

Valmiki's Ramayana contains numerous useful anecdotes. One of such anecdotes was in **Aranya Kanda Sarga 9** which was told by Seetha Devi to Sri Rama. Prior knowledge of the context in which Seetha Devi expressed it would put us in proper perspective to appreciate the point.

On their arrival at the interior of Dandaka Forest, Sri Rama, Seetha Devi and Lakshmana were greeted by the sages doing severe penance and existing on frugal living like roots or bulbs or fruits. The sages were overwhelmed on beholding the beautiful attractive personality of Sri Rama, Seetha Devi and Lakshmana. With the feeling of exhilaration running over the body and with free-flowing tears of joy, they took refuge at the lotus feet of Sri Rama. They surrendered and sought protection from an unending daily atrocity of the demons. They indicated that their sufferings had reached an unbearable point as the severity of violence had increased many folds in the recent past. Naturally compassionate Sri Rama could not refrain except expressing a solemn vow that he would protect them by eliminating, lock, stock and barrel, the tribe of demons from the forest. Fully gratified by his utterance, the satisfied sages blessed them and retired to their respective places.

Seetha Devi, somehow, felt uncomfortable with definite elimination of the demons in the Dandaka Forest by Sri Rama with no enmity and no cause for retaliation whatsoever exists between Sri Rama and the so-called demons. As she could foresee the terrible upshoot, which would bound to befall on them, from this apparently innocuous enmity, she started a narrative through an anecdote during their return journey after meeting with the sages.

Ways of the nature are abstruse. Human beings could not avert pursuit of self-gratification. However, doing certain things would always result in grave injustice to the doer.¹

The three such desires, in order of the worseness, are fallacious speech/ conduct, fascination towards other women and causing unwanted injury to anyone without any provocation².

As a result of these misdemeanours, such human beings unobtrusively would fall into socially unacceptable ways, loose respectability, name and fame leading to hellish life here and thereafter.

Out of these three gates to hell, the third one, namely, causing injury always stem silently from the most unexpected corner. She gently expressed that Sri Rama does not suffer from any of the above said misdemeanours except the intended act of causing cruelty to the demons without any enmity, as a result of pledge given by him to the sages.³

To avoid inflicting injury to demons, she suggested them that the habit of carrying bow and arrows with them could be given up. Further, carrying a weapon is contrary to the attire of

¹ अधर्मम् तु सुसूक्ष्मेण विधिना प्राप्यते महान् ॥

² त्रीणि एव व्यसनानि अत्र कामजानि भवन्ति उत ॥ मिथ्या वाक्यम् तु परमम् तस्मात् गुरुतरा उभौ ॥ पर दार अभिगमनम् विना वैरम् च रौद्रता ॥

³ तृतीयम् यद् इदम् रौद्रम् पर प्राण अभिहिंसनम् ॥ निर्वैरम् क्रियते मोहात् तत् च ते समुपस्थितम् ॥

a recluse worn by them. They could, however, pick up the bow and arrows on return to the kingdom.

In this connection, she explained that scholars laid down that any arm or weapon within reach of a soldier as well as the fuel kept in near vicinity of a burning fire would always result in intensifying the deadly effect of harm or fire respectively.⁴

To validate above the point, she narrated the following anecdote.

Once upon a time, a pious sage was living happily in a forest doing penances uninterruptedly. As the efforts of this pious person would not go waste, Indira got envied and felt nervous that the sage could be a potential competitor to his exalted position. In order to avoid any such remote possibility, he decided to lean away the sage from his meritorious act and cause him to go astray. He appeared at the hermitage of the sage in the guise of a king carrying a sword. He told to the unsuspecting sage that he wanted to deposit his most precious sword into his custody as he wanted to go deep into the forest for doing penance. The sage felt that it is his humble duty to help the king to pursue his noble pursuit. He willingly took the sword into his safe custody. Indira left the place.

The mind of the sage started slowly thinking about protecting the sword deposited with him for safe custody. Lest should he fail in his duty in protecting and ensuring safe custody of the sword entrusted to him, he started carrying the sword with him as a measure of abundant caution.⁵

The sword remained with him wherever he went, either to gather woods, fruits, flowers or for other necessary activities etc. Unobtrusively, his mind got enamoured with the new found armour, the sword. He started behaving arrogant unconsciously. Without any thought of injuring and inflicting grief, he wantonly thrashed the blades of grass with the sword, wielded it menacingly at the unsuspected deer, cow and other animals which used to frequent his calm hermitage. As months and years rolled by, the sage had transformed fully to the conduct of a warrior using the sword in a trice to cause misery, injury and routinely inflicting violence. Needless to say, he had completely gone astray and settled into a brutal routine of a demon. He unknowingly got his discerning faculty furious at all times thereby losing his resolve and determination to lead a peaceful way of living.⁶

He gradually become ruthless and obsessed with violence leading his downfall into hell⁷. We can only say that such a misdemeanour happened due to his innocuous habit of carrying sharp edged sword on his person and roaming here and there despite wearing the attire of a sage.⁸

The three gates of self-gratification, even practiced unconsciously or habitually with full knowledge, may drive a person to develop tendencies of unscrupulousness, uncontrolled

⁴ क्षत्रियाणाम् इह धनुर् हुताशस्य इन्धनानि च ॥ समीपतः स्थितम् तेजो बलम् उच्छहयते भृशम् ॥

⁵ स तत् शस्त्रम् अनुप्राप्य न्यास रक्षणं तत्परः ॥ वने तु विचरति एव रक्षन् प्रत्ययम् आत्मनः ॥

⁶ नित्यम् शस्त्रम् परिवहन् क्रमेण स तपोधनः ॥ चकार रौद्रीम् स्वाम् बुद्धिम् त्यक्त्वा तपसि निश्चयम् ॥

⁷ ततः स रौद्र अभिरतः प्रमत्तो अधर्मं कर्षितः ॥ तस्य शस्त्रस्य संवासात् जगाम नरकम् मुनिः ॥

⁸ एवम् एतत् पुरा वृत्तम् शस्त्र संयोग कारणम् ॥ अग्नि संयोगवत् हेतुः शस्त्र संयोग उच्यते ॥

carnal desires and a master of intrigues to inflict cruelty on others. Preponderance of any of these in anyone is frowned upon in any society.

From the above anecdote, the analysis for a peaceful living can be summarised as below.

Just like a combustible material in the vicinity of raging fire adds fuel to it, constant association of dangerous objects even as a part of attire, be it bow and arrow or sword or gun etc would slowly inculcate and inure a person into its usage without remorse. Here, one should understand the subtle difference. It is not the thought alone which is the cause of violence here. Even a mere possession of a blunt object constantly with oneself, can harden one's consciousness to its application as a normal way of life.

As corollary, even choosing companionship by adolescent and adult needs to be done judiciously. As peer pressure among the adolescent is real, the boy/girl should be made aware gently the perils of association with friends or classmate whose behaviour is detestable at the outset, not comfortable and not, at all, in tune with his/her way of thinking or living etc. Just like the impact on possession of an inanimate objects, companionship with one whose attitude/practice is diametrically ranked outside to one's own thinking or interests may also entice or propel one over the period of time to practice the same detestable behaviour.

As regards, impact of an association, it is worth to recollect a beautiful summary by Goswami ji from his Sri Rama Charita Manas. In brief, it says that the dust particles in contact with air flies high with it, but the same dust particles when in contact with the mud settled down to earth in muddy water. Parrot and Maina having raised in the household of gentle and quarrelsome tend to repeat polite words and abusive phrases respectively. Smoke in mixture with an earthly substance turns into soot, whereas in conjunction with water, fire and air transforms into cloud and infuse life to the world.

The Sarga 9 in Aryan Kanda ends with the saying that Prosperity emanating from good practices of ways and means is always sought after. Right conduct and thinking always ensure everlasting happiness. ⁹ Wise people always give importance to modest way of living and sublime their thinking to the overall benefit of the society at large¹⁰.

Therefore, by the grace of Sri Rama and Seetha Devi, let us be bestowed with good habits and stay away from the prospect of falling into the category of causing injury to others. Let integrity, honesty, morality and magnanimity be our guiding light by the grace of Almighty.

⁹ धर्मात् अर्थः प्रभवति धर्मात् प्रभवते सुखम् ॥ धर्मेण लभते सर्वम् धर्म सारम् इदम् जगत् ॥

¹⁰ आत्मानम् नियमैः तैः तैः कर्षयित्वा प्रयत्नतः ॥ प्राप्यते निपुणैः धर्मो न सुखात् लभते सुखम् ॥