

Assessment of opponent's skill on attack in Ashok Vanam - Series on Episodes about Hanuman - B

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Hanuman's successful heroic deeds at Ashok Vanam is very much popular amongst ardent followers of Hanuman ji. There are some valuable lessons to learn even from his bravery act, which is the main focus of this article.

Sargas from 41 to 48 in Sundara Kanda of Srimad Valmiki Ramayana describes how Hanuman had destroyed well-guarded secluded beautiful Ashok Vanam after his successful meeting with Seetha Devi, handing over a ring specially sent by Sri Rama and receiving an ornament from her. Hanuman, having seen firsthand the ill treatment meted out to Seetha Devi, was infuriated by the unbecoming conduct of Ravana and by the lady ogress who were given the task of guarding her.

Hanuman was well aware that he was only entrusted with a mission to locate whereabouts of Seetha Devi. The modalities and strategies to get her released rests with Lord Sri Rama and Sugriva. Seetha Devi too didn't mince words by saying to the worried Hanuman that it would be befitting to Rama as a king to get her released from the captivity with the help of Sugriva by waging a war against Ravana. He, too, thought that his search got ended with the finding of location, conveyance of the message from Sri Rama, tendering assurance for her rescue.

However, on his intended departure, he was pertinently queried by her about the capability of Vanaras to fight against Ravana's army and their ability to cross over the Ocean. Hanuman painstakingly explained to her that everybody under the leadership of Sugriva was capable of cruising through water, sky above, region situated below the earth etc. About their stamina, he assured that each one has the power of hundreds of elephants put together. The army of such Vanaras was in thousands of crores. They were adept in using their hands, teeth, feet etc to inflict grievous fatal blow/ injuries even to the so-called mighty demons. A far cry from mighty army force of demons.

To give her confidence, he, further, informed her that he ranked very much low in comparison to those Vanaras. He quoted saying that normally only the junior one or whose services can be dispensed with would only be sent on perilous errand. A truthful sign of humility and a sincere attempt to assuage diffident and worried Seetha. Really, a pragmatic approach to restore confidence in her which got diminished due to the long stay in the most hostile atmosphere.

Though Hanuman had briefed her about the strength of Vanaras' army in glowing terms, as an intelligent, shrewd emissary, he wanted to test and know in person about capability, readiness of the battalion of army under Ravana before his return. Further, he wanted to inject a psychological feeling of diffidence into the minds of Ravana's army by taking the fight in the midst of their camp and give a decisive defeat. He perceived such a move was essential to demoralise the demons.

As we all know that before venturing into any type of attack on enemy, it is essential to have a clear understanding about one's own strength and confidence to put behind nagging thoughts of diffidence on any perceived weakness. It is also needed to weigh in likely obstacles to overcome, end results of anticipated benefits and fallout in the event of failure.

In spite of favourable conditions on the basis of merit, the entire thought process assumes a greater proportion of difficulty in the cases of waging a war against the enemy in their territory. In other words, the so-called strength arising out of locational and local advantages get nullified. Instead, disadvantages loom large to plan any predetermined attack.

Hanuman had found himself in a such a situation at Ashok Vanam in Lanka.

Here, Maharishi Valmiki expresses two important principles namely, as an emissary one should not engage in any hostile activities through over confidence without understanding truly about one's capacity. Secondly, nothing should be done which is detrimental or contrary to the already achieved result. In this connection, it is worth to recollect the sayings of Seetha Devi to Hanuman that in any fight, no one can predict success in certainty due to so many variable favourable and unfavourable factors.

Intelligent Hanuman reasoned himself that an attack was only the option left with him in the given circumstance of the military strength, the richness of the country, unflinching loyalty towards Ravana among the citizens. He arrived at this most defining decision of attack alone as the best suitable option after convincing himself that neither the method of negotiation nor sowing dissension was practicable in the case of those who were proud of their strength. Similarly, no amount of monetary inducement would work with those who were having abundant wealth.

त्रीन् उपायान् अतिक्रम्य चतुर्थं इह दृश्यते ॥ न साम रक्षहसु गुणाय कल्पते | न दनम् अर्थ उपचितेषु वर्तते | न भेद साध्या बल दर्पिता जनाः | पराक्रमः तु एष मम इह रोचते ॥ (Sundara kanda Sarga 41)

Hanuman found a silver lining in his plan of assault as he was sure that Ravana's side would lose some of his foremost generals. To the extent, there will be depletion of his army apart from psychological shock of defeat at the hands of a monkey. It may result in diffident defensive approach on Ravana's side in the ensuing combat with Sri Rama.

He anticipated multi fold attack by Ravana with sharp weapons from many warriors from all directions leaving him no time to defend rather than wage an effective counter attack. He mused that an over confident emissary mistakenly plunges into an entirely avoidable attack exposing his vulnerabilities and putting the cause of his master at peril. Hanuman with his intellectual acumen aided by the boon of undefeatability bestowed on him, prepared for eventualities and courageously went about.

As a token of provocation, he destroyed the beautiful Ashok Vanam. As visualised by him, Ravana despatched an army of about 80000 soldiers to fight. They did bring all sort of sharp weapons, blunt objects, spears, clubs wielding menacingly with intent to kill him. Singlehanded, he killed them all. Subsequent deputation of equally valiant Jambumali, brave seven sons of Prahasata too met with deafening defeats. Then, Ravana called his foremost five army Generals leaders to defeat the warring monkey. Just before their departure, Ravana told them a profound advice which was worth reading. He informed them that he was aware of the strength of Vanara leaders viz Vali, Sugriva, Nala, Nila, etc. But the activities and boldness shown by this monkey was unheard of by him. He remarked that the commitment, the intensity and the dedication of Hanuman was exemplary. It would be their foremost duty to devise ways to kill him by taking decision on the spot. He advised them not to go with any pre notion of attack.

However, such a sane advice could not be employed by them in front of gigantic Hanuman. They miserably got killed. Subsequent valiant efforts on the battlefield in fight with Hanuman by one Akshaya Kumar, was also unsuccessful and he was killed.

The news of the death of brave warriors in a such quick succession had posed a challenge to the authority of the king. He was furious, seething with anger and trying hard for the next step to be taken. At that time, he looked at Inderjit, who too was visibly angry and wanted to avenge the defeats of his tribe. Experienced Ravana told him, once again, some profound truthful words of wisdom.

Initially, he praised him about his capability and invincibility in the war front pointing out that he had defeated Indira and got boon form Brahma. At the same breadth, he informed him that the superiority of wielding arms and boons might not work when the opponent was equally adept and the events unfolded before us proved so. He advised him to think differently either to catch or kill by means other than through force of weapons. He admitted that he could find no ways to suggest to tackle the menace caused by Hanuman. He stressed out that Inderjeet should aspire success even in this unsure occasion and fight for a win. He agreed that sending him was not a good option. He let him to understand one more principle that the ethic of royalty lays down that king should never expose himself to the enemy going for an attack when it could be done by his worthy subordinates. With the blessing of Ravana, Inderjeet gladly and bravely went ahead to meet undefeatable Hanuman.

In no time, both Inderjeet and Hanuman understood that they could not find out the weakness of other to target and gain an upper hand over the opponent. Hanuman quickly, realised that he should get himself caught by the enemy as that would only enable him to meet Ravana in person to understand his thinking and plan. In the same time, intelligent Inderjeet too thought that immobilisation of Hanuman was the only suitable option. So, he deployed Brahma missile to immobilise him. Though, Hanuman was free from the effect of Brahma missile in no time as per the boon given by none other than Brahma, he acted as though he was caught in and endured dragging him to the court of Ravana.

Of course, the events happened in the court of Ravana with ultimate order of Ravana to set fire to Hanuman's tail may not be expected by Hanuman. But he endured the suffering, the unlikely turn of events. He reflected by himself that by enduing the pain he could see the strength of Ravana's army, the army bases, the people's involvement to the cause of their master in broad daylight and use it to the advantage for Vanaras. Indeed, a great grit of determination to bear the burning pain and to be alert and alive to carefully note on the military facilities passed through.

In this innocuous illustration of incidents, we can list out that Hanuman, despite having witnessed intimidating tactics of Ravana to Seetha Devi with harsh words, did not jump or shout or fight as a show of brazen bravery which would have marred all the later achievements. Secondly, relying on his fighting strength, he had decided on destroying the Ashok Vanam anticipating a fight. Here, Maharishi conveyed subtly that confidence stemmed out on crossing over the ocean should not result in overconfidence to fight an army alone. In the case of Hanuman, he was bestowed so many boons and indeed undefeatable in any type of war fare. Hence, he could decide on this course. Thirdly, having killed so many warriors, it may not be difficult for him to defeat or grievously inflict Inderjeet. But he refrained from doing only to have an audience with Ravana. Fourthly, he could have smashed the demons who were clothing

and putting oil on his tail but he endured it to have a merry go round to have a broad day light view of the city and its military facilities. Essentially, even if the outcome is contrary to the expectations, one should be able to quickly devise ingenious ways to capitalize to one's advantage, namely, enduring suffering to the larger cause of benefit to one's own side. In this context, a greater service was achieved by Hanuman providentially.

Profound sayings of Maharishi Valmiki are worth reading. In any decision of doing things beyond expected call of duty, all associated secondary tasks should be selected carefully as there plenty of ways a work can be attempted to. The person should be confident and capable of doing all of those diverse methods. Whatever to be undertaken should not jeopardise the already achieved work.

कार्ये कर्मणि निर्दिष्टः यो बहूनि अपि साधयेत् | पूर्व कार्यं विरोधेन स कार्यम् कर्तुम् अर्हति ||

न हि एकः साधको हेतुः स्वल्पस्य अपि इह कर्मणः | यो हि अर्थम् बहुधा वेद स समर्थो अर्थ साधने ||

Similarly, Ravana had tactfully avoided any confrontation with Hanuman though he could have prevailed over him in a direct fight. He, too, relied on the wisdom that in warfare success cannot be taken as granted.

तथा अपि तु नयज्ञेन जयम् आकाङ्क्षता रणे || आत्मा रक्ष्यः प्रयत्नेन युद्ध सिद्धिः हि चञ्चला || (Sundara kanda sarg 46)

Secondly, even without seeing in person the warring Hanuman, he could correctly assess the strength and the intensity of commitment of Hanuman and warned his warriors. Thirdly, Inderjeet had given heed to his father's advice and acted aptly to immobilise Hanuman thereby opted for a face-saving act for both the warring faction.

Ravana's profound advice stands test of time such as Be respectful to the opponent. Be alert, diligent. Any retaliation should be aligned with time and space.

कर्म च अपि समाधेयम् देश काल विरोधितम् || न अवमन्यो भवद्भिः च हरिः क्रूर पराक्रमः || (Sundara kanda sarg 46)

Even to those well versed in war strategy and wanted to be victorious, one should be aware to protect himself as victory in a battle was indeed unpredictable. Three things are essential for one's protection in the battle, namely, shrewd intellect, strong arms and skills acquired by penance or practice. Always alive to the happenings on the ground.

न कश्चिद्विषु लोकेषु सम्युगे न गतश्रमः | भुजवीर्याभिगुप्तश्च तपसा चाभिरक्षितः || देशकालविभागज्ञस्त्वमेव मत्तिसत्तमः | (Sundara kanda sarg 48).

The above view broadly underlines the fact that one's superior strength alone in comparison to the opponent is not only the criteria to start any type of hostile action against anybody. Forewarning and forearming oneself to guard against from the opponent's tactics also contribute to the eventual success.