

## Reflections of Bhakti in Adhyatma Ramayana

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### ABSTRACT

The very name “Adhyatma Ramayana” suggests its content: it is the Spiritual Version of Ramayana. While Valmiki deals with the direct meaning of the Rama Saga, the Adhyatma Ramayana is a direct elaboration of its spiritual implications. The prime object of this great text (Adhyatma Ramayana) is to teach that Bhakti and Jnana are not only reconcilable but always go together. This beautiful text contains numerous hymns which are Advaitic in their philosophic content while their tone is intensely devotional. They again and again establish the doctrine that non-duality is the Supreme Truth but the way to its realisation is through devotion and divine grace. Without these, mere intellectualism will never bring spiritual illumination. Thus this great text seeks to reconcile Jnana and Bhakti as the obverse and reverse of an identical spiritual discipline. Being a text of the Rama cult, Rama is held forth as the Deity to be adored by those who seek salvation.

Here, an attempt is being made to study the characters Hanuman and Ravana who are totally antithetical to each other but from one perspective they share a common ground. They are both devotees of Lord Rama!!!

Ravana practices Vidvesha Bhakti to Rama i.e. he ceaselessly remembers the Lord through hatred and enmity. Since his approach is that of antagonism the Lord responds to his supplication accordingly through blows and attacks and eventually liberates him by killing him. Thus the Lord slaughters Ravana in war and there by facilitates his reunion with Lord Vishnu in Vaikuntha.

In stark contrast to Ravana there is the Bhakta Chakravarti, Hanuman. The thought of Sri Rama is inevitably accompanied by Bhakt Hanuman because he is that great a devotee of Lord Rama but unlike Ravana who confronted the Lord with hatred and enmity, Hanuman practised loving devotion to the Lord with humility and selfless service.

Hanuman, the one who undoubtedly possesses a stupendous personality is but a servant in front of his Lord Sri Rama. He is the epitome of Dasya Bhakti and Padasevana which is directed one-pointedly to his beloved Master Sri Rama. There are many instances in the epic Ramayana, which brings to the forefront Hanuman's sincere bhava of Dasya Bhakti and the timely and most needed service rendered by him to his master (Padasevana)...here in this article these instances have been systematically enumerated and described highlighting Hanuman's loving bhakti.

The article concludes with the declaration that it doesn't matter how you remember God – through hate or through love. What matters is that you always ceaselessly remember the Lord. So potent is the Lord's thought that it purifies the thinker of all his latent tendencies and gives him perfect purity which liberates him to join the Lord in His abode itself.

### Keywords

Valmiki Ramayana, Adhyatma Ramayana, Bhakti, Vidvesha Bhakti, Ravana the Bhakta, Bhakta Hanuman.

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### Introduction

Every Indian - literate or illiterate, rich or poor, irrespective of their religion, residing in India or abroad is definitely familiar with the epic character **SRI RAMA**. Sri Rama is known even beyond the shores of India. Not only is he considered a historical personality but is adored and worshipped as Godhead. The great Sanskrit epic **Ramayana** is the narration of the Rama Saga. This **Adhikavya** (the primeval poem) was composed by Valmiki, the **Adikavi** (the first of poets). This Valmiki Ramayana has been the basis for the later composition of many versions of Rama Story: Vasishtha Ramayana, Ananda Ramayana and Agastya Ramayana in Sanskrit; Kambha Ramayana in Tamil; Tulsidas Ramayana in Hindi; Kirtivasa Ramayana in Bengali and Ezuthachan's Adhyatma Ramayana in Malayalam. The Sanskrit Adhyatma Ramayana by Veda Vyasa found in the Brahmanda Purana also has the same Valmiki's Ramayana as its basis.

The very name “Adhyatma Ramayana” suggests its content: it is the Spiritual Version of Ramayana. While Valmiki deals with the direct meaning of the Rama Saga, the Adhyatma Ramayana is a direct elaboration of its spiritual implications. The prime object of this great text (*Adhyatma Ramayana*) is to teach that *Bhakti* and *Jnana* are not only reconcilable but always go together. This beautiful text

contains numerous hymns which are Advaitic in their philosophic content while their tone is intensely devotional. They again and again establish the doctrine that non-duality is the Supreme Truth but the way to its realisation is through devotion and divine grace. Without these, mere intellectualism will never bring spiritual illumination. Thus this great text seeks to reconcile Jnana and Bhakti as the obverse and reverse of an identical spiritual discipline. Being a text of the Rama cult, Rama is held forth as the Deity to be adored by those who seek salvation.

The philosophy of Adhyatma Ramayana echoes the declaration of the Svetasvatara Upanishad,

*“If these truths have been told to a high-souled one, who has supreme devotion to God and as much devotion to his Guru or preceptor as to God, then only, they will shine forth, then only, they will shine forth indeed.”* (VI.23)

It is only in one who has supreme devotion to God and equal, if not more devotion to his spiritual Master, then only this Advaitic Truth which is the knowledge of the non-dual Self, will shine when taught; i.e. will be comprehended and experienced as one's own reality. Thus this esoteric knowledge is revealed only to the ones whose hearts beat with the supreme devotional fervour for the Guru and God alike, who in reality are one and the same.

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa drawing attention to the devotional importance of this text emphasizes this aspect of

spiritual life in a beautiful parable: *A noble man had a big garden which he placed under the care of a gardener. The gardener works hard and produces excellent fruits and vegetables all the year round. In course of time, when the master sees his produce, he is extremely pleased with him and keeps him on his own seat. He tells the gardener that he is his own self. Instead of pleasing the master with devotion, had the gardener sat on the seat with pride and greed, he would have been pushed away.*

The moral of the story is that only through devotion alone this Supreme knowledge is obtained.

Bhagavad Gita also echoes the same principle...

*"Out of mere compassion for them, I, dwelling within their heart, destroy the darkness born of ignorance by the luminous Lamp-of-Knowledge."* (X-11)

Krishna says here, that He is gracious to those who are thus firmly devoted to Him, and He thereby destroys the darkness of ignorance in them, lighting the lamp of wisdom in them by His Presence as their very Self.

Adhyatma Ramayana is a beautiful blend of Vedanta Philosophy and the cult of Bhakti in general and Rama bhakti in particular.

The Ramayana explores different devotional relationships not only between human beings and God but also the bhakti of animals and birds. Ramayana's various characters like Sita, Hanuman, Lakshmana, Bharata, Kausalya, Dasaratha, Sabari, Vibheeshana, Ravana, Sugreeva, Guha, Jatayu and Sampati exhibit bhakti to Lord Rama in their own special way. Though individualistic in expression their Bhakti can be mapped to the eternal bhakti concepts as stated in the authoritative Bhakti Shastras. Let us walk through the landscape of Adhyatma Ramayana and unearth a few gems of devotion as we together tread along this Rama Saga...

In the devotional literature, there is mentioned the six devotional disciplines which are as follows: *Santa* (placid and philosophical), *Dasya* (servitude), *Apatya* (filial), *Vatsalya* (parental), *Sakhya* (companionship), and *Madhurya* (conjugal).

These bhavas or devotional attitudes are of the very essence of the higher forms of Bhakti (*Para-Bhakti*). When devotion becomes spontaneous, these disciplines cease to be disciplines, but become natural channels for the expression of the devotional sentiment.

All these *Bhavas* except the first (*Santa*) are intensely personal with powerful sentiments as the moving force. In the personal *Bhavas* the feeling that God is "one's own" dominates. It finds expression in a sense of intimate and personal relationship, instead of a philosophical one. Of these, to feel that God is one's father or mother, or master is natural to a devotee, and is all that is practicable for an ordinary aspirant following the path of devotion. But to feel that God is one's Child, or one's Companion, or one's sweetheart, is so intimate a form of relationship that an ordinary devotee, who is dominated by a sense of Divine Majesty, does not dare to cultivate it. Even the sense of Fatherhood, Motherhood and Lordship can be felt by him only in a philosophic sense and not in an intensely personal relationship.

In Ramayana, Kausalya and Dasaratha had *Vatsalya Bhava*, Lakshmana, Bharata and Hanuman had *Dasya Bhava*, Sugreeva and Guha had *Sakhya Bhava*, Sita Devi had

*Madhurya Bhava* and Sabari and the citizens of Ayodhya had *Santa Bhava*...

Here, an attempt is being made to study the characters Hanuman and Ravana who are totally antithetical to each other but from one perspective they share a common ground. *They are both devotees of Lord Rama!!!*

## Ravana, The Bhakta

Surprisingly, the antagonist **Ravana**, who is evil personified is actually a devout Rama Bhakta...

In the Rama Katha, the most simplistic classification of character portrayal would be Rama is the hero, Sita is the heroine and Ravana is the villain. Ravana is depicted as the arch enemy in this life-drama of Sri Rama.

### Ravana in Valmiki Ramayana

In Valmiki Ramayana, Ravana surfaces through and through as a symbol of evil. Having a harem of women as his wives, Ravana is painted as being lustful and blindly infatuated with beautiful Sita, having heard the description of her captivating beauty from his sister Surpanakha. He is so obsessed with the idea of possessing her that he ultimately devises an evil plan to abduct her: Maricha, the rakshasa who had the ability to shapeshift assumed the form of a very enchanting golden deer to arrest Sita's heart. On Sita's insistence Sri Rama chases this deer to capture it for his dear wife but deceptive Maricha lures Sri Rama far away from their place of residence so that Ravana has a good opportunity to kidnap Sita. When Lakshmana too leaves the hut on hearing the misleading cry of Maricha, Ravana comes in the disguise of a mendicant and carries off the most unwilling and protesting Sita.

Throughout Valmiki Ramayana, Ravana is seen trying different means to win over the chaste and loyal Sita: he tempts her with riches and enormous wealth and luxury; tries to persuade her; cajoles her; coaxes her; rationalizes with her; rebukes her; intimidates her with death threats; commands his rakshasi attendants to abuse, frighten, threaten Sita to come around to fulfil his wish but to no avail. Sita was steadfast and loyally devoted to her husband Sri Rama.

### Ravana in Adhyatma Ramayana

Thus, Ravana comes across as a total and complete villain as depicted by Valmiki Ramayana. But that is only one side of the saga. There is a flip side to this story. The Adhyatma Ramayana by Veda Vyasa reveals the truth behind the scenes of this Ram-Leela...

In Kailash, Parvati Devi once posed a question to Lord Shiva as to how come Rama is worthy of worship. Rama as portrayed by Valmiki is so downright human with limitations and shortcomings. On the loss of Sita, Rama behaves like an ordinary human being with uncontrollable pangs of separation from his wife. Would a being of divine stature behave so?

*"Rama is said to be the Original Being transcending all the manifestations of the Gunas of Prakriti and is unaffected by them. Accepting him to be so, men devote themselves day and night without any reservation to his adoration and*

thereby they attain to the Supreme State. Some people, however say that in spite of being the Supreme One Rama could not know Himself as the Spiritual Self (Brahman) owing to his own Power of Ignorance. When instructed by another (i.e by Brahma as stated in Valmiki's Ramayana) he came to know the truth about the Transcendent Self. If he had known the truth about Himself earlier, how could he, the Supreme Being, be stricken with grief by the loss of Sita and bemoan his fate? But if he was without knowledge of the Self, how can he be a fit object for adoration, being only on par with all the ignorant living creatures? Whatever explanation you have for this conundrum, deign to inform me of it and remove my doubt."

(Adhyatma Ramayana, Bala Kanda ch.1 12 - 15)

To alleviate this doubt of Parvati Devi, Lord Shiva reveals to Her the truth behind the entire life-story of Rama describing them in detail incident by incident which thus forms the Adhyatma Ramayana.

In the course of this spiritual version of Ramayana, Lord Shiva divulges many secrets known only to Sri Rama which declares loud and clear that Sri Rama is an incarnation of Lord Vishnu. In its wake it also exposes the astonishing truth and real motive behind many key action-oriented incidents and characters of this life-narrative.

One such revelation is the disclosure of the real character of Ravana...

### Past-life of Ravana

Ravana was the re-birth of one of the two devout gatekeepers of Vaikunta – the abode of Lord Vishnu. Let's see their story in a flashback that is part of the Srimad Bhagavata Purana...

The four Kumaras : Sanaka, Sanatana, Sanandana, Sanatkumara who were the mind-born sons of Brahma once arrived at the gates of Vaikunta desiring to see Lord Vishnu. These kumars though in reality were aged sages and far advanced spiritually were like five year old children in appearance. Because of this misleading exterior look, the two gatekeepers of Vaikuntha – Jaya and Vijaya arrogantly try to shoo them off stating that Lord Vishnu was resting at the time.

Offended at such haughty treatment at the Lord's abode, the Kumaras curse the twin attendants to be parted from their Lord and to take birth in the lower worlds of material existence. Jaya and Vijaya were immediately repentant and sought forgiveness.

*"What you (Sanaka and other Kumaras) have done is only to inflict a deserving punishment on sinners. We have nothing to say against the infliction of it, as it will destroy our sin of disobeying the Lord's command. But though we are doomed to a precipitous fall from our present state, grant that we may not, by virtue of your sympathy and goodwill towards us, be deprived of our mind's capacity to remember Him always."*

(Srimad Bhagavata III.15.36)

Jaya and Vijaya, upon addressing the above prayer were given a choice: Taking the earthly journey was inevitable in order to be delivered from the curse but they could choose either seven births as an ally of the Avataar Vishnu or three births as a bitter enemy of Avataar Vishnu. Not wanting to be away from their Lord too long they both chose the latter.

And thus they took three births on earth as bitter and fierce enemies of the Lord: in Kritayuga, the two were born as daityas - Hiranyakasipu and Hiranyaksha. They were liberated by Lord Vishnu Himself in his Narsimha (Man-Lion) and Varaha (Boar) avataars respectively; in the Tretayug they were born as Rakshasas Ravana and Kumbhakarna and were delivered from this birth by Vishnu incarnate Sri Rama. In the Dwapar Yuga, they were born as Shishupala and Dantavakra who were set free by Vishnu's leela avatar Sri Krishna.

### Glimpses of Ravana's Vidvesha Bhakti for Lord Rama

Thus the Vishnu bhakt and gatekeeper of Vishnu's abode Jaya is born as the Rakshasa king Ravana who is the sworn enemy of Sri Rama as represented by the Valmiki Ramayana. It is Adhyatma Ramayana that shows how in that birth itself it was a conscious decision on part of Ravana to assume the role of a foe in relation to the Avataar Purusha – Sri Rama...

On the occasion of Surpanakha's mutilation, she rushes to Lanka to report to her brother Ravana of her humiliation at the hands of the two royal brothers Rama and Lakshmana. On hearing Surpanakha's representation of Rama, Ravana become restless, sleepless and lost in deep thought.

*"In all probability, Rama may not be a mere man. He may be that Supreme Being, who has now assumed a human form in the line of the Raghus, and come with his forces to destroy me with my army, as implored by Brahma in days of old."*

*"If I am killed by the Supreme Self, I shall reign in the Supreme Realm of Vaikuntha. If I am not killed, I shall be enjoying this realm of the Rakshasas for a long time. So, I am going to oppose Rama."*

*"Reflecting in this way, that lord of the Rakshasas concluded that Rama must be Hari, the Supreme Lord, and resolved within himself, 'I shall attain to Him through the attitude of confrontation; for, the Lord does not reveal himself quickly by ordinary forms of Bhakti (devotion)'."*

(Adhyatma Ramayana, Aranya Kanda ch.5 59 - 61)

Thus he deliberately chose to express **Vidvesha Bhakti** towards the Lord to attain salvation.

Thus, before Ravana approaches Maricha to assume the shape of a golden deer and decoy Rama by his movements as the step preparatory to the abduction of Sita, Ravana according to the Adhyatma Ramayana, soliloquises to the effect that Rama must be Vishnu incarnate come to destroy him, that destruction at Rama's hand is an easier way of gaining salvation than through spiritual practices, and that by abducting Sita, he could provoke Rama to fight and kill him soon and thus enable him to attain salvation. Thus, from the very start Ravana is introduced as one practising **Vidvesha-Bhakti** or devotion through confrontation. This attitude of Ravana is frequently alluded to in the Adhyatma Ramayana with the progress of the narrative.

Even after the abduction of Sita, Ravana is shown restless over the fact that Sri Rama had not yet come in search of him. Thus Ravana is eagerly awaiting the arrival of the Lord so that his liberation from this earthly plane is hastened.

*"Meantime, Ravana had all along been thinking, 'What could hasten my death at the hands of Rama? I do not find Rama as yet coming in quest of Sita. Why is it so?' Thinking*



thus always about Rama, Ravana had a dream the previous night. He saw in the dream that a monkey deputed by Rama, and capable of taking any form, had come assuming a very small form, and was watching from the top of the trees. Experiencing this wonderful dream, Ravana thought within himself: 'Dreams sometimes come true. So let me decide to do like this: I shall wound the feelings of Sita by harsh words and make her extremely sorrow-stricken. Let the monkey see it and report it to Rama.' It was while thinking this way after he had this dream experience that he started to the place where Sita was confined. (Ashoka grove)"

(Adhyatma Ramayana, Sundara Kanda

ch.2 15 - 20)

Thus the heated interaction in the Ashoka grove was only pretence on the part of Ravana to instigate Rama.

Even before the destruction of Ravana in the battle by Sri Rama, there is a conversation between Ravana and his wife Mandodari which also throws light on the fact that Ravana is doing all these diabolic activities knowing fully well the true identity of Sri Rama and thus wanting eagerly to be killed at the Lord's hands by instigating Him to do so.

Revealing that Sri Rama is the Supreme Being Himself, Mandodari tries to dissuade him from going in war with Sri Rama but instead suggests both should retire to a life of forest-dwelling ascetics.

"On hearing these words of Mandodari, Ravana replied, 'O good Lady! After having caused the destruction of my sons, of my brother and of the community of the Rakshasas through Rama, how can I now even think of saving my life by departing to the forest?

I shall fight with Rama. Pierced by the speedy arrows of his, I shall attain to the status of Vishnu.

I know that Rama is Vishnu and that Sita, the daughter of Janaka, is Lakshmi. It is with the full knowledge of this that I forcibly abducted Sita from the forest.

By courting death at the hands of Rama, I shall leave you in this world of Samsara and myself attain to the Supreme state of Vishnu. O dear one! For this purpose, I brought Sita and now I am going to die with my relatives.

That State, pure and blissful, which liberation-seekers attain – that very goal, I shall gain by being killed by Rama in battle.

All my sins done in this world shall be washed off by death at Rama's hand and I shall gain liberation, which is a rare attainment for a Jiva."

(Adhyatma Ramayana, Yuddha Kanda ch.10 55-

57)

The conversation between Mandodari and Ravana clearly shows that Ravana is not only aware of Sri Rama and Sita's real identity but he is totally aware of his own actions. He has deliberately plotted this whole drama wanting to be vanquished at the hands of the Divine Sri Rama and thereby attain to his rightful place at the abode of Lord Vishnu-Vaikuntha.

On the death of Ravana, his spirit, having the luminosity of lightning, enters into Rama and attains salvation, to the utter astonishment of the Devas and the Rishis watching the course of the battle.

"All the Devas witnessed how from the body of Ravana, a brilliance equal to that of the sun emerged and entered into Rama."

(Adhyatma Ramayana, Yuddha Kanda ch.11 79)

To the astonished Devas, Narada gives the explanation of this apparently most cruel and violent tyrant of a Rakshasa gaining salvation. The explanation is that Ravana is a devotee at heart, practising what is known in devotional ideology as *Vidvesa-Bhakti* or devotion through confrontation. He knows that Rama is Mahavishnu and wants to get salvation easily by slaughter at His hands. Through the antagonism he developed towards Rama, he has constantly been thinking of him with an intensity of thought that even worshippers seldom have. Such concentration, being on the Lord, is enough to purify a man. And finally, by meeting death at Rama's hands, Ravana becomes eligible for immediate salvation.

"I consider as devotees even those Asuras and wicked men whose mind attained to concentration on Krishna due to antagonism towards Him. For, in the field of battle they saw, as they fell, the Lord Himself attacking them, discus in hand and seated on His eagle vehicle."

(Srimad Bhagavata III.2.24)

Just as God could be approached through love, He could also be reached through a form of intense antagonism born of mortal fear. This is a special doctrine of the *Bhagavata*.

The Principle underlying this doctrine is that, whatever the motivation, if the mind could be fixed on Him firmly and with the whole energy of one's being, His grace descends on one in a form appropriate to the mood in which such a fixing is made.

One can approach Him through prayer and supplication, as all devotees usually do, and He blesses them appearing before them as their protector. But there are some titanic spirits, Asuras like Ravana similar to Hiranyaksha, Hiranyakasipu, Kamsa, Kumbhakarna, Sisupala etc, who lived in mortal dread of Mahavishnu. As a result, they always kept themselves in a mood of alertness and confrontation, thinking of Him with intense fear and hatred. The *Puranas* describe how in good time He appeared before them in appropriate forms of a terrible nature and destroyed them in battle.

They were physically destroyed, but spiritually regenerated. The blows He delivered on them being His blessings appropriate to the mood of the Asuras.

The fear and antagonism affect a transformation for the better. This can be explained with the analogy of a larva that is imprisoned in a hole or muddy crust by a certain type of wasp. The wasp goes on buzzing, hovering about or sitting on the spot. Poetic fancy attributes the gradual transformation of the larva into a wasp due to its constant thought of the wasp generated by fear.

"Just as the worm, imprisoned by the wasp and contemplating on it, is transformed into a wasp through dread, so did many kings, inimical to Krishna, overcome their previous sins by concentration on Him through fear and enmity."

(Srimad Bhagavata

VII.10.39)

Intense and constant fear fixes one's attention on the foe as much as love does on the beloved. These Asuras fixed their mind on Vishnu or His incarnations, through fear. This act had a transforming effect, irrespective of the nature of the motivating emotion. The relevant fact is that the mind was fixed intensely on Vishnu.

This strange way of approaching the Divine is called *Vidvesha Bhakti* – communion through confrontation. And Ravana's bhakti was a good example of this kind of devotional practice.

As these Asuras and Asuric kings perished at His hands and attained salvation immediately, they did not live to exemplify of what nature that transformation that came over them was.

Personalities like Ravana are not ordinary jivas working out their spiritual evolution, but divine spirits under a curse, awaiting redemption by meeting with destruction at the hands of the Lord as the Incarnate.

Remembrance of the Lord, with all the energy of one's being, whatever might be the motive or passion directing that energy, will result in His manifesting Himself to the person concerned. Antagonism, accompanied by mortal fear, can be such a driving passion in some exceptional souls.

It is noted that in Christian mythology also there is a parallel to this, though it has no devotional implication. Satan was one of the Archangels of God. He revolted against God and lost his place, and became Satan – the great enemy of God, seducing His creatures. Satan is ever in confrontation with God. But unlike Jaya and Vijaya, he has no contrition and is ultimately condemned to eternal hell. One wonders how Christian thinkers failed to recognize that one's antagonism to God involves Remembrance of Him and should ultimately work out one's salvation.

All conflicting forms of devotional attitudes, including those of confrontation and conjugal love are reconciled on the ground that they are all forms of *Smarana* and Remembrance.

*"Through remembrance, Thy antagonists attained to the same spiritual goal as the sages who had established complete control over their vital forces, mind and sense, and meditated on Thee in the heart. To Thee, we (the Sruti Devatas), who look upon Thee as equally present everywhere and ever commune with Thy lotus feet, and the women (the Gopikas of Vrindavan) who longed for the embrace of Thy arms, powerful and handsome like Adishesha, are of equal worth. Whatever the nature of passion that moves the devotee, if it makes him intensely think of Thee, Thy grace falls on him."*

(Srimad

*Bhagavata* X.87.23)

Sri Rama faced Ravana with weapons in hand and raised him to the highest spiritual glory by delivering deadly blows on him.

### Ravana's Bhakti for Sita Devi

Ravana not only had bhakti for Rama but had equal respect and reverence for the Lord's consort Sita Devi. In his conversation with his wife Mandodari, he openly acknowledges that,

*"I know that Rama is Vishnu and that Sita, the daughter of Janaka, is Lakshmi. It is with the full knowledge of this that I forcibly abducted Sita from the forest."*

(Adhyatma Ramayana, Yuddha

Kandam ch.10 57)

Adhyatma Ramayana says, that is the reason why he never touched Sita Devi though he abducted her.

*"... Ravana now scooped up the ground on which Sita was standing, and placing that block of earth along with Sita in his aerial car hastened through the sky..."*

(Adhyatma Ramayana, Aranya Kandam ch.7 51-52)

Back in Lanka he protected her as one would one's own mother.

*"And as for Ravana he crossed the sea and reached Lanka with Sita. He took her to his residential palace, and lodged her amidst a guard of Rakshasa women in an Ashoka grove, situated at a very sequestered region. He protected her, as one would do one's mother (matrbudhya)"*

(Adhyatma Ramayana, Aranya Kandam ch.7 65)

To say a few concluding words on Ravana...

Knowing the Rama Katha through Valmiki Ramayana, the reader may come to loathe and hate the cruel Ravana for his immoral deeds which were prompted by his vicious demeanour and conduct. But the whole picture is flipped over showing the better and brighter side of Ravana by Adhyatma Ramayana through its revelation of behind-the-scenes of events and the real motive that propels Ravana to behave in such a venomous manner. His one and only goal was to die at the hands of Vishnu's incarnate Sri Rama as earliest as possible so that he is redeemed from the curse and he can join his Lord in Vaikuntha.

### Hanuman, the Giant Devotee of Rama

In stark contrast to Ravana there is the Bhakta Chakravarti, Hanuman. The thought of Sri Rama is inevitably accompanied by Bhakt Hanuman because he is that great a devotee of Lord Rama but unlike Ravana who confronted the Lord with hatred and enmity, Hanuman practised loving devotion to the Lord with humility and selfless service.

#### Hanuman, the epitome of nav-vidha bhakti

This gem of a devotee, typifies all the nine forms of bhakti as stated in the classic bhakti text Srimad Bhagavata...

*"Hearing about Vishnu, Singing about Him, remembering Him, serving Him, worshipping Him, saluting Him, being His servant, being His comrade, and surrendering oneself and everything that is one's own to Him – these are the nine aspects of Bhakti or God-love."* (Srimad Bhagavata VII.5.23-24)

Now let's see how Bhakt Hanuman has come to become the personification of *Nav vidha bhakti*...

#### ❖ Dasya Bhakti and Padasevana

Hanuman, the one who undoubtedly possesses a stupendous personality is but a servant in front of his Lord Sri Rama. He is the epitome of *Dasya Bhakti* and *Padasevana* which is directed one-pointedly to his beloved Master Sri Rama. There are three main instances in the epic *Ramayana*, which brings to the forefront Hanuman's sincere bhava of *Dasya Bhakti* and the timely and most needed service rendered by him to his master (*Padasevana*)...

- I. **The first instance is when Sita Devi was abducted. Sri Rama not knowing her whereabouts entered into an alliance with the Monkey King Sugreeva. This Vanara king Sugreeva decided to dispatch scores of**

**his monkey-warriors to all the four directions to search for Sri Rama's consort. At that instance,**

*"Seeing Hanuman about to start, Rama called him aside and said to him: 'As a token for recognition, you privately give to Sita this signet ring of mine, having my name inscribed on it. I deem you, O monkey leader, as the principal agent in this enterprise. I have understood the full extent of your prowess. Now go ahead. May success attend your effort!'"*

(Adhyatma Ramayana, Kishkindha Kanda ch.6 28-29)

This gesture on the part of Sri Rama reveals his omniscience as he knows that of all the millions of *Vanaras* deputed all over, it is Hanuman who is going to find His Sita and that is why he gives him the signet ring. Thus Hanuman becomes the main emissary on this divine mission. He performs his duty with utmost sincerity regardless of the risks to his own life and being. The intelligent and courageous Hanuman crosses the hundred yojanas long Indian Ocean to reach Lanka, the abode of Ravana with one gigantic leap from the Mahendra Mountain to the Trikuta Mountain in Lanka. This impossible feat was possible because of his unswerving faith and devotion in the power of his Lord's name – RAMA.

On this journey he intelligently dodges Surasa, the mother of serpents who wished to devour him and also kills the shadow-eating demoness Simhika, thus surmounting all the obstacles and difficulties in his path. His refusal of Mount Mainaka's offer to rest, on this long onward journey shows his utter dedication and commitment to his Lord. This right attitude towards one's duty is evident from his reply to Mount Mainaka that had surfaced in a human form from the depths of the sea...

*"For me who am going on Rama's errand, where is the need for food, where is the need for rest? My foremost duty is to proceed as quickly as possible without any delay. With these words he just touched the peak of the mountain with his hands, and proceeded towards Lanka."*

(Adhyatma Ramayana, Sundara Kanda ch.1 33)

There in Lanka, not only does he find Sita Devi in the Ashoka grove, but he very intelligently approaches her lest she may doubt his credibility and spurn him away. So in order to win her trust, he assumes a very tiny size and hides in the foliage of the simsapa tree under which she was seated all emaciated and dejected. From his hidden vantage point he starts narrating the Rama Katha till date just loud enough for Sita's hearing. This makes Sita Devi hopeful and on seeing her husband's signet ring, faith and confidence is re-instilled in her. Thus consoling mother Sita and reassuring her of Rama's arrival to rescue her, Hanuman makes plan for his return journey to Sri Rama.

But before he starts back, just like a true envoy he did his extra bit. He thought...

*"A messenger, who has been sent for one purpose, if he returns merely after accomplishing his mission but without doing something more in extension of it, is the most inferior type of a messenger. Therefore, I will accomplish something more here and try to meet Ravana and talk with him. After that I shall proceed to meet Rama."*

(Adhyatma Ramayana, Sundara Kanda ch.3 69-71)

He thus, found a way to gain admission to the presence of the *Dasamukha* Ravana to check out his enemy himself and later on set most of Lanka on fire leaving only the palace of Ravana and Mother Sita's shelter. Thus he returned only after destroying a lot of Lanka's property including Ashoka grove and killing numerous Rakshasas. In this process of giving Ravana an inkling of formidable Rama and his army's strength and capability, he gathered first-hand information of enemy's military prowess, sized up their battalions, making a mental note of the heavily guarded fortresses etc, thus serving as an invaluable C.I.D. agent indeed!

Having accomplished all this in one and a half days, Hanuman returned to Sri Rama and delivered the good news of having found Sita Devi safe and sound.

*"I have seen Sita in a healthy condition."*

(Adhyatma Ramayana, Sundara Kanda ch.5 36)

He reported his adventures in detail and in conclusion to his mission report to Rama, Hanuman says,

*"I am the minister of Sugreeva and the servant of Rama. Overcoming very great difficulties, I have now been able to discover the daughter of Jnaka."*

(Adhyatma Ramayana, Sundara Kanda ch.5 43)

It is well-known that when the devotee takes one step towards the Lord, the compassionate Lord takes hundred steps towards His devotee. This dictum is proved true by Sri Rama in his response to Hanuman's speech... Rama not only acknowledges and appreciates his efforts but praises him generously and gratefully and bestows upon him the highest level of spiritual attainment...

*"Hearing these words of Hanuman, Rama was extremely delighted and said to him, 'You have done something that is very difficult even for Devas to achieve. I find no way of making adequate returns to the service you have done me. O son of the Wind-god! I now offer to you all that I have.' Speaking in this way, with tears flowing from his eyes, Rama held Hanuman in his tight embrace and felt great delight. Rama, the lover of devotees, next said to Hanuman as follows:*

*He said, 'In this world it is very difficult for anyone to be embraced in this manner by Me, the Supreme Spirit. Therefore, O the noblest of monkeys! You are my devotee and dear to Me.'*

*He by worshipping whose lotus-feet with Tulasi and other ingredients one attains to the unparalleled Status of Vishnu – when one is embraced by that Being manifest as Rama, what doubt is there that such a person will attain to the summit of spiritual excellence?"*

(Adhyatma Ramayana, Sundara Kanda ch.5 62-64)

Thus, the Lord, the Master reciprocates to his Servant, Dasya and his *Padasevana* appropriately.

## II. The second instance where Hanuman displays his implicit obedience to his master Sri Rama is when twice Sri Rama deploys him to get medicinal herbs.

a. The first occasion is when Meghanada delivers a devastating attack on Rama's monkey warriors with the Brahma missile and the troops of monkey army fell in large numbers.

*"Rama was very much afflicted to see a very large number of monkey troops fallen down by Meghanada's attack. So he*



said to Hanuman, 'Go quickly to Milk Ocean where there is a mountain called Drona, on which many medicinal herbs grow. Go and bring it quickly in order to rejuvenate these monkeys. This will bring you eternal fame.' Hanuman accepted the order implicitly and went away immediately on that mission. The mountain was brought and all the monkeys were revived with its help. Hanuman took back the mountain to replace it and came back quickly."

(Adhyatma Ramayana, Yuddha Kandam ch.5 71-74)

b. The second occasion is when Lakshmana is rendered unconscious by Ravana's powerful weapon Sakti. On seeing Lakshmana lying unconscious, Rama said to Hanuman,

"Dear one! As before, go and get those great herbal remedies once more in order to revive Lakshmana and the monkeys.' Ordered in this way by Rama, Hanuman proceeded with the speed of wind, crossing the ocean."

(Adhyatma Ramayana, Yuddha Kandam ch.6 33-34)

c. The third occasion is when on completion of fourteen years of exile, during their return journey to Ayodhya, they stop at sage Bharadwaja's ashrama and accepting his hospitality stay the night there on the Rishi's request. Bharata who was then in Nandigrama, four miles away from Ayodhya, dressed in tree-bark cloth and a skin of black antelope with matted hair and subsisting on roots and fruits was ruling the kingdom on Rama's behalf dedicating his actions to Sri Rama's sandals. Bharata had vowed that if Rama did not return at the end of fourteen years he would immolate himself. Since they were staying the night at the ashram and would be delayed a bit, Sri Rama sends Hanuman to Bharata in advance to convey the good news of their return and thereby stop Bharata from taking any rash decision.

"Agreeing to do so, Hanuman assumed a human body. Then with the lightning speed of a Garuda attacking a serpent, he quickly proceeded to Nandigrama."

(Adhyatma Ramayana, Yuddha Kandam ch.14 46)

Thus, Hanuman is a life-saver in the Ramayana. He saved Sita's life from deep depression and attempted suicide by his masterly recital of the Ramayana story to her. He saved Lakshmana's life and the lives of the entire army, struck by the poisonous weapons of the enemy, by bringing the mountain containing the life-saving sanjeevani herbs. Again, he saved the life of Rama's brother Bharata by the recital of Ramayana for Bharata who was about to enter the fire as per his vow on not seeing his beloved brother on the completion of fourteen years of exile. Here again, Hanuman was sent in advance by Rama to convey the good news to Bharata and save his life. Thus, Hanuman deservingly known as *Ramaduta* does not leave any stone unturned in his performance of service to his Master (*Padasevana*) and thus expresses his *Dasya Bhakti*. These impossible feats were possible because of Hanuman's total faith and surrender to the feet of his Lord. (*Atmanivedanam*)

## ❖ Shravana, Kirtana, Smarana, Archana and Vandanam

The story goes that at the final departure from Sri Rama's presence, Anjaneya was blessed by his Master with a life that was to endure as long as the *Ramayana* survived in this world, so that he could bear the separation by hearing the recital of Sri Rama's name, fame and exploits. Tradition has it that wherever the *Ramayana* is read, recited or expounded Anjaneya is present though not visible to the naked eye; and in very orthodox gatherings held for the study of the *Ramayana*, it is still the practice to have an unoccupied front seat for Anjaneya. Wherever Rama's story is narrated, Anjaneya is there with hands folded over his head and with eyes bedimmed with tears of joy at the very mention of Sri Rama's Name and sorrow at this survival after Sri Rama's departure to Vaikuntha. Thus *Cheeranjivi* (Immortal) Hanuman is ever engaged in *Shravana* (Hearing), *Kirtana* (Singing) and *smarana* (remembrance) of Sri Rama, his Beloved Lord. In the Lord's presence he is always seen kneeled down with joined palms thus expressing his *Archana* (worshipful attitude) and *Vandanam* (Salutations to his Lord.)

## ❖ Sakhya and Atmanivedanam

Sri Rama considers Hanuman as his friend and so he always embraces him as one would one's friend to show his feelings of happiness and delight. Thus Hanuman was *Sakhya* (a friend) too to Rama.

Hanuman's flagstaff is his *Ananya Bhakti*. Every pore emits the fragrance of his unstinting and unflinching devotion. His is not a blind devotion. It is reinforced with depths of understanding, where all the aspects of Bhakti : *Shravana* (hearing), *Kirtana* (singing), *smaranam* (remembering), *Padasevanam* (serving at his feet), *Archanam* (worshipping), *Vandanam* (adoration/salutation), *Dasya* (service), *Sakhya* (friendship), *Atmanivedanam* (offering up of the total self to the Lord) spiral him to the status of ***Bhakta Chakravarthi***. All the glory and might of his success he does not arrogate to himself, but accepts it as the benediction of his Lord. True to the nature of a real devotee, he was ever drenched in modesty and humility.

## Conclusion

Both these characters of the epic *Ramayana* – Rama's arch enemy Ravana or Rama's humble devout loving devotee Hanuman though different in their approaches to the Lord are great devotees in their own right. They explicitly depict contrasting types of *Bhakti*. They go to declare that it doesn't matter how you remember God – through hate or through love. What matters is that you always ceaselessly remember the Lord. So potent is the Lord's thought that it purifies the thinker of all his latent tendencies and gives him perfect purity which liberates him to join the Lord in His abode itself.

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