present Brahma.

The vedas say that Brahman is everything and everything is Brahman. Sri Rama and Hanuman had the knowledge or enlightenment (that they were not different from Brahman) while Ravana, though not different from Brahman had no knowledge of it because he was gloating under the bloated ego. Maya plays its part and conflicts, friendships and relationships get created.

Lakshmana, as per the protocol answered Hanuman and told him the abdication of Sita and the search for her. He further said that Sri Rama had the choice to spend the 14 years in the forest close to Ayodhya, he chose Dandakaranya to destroy the rakshasas who were constantly troubling the ascetics involved in Tapas there. He further said that the eldest son of King Dasaradha who provided shelter to kings had to seek shelter under the Vanara Sugreeva. The word used by Maharshi Valmiki was saranam for shelter. Saranam means total surrender and also the only hope. When Saranam was used with reference to Sri Rama it was meant total surrender while it meant 'only hope' when it was with reference to Sugriva. Sri Rama as a king was proved to be a capable warrior par excellence and could provide protection to anybody seeking saranam. Sri Rama as the Brahman is known to give enlightenment to those who sought saranam of him. In spite of these facts, Sri Rama acting as a human being had no other way than seeking saranam of Sugreeva which means that Sri Rama's only hope was Sugreeva to search for Sita. The great artist in Maharshi Valmiki used the same word in both cases only to indicate that humility is essential for a human being either to get enlightenment or in seeking help.

Here Sri Rama maintained the Dharma of a king (ruler) in making Lakshmana answer Hanuman instead of directly answering Hanuman.

Ramayana, as was left to the human beings contains 24,000 slokas at the rate of 1,000 slokas for each one of the 24 letters in Gayatri Mantra. In Kishkindha Kanda, during the conversation between Laksmana and Hanuman, Laksmana addressed Hanuman as plavagottama which contains the letter ga corresponding to the 10th letter ga in Gayatri mantra. Upto that point 9,000 slokas were written and the sloka 9,001 starts in this sloka containing plavagottama. Scholars were able to discern the letters of Gayatri in the slokas of Ramayana. Even those who read Ramayana as a kavya for the story content will be able to reap the benefit of reciting Gayatri Mantra because the letters of Gayatri mantra were deliberately and skillfully woven. These people need not be initiated in Gayatri Mantra. Maharshi Valmiki adopted a method which involves getting the benefit of Gayatri Mantra through a biography. We adopt this technique to teach children about morals and other serious matters because the story always captivates the mind and the reader willingly goes through the story to enjoy it.

It is interesting to note that Saint Tyagaraja composed 24,000 kritis. The importance of the number 24,000 stems out when we understand that they are all linked with the Gayatri Mantra. Annamacharya composed 32,000 samkirtanas which again is the number of letters in Gayatri that is meant for a sanyasi. The essence of all the Vedas and Upanishads is said to be the Gayatri Mantra and knowing Gayatri Mantra either by meditation or by any other means gives the reader the benefit of knowing Vedas (the pure knowledge) and taking him/her to the path of realization of Brahman. The endeavor of the great Rishis in every age was to provide opportunities to all human beings to have access to Vedas irrespective of the Varna they belong; the dwija varna human beings directly get initiated to Gayatri Mantra while the others get the benefit from reading Ramayana.

It should not be construed that the mere birth into dwija varna and initiation to Gayatri Mantra alone is sufficient to take an individual to enlightenment. Not all born as dwijas use the opportunity and privilege. Majority of them waste the privilege and because of the karma they do in the birth of dwija, they take birth in any form and not necessarily a human birth. The birth as dwija is because of the karma and everybody has the opportunity to be born in dwija Varna. Similarly those who do not have the privilege to be initiated to Gayatri Mantra are not doomed and prevented from getting enlightenment and they can definitely take the alternate route. In case of those who are unlettered, resorting to Sravanam (hearing) is also advised.

Ramayana has a special place in literature. Vedas tell that Atma is enclosed in five sheaths. They are annamaya kosa, pranamaya kosa, manomaya kosa, vignanamaya kosa and anandamaya kosa. The literature that appeals to annamaya kosa is purely some reading material and has no long time effect on the readers. The literature that appeals to pranamaya kosa is material that is better than reading material and containing some message. The literature that appeals to manomaya kosa is the material that is appealing to mind and makes one think further. The literature that appeals to vignanamaya kosa is the material which provides knowledge that is cherished. The literature that appeals to anandamaya kosa is that which keeps one in bliss. Vedas and Upanishads are placed in anandamaya kosa literature. Puranas are classified as literature of vignanamaya kosa. In this classification, Valmiki Ramayana is put in the class of literature that is belonging to anandamaya kosa by the scholars, a place given only to Vedas and Upanishads.

Having convinced himself that Sri Rama and Lakshmana pose no danger to Sugriva and also realized that Sri Rama was none other than Brahman In human form, Hanuman immediately became a devotee. They were then taken to the Rishyamuka Mountain where Sugreeva was anxiously waiting for Hanuman.

Vali and Sugreeva were brothers belonging to Vanara race. Vali was born with the amsa of Devendra, the king of devaloka and Sugreeva was the amsa of the Sun. Both of them were of immense physical strength and possessed identical physical features which make distinguishing one from the other impossible. Because of the garland given by Devendra, Vali while wearing it around his neck became invincible in frontal attack and fight by anybody due to the boon attached to wearing the garland. Vali was the king of Kishkinda ruling over all the monkeys and bears of the world. Vali made his brother Sugreeva the regent to the kingdom and was very good to him. Vali married Tara, considered to be very intelligent and adroit in state craft and had a son Angada with her. Sugreeva married Ruma.

Vali and Sugreeva were both learnt in Vedas and so they were in a society that believed in Vedas just like Rakshasa and human societies.

Vali, fully aware of his prowess and ably assisted by his wife Tara was ruling the kingdom with abandon. A rakshasa named Mayavi who was having enmity with Vali on account of a woman challenged Vali one night for a fight. Vali, highly stung and enraged at the temerity of the rakshasa ran after him. But Mayavi instead of fighting lead Vali to a cave. Vali ordered Sugreeva who was following him closely to stay at the entrance of the cave and entered the cave. Sugreeva heard the cries of their fight for several days and noticed the flow of blood unabated from the cave after some time. When this flow continued for several days and hearing the agonized cries continuously, he was in a dilemma as to what he should do. When nobody emerged after a long wait, Sugreeva, convinced that Vali was dead closed the entrance of the cave with boulders and returned to Kishkinda. After informing everybody about what he thought had happened he assumed the kingship and took Tara as his wife as was the custom called Devara Nyayam.¹

Though the Vanara society follows the sruti , the smriti seem to have been modified in certain respects, notably with regard to marriage.

Vali returned to Kishkinda after killing the rakshasa Mayavi and after finding the entrance of the cave closed, totally convinced that Sugriva had developed interest in the kingdom and wanted Vali to die in the cave. Without any verification of the assumed misdeed of Sugriva, Vali kicked and thrashed him within an inch of his life vowing all the time that Sugriva deserved death and he was going to give Sugriva just that. As Sugriva started running away, Vali chased him like a hunter. Sugriva climbed the mountain Rishyamuka knowing fully well that Vali dared not to step on the mountain because of the curse which will cause death to Vali if he stepped on the mountain.

¹ Devaranyayam is a social law through which the younger brother gets the duty of marrying the wife of deceased elder brother.

Vali returned to Kishkinda, forcibly took his younger brother's wife Ruma which was a sacrilege as per the norms of their society. Being a king and responsible for maintaining the tenets of smriti resorted to commit a crime against the society himself knowing that he would award death sentence to anybody in the society committing the same crime..

At this stage Sugreeva, surrounded by his loyal ministers of whom Hanuman was the principal adviser mortally afraid of Vali and confined to Risyhamuka Mountain was looking for an ally who could kill Vali, for his life was always in danger as long as Vali lived. When he saw Sri Rama and Lakshmana approaching Rishyamuka Mountain, he was scared that they were perhaps sent by Vali to kill him. But the wise Hanuman told him that he would enquire who they were.

Thus Sri Rama and Lakshmana came to the presence of Sugriva having been carried by Hanuman on his shoulders.

Here we have to observe the significance of using Hanuman as a vehicle to go to Sugriva. 1. Sri Rama had accepted Hanuman as a servant and 2. Sri Rama was an emperor and so he should visit the possible ally with due ceremony befitting his rank. Also, Hanuman recognized Brahman in Sri Rama and decided to be a bhakta in the way of a servant.

Sugriva, after telling his fears to Sri Rama requested that he may permanently be rid of the worry of his life. Sri Rama at once assured Sugriva that he would see that Sugriva gets everything that was lost thereby assuring that Vali shall be killed and Sugriva would then be restored as the king and would get back his wife.

Generally the promise made by Sri Rama is looked as a hasty one because Sri Rama had no enmity with Vali. Was it because Sri Rama was in need of help of Sugriva desperately? Or was it because both Sri Rama and Sugriva were in the same condition as Sita was abducted and Ruma was forcibly taken by Vali.

Neither of them could be true. Sri Rama as an avatar of Lord Vishnu would not think of killing Vali for the friendship of Sugriva for help in searching for Sita. Sri Rama as an emperor and a human being would also not resort to killing of Vali for the sake of help from Sugriva. As an avatar, He would destroy evil to save the righteous. As a human being and an emperor, he would be just. As an avatar, Sri Rama could see the unjust behavior of Vali in vowing to kill Sugriva besides taking Ruma forcibly. As an emperor and human being, he has the responsibility to enforce the laws of the society to which the Vanaras were bound and Vali was a criminal having abrogated the social law by taking forcibly his younger brother's wife. The punishment was death in both the cases.

Sri Rama and Sugriva took the oath of friendship keeping the sacred fire as their witness. By this friendship Sri Rama promised Sugriva that he would kill Vali and get him back his wife and in return he wanted Sugriva to search for Sita .Notwithstanding the oath, Sugriva was not convinced that Sri Rama had the strength to kill Vali in combat. Sri Rama had then showed him his strength. Then Sugriva asked one of his ministers to show the jewels that were dropped by a woman amidst them which were recognized to be the jewels of Sita. When Sri Rama asked Lakshmana to identify the jewels, Lakshmana

said that he could identify only the jewel worn on the foot, having seen it daily when he went to touch Sita's feet.

That was the discipline and respect shown by a younger brother to the wife of elder brother.

Encouraged by Sri Rama, Sugriva rushed to Kishkinda and with a loud voice challenged Vali for a fight. Vali rushed to meet Sugriva for a fight. Sugriva was again given a good beating by Vali which made him run for life. He started blaming Sri Rama for the state of affairs and his humiliation at the hands of Vali. Sri Rama then told him that he could not decide to send his arrow because he could not distinguish between Vali and Sugriva for they looked alike. He then asked Sugriva to wear a garland of flowers for recognition and challenge Vali for a fight.

Hearing Sugriva shouting the challenge for the second time, Vali rushed forward to meet his brother ignoring the advice of wise Tara that he should assess the situation and find what additional strength Sugriva gained after their first encounter, and was also told by her that she had information that Sugriva befriended two princes dressed in muni's garb.

Vali was felled by the arrow of Sri Rama. Vali was still conscious and was in death throes. But he recognized Sri Rama and questioned him with a volley of questions. All the questions the modern day critics want to put forward were already shot by Vali and if any were remaining were addressed by Tara subsequently. The important questions asked by Vali were:

1. Why was he killed when there was no enmity between them?
2. Why did he hide behind a tree and shot the arrow instead of a direct confrontation?
3. Why was he killed, even if it were a hunt when his flesh was not fit for eating?
4. If only Sri Rama sought the help of Vali, he would have brought back Sita then why did Sri Rama resort to this way?

Sri Rama answered his questions and Vali was satisfied by the answers even though some people still think that killing of Vali was adharma. Several commentaries of Valmiki Ramayana had discussed this killing from different angles, that Sri Rama was an avatar, that Sri Rama was a human and emperor etc., The commentators did not skirt the issue but placed the points of dharma as told by Sri Rama and corroborated by the society.

Sri Rama told Vali that:

He was the descendent of Ikshwaku dynasty who have the suzerainty over all the lands. Hills and forests with all the inhabitants. He had the responsibility of upholding the laws of the empire.

He was not fighting Vali but administering justice for the crime committed by him.

He can kill ferocious animals by staying behind a tree, and Vali was an animal.

The intention of killing was not for food.

He won't beg his vassal for help to get back his wife from the abductor for he was fully capable of getting back his wife. Sri Ram made it clear that the problem of abduction of his wife was to be solved by him and the way he wanted. He did not request Sugriva to bring back his wife but only asked to search for her. Sri Rama was administering justice and even in his personal problem he was determined to go by the laws of the land.

Another objection raised by critics is that Sri Rama was not an emperor but was spending his time in the forests because he was banished by his father. We have to understand that Bharata was ruling the empire keeping the Padukas(foot guards) of Sri Rama on the throne. Though Sri Rama was in forest, the empire was ruled in his name and statute. But Sri Rama kept on saying that he was representing Bharata, the ruler for 14 years as per the injunction of their father.

Sri Rama, an emperor or according to him the agent of the emperor cannot stoop to go to the level of asking help to get back his wife thereby making him special and exception before law. When he punished Vali for the abduction of his younger brother's wife, he cannot allow the abductor of his wife to go unpunished.

Now Tara, having heard that her husband was mortally wounded rushed to the place of fight and started wailing at the misfortune of Vali to have fallen by the arrow of Sri Rama. The wise Hanuman came forward and consoled Tara saying that Vali fell because of his karma for nobody can escape karma. He further said that she was more unfortunate because she was living and had to think of their son Angada in the changed circumstances and said that Angada would now be the regent. We have to admire the wisdom of Hanuman because he made it clear that the death of Vali was the fruits of his karma and at the same time tacitly secured the future of Angada by announcing that Angada would be a the regent, thus showing the duty of Sugriva.

Vali regained consciousness just before the ultimate and called Sugriva and gave away the golden necklace given by Devendra, advised Angada that he has to obey Sugriva for he is the king and realizing the truth in what Sri Rama said breathed his last.

Sugriva became king and appointed Angada as the regent after the obsequies of Vali were performed befitting the mighty warrior and king that was Vali. Sugriva took Tara as his wife as per the devaranyaya.

Sugriva returned to Kishkinda after promising Sri Rama that he would send the search parties in all the directions after the end of rainy season.

After the rains receded, Sugriva dispatched three teams of Vanaras to search for Sita in the three directions-East, West and North under able and recognized leaders. Since Ravana's Lanka was to the South of their place, Sugriva selected the ablest of his vanaras comprising of Hanuman and the oldest Bear leader Jambavantha among others lead by the regent Angada to search for Sita in that direction confident that this team would return with news of Sita. Sri Rama having already recognized the great qualities of Hanuman and his absolute devotion gave his ring to Hanuman to show to Sita for the purpose of authenticating the representation on his behalf.

Sugriva, while sending the teams in all the directions gives the vivid details of the geography of the country and asks his teams to search diligently. Sri Rama surprised at the knowledge of geography of Sugriva asked him how he was able to narrate and describe the places. Sugriva replied that when he was running for life from Vali after he was beaten and banished from Kishkinda, he saw all these places followed by Vali in search of a place safe from the fear of Vali. After roaming around the earth he was able to see Rishyamuka Mountain inaccessible to Vali due to the curse.

The geographical description of Sugriva is taken by scholars to determine the age of Ramayana with scant regard to the time lapse; and they try to associate the places given with the modern known names at the wrong places and arrive at different age for different person. Over a period we notice that the names of places change and sometimes different names are used for the same place or river by different people. For example what is known as river Brahmaputra in India is called by a different name in Tibet.

Another point raised is that Sri Rama could not have given the ring because he shed all his jewels at the time of leaving Ayodhya. If the ring was a symbol of marriage, Sri Rama could not remove it. Even today, a ring (Bhatuvu) is presented by the father of the bride to the groom at the time of marriage.

Sugriva mentions civilization beyond Jambudwipa and called them by different names which the modern scholars try to associate with Greeks and others. One thing that can be deduced is that there were some civilizations outside the influence of Ikshwakus and they were not following the Sanatana Dharma. Such civilizations could be semi-barbaric and were termed as Mlechhas. At the time of Sri Rama there is no possibility of having any known civilizations such as Greek, Sumerian, and Babylonian because their age is considered by the modern scholars to be less than 10,000 years.

Jambavan, the chief of Bears contingent was part of Sugriva's army. Jambavan, as per Ramayana was the grandson of Lord Brahma and according to his own statement lived even in the age of Vamana Avatar. It is to be expected that the mighty Vanaras were able to subdue the bears and made a contingent in their army.

Sri Rama gave his ring to Hanuman because he was the one who introduced him to Sugriva and also impressed with his intelligence, maturity and conversational capacity and above all devoted totally Sri Rama in preference to Angada, the chief of the party containing Hanuman who was young and was still under the trauma of his father's death.

Sugriva fixed the time of one month from the day they started to get the where about of Sita and the penalty for missing the dead line was death. The teams sent to East, West and North returned and reported that Sita was not there in those regions.

The team lead by Angada searched everyplace in the south and reached the southern ocean without any success. They were dejected, tired and desperate. Instead of reporting that they could not find Sita, they thought it better to resort to fasting unto death. They were in that state of dilemma and were discussing the pros and cons when they were accosted by a great bird whose name was Sampathi.

The bird asked them the reason for their despondency and was explained their predicament. Then Sampathi told them that Sita was carried away by Ravana to Lanka and actually he could see Sita in Lanka because he said the sight of a bird like him see objects at a great distance which could not be seen by anybody. When he gave the news he regained his wings which were burnt earlier and immobilized him. He then told his story and said he was the elder brother of Jatayu . He left to offer oblations for his deceased younger brother Jatayu in the hands of Ravana when he was told about his death with grief.

People express doubt as to why Sampathi did not tell the exact location of Sita's internment. One should understand that Maharshi Valmiki, a contemporary wrote the biography of Sri Rama but not a novel about him. Besides Hanuman was charged to actually meet Sita and introduce himself by showing the ring and get the information regarding all aspects of her internment. The mere information regarding the place of internment, even if obtained by further questioning Sampathi would not have been much use. Moreover, Sampathi was grief-stricken on hearing the news of the death of his younger brother whom he was trying to protect from Sun's rays and lost his wings in the process.

After obtaining the clue to the where about of Sita from Sampathi, the team felt it had a new lease of life and reached the ocean separating Lanka with the mail land. After seeing the vast ocean, each of the vanara chiefs was telling his capacity to jump while Hanuman was just listening. At last when it was found that no one except Angada would perhaps be able to jump to Lanka, Jambavan said that Hanuman was capable of jumping not only this ocean but 10 times bigger than this and urged Hanuma to get up and move towards the job.

Having been pronounced to be the capable person for the task, Hanuman rose up and said that he would undertake the mission. All the while he was modest and only when he was urged to shoulder the responsibility he came forward and he increased his body to such a huge state that he was said to be as big as the Mahendra Mountain on which they were all standing.

The next kanda called Sundara kanda is considered the most important because of the exploits of Hanuman on one hand and on the other it is loaded with mantra. Maharshi Valmiki planned Ramayana not only as a biography of Sri Rama but an epic consisting of 24,000 slokas, one thousand slokas for each letter in Gayatri Mantra. These letters are imbedded such that for each thousand slokas one letter of Gayatri comes. The idea is that Gayatri Mantra is available to only a few and so the benefits of Gayatrijapa should be available to those who are not eligible to take Gayatri mantra. This is made possible by reading the Ramayana or at least hearing the Ramayana.

Sundare sundara ramah sundare sundari katha

Sundare sundari Sita Sundare sundaram vanam

Sundare sundaram kavyam sundare sundarah kapih

Sundare sundaram mantram sundare kim na sundaram

Maharshi Valmiki deviated from the regular pattern of naming the chapters relating to the parts of life of Sri Rama after the Kishkinda kanda. After naming the next kanda Sundara Kanda he again

reverted to the original practice and named the next chapter Yudda kanda. The commentators were of the opinion that it was named so because of what was explained in the above sloka.

The sloka says: Sri Rama is a sundara and the Katha is sundari. Sita is sundari and the garden is sundaram. The Ramayana kavyam is sundaram and the kapi(Hanuman) is sundarah.The mantram is sundaram, then why should not be chapter be sundaram. Sundaram is used to describe an object or person of beauty. The word Sundara has different forms depending on the gender and usage according to Sanskrit grammar.

Entire Ramayanam is about Sri Rama and Sita. Sri Raama and Sita were beautiful. Ramayana is beautiful as a story and also as a biography of Sri Rama. Where was the necessity to call this chapter as Sundara Kanda? The other words which were described as beautiful were Kapi and Mantra. How can he say that the kapi was beautiful? And what mantra he was referring to?

Sundaresa is the name given to Lord Siva in Madurai temple. So the Lord Siva is known as Sundaresa . Besides, when we describe the ultimate Brahman, we use Satyam, Sivam and Sundaram. It is obvious that the Brahman is Sivam(That Siva and Vishnu are not different was the truth given by Vedas) meaning that Brahman is auspicious. It would mean that Brahman is truth, auspicious and beautiful. Since Siva is identified with Brahman, Siva is beautiful (Sundaram). Hanuman who is the kapi referred in the sloka is an amsa of Lord Siva as per the Puranas and also Ramayana. Therefore the Kapi is said to be beautiful. But Hanuman made his appearance in Kishkinda Kanda also. Then why is this chapter specially called Sundara Kanda?

Obviously, the mantra referred to in the sloka is the reason for naming it so as the chapter contains all that is beautiful. What else could be beautiful in mantras other than Gayatri Mantra? But there are several Gayatri Mantras. The word Gayatri Mantra is applied to that Mantra which on being sung gives protection. The Gayatri Mantra given by Maharshi Viswamitra and was included in all the four Vedas by Maharshi Vyasa in his classification is accepted as the Gayatri Mantra that is capable of taking the aspirant to Brahman when meditated upon. It was included in Rig Veda because it could be used as a prayer or Mantra for meditation, in Yajur Veda because it could be used for Homa and Tarpana, in Sama Veda because it can be sung and in Atharvana Veda because it can ward off evil effects on the physical body and life as a human being. All most all the Gayatri Mantras start with the word Tat and ends with Tat. This is opined to be so because of the Maha Vakyam "Tatwam Asi".The pure Brahman is referred as Tat. The Gayatri Mantra given by Maharshi Viswamitra also begins with the word Tat and ends with Tat. But, unlike other Gayatri Mantras, there is an eligibility criterion which prohibits Women and those who are not dwijas(Twice born). Obviously, the majority of the human beings, ney except a small and insignificant minority (Insignificant in terms of numbers) are barred from this Mantra. It looks unjust for everybody should have the same opportunity to reach Brahman if desired. The reasons for this discrimination stems from the fact that the Gayatri Mantra used in meditation involves not only manana(repetition) but Pranayama and controlling and regulating breathing, which if practices without a Guru (Call him as the one qualified to supervise the practice of meditation on Gayatri Mantra) will result in disastrous results effecting the aspirant and sometimes leading to the physical death. Today Gayatri Mantra is initiated to the aspirant at the time of upanayanam as a mere ritual and no care is

taken to initiate the aspirant in all the aspects surrounding the initiation. So much so, it is being questioned by those who are denied and in some cases even by those who are initiated about the absurdity of such denial. Besides, this initiation is not done at the correct age and there is no follow up in the practice of meditation after initiation making the whole ritual ludicrous.

The result is that Gayatri Mantra recitation has become casual and is used in all occasions by everybody merely as a repetition of the text of Mantra without realizing its potential. Luckily Gayatri Mantra recitation gives benefits if properly done but has no ill effects even if care is not taken. That is the greatness of Gayatri Mantra. In case of other Mantras, there is always an adverse effect on the aspirant if improper method was used in the use of Mantra.

If Maharshi Valmiki felt the need to make Ramayana a Parayana Grandham (Book fit for serious study), the fore sight of the great have to be appreciated for they have the vision to foresee a situation where there will be practically none to get initiation to Gayatri Mantra. They had taken into consideration that a few people may have time, aspiration, interest and enjoyment of going through a book, more who have interest but not time to enjoy the entire book, many more who cannot read and all having a common interest of getting the benefit of the exercise. If a book were to be useful to everybody for all the time to come it should be so designed that mere hearing the book read shall get benefits. Maharshi Valmiki did just that.

The entire Ramayana consisting of 24,000 slokas is imbedded with the 24 letters of Gayatri so that those who do the Parayana of Ramayana would get the benefits of meditation of Gayatri Mantra whether they are qualified or not. For those who do not have the time to do the Parayana of the Ramayana, he designed the sixth chapter of Ramayana- Sundara Kanda- to start with Tat in the opening sloka and end with Tat in the last sloka of the chapter and imbedding with the twelfth letter va of Gayatri Mantra thus making it Gayatri Mantra itself. For those who are unlettered, mere hearing either the entire Ramayana being read if there is time, or hearing Sundara Kanda being read if there is no time could get the benefits. For those who cannot be brought under the above categories, the mere repetition of the word RAMA would bring the benefits. Of course! Each one belonging to the above categories goes there because of his/her karma. Human beings, having the facility of decision making are expected to get into one of the categories. That is the reason why traditionally in Indian households the name of Rama is uttered for everything whether in pain or pleasure so that it becomes a habit with everybody in the family.

Sundara Kanda, according to late Paramacharya His Holiness Chandrasekharananda Saraswati Swami of Kanchi is so designed that not only Gayatri Mantra but some other Mantras meant for Victory over enemies, Mantras for freedom from imprisonment were included so that the Parayana brings not only the enlightenment but such small benefits needed for this finite life as a human being. He also mentioned that the name Sundara is justified with the beautiful Gayatri Mantra woven in the fabric of the chapter because no other chapter of Ramayana starts with the word Tat and ends with the word Tat.

No wonder that Ramayana culture spread over the entire India, South-East Asia. It has its versions in Buddhism and Jainism also. It is the subject matter of so many writers in different languages in India. The Ram Charit Manas written by Goswami Tulasidas in spoken Hindi is as popular as Ramayana and that the Hanuman Chalisa of Ram Charit Manas is revered like the Sundara Kanda. In Telugu, the number of writers making their mission to write Ramayana is never decreasing. To quote The Gnana Peeth awardee the Late Viswanatha Satyanarayana, one doesn't get tired of reading Ramayana just as he doesn't get tired of eating because both are life sustaining; Or for that matter writing Ramayana. The writing of Ramakoti(10 million times of the word Rama) and dedicating to the Sri Rama Temple in Bhadrachalam is a practice in all most all the households in the Telugu- speaking population until recently and modernization has some little effect to this practice just as its effects in other areas.

Now, having been told by Jambavantha that he alone can accomplish the mission Hanuman as has been told earlier made his body huge like a mountain and having paid respects to Surya, Vayu and other elders took the jump by kicking his heels on the Mahendra Mountain. Maharshi Valmiki said that the impact of his heels on the mountain created such a disturbance that it looked like a rain of trees, boulders into the ocean.

In the prayer to Hanuman, it is said that he had the vigor of the mind and the speed of ai(Mano javam marutha tulya vegam). When he jumped from the Mahendra Mountain, his speed he said would be that of RamaBana(Sri Rama's arrow).

On his way to Lanka, Hanuman encountered the rising Mountain named Mainaka, who offered hospitality in return to the help rendered to him by Vayu earlier. Hanuman politely declined saying that he would not stop because of his oath and touched the mountain with his hand indicating his friendliness. The Devas witnessing the great feat of Hanuman asked Surasa, the mother of Nagas who can assume any form to try to stop Hanuman because of their interest in testing the capabilities of Hanuman. Then Surasa assumed a huge body of horrible demonic appearance and accosted Hanuman and said "Today the Devas have given you as food and you cannot escape without entering my mouth." Hanuman replied that he was ready to comply with the decision of Devas but he had undertaken a task of finding Sita and he would return to Surasa after completing the task. Surasa was not prepared for the alternative and insisted that she would devour him. Immediately Hanuman began increasing his body and Surasa also started to increase the width of her mouth and body. There upon Hanuman suddenly reduced his figure to that of a thumb nail, entered Surasa's mouth and exited it in all but a fraction of a second. Hanuman said that he entered her mouth as per her wish and so he was continuing his flight. Surasa assumed her original form, blessed Hanuman and admired at his intelligence. Hanuman is termed the best among intellectuals (Buddimatam Varishta) and these instances give one more proof of his intelligence. As he was flying for some time, he realized that he was being dragged and on observation found that someone was dragging his shadow in the ocean because of which he felt he was dragged. It was a demon named Simhika which was sucking his shadow so that he was dragged into her mouth. Hanuman entered her mouth, increased his body and killed her by tearing her internal organs and emerged from her mouth and continued his flight and reached the end of the ocean. He was now on the outskirts of Lanka. The three episodes give a good lesson as to how one should treat a friend even when

busy, how to escape from a difficult situation and ultimately what had to be done when a demonic force attacks.

This sarga(Part of the chapter-kanda) is recommended for parayana for Victory over adversities.

Modern day critics would question the existence of a demon like Simhika, a character like Surasa and the rising out of a mountain in an ocean. From our experience over the past two thousand years (because of the available records), the extinction of species of dinosaurs and the conjectures of the geologists and also considering the antiquity of Ramayana, It may not be possible to reject the phenomenon described in Ramayana. Hanuman crossed the ocean and the distance he covered was 100 yojanas equivalent to about 250 miles of today. But the distance between Lanka and the place from where Hanuman took the jump is less than 100 miles. Again we take the findings of the geologists with regard to formation of land mass and drifting of the continents over the time and also the recent submersion of part of Rameswaram island which contained Dhanushkodi(There was a railway station with that name which was submerged in the ocean) to explain the situation.

Hanuman, having landed on the beach of the sea that surrounded Lanka had a good look around and found that the city Lanka was fortified with all the trimmings of preparedness for any attack; it was surrounded by woods and forest and a moat surrounding the fortified Wall with well-guarded Gates. He thought that such a city, even if the vanara army were to reach it was difficult to conquer. After climbing the Tallest peak of a Mountain called Lamba Mountain, he had the glimpse of the great city of Lanka constructed by Viswakarma using gold and precious stones on the top of the peak of the Mountain called Trikuta Mountain which looked as though it was floating in the clouds and air. He decided that he should, at all costs take every care to see that he was not detected by the Ravana army in order the mission entrusted to him should not be thwarted. He reduced his body size to that of an ordinary monkey and waited for the night to set in to step into the city.

When Hanuman decided that it is time to get into the city and started to jump over the wall, he was confronted with a hideous demon who gave him a thundering hit making him dizzy for a while demanding to know the intentions. Hanuman, seeing a woman in the demon lifted his left hand and gave a hit which made her fall down. She said she was the city Lanka and because of the hit by Hanuman realized that the destruction of Lanka was inevitable as per the words of Lord Brahma and further said that he could go into the city and search for Sita.

Even Lanka did not tell Hanuman the exact location of Sita's internment. Why? Lanka was not able to recover from the hit given by Hanuman and he was not interested to wait any longer for questioning her. Instead he put his left foot forward and jumped over the wall and entered the city of Lanka. These doubts cannot be raised as the biography gives what had happened. It cannot give answers to what people did and what people thought at any moment. Hanuman declared that Lanka was an enemy city and therefore did not enter through a door or by placing his right foot.

Under the light thrown by the bright moon, Hanuman began his search inch by inch without taking any chance to leave any particular place by complacency and found that the living conditions of rakshasas of all shades and status are linked to wine, women and wealth disregarding the code of

Dharma. Hanuman was appalled at the type of moral degradation existing in Lanka. Only the place where Vibhishana, the younger brother of Ravana lived was free from these degenerate practices. Having spent a good part of the night in the search of Sita in Lanka in vain, Hanuman was disconcerted but was bent on fulfilling his mission.

He, then went to the Asoka Garden which was a prized place of Ravana and found Sita sitting under an Asoka tree surrounded by fierce looking rakshasa- guards, every moment tormented by the words and asking her to choose between marrying Ravana or becoming their meal.

The greatness of Sundara Kanda as explained by scholars has its culmination when Hanuman found Sita. The city Lanka was on Trikuta Mountain. Trikuta means three kutas- Vagbhava Kuta, Kamaraja Kuta and Sakti Kuta. The abode of the supreme Brahman Rajarajeswari is Trikuta. When Hanuman found Sita, it is said that the supreme Brahman was found by Hanuman in Sita in Trikuta. She is Gayatri because in Lalitha Sahsrnamas it is said that" Gayatri Vyahruti Sandhya Dwija Brinda Nishevita". It means that the supreme Brahman Rajarajeswari is prayed by the dwijas as Gayatri. Vyahritis. Sri Vidya designates the abode of Rajarajeswari as Trikuta. Hanuman found Brahman when he said he found Sita.

The aspirant after the parayana of Sundara Kanda comes to realize the Brahman because he had gone through the process of meditating upon the beautiful (Sundara) mantra Gayatri. What was possible for Hanuman becomes possible to every ardent aspirant with diligence (Sradda), if he/she does parayana of Sundara Kanda. In other words parayana of Sundara Kanda is equivalent to the practice of Sri Vidya. The problem of making available the secret Sri Vidya or the fruits of Gayatri Mantra Japa, available to only a few was solved by Maharshi Valmiki when he imbedded the Gayatri Mantra in Sundara Kanda. At that time all those who were literate had the access to Sundara Kanda. Still a large segment of unlettered remains to be addressed and the only way seemed to be to make them hear the Sundara Kanda pravachan(Discourse) and memorizing at least some parts of it; for those who could not do this, recitation of the word Sri Rama was prescribed. Once enticed to the Sri Rama recitation, the individual would be on the way to think to better his/her conditions.

Hanuman, a great devotee of Sri Rama and well versed in the Veda and grammar and also known for his well-modulated speech made himself known to Sita through the process of reciting the Sri Rama katha (Sri Rama's story). Sita, after questioning Hanuman very intensely realized that he was indeed the messenger from Sri Rama and not a rakshasa in disguise Hanuman then gave the ring of Sri Rama to Sita and obtained her jewel to be shown to Sri Rama.. Hanuman was a witness to the visit of Ravana and also the ultimatum that Sita would be slaughtered if she did not accept Ravana as her husband in two months' time. Hanuman also heard Ravana ordering the guarding rakshasis to make Sita accept him as the husband.

Hanuman having determined to face Ravana to give him a chance to relent and make remedial action for abducting Sita started to destroy the Asoka garden which was a very dear to Ravana. The guards of the garden, unable to prevent neither the destruction of trees and plants nor were capable of facing Hanuman ran to Ravana and reported the matter. Ravana sent his ablest warrior Jambumali and

then his own son, the valiant Aksha to bring Hanuman but both met horrible death in the hands of Hanuman. Ravana sent his eldest son Meghanatha usually styled Indrajit because he had vanquished Lord Indra in battle, who was considered as the foremost warrior and possessor of great astras. Indrajit had to use Brahmastra in order to stun Hanuman as he had a boon from Lord Brahma that he would not be hurt by Brahmastra. Then the rakshasa soldiers bound Hanuman with ropes and dragged him to Ravana.

Hanuman had pricked the bubble of Ravana's pride and vanity by killing two of his most valiant warriors of which one was his own son and Ravana was enraged. When Hanuman was brought to the Royal court, Hanuman was able to see the splendor of Ravana's court and also the great and magnificent personality of Ravana. When asked who he was and the reason for destruction of the garden, Hanuman told the story of Rama and told Ravana that he should immediately restore Sita to Sri Rama by begging pardon for his mistake as otherwise he would surely face nothing short of death in the hands of Sri Rama. Ravana, hurt because of the temerity of Hanuman in not only wounding his pride but also the insulting speech in his own court ordered Hanuman to be put to death. Vibhishana reminded Ravana that it was not ethical to kill an envoy of the enemy and more so by a great king Ravana and further said that if the envoy were to be killed, the enemy would not get any message. He said the code only allows the envoy to be punished for any misdeeds. Ravana, there upon ordered that the tail of Hanuman be burnt so that he would be mutilated and also will lose his most prized part of the body.

The rakshasas took great care to find rags and made a thick covering to Hanuman's tail, drenched it with oil and set fire to it. Hanuman kept still till his tail was set fire, then increased his body enormously, jumped from captivity and began setting fire to the buildings in Lanka starting with Ravana's mansion and leaving only Vibhishana's mansion. In a short while the entire city was engulfed in fire and got totally destroyed. Hanuman now thought that his action might have hurt Sita but was gladdened when he heard the rakshasas say that even though the entire city was reduced to ashes, Sita was safe from fire. He went to the ocean, put off the fire on his tail by drenching it in the ocean, returned to Asoka garden, took permission from Sita and started his flight back. On his way he touched the peak of the Mainaka Mountain as a gesture of affection and friendship and landed near his band on the Mahendra Mountain shouting that he had seen Sita.

The team lead by Angada having rejoiced at the accomplishments of Hanuman and the success of the mission were on their way to Kishkinda. They stopped at a part of honey especially reserved for the king Sugriva, enjoyed the honey and made a celebration which made the keeper of the park angry. When the keeper Dadhimukha tried to stop them, he was thrashed. He then rushed to Sugriva and reported the matter. Sugriva, then addressed Sri Rama and said the team lead by Angada must have seen Sita as otherwise they would dare not do what they did at the park of honey (Madhu Vana). He then ordered that Angada and his party be brought immediately to him. On reaching the place of audience, Hanuman once again said that he had seen Sita.

The commentators attach lot of significance to what Hanuman uttered when he first landed at the Mahendra Mountain and also when he was addressing Sri Rama- " I saw Sita" and also the

destruction of park of honey and celebration. When people are anxious about anything, good news should be reported first without details so that the people concerned would have comfort from anxiety.

The search for Sita was very important for the story of Sri Rama as it shows what a man whose wife was abducted feels even though he was great in every respect. A person in that state would not think of his valor but suddenly finds that he was helpless and tries to muster help from whatever quarter available at that moment. Sri Rama now knew who his adversary was, where his wife was kept and what he had to face to get back his wife.

The lesson the Vedas convey through the story is that the quest for Brahman is as difficult as finding Sita in Lanka and can be achieved with the determination shown by Hanuman and the help the Gayatri Mantra.

Sri Rama having heard Hanuman describes his journey to Lanka, his meeting with Sita and all that happened subsequently in the killing of Jambumali and Aksha, burning the city of Lanka and time limit of 2 months immediately ordered Sugreeva to move the army next day which happened to be an auspicious day. The auspicious moment was fixed on that day when Moon enters Hasta star.

Sri Rama Said” Sugriva

1. Let the commander in chief Nila move with his contingent right in front as an advance party and decide the path free from any trouble with abundant supply of fruits and water.
2. Let a small army be left at Kishkinda for its protection.
3. Let the commanders Gaja, Gavaya and Gavaska follow with their contingents at the head of the army on the path made by Nila.
4. Let the commander Rishabha move with his contingent and guard the right flank of the army,
5. Let the commander Gandhamadana move with his contingent and guard the left flank of the army
6. I will mount on the shoulders of Hanuman and Lakshmana shall mount on the shoulders of Angada and cheer the army placed in the middle of the body of army.
7. Let the commanders Jambavan, Sushena and Vegadarsi guard the central part of the army with their contingents and
8. Let the rest of the army follow with their commanders in the rear part of the body of the army.

Accordingly the entire army reached the ocean swiftly without taking any rest and was asked to camp on the shores of the ocean till further orders.

Meanwhile, Ravana convened the assembly to determine the strategy to face any situation and to face imminent war because Ravana was convinced that when a monkey, a mere messenger could cause so much havoc in Lanka Sri Rama would contrive some method to reach Lanka with his Vanara army. He explained everything to all his courtiers and wanted to know what they should do. All the

generals and his courtiers except his younger brother Vibheeshana voiced unanimously that they should fight, assuring that victory was a foregone conclusion. All his generals and courtiers were mostly related to him and have tasted the victory in all their wars earlier under the leadership of Ravana and were blind followers and also sycophants because they were enjoying the fruits of their earlier exploits in the shape of wealth, women and wine.

Vibheeshana, on the other hand was a satwic by temperament and a devotee of Lord Vishnu and was always averse to the methods and the style of living of all rakshasas including his brother and king Ravana and never tried to hide his feelings. He saw the present position clearly and advised Ravana to save the rakshasa clan from annihilation by returning Sita to Sri Rama. He did not like the way Ravana treated their half-brother Kubera and the way Ravana snatched the Pushpaka Vimana from him. He was the well-wisher of his brothers and his clan and had to tolerate all their misdeeds, adharma because of attachment to his brother. But he never allowed a chance to go without telling his disapproval to Ravana's deeds. Ravana also tolerated Vibheeshana because of his sibling affection and also the truth in what Vibheeshana said, though he summarily ignored the sane advice. The other rakshasas were forced to accept Vibheeshana because he was the younger brother of the King.

Vibheeshana, having recognized that Sri Rama was a man, Ravana had the boon of invincibility and death from everybody except human beings and Vanaras, and also the annihilation of the entire rakshasa clan including the valiant Khara and Dushana in Janasthana in the hands of Sri Rama saw the great danger to Ravana from Sri Rama. After all, the three brothers Ravana, Kumbhakarna and Vibheeshana were the sons of a great rishi and had the privilege of learning Vedas and sastras from their father. Vibheeshana, therefore braved the disrespect from all the sycophants and also the displeasure of Ravana and again prayed Ravana to save himself and the rakshasa clan from the powerful arrows of Sri Rama that spew death.

Ravana was enraged. He was not less intelligent than Vibheeshana; not less proficient in Dharma or Vedas and sastras. In fact Ravana knew everything. He was master of all that is to be known. Only thing was that he adopted the Rajasa and Tamasa ways of living and he was determined to continue to live the same way. He wanted his court to approve whatever he wished. Vibheeshana as a thorn was poking again and again over his mistakes where his own son the valiant Meghanatha was supporting him unconditionally.

No person in power will have the capacity to take criticism, much less a dictator. Ravana immediately said, 'Vibheeshana, you would not have lived after taking the way you did had you not been my brother. You better leave my presence immediately'.

Vibheeshana immediately rose up into air followed by four followers and said that he was going to seek protection of Sri Rama.

Kumbhakarna woke up from his sleep of six months and he was summoned to the court. When appraised of the situation, he got angry with Ravana and said that he should have consulted the courtiers when he decided to abduct somebody's wife but he should not ask the courtiers to ratify his

action. He said that Sri Rama has to kill him before killing Ravana. He then said that he would kill Sri Rama, his brother along with all the army for the sake of Ravana and advised him to enjoy life.

The two brothers Kumbhakarna and Vibheeshana did not like Ravana's action in abducting Sita for different reasons. Kumbhakarna finds fault because Ravana did not consult the court before committing the act while Vibheeshana for the act itself. Kumbhakarna was a tamasic to a great extent and also rajasic but Vibheeshana was purely satwic. Their behavior was dependent on their gunas. Kumbhakarna, even when things are obvious felt that his strength was enough to kill Sri Rama and others while Vibheeshana saw the imminent doom on the rakshsa race in the hands of Sri Rama because the crime committed by Ravana was heinous.

Now that he was banished, Vibheeshana decided to seek refuge under Sri Rama since that was the only way he could save himself and whatever was left of the rakshasa race after the certain death of Ravana and Kumbhakarna.

From the point of Karma, Ravana and Kumbhakarna were destined to die in the hands of Sri Rama according to the curse of the sages Sankasa nandana etc. The scholars feel that Ravana and Kumbhakarna were only hastening their end by their attitude.

Vibheeshana with his four followers reached Sri Rama's camp and requested asylum (Saranagati) even without getting in the ground. Sri Rama consulted the important Vanara generals, Angada, Sugreeva and Hanuman. Everybody except Hanuman advised Sri Rama against grant of asylum on the grounds that he was a raksasa and also the brother of Ravana, while Hanuman narrated the good qualities of Vibheeshana including the fact that he was brave enough to tell Dharma to Ravana knowing fully well that such an advice will be frowned upon..Hanuman said" Moreover, he may be wishing to be the king of Lanka just as Sugriva became king of Kishkinda after the death of Vali. He may be given refuge at least for this probable wish".

The doubt arises about Vibheeshana's true intentions. Valmiki Maharshi was true in narration because Hanuman spoke of the possible intentions of Vibheeshana in seeking refuge from Sri Rama. He was banished from Lanka with the threat of death for speaking about the Dharma. He was bold and was fearless in expressing the Dharma knowing fully well that Ravana would be furious. When Ravana decided that he would fight Sri Rama, Vibheeshana knew the outcome of the war from what he knew about the slaying of Vali and anointing Sugreeva as the king. He was known to be a satwic in the land where all most all the others were rajasic and tamasic. Wishing to become king on the death of Ravana with his children was only to salvage the damage caused by Ravana and make the rakshasa race turn to live in Dharma. In the light of this analysis Hanuman, who is wise thought Vibheeshana's wish was as per Dharma and deserved favorable consideration from Sri Rama.

Sri Rama, after weighing all the counsels decided to grant asylum to Vibheeshana and his followers because he was determined to give protection to anybody regardless of what he was as it was his Dharma as a king and as the representative of the king. He said that he would give the same treatment even to Ravana, if he shows remorse for his mistake and takes refuge. There after Vibheeshana was welcomed by Sri Rama to his camp.

Sri Rama immediately declared that Vibheeshana would be given the kingdom of Lanka after the killing of Ravana and his followers and asked Lakshmana to anoint Vibheeshana with the waters of the ocean and proclaim him as the king of Lanka which was swiftly carried out. Vibheeshana, on his part decided to fight the rakshasa forces to the best of his capacity.

The biggest problem before Sri Rama was to find a way by which his army crosses the ocean and reaches Lanka. Sri Rama asked Vibheeshana what he should do. Vibheeshana said that there was no other way except asking the ocean to give way. Sri Rama took a holy dip in the ocean and sat in meditation to pray for the ocean's help. When the help was not forthcoming, Sri Rama became very angry with the ocean and drew his arrow with the intention of drying the ocean and loudly made his intentions known. The ocean appeared to him and said that it was not natural for the elements to yield to the caprices of individuals and Sri Rama should not demand an exception. The ocean advised Sri Rama to build a bridge across the ocean with the help of the Vanara Engineer Nila born with the amsa of Viswakarma, the celestial Engineer. Nila was cursed by the Rishis that whatever he threw in the ocean would float, he having got the curse for his pranks on the Rishis when he was a child in throwing the articles used by them.

The doubt regarding the ability to dry the ocean by Sri Rama comes out at once, particularly when Sri Rama was a human being. We should not forget that Sri Rama had already some achievements like breaking the bows of Siva and Vishnu which were impossible to lift for ordinary human beings, defeating Parasurama without even a fight, destruction of the entire rakshasa army led by Khara and Dushana in Janmasthan beside the exploits of killing Tataka, Subahu and Maricha earlier. As mentioned earlier Sri Rama was a realized soul and he was Brahman in human body. For an enlightened soul in any form, nothing is impossible because Brahman is everything and everything is Brahman. Because Sri Rama was a human being he had to go through the ways humans do and that did not doubt the capacity he had and of which he was fully aware. This can be established by his victory over Parasurama and the consequent destruction of all the power got by Parasurama with his Tapas through the arrow of Sri Rama.

Ravana decided to fight and accordingly instructed his generals. He then dispatched his spies Suka and Sarana to Sri Rama's camp to assess the enemy's strength. They were promptly identified by Vibheeshana and were produced before Sri Rama. Sri Rama told them to tour the entire army and report the same to Ravana. The terrified Suka and Sarana came back and reported how they were saved by Sri Rama from thrashing by monkeys, the greatness of Sri Rama's army and lastly the greatness of Sri Rama. Ravana was enraged at the praise of Sri Rama by his own spies and dismissed them from his presence by a rebuke. He then ordered Sardula the tiger among spies to get a detailed account of the army and the strength of the generals of Sri Rama. He returned shaking with fear and told Ravana that he could come back from certain death due to the generosity of Sri Rama and said that Sri Rama's army was a mighty army studded with great generals Sugreevam, Angada, Jambavan and his brother, Hanuman and his father Kesari, Dadhimukha, the commander in chief Nila, Sushena and several others who were born with the amsas of the Deva stalwarts.

More than anything Ravana was perturbed by the heaping of praises by his most trusted spies about Sri Rama's greatness and was equally concerned by hearing the names of the generals and warriors of Sri Rama's army that were the amasas of the Devas.

Sri Rama directed Nala to construct the bridge across the mountain and in a short time all the monkeys helped Nala to lay a strong bridge with the boulders they brought. Sri Rama then crossed the bridge with his entourage and army and camped on the Suvela Mountain.

Ravana convened his court again in order to decide the next step when he saw that Sri Rama crossed the ocean with his army and camping on the outskirts of Lanka. Sumali(Malyavan), the grandfather of Ravana strongly advocated giving up Sita and prevent the war. Ravana was very angry with him and abused him saying that he would never give up Sita. He then instructed his generals to guard all the four entrances to the fortified Lanka against the attacking army.

Ravana was advised by Vibheeshana to give up Sita and also advised by Malyavant, his maternal grandfather, again for different reasons. So did Kumbhakarna. Still Ravana was adamant and wanted to fight Sri Rama with a hope of killing Sri Rama to possess Sita. Two explanations are given by scholars for Ravana's behavior. One he was accelerating his death in order to reach his original abode, Vaikuntham and second he was engulfed in Maya and was holding to a hope just as a person swept by floods tries to hold even a blade of grass or willow for survival.

Ravana knew that the war with Sri Rama was not easy to win and so he decided on a proxy war which depended on sorcery and deceit. He made one of his scorers to prepare the severed heads of Sri Rama and Lakshmana and took them to Sita with a view to make her agree to be his wife since Sri Rama was already killed. Sita on seeing the severed heads becomes despondent, but Ravana inghad to leave the place immediately because of the clamor of the monkeys that were destroying the surroundings of Lanka. As soon as Ravana left the place, the heads disappeared. Then Surama, a friendly woman and wife of Vibheeshana explained the treachery of Ravana and said what all that was exhibited was the sorcery .

Sri Rama decided to stay at his camp on Suvela Mountain and sent Angada as his ambassador to Ravana with an ultimatum which was rejected.

Indrajit suddenly appeared at the camp- site and sent nagastras (Weapons which carried the serpent heads and could be used only through mantra) on Sri Rama and Lakshmana from a position of invisibility which made Sri Rama and Lakshmana bound by serpents thus making them immobile. He went back to his father Ravana and told how he destroyed Sri Rama and Lakshmana. When Sita heard the news, she was distraught with grief for she could never believe that Sri Rama specially and Lakshmana would ever be in that state. Trijata, a guard then consoled Sita that Sri Rama and Lakshmana would come out of the difficulty and Ravana was sure to die in the hands of Sri Rama. Suddenly Garuda appeared in the camp of Sri Rama and the serpents ran away at the sight of Garuda. Sri Rama and Lakshmana were freed and wanted to know who Garuda was. Garuda told that he was always the friend of Sri Rama. The jubilation of Ravana was short lived.

Ravana ordered his generals to declare war and start fighting with the Vanara army which already started demolition of the security measures around Lanka. Seeing that he could not stop the destruction of his fortifications, Ravana ordered general after general to take an army and fight Sri Rama and his army when each one of them was killed in the battle. Thus all his generals, his valiant sons except Meghanatha and the sons of Kumbhakarna met death at the hands of the Vanara generals.

It was ironic that the seasoned generals who fought many wars with Devas with such stunning success with all their mighty arms were reduced to nothing in the hands of Vanara generals who had to use only boulders and trees as arms against them. Obviously the rakshasa generals never thought that they should have protection against the boulders and trees.

Ravana was now left with a few warriors and yet he wanted to fight without the consideration of odds against him. He then ordered his most able warrior and winner of many battles whose very name brought shivers to all the Devas, Prahastha, the chief commander of his army to go with an army and fight Sri Rama. When Sri Rama saw Prahastha, he was wonderstruck at the body, arms, and chariot of Prahastha and asked Vibheeshana who the approaching warrior was and about his antecedents. Vibheeshana then told him the exploits and the valor of Prahastha. The battle was fierce with both sides represented by mighty warrior and Prahastha was killed with his head broken into pieces by the great boulder thrown by Nila, the commander of Sri Rama's army.

Ravana decided to face the enemy personally and led a great army to fight Sri Rama. He was badly wounded, thoroughly mauled and defeated in his battle with Sri Rama and was asked by Sri Rama to back and come for battle after taking rest. Ravana for the first time tasted the sharpness of the arrows of Sri Rama and perhaps in his heart of hearts could estimate the enemy to be formidable. Besides the humiliation of defeat in the battle added to his already troubled mind, so he immediately ordered that Kumbhakarna should be roused from his sleep to send him to fight Sri Rama.

Kumbhakarna, a giant among giants woke up from deep sleep and so he was not fully in control of all his faculties. He then went to Ravana to inquire as to why he was forced to rouse him from sleep. Ravana told what had happened during the time Kumbhakarna was asleep and ended his explanation saying that barring a small fraction of army, the children and old all the others were dead in the battle. Kumbhakarna blasted Ravana for ignoring the good advice tendered by Vibheeshana and also his Dharma as king and reminded him that he also advised against this war before he went to sleep. Ravana was peeved at this advice because he was no less educated in Dharma than Kumbhakarna and what he wanted was that Kumbhakarna should go to war and kill his enemies. So he said that there is no point to discuss things that have happened in the past as he decided to fight and he vehemently said that Kumbhakarna could go back to sleep if he decided not to fight.

Kumbhakarna immediately said that he was ready to obey the king and his elder brother and further assured that as long as he was alive danger cannot touch Ravana .

Kumbhakarna said that Ravana did not follow raja dharma by not heeding to the advice of well-wishers and also asserted that Ravana has to pay for abduction of somebody's wife. We can see that even people living in adharma follow some code of conduct and Kumbhakarna was referring to that. The

act of abduction of some body's wife is considered a crime according to Kumbhakarna because if it was condoned because it was the king who committed the crime, then anybody in Lanka can commit the same crime by abducting the wife of somebody in Lanka also. Kumbhakarna was also reiterating the doctrine of Karma when he was referring to the cost to be paid for the crime.

In Ramayana three battles look to be special. The first one was the battle Kumbhakarna waged against the army of Sri Rama in which Kumbhakarna though half asleep wrought havoc to the army of Sri Rama with no special arms or astras but with whatever was available to be used as weapons of mass destruction including his own limbs. The second one was that of Indrajit who was a past master in warfare with sophisticated astras coupled with sorcery. The third one, the greatest of all was the battle between Sri Rama and Ravana which Maharshi Valmiki said was something even the Devas, Munis and Maharshis were anxious to witness and were present.

Kumbhakarna, when he entered the battle field looked like a walking mountain, towering over everything visible at whose sight the vanara soldiers ran away from the battle. Sri Rama asked Vibheeshana for the particulars about Kumbhakarna and was told that even when he was a boy, he was devouring everything in sight to satisfy his insatiable hunger which made Lord Brahma to curse Kumbhakarna to sleep for six months and be awake for one day before going to sleep again for six months. On that one day, Kumbhakarna's hunger took the toll of the food reserves. Vibheeshana further said that fully awake Kumbhakarna needed no weapons and was difficult to face him in the battle. Sri Rama saw for himself what Kumbhakarna was doing in the battle field. He, with half closed eyes because of the slumber was lifting hand fulls of Vanara soldiers or Rakshasa soldiers and was thrusting them into his mouth, his fistful containing many soldiers disregarding the arrows that hit him and the severe beatings with boulders by the vanara generals. As he smelled blood, his hunger increased and was devouring without distinguishing the vanara or rakshasa.

Sri Rama was perplexed because his arrows though powerful and were inflicting severe pain on the body of Kumbhakarna, he could not arrest the damage Kumbhakarna was causing. So he asked the vanara generals to make the vanara soldiers jump and hold his arms by sitting on them. Even then Kumbhakarna was whisking his arms and was eating. Sri Rama then cut off his hands, his legs and ultimately his head putting an end to Kumbhakarna to the joy of Vanara army and the distress to Ravana. Maharshi Valmiki described and said that even as the fall of the limbs of Kumbhakarna killed many vanara soldiers. Ravana was at a loss to understand how Kumbhakarna could be killed.

Ravana's grief at the death of Kumbhakarna was inconsolable and he felt that his right hand was lost. Trisira, one of his sons asked permission to go and fight.. At that time, Ravana was left with his sons Trisira, Devantaka Narantaka and Atikaya, his step brothers Mahodara and Mahaparswa, Kumbhakarna's sons Kumbha and Nikumbha besides the mighty Indrajit , the other notable warriors being dead. Yet Ravana did not swerve from his determination and asked his sons, Trisira, Devantaka, Narantaka and Atikaya to go to the battle and ordered his step brothers Mahodara and Mahaparswa to go and guard his sons from the flanks .One after the other died at the hands of the Vanara generals. Seeing the death of his brothers, Atikaya was eager to meet Sri Rama. Vibheeshana told Sri Rama that Atikaya was the valorous son of Ravana with his other wife Dhanyamalini. Atikaya faced Sri

Rama having brushed aside all the missiles of the Vanara generals. Lakshmana could not remain inactive and so intercepted Atikaya and started fighting. In the great battle that ensued, Lakshmana killed Atikaya by hurling the Brahmastra, the mighty missile of Brahma.

Ravana became enraged on hearing that all his children and step brothers with all the army was decimated and was particularly grief stricken at the death of his son Atikaya. Instead of understanding the situation he became despondent and desperate and ordered his son the mighty Indrajit to go and kill Sri Rama and Lakshmana for Indrajit was an expert in sorcery and black magic apart from his valor and boons from the Lord Brahma.

Indrajit performed a sacrifice with fire and offered oblations before starting for the battle because of which he could become invisible. With this extra facility he started to create havoc in the ranks of the Sri Rama's army to such an extent that Sri Rama and Lakshmana were unable to arrest his activity and ultimately fell unconscious from the effect of Indrajit's mighty arrows. Indrajit promptly returned to his father and reported that Sri Rama and Lakshmana were both felled and were sure to die. The Vanara army was totally disarrayed and totally stupefied and everybody thought that Sri Rama and Lakshmana would be dead. The Vibheeshana with a torch in hand began searching for some who are conscious and found Jambavan who with his feeble voice asked whether Hanuman was alive. Vibheeshana was surprised and asked Jambavan why he was inquiring about Hanuman without asking about Sri Rama and others. Jambavan said that if Hanuman were to be alive everything would be alright and all is lost if Hanuman was not alive. When Hanuman approached Jambavan, he asked Hanuman to go swiftly to Himalya Mountains and get the herbs to revive the army together with Sri Rama and Lakshmana.

Hanuman, without tarrying flew with the speed of wind to Himalaya mountains and searched for the lifesaving herbs on the Sanjeevani Mountain without any success and in order to save time he lifted the entire Sanjeevani Mountain and returned to the battle field. The very wind coming from the herbs of the Sanjeevani Mountain revived the entire Vanara army from stupor and Sri Rama and Lakshmana recovered from their faint. Hanuman returned back to Himalaya Mountains and replaced the Sanjeevani Mountain at its original position as swiftly as he had brought. The entire army was in ecstasy and resumed fighting. Sugreeva ordered that the city of Lanka be burned with torches. Seeing the monkeys with torches all over Lanka and the monkeys intent on burning Lanka, Ravana was enraged at what was happening. He ordered Kumbha and Nikumbha, sons of Kumbhakarna to move with their armies and destroy the enemy. Sugreeva killed Kumbha and Hanuman Nikumbha in the great battle. Ravana then ordered the general Makaraksha to proceed and kill Sri Rama and Makaraksha met death in the hands of Sri Rama through a mighty missile (astra).

Ravana was at his wits end having lost all his able generals and looks to Indrajit again and ordered him to fight. Indrajit creates the illusion of a live Sita, showed it to the Vanara army and Sri Rama and Lakshmana and chops of her head. On seeing the head of Sita severed Sri Rama fainted and when he came to his senses started lamenting and nobody could do anything, even for that matter Lakshmana. Vibheeshana approached Sri Rama and told him that Indrajit resorted to magic and what they saw was only an illusion and that Indrajit dared not to touch Sita. Vibheeshana urged Sri Rama to

send Lakshmana with an army to kill Indrajit immediately. He said” O! Sri Rama, Indrajit went to Kumbhilini temple to offer oblations in the sacred fire .As per the boon of Lord Brahma, Indrajit cannot be killed if he completes the oblation. He must be killed before he had a chance to do the oblations”.

Sri Rama asked Lakshmana to take an army and go to fight and kill Indrajit. Lakshmana then circumambulated to Sri Rama, obtained his blessings and took Hanuman, Jambavan, Sugreeva and a large army of Vanara soldiers with Vibheeshana to take them to Kumbhilini Temple. The Vanara army, seeing the army of Indrajit attacked with such a force that Indrajit had to come away from the temple without completing the oblations. Then Vibheeshana asked Lakshmana to attack Indrajit and kill him. Indrajit, enraged at seeing his own uncle urging Lakshmana to kill him began abusing in the foulest language. Vibheeshana said that he was banished by his own brother at the risk of being killed for tendering advice to his good and the relationship ended there. So it was his duty to kill the enemy or advice as to how the enemy could be killed.

Vibheeshana’a actions raise lot of doubts. He grew up with his brothers Ravana and Kumbhakarna and without their affection and tolerance he could not have lived in Lanka and practiced the saintly life in Sanatana Dharma befitting a Brahmin he was. His father predicted that he would be pious and savior of the Rakshasa clan which would otherwise be annihilated because of the activities and atrocities of his elder brothers, though Brahmins. He pleaded with Ravana several times to give up Sita and act in Dharma. Ravana, though respected Vibheeshana for his wisdom and virtuous lifw did not wish him to oppose him in his adharma and said that he would have killed him had he not been his brother and further said he would face death if he did not leave his presence(Obviously Lanka and the places where his authority prevailed). Vibheeshana had no other place to go to except to Sri Rama, who was now the enemy of Ravana .Vibheeshana declared that he was going to Sri Rama .When he sought protection and was granted asylum by Sri Rama, he became an enemy of Ravana and his Dharma was to kill or support to kill Ravana and his protégés.

The fight between Lakshmana and Indrajit this time was the battle fought without any sorcery on the part of Indrajit and was fierce with both sides using their skills and the divine astras(Missiles) and counter astras(Missiles). If Kumbhakarna fought only with what was available to be used as a weapon, Indrajit showed his mastery in warfare of magic and sorcery on earlier occasions and his divine weapons this time. In this battle Vibheeshana and other Vanara chiefs had given support to Lakshmana and Indrajit did not spare any of the Vanara chiefs or Vibheeshana . Heavily hit by the arrows of Indrajit, the enraged Vibheeshana killed the horses of the chariot of Indrajit. When Lakshmana was not able to think of any astra that could kill Indrajit, he chose an altogether new unheard astra which can be termed as Rama Astra. Taking Indrasta from his quiver, Lakshmana remembered Rama and said “If Rama is Dharma Incarnate and is ever truthful, this arrow will cut off the head of Indrajit” and shot the arrow. The arrow sped and cut off the head of Indrajit.

We see that Indrajiti, the master in sorcery and black magic, a great warrior, possessor of divine asrtras and had boon from Lord Brahma that he would not die of any astras met his end in the hands of Lakshmana by Rama Astra which was representing Sri Rama as Dharmatma and Satyasandha. Valmiki

Maharshi writes that devas in hordes came to see the battle between Lakshmana, a human being and Indrajit, the one who defeated Indra.

The death of Indrajit brought Ravana to a state of despair and despondency that he decided to kill Sita and avenge the deaths of all those fallen thereby thwarting the goal of Sri Rama. However, a wise minister named Suparswa dissuaded Ravana from the heinous act of killing Sita by saying that Ravana's greatness was at stake. Ravana then decided to turn his fury towards Sri Rama and Lakshmana, ordered his personal army for battle. This was the second time Ravana was facing Sri Rama in battle. The battle was fierce with both sides using the celestial missiles (astras) and Lakshmana joined and immediately broke the bow of Ravana. Vibheeshana also joined and killed the horses of Ravana which made Ravana furious and so he threw a spear at Vibheeshana. Lakshmana immediately cut the spear in pieces thus saving the life of Vibheeshana. Ravana, now aimed a heavy spear and threw it at Lakshmana which entered his bosom and he fell unconscious. Sri Rama attacked Ravana and his arrows were aimed at Ravana with deadly precision that Ravana had to run away from the battle.

On seeing Lakshmana unconscious, Sri Rama was listless and began saying " My life without Lakshmana is meaningless. I am not able to hold my bow also. I do not seem to have any energy left. He asked Sushena, the Vanara doctor to examine Lakshmana. Sushena said that Lakshmana's life was in danger and unless Sanjeevani was brought before sunrise, Lakshmana would not survive. Immediately Hanuman went to Himalaya Mountain and brought back the Sanjeevani Mountain containing the lifesaving herbs instead of searching for them. Sushena took the herb and treated Lakshmana and Lakshmana got up fully recovered to the joy of Sri Rama and everybody in the camp.

Ravana returned to the battlefield with renewed determination and Sri Rama faced Ravana after hearing Lakshmana say that Ravana returned. Sri Rama received a chariot with the charioteer Maatali and some special arms from Devendra as he was fighting an unequal battle with Ravana where Ravana was fighting from a chariot while Sri Rama was fighting on foot. This battle was so fierce that all the celestials came to witness the two mighty warriors use their skill and the missiles. Sri Rama who initially tormented by the arms of Ravana recovered and with fury hurt Ravana with his arrows and Ravana was severely wounded and was taken away from the battle field by his charioteer.

Having recovered from the fatigue, Ravana realized what happened and severely rebuked his charioteer for bringing him away from the battle field. The charioteer reminded Ravana that he did his duty as the charioteer and it was the responsibility of the charioteer to give rest to the horses as well as the warrior on the chariot. Ravana saw the truth in the statement and directed the charioteer to take him back to the battle field. When Ravana faced Sri Rama once again, the battle that ensued was described to be unique. Maharshi Valmiki says that the sky can be compared only with the sky, the ocean with the ocean and the battle between Sri Rama and Ravana with their battle only, meaning that their battle had no parallel.

Maharshi Agastya who came to witness the battle saw how Sri Rama was getting tired and recovering from fatigue in the battle in the same way Ravana did. He then told Sri Rama that he should

recite Aditya Hridayam, a mantra in praise of Sun God which was sure to give him victory through killing Ravana.

Sri Rama did the ritual of purification of body and mind and started reciting the mantra as he was fighting Ravana. After a time, Maatali reminded Sri Rama that it was time for killing of Ravana and asked Sri Rama to use Brahmastra. Accordingly Sri Rama did and the discharged Brahmastra from Sri Rama's bow killed Ravana to the joy of the entire multitude of devas, Rishis who were witnessing the battle.

Maharshi Valmiki described the Sri Rama and Ravana's war in great detail applauding the valor where it deserved be it a rakshasa or a monkey. He said several Munis and Maharshis along with the Devas came to witness the war. Also Devendra sent Matali with the celestial chariot because Sri Rama was fighting on foot while the rakshasa warriors were in chariots. These aspects create doubts in the minds of people who wish to analyze Ramayana as a book of history.

If people go to Ramayana with reverence and study it as a piece of literature showing how an ordinary mortal can attain the position of Brahman by diligently following the Dharma and Satya as was done by Sri Rama, there is no problem; because one would see Sri Rama as the Parabrahman in mortal body. For someone who attained the position of Brahman, things come the way they are wanted irrespective of the body he or she is encased.

If people wish to approach Ramayana as a piece of history, everything appears to be preposterous because the time lapse, the social conditions and the rules and regulations accepted by that society have to be thoroughly understood and one cannot judge by the conditions of today and pass comments. However, the existence of some races which are called Devas and their invisibility to common people is a bit complex to comprehend unless one accepts the concept of existence of different kind of races at different levels of attainment spiritually, though not with human bodies. For that matter Devas and Rakshasas have come from the same Brahman and so are human beings. The human beings were considered inferior by Rakshasas because of their physical stature while Devas are considered one step ahead of human beings in the path of salvation or moksha. While human beings could aspire for salvation without going through the process of becoming Devas, Devas have to take birth as human beings after exhausting their good karma.

Maharshi Agasthya advised Sri Rama to recite Aditya Hridayam in order to obtain victory over Ravana , in other words over evil. He also said that Aditya Hridayam gives health and energy. By reciting Aditya Hridayam , one gets energy, health and victory over evil. The recitation brings such vibrations that the person reciting gets the benefit of all those Sri Rama had got.

If anybody reads Ramayana for whatever purpose, the benefit of having recited Gayatri Mantra accrues to the person's credit. It is said that hearing Ramayana being recited will make one tuned to the vibrations of Gayatri Mantra. The wisdom and the natural tendency of a realized soul is always to give the benefit to everybody irrespective of attainment and sex; and those realized souls in the form of Maharshis device various methods to reach everybody and Ramayana is one such method. The easiest method was given in the recitation or hearing Ramayana being recited.

The death of Ravana brought forth the immense love and affection Vibheeshana had for his eldest brother and he lamented at the fate of Ravana, who died because of Adharma; though possessing qualities worthy of a great person. The women folk headed by the Queen Mandodari arrived at the battle field and seeing Ravana's dead body started wailing, extoling the greatness on one hand and the Adharma on the other which brought his death. It is significant that no mourner of the death of Ravana blamed Sri Rama.

The attitude of everybody be it a Deva, Rakshasa, Human being or a Vanara was to adhere to Dharma of universal nature taught by Vedas and the smriti of the time, place and society and everybody knew inherently that Dharma alone saves and stands all the time. The message the wailing queens or Vibheeshana sent was that Ravana, in spite of his valor and learning had met death because of his adhama.

Sri Rama asked Vibheeshana to go and perform obsequies to Ravana as there was no son of Ravana was alive. Vibheeshana protested at the suggestion because Ravana, though was his brother spent his life in adhama and became his enemy when he was mercilessly banished from the kingdom with the threat of death. Sri Rama again brought Dharma and said death had removed the enmity and it was his Dharma to do the obsequies. There upon Vibheeshana took the women folk into the city and performed the last rights to Ravana befitting the status.

When Vibheeshana returned, Sri Rama asked him to bring Sita after she had taken bath so that all the people could see her. Accordingly Sita was brought and the entire Vanara army which was eager to see Sita for whom the battle was fought had the divine glimpse of Sita. Sri Rama said, "Sita! You stayed one year in enemy's place and so I cannot take you back. You may choose to live where ever you want- Lanka or Kishkinda or any place." Sita was aghast at the cruel words of Sri Rama and said that she did not deserve this treatment as she had only Sri Rama in her heart and mind all the time and she was forced to stay in Lanka as she was helpless. Sri Rama did not say anything and the entire congregation was speechless because they could see the determination of Sri Rama even after understanding the truth of what Sita had said and no body dared to intervene. Sita then turned towards Lakshmana and said, "Lakshmana, prepare the funeral pyre. I am not prepared to live and bear the indignity inflicted upon me". Lakshmana, when he saw that Sri Rama was not responding prepared the pyre and lit it with fire and Sita jumped into it after going around Sri Rama with folded hands.

The fire-God could do no harm to such a divine person as Sita who was pure in every respect and so Sita returned from the pyre to the great joy of not only Sri Rama but the multitude waiting there.

How can fire not burn Sita? Even Hanuman escaped from the clutches of fire when his tail was put on fire, how? The answer is simple. The realized souls are Brahman in a body and as such no element which incidentally is part of Brahman and cannot inflict any kind of damage. This is said to work not only with Sita and Hanuman but with every realized soul.

Sri Rama refused to accept Sita when she emerged from captivity on the grounds that she was living in alien place for a year. Was it justified, particularly when he knew that Sita was pure in every respect? Did Hanuman not tell Sri Rama about Sita in Lanka? Sri Rama was a human though a realized

soul and also a king. He had the responsibility of adhering to prevailing Dharma as he was to supervise the practice of that Dharma by everybody. He was setting an example to show that even a king had to bow down before Dharma.

Vibheeshana then requested Sri Rama to spend some time in Lanka with his friends and army but Sri Rama politely declined saying that he could not tarry anywhere when his younger brother Bharata was eagerly waiting for him in Nandigram with a vow that he would immolate if Sri Rama did not return on the appointed day. Also Sri Rama was bound by the vow that he would spend 14 years in forest and entering Lanka would mean breaking that Vow. He similarly did not enter Kishkinda but sent Lakshmana instead. Vibheeshana was in no position to plead any further because he was a bhakta and anything that was said by Sri Rama was sacred besides being Dharma. Vibheeshana, being a realized soul was in complete ecstasy of the presence of Brahman in the body of Sri Rama. Different lines of thinking of Vibheeshana's actions were criticized from different angles- that of a younger brother, that of being a Rakshasa and lastly the citizen of Lanka- and find fault with him. We have to remember what his father said at the time of Vibheeshana's birth. That the two elders Ravana and Kumbhakarna were destined to be the trouble makers for whatever the Brahman stans while Vibheeshana was destined to be the person who uplifts Dharma and saves the Rakshasa clan from taking wrong route.

Vibheeshana then assured Sri Rama that reaching Ayodhya within the stipulated time is no worry because the Pushpaka would ferry within a matter of a second all those whom intend going to Ayodhya. He then requested Sri Rama to give directions as to how he could show his gratitude to the mighty army of Vanaras who were responsible with Sri Rama and Lakshmana at the head to root out the evil from the face of the earth. Sri Rama then asked Vibheeshana to entertain the Vanaras and give them the gifts he wants to give. Vibheeshana took care to see that every Vanara was treated as special and he made the entire Vanara army happy with his gifts and treatment. The important thing that has to be remembered is that when a good turn was shown to an individual, he in turn should express his gratitude which is the most important tenet of Dharma.

The Pushpak Vimana was made ready by Vibheeshana and at the request of Vibheeshana Sri Rama and Lakshmana and Sita embarked the Pushpak. Sri Rama called Sugreeva and said that he was grateful for all the help he, his generals and the Vanara army rendered to him and he could not thank them adequately and individually. He therefore wished that all the Vanaras could go where they wish. The vanaras along with the generals got into the Vimana after a nod from Sri Rama.

Vibheeshana made a request to Sri Rama that he along with the prominent Rakshasas be permitted to accompany him to Ayodhya to participate in the coronation of Sri Rama which was immediately and joyfully conceded. Vibheeshana accompanied by the women folk and his ministers entered the Pushpak. The Vimana had the capacity to take every one and so there was no problem to take all the people.

When everybody settled down comfortably in the Vimana it took off in the direction of Ayodhya. Sri Rama started to explain to Sita the significance of each place and its association to the battle and the mighty Rakshasas that were felled in the battle. Sita was beside herself seeing the battle

field and the efforts Sri Rama took to free Sita from the Ravana's city of Lanka. Sri Rama then identified the principal generals of Ravana's army who were known to be invincible and who were slain by the generals of the Vanara army to Sita. While the Pushpak was moving, Sri Rama showed the path they had taken in search of Sita and how he came to be friends with Sugriva. When they were close to Kishkinda, Sri Rama asked Sugriva to bring all those Vanara women to Ayodhya. The Pushpak landed in Kishkinda and Sugriva had gone inside his palace to inform Tara about Sri Rama's invitation. The Vanara women then came out and embarked the Pushpak to go to Ayodhya.

From these details, we understand the principles Sri Rama stood for. Rakshsas had taken permission to go to Ayodhya with their women and so he asked Sugriva to bring in the Vanara Women. The etiquette (Maryada) involved is something from which lessons could be drawn on for the modern day living. Ramayana recorded the day to day activity in detail and every incident indicates the way of living and the behavioral pattern prescribed and followed by Sri Rama with a view to show to the society the art of living in harmony.

The Pushpak, having allowed the Vanara Women to embark started at the instance of Sri Rama towards Ayodhya. All the while Sri Rama was pointing the land marks and the places where all three, Sri Rama, Sita and Lakshmana spent their time in the Dandaka forest for 13 years. Particularly the river Godavari, the Panchavati and the place where they were received by Sabari, the asramam of Maharishi Agastya were notable because each was associated with their life in a specific way. As they were proceeding to the asramam of Maharishi Bharadwaja, they chanced to look down and Sri Rama showed the asramam of Maharishi Atri, where Sita was entertained by Anasuya, the wife of Maharishi Atri.

When the Pushpak landed near the Asramam of Maharishi Bharadwaja, Sri Rama alighted with Sita and Lakshmana and paid their obeisance in turn receiving the reception of the Maharishi. Sri Rama was eager to find out news of Ayodhya and so asked the Maharishi' Mahatma, "please tell me how Bharata is ruling the kingdom,, whether the people of Ayodhya have plenty of food and are free from diseases, whether our mothers are alive"

The Maaharishi smiled and said "Bharata is mud smeared and with his matted locks of hair lives in Nandigram as the custodian of your wooden Padukas and rules in your name. Everybody in Ayodhya is fine. We were sad when you, followed by your wife and Lakshmana went to the forest bare-footed to live and establish trouble free life for the ascetics in the Dandaka forest but are glad that you returned fulfilling your mission and also the vow given to your father". He further added that he was conveying the day to day happenings in the forest to Bharata by invoking his power of his tapas. Maharishi Bharadwaja said that Bharata was waiting for the arrival of Sri Rama eagerly.

Maharishi Bharadwaja, interestingly drew the attention of Sri Rama to the following truth;

"The friends, riches and the grains are respected in this world. Mother and Mother-land are superior even to heaven"

The sloka is important and is remembered by everybody runs as follows.

“:Maitraanee dhana dhanyaani Praajaanam sammataanaiva

Jananee Janmabhumischa Swarga dapi gareeyasi”

We have to observe closely what Sri Rama asked and the way he was given the answers by maharishi Bharadwaja. Sri Rama first enquired about the food and medical problems of the subjects of Ayodhya, and then enquired about the rule of Bharata and lastly the welfare of his mothers. The King / ruler is supposed to take care of the subjects before thinking of his kith and kin. The most important aspects that a king/ruler has to give attention to are food for all and freedom from disease.

In response Maharishi Bharadwaja said that Bharata with mud smeared body was acting as the custodian of Padukas of Sri Rama. In other words, the rule of Bharata was that of Sri Rama only and so nothing can go wrong. He then said that everybody was fine in Ayodhya. Showing his pleasure at Sri Rama's return, the Maharishi made his pleasure that of everybody. Lastly he was telling Sri Rama the things held important by the people and the pleasure of home- coming. The implications of Sri Rama's questions were dealt in detail by Maharishi Bharadwaja and assured him that nothing could go wrong when the administration was carried in the name of Sri Rama. He pointed the efficient and able administration of Bharata as an agent and his attitude towards Sri Rama in upholding what was dear to Sri Rama.

Sri Rama made a request to Maharishi Bharadwaja that the entire area extending to four jojanas on either side of the path to Ayodhya may be blessed with fruits and honey in limitless abundance even though it was out of the season for fruits as it was the lunar month Aswayuja sukla Panchami when he arrived at the asramam of Maharishi Bharadwaja. The Maharishi smiled at the request and presently the entire area started to change with trees laden with ripe fruits and honey combs filled with honey. Thus Sri Rama had taken care of the food needs of the Vanaras accompanying him.

Sri Rama then looked at Hanuman with affection and told him to proceed first to Shringaberi puram and meet his friend, the Nishada chief Guha and inform him of the arrival of Sri Rama, Sita and Lakshmana at the Bharadwaja asramam. He directed Hanuman to find out from Guha the convenient road the party should take from the asramam of Maharishi Bharadwaja to Ayodhya. Hanuman was further directed to go to Nandigramam and meet Bharata and inform the arrival of Sri Rama, Sita and Lakshmana at the asramam of Maharishi Bharadwaja. Hanuman was asked to tell the entire story of abduction of Sita by Ravana, the search and befriending Sugriva, killing of Vali and finally the battle with Ravana in Lanka and the consequent destruction of all the rakshasa. Hanuman was asked to observe the facial expressions of Bharata during the narration in order to find any sign of unhappiness at the arrival of Sri Rama.

We should understand that Sri Rama instructed Hanuman to find the feelings at the news of his return of Bharata knowing full well the devotion of Bharata personally and also from what Maharishi Bharadwaja told. Why did he choose to do so? Maharishi Valmiki gives us the character of Sri Rama further. Sri Rama was returning after 14 years and Bharata was ruling in the name of Sri Rama. But still, he thought that Bharata could have developed some interest in the Kingdom. Hanuman who was known for his exemplary character and wisdom was the only one who could assess the feelings of Bharata and

report to Sri Rama. If there was a slight change in Bharata's attitude, Hanuman would know it and would report to Sri Rama. He would turn back and go into the forest but would not lay claim on the kingdom. Besides the character of Bharata should be known to one and all and it should not be treated as a secret known only to him. How else could he have shown Bharata except through Hanuman?

Hanuman went to Guha and when he told Guha the news, the entire body of Guha went into ecstasy. Hanuman then went to Nandigrama and found Bharata in a state of a bhakta longing for the lord. After the introduction, Hanuman told the arrival of Sri Rama at Maharishi Bharadwaja's asramam which made Bharata to fall down unconscious with excessive joy. After recovering from the swoon, Bharata got up and offered a seat to Hanuman and asked him to relate the events of the 14 years of Sri Rama's stay in the forest. Hanuman described all that happened vividly, all the while observing closely the face of Bharata. Hanuman then told Bharata that Sri Rama would meet him on the day when the moon enters Pushyamai star. Hanuman was now fully convinced of the sincerity of Bharata and decided that Bharata was also a bhakta and his feelings did not change in the fourteen years.

Bharata at once turned around and ordered Satrugna to make all arrangements to give a rousing welcome to Sri Rama. He said the roads leading to Ayodhya must be made free of pot holes and the entire road that Sri Rama and the party were to take must be made congenial with sprinkling of mild scented water and decorated with the buntings of welcome to the king. The citizens, the nobles and all the ministers must get ready to receive Sri Rama at the appointed hour.

Satrugna took all the ministers headed by the beloved Sumntra with him to Ayodhya to make preparations for the reception of Sri Rama, Sita and Lakshmana as directed by Bharata,. In no time the ministers arranged the group of bards to extol the greatness of the Ischwaku dynasty and Sri rama, the group of Brahmins to give welcome with Vedic mantras, the army on the mount, the musicians and dancers playing to come and become the welcoming party. The queen mothers Kausalya, Sumithra and Kaikeyi emerged in chariots to go to Nandigram to receive Sri Rama,Sita and Lakshmana and the party. They all reached Nandigrama in time to form a procession with Bharata at the head. Bharata took out the Padukas from their seat and put them on his head amidst the incessant chanting of Veda. The entire Ayodhya was there to welcome the beloved Sri Rama who left those 14 years ago and stealthily moved in the dead of night away with the help of Guha.

The mutual affection between the ruler and the ruled was amply exhibited in Ramayana and the relationship is what is called the rule of Sri Rama. The citizens of Ayodhya saw Sri Rama grow up and the feats of his in the company of Maharishi Viswamitra and the way he behaved with everybody in Ayodhya even though he was not the king was the reason for them to ask Sri Rama's coronation. The subsequent events in the past 14 years as were told by the Maharishis headed by Brahmarishi Vasishta and the legends narrated by Hanuman and the way he came to Maharishi Bharadwaja asramam in Pushpak Vimana and above all the way he left the kingdom for the sake of his father's promise and refusal to take it back when pleaded by Bharata earnestly made Sri Rama the God in human form whom everybody wanted.

The preparations and the devotion with which they were undertaken by one and all were observed by Hanuman who was all the while standing next to Bharata. He came to the conclusion that Bharata was the brother anybody would want and Sri Rama was right about Bharata in all respects.

The moment fixed for arrival of Sri Rama was approaching and there was no trace of his party. Disturbed Bharata looked at Hanuman and asked him whether he was playing a trick as was natural for a monkey. The party of Bhatrata had proceeded to some distance from Nandigrana to offer their respects and Bharata in his impatience, was annoyed. Hanuman smiled and pointed towards the sky and there was a huge cry of jubilation from the monkeys enjoying the luscious fruits and copious honey on the trees bordering the road to Nandigrana besides the dust that was swirling in the atmosphere. At the joyous shouts of the monkeys, Sri Rama and the party came in Pushpak which stopped before Bharata at the order of Sri Rama.

Bharata entered the Pushpak, saluted Sri Rama but could not speak because of emotion caused by the joy of seeing Sri Rama. The situation was grasped by Sri Rama and he at once took Bharata on his lap and embraced him. Bharata then paid his respects to Sita and greeted Lakshmana. Sri Rama then prostrated before his mother Kausalya, who was in a state of daze. He then approached Sumithra and Kaikeyi and paid his respects as humble as a son of their own could not have done the act. Sri Rama did not have a trace of ill will or anger towards Kaikeyi. Then the Pushpak Vimana took off and landed in Nandigrana where all the great Maharishis with Maharishi Vasishtha at their head were waiting for the arrival of Sri Rama.

Sri Rama got down from the Pushpak and prostrated to Brahmarishi Vasishtha by affectionately pressing his feet. The message went through the Brahmarishi that Sri Rama was showing affection besides the respect to the Guru which went beyond the formalities.

Bharata came forward with the Padukas still on his head, bowed low to Sri Rama and said " You put me in charge of this kingdom in my charge because you did not wish to deviate from your determination to adhere to the promises given by our father to my mother, all the while respecting the wishes of my mother. I had carried on this job for long and the wealth had grown 10 fold. I cannot carry on this task any more. Please take back the kingdom as you promised". Sri Rama smiled and simply said "so be it". Hethen sat on the high seat meant for the king and hitherto was occupied by the padukas.

Bharata was already appraised by Hanuman the place Sugriva had with Sri Rama and also Vibheeshana who came to Sri Rama as a refugee and became king of Lanka because of his devotion to Sri Rama as a bhakta. Bharata greeted Sugriva and said that they are now five brothers. He approached Vibheeshana with such humility as becoming of a bhakta to a bhakta. Vibheeshana was so touched at the reception Bharata gave to Sri Rama and the affection Sri Rama reciprocated to Bharata that he shed tears of joy.

Sri Rama then ordered the Pushpaka to return to its owner Kubera which was the desire Vibheeshana expressed. Ravana took Pushpaka by force and Vibheeshana felt that it was an act of Adharma and wanted to undo the injustice to Kubera.

Bharata then said that he would be happy to see Sri Rama officially coronated so that the splendor of the solar dynasty will shine like the Sun through Sri Rama. He requested Sri Rama to relax that day and be ready for coronation next day morning. All the while Sri Rama and Bharata were wearing their hair in matted locks as a tapasvi, Bharata having decided to live in Nandigrana as Sri Rama did in the forest. Also Lakshmana was in the same attire as Sri Rama. Now that Sri Rama had fulfilled the vow there was no necessity to have the attire of a tapasvi. Bharata first took a bath after his matted locks of hair were shorn and then Sri Rama went through the same process along with Lakshmana.

The other notable followers of Sri Rama, Sugriva, Jambavata, Vibheeshana, Angada took their bath following the ritual started by Bharata. Kausalya then came forward and adorned Sita with jewells after she had taken her ritual bath.

Meanwhile Satrughna made a chariot ready for Sri Rama to proceed towards Ayodhya yoked by excellent and fault less horses and looking like the chariot of Sun with the charioteer Sumantra. Sri Rama, and all the monkey warriors adorned with the ornaments given by Kausalya emerged from the hermitage of Bharata at Nandigrama and had a look at the chariot Sri Rama would take. Pleased with the arrangements made, Sri Rama climbed the chariot along with Sita. There upon, Bharata took the reins of the horses and took the place of charioteer, while Satrughna spread a parasol on the heads of Sri Rama and Sita, Lakshmana took a fan and started whisking to Sri Rama and Sita. Vibheeshana chose to serve the Lord and so he took another fan and started whisking the Royal couple. Sugreeva and the Vanara generals who had taken the human bodies, decked with all the finaries mounted the elephants kept ready for them.

As the party moved towards Ayodhya, the military might of the Kosala followed with 9000 elephants and other organs. The people of Ayodhya lined on either side of the road showered Sri Rama and Sita with rice mixed with pearls, having first made the city decked with flags of welcome and a time of celebration.

Sri Rama told the greatness of Sugriva, Hanuman and Jambavanta to his ministers while introducing them to the ministers and particularly mentioned Sugriva for his friendship and Hanuman for his greatness while extolling the great qualities of each Vanara general. The he introduced Vibheeshana to them in such endearing terms that the ministers were amazed at the might of all those who were following Sri Rama.

Bharata approached Sugriva and said “my brother, please send your mighty Vanaras to bring waters from all the rivers and seas for the coronation of Sri Rama. They should accomplish this errand before sunrise”. Sugriva sent hanuman and Jambavantha to collect waters from all the rivers in pots specially made adorned by precious stones that went around the country and got the waters from all the rivers. Sugriva then gave vessels encrusted with jems to four mighty Vanaras to get the waters of the seas in four directions. The mighty Vanara Sushena went and brought waters of seas in the east, Rishabha got the waters of the seas of the South, Gavaya got the waters of seas in the west and Nila got the waters of the seas in the north.

The procession reached the city of Ayodhya and Sri Rama got down from the chariot and paid respects to mother Kausalya, mother Sumithra and Kausalya who were waiting for his arrival. Sri Rama then looked towards Bharata and said that the best Palace which is decorated with the entire splendor in precious stones is given to Sugriva and Satrughna complied with the orders that moment.

Very early in the next morning Satrughna addressed the chief of the family Gurus, Brahmarishi Vasishta about the sacred water brought by the Vanaras from all the rivers and seas for the coronation of Sri Rama. Brahmarishi vasishta immediately invoked Sri Rama to be duty bound and get ready for the coronation along with Seetha. When Sri Rama and Seetha got ready the great Rishis Vasishta, Vaamadeva, Kasyapa, Kaatyayana, Suyajna, Gouthama and Vijaya consecrated the Royal couple Sri Rama and Seetha with the sacred and fragrant waters of all the rivers and seas. The entire populace gathered in the assembly Hall threw consecrated rice (Akshatalu) sacred herbs and flowers on the King and the Queen. Then Brahmarishi Vasishta brought for the great crown first belonged to the great Manu who

was coroneted with it and was coroneted with through ages all the descendants of the Ikshwaku kings up to Sri Rama and placed it on the damp head of Sri Rama amidst tumultuous vedic chants from all the assembled Rishis and Brahmins. He then made Sri Rama wear the traditional jewelry of his amcestors.

Satrugghna took a white parasol and spread it on the head of Sri Rama while Sugreeva and Vibheeshana took fans and started whisking at Sri Rama. This act indicates that Sri Rama's suzerainty over all human beings, all Vanacharas and Rakshsaas.

Sri Rama, now the emperor of all regions gave away 100,000 cows with calves to the Brahmins, 30 crores of gold coins to the Veda pundits and Brahmins. He gifted individually all the notables of the Vanara army which pleased them immensely because they were given what they most cherished. Of them Sugriva, Angada and Jambavanta were the most important personages. Vibheeshana was gifted as per the position he held and was thoroughly satisfied. Seetha was witnessing all that passed during the coronation, she being very much there by being seated next to Sri Rama. Then Sri Rama took a very beautiful and valuable necklace of pearls and gave it to Seetha which she immediately put it on her neck. When she looked at Sri Rama he asked her to gift to a person who possesses the qualities of 1. Sharpness, 2. Firmness, 3. Renown, 4. Dexterity, 5. Competence, 6. Modesty, 7. Prudence, 8. Virility 9. Prowess and 10. Intelligence and above all liked by her. She presented it to Hanuman without a second's thought and Hanuman having received it took great pleasure in looking and examining it before wearing it on his neck.

The idea of gifting different sections of people in different status with appropriate presents is to be understood correctly. The Brahmins and Pundits valued cows, horses and gold because they live in such places that these are the things they most need. Besides giving cows with calves indicate that they were given the Veda. Horses indicate, the instruments for their agriculture and gold is the thing they are entitled to receive as a Daana which in turn could be donated (Daana) to the needy. Brahmin is supposed to donate everything without the choice of hoarding. The other notables have different levels of positions and their expectations depend on the position they hold. They should be pleased with the gifts without being jealous of others. All the gifts were given by Sri Rama though Seetha was part of it tacitly. But the gift given to Hanuman had special significance. Sri Rama gave it as a gift to Seetha which she accepted and adorned with it. Then Sri Rama asked her to gift it somebody she liked possessing 10 qualities. These ten qualities are the epithets used to describe Brahman. Sri Rama and Seetha identified Hanuman as the person who possessed these qualities and a realized soul. Hanuman, on his part accepted knowing fully well that he was being gifted by the Brahman.

The next question that comes to the mind is why Sri Rama squandered the public money in giving gifts. The tradition says that a king cannot gift money collected as taxes from the people for his pleasures. However a certain amount of money was always earmarked from the taxes for the maintenance of the ruler which was considered legitimate. Also the kings had some property and income on that property was the king's own and could be given as he wished. There were many instances where the kings distributed all their personal wealth periodically because daana was one of the important tenets of the mundane life. For example When Dharmaraja was intending to perform Aswamedha yagna, Lord Krishna showed him the treasure unclaimed and belonged to nobody which could be used and it was used. That was in Dwaparayuga where Dharma stood on two legs. Sri Rama belonged to tretayuga where Dharma stood on three legs. We should remember what Bharata said. In Sri Rama's absence, his property increased 10 fold as per Bharata. If Sri Rama wanted, all the wealth of

Lanka could have been his. When Vibheeshana requested Sri Rama, he was told to give gifts to individual soldiers of Vanara army but never wanted anything for himself.

After the coronation ceremony and the festivities are over. Sugriva took permission to leave Ayodhya with his army and the women and left the place to Kishkinda. Vibheeshana also sought the permission from Sri Rama to leave for Lanka and he returned having gained the kingdom of Lanka.

Sri Rama offered Lakshmana to become the prince regent and Lakshmana politely declined preferring his place as the most trusted and devoted brother, servant and shadow to Sri Rama. Bharata was then chosen to be the prince regent and he was anointed as such to the happiness of one and all.

Maharishi Valmiki says that Sri Rama ruled over the kingdom in such a fashion that rains were in time and to the extent needed and crops flourished to make the granaries full and there was no want in the kingdom. The rule was just, sympathetic tough towards the wrong doers- and there were none- and decisive. The people automatically resorted to Dharma and that resulted in everybody doing his duty untold or reminded. The people were contented and so happiness sought the people instead of people seeking happiness. There was no jealousy among people because they got what they wanted as per Dharma. Sri Rama's name was on every lip all the time and the country was reverberating with the sound of Sri Rama. It is no wonder that the effect continues even after the lapse so many years and it is common to take the name of Sri Rama for everything, when something good happened and when some problem or trouble came up

Traditionally all the puranas written by Brahmarishi Veda Vyasa give Phalshruti which means the benefit of listening to the Purana. Perhaps the tradition started with Ramayana only because this epic is far too ancient compared to Puranas. Why do they add Phalshruti to these epics and Puranas. These were written with no intention of gain in money, popularity or greatness or for some reward. They were designed to reach the common man, probably unlettered in some cases and lettered in most cases and also satisfying the critical eye of a scholar. It is not an exaggeration if we say that every individual in the society was taken as the beneficiary. What is the benefit? That is what Phalshruti says. Ramayana is not merely a story to appeal the reader but also a scheme where in the most important mantras were embedded in such a skillful way that the writer, the translator, the reader and the listener get direct vibrations of the mantras. It is therefore said that these great books of knowledge were meant for the good of the human being. Good for a human being is of two fold. One by which the human being gets happiness in the limited life time and the other the foundation laid in these to gain the ultimate by every human being in the life unlimited. The unlimited life of an individual going through the cycle of births and deaths has to stop and better stop earlier. That these great books are aimed at is beyond any doubt.

Ramayana is that unique epic which takes the human being away from the ordinary weaknesses of a human being to the heights of a superman in the parleys of Sage Aurobindo touching the Adhi Daivata and Adhyatma stages corresponding to Bhuvan and Suvar lokas refereed in Gayatri Mantra from the stage of Bhuloka that corresponds to Adi Bhoutika stage of a human being. In addition one cannot miss reading or listening the word Sri Rama by going through Ramayana. That mantra itself elevates the common and scholar alike to the higher stage.

Maharishi Valmiki gave the Phalshruti not only to the one that listens it but also to those who translated, who wrote in their own words, who reads. That is the reason that Ramayana was written and is being written by several with the understanding of each being brought out in his work. Whatever may be the way one goes to Ramayana, one cannot miss repeating the name of Sri Rama and that itself is

japa of Ramanama. The entire epic is full of mantras and the crown mantra is Ramanama. It is considered the pranava Mantra, Gayatri Mantra and Taraka mantra.

Valmiki Ramayana ends with Yuddha Kanda and even in that with Sri Rama pattabhishekam. The Uttara Kanda must be a later addition giving the story of Sri Rama's rule. What all that had to be included as the tools for elevation of a human has reached the pinnacle in Sri Rama Pattabhishekam. There must be some reason to give so much importance to Sri Rama Pattabhishekam and the scholars had made deep study and brought out interesting and useful points that help human beings in pursuit of their goal.

The Brahman is represented by Pranavam with a single Aksharam AUM according to Veda. It is also represented by THAT because of the Upanishadic Word TAT TVAM ASI. Since Brahman is independent of time which means that it existed, exists and will exist, it is SATYA because it is called SATCHITANANDA. The Sundara Kanda of the Ramayan starts with THAT and so Gayatri Mantra. So Sundara Kanda represents the Gayatri Mantra interwoven for the benefit of the common man. Obviously the vibration created by Gayatri Mantra by recitation is said to be the same as that produced by reading Sundara Kanda. Whether one listens to Gayatri Mantra or Sundara Kanda, the effect is said to be the same. While Gayatri Mantra is available only to a few, Sundara Kanda is available to one and all from an unlettered to a scholar. So Ramayana gives the Gayatri Mantra and so could be called Gayatri itself.

The Pranavam consists of three letters A, U and M and the last letter M is pronounced only to the extent of half. Scholars who made deep study had said that Pranavam extends far beyond the three letters A,U and M. They say that beyond the half letter M, there is a bindu, then Naadam, then Kaalam, then Kaalateetham and the Brahman. The letter A represents Brahma, the creator, letter U represents Lord Vishnu, the sustainer and the last letter M represents Siva, the annihilator. In Sri Rama Pattabhishekam, the principal actors were, Jambavant, Sugreeva, Hanuman, Satrugna, Bharata, Lakshmana, Seetha and Sri Rama. The scholars say that Jambavant being the son of Brahma represents Lord Brahma and so the letter A is represented by Jambavant. Sugreeva is the son of Sun and so represents Lord Vishnu and corresponds to the letter U. Hanuman was born of the amsa of Lord Siva and so he represents Lord Siva. The Bindu is represented by Satrugna as he was the Chakra of Lord Vishnu. Naada was represented by Bharata as Bharata was the Conch (Sankha) which produces Adishesha a serpent, the serpent being the symbol of time. Seetha being the parasakthi is timeless and so independent of time and so represents the Kaalaateetha. Sri Rama being the Parabrahman is the ultimate. Thus Sri Rama Pattabhishekam represents the Pranavam. So those who keep Sri Rama Pattabhishekam picture and worship it are in effect worshipping Pranavam. Thus Ramayana is Pranavam also.

Lastly the Mantra SRI RAMA is called the Taraka Mantra because it is capable of uplifting the person to the ultimate by annihilating the birth and death cycle. So Ramayana is TARAKA MANTRA also. The scholars are of the opinion that when a person reaches the ultimate, there cannot be anything beyond. Therefore Maharishi Valmiki brought the story to a stop with Sri Rama Pattabhishekam indicating that by writing, reading or listening to Ramayana, a person reaches the ultimate meaning that he realizes Brahman.

Experience through the lives of Tulasidas, Kabirdas, Ramadas and Tyagaraja show the truth of the analysis of the scholars for Tulasidas had written Ramayana as Ramcharitmanasa, Kabir sang and

repeated the Ramanama, Ramadas sang and repeated the Ramanama and also worshipped the saakar Sri Rama in Bhadrachalam and Tyagaraja sang the entire Ramayana as songs and repeated Ramanama 97 crores of times. These saints made the Ramanama the byword of every household throughout the length and breadth of India.

It is said that Ramayana existed, exists and will exist making it independent of time and so The Brahman. OMTATSAT.