

Individual sufferings and the response as in Valmiki Ramayana

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Everyone of us, rather occasionally, goes through a phase of feeling stress and anger on happenings to us as well as in and around us. This is taken as a normal way of living in the present time. More often than not, it is perceived that a certain amount of positive stress would prepare one to manage his overall living in a better manner. It is commonly seen that when a person feels stressed, the mind or his thinking goes outward to find fault with the “other”. Unfortunately, it is also an undeniable fact that the “other” denotes those who were close to him, be it parents, spouse, children, colleagues, classmate etc. Human beings find comforts with above-mentioned people but it also imagines displeasure with them so much so that many times it results in a sort of uneasiness in the relationship. Of course, in the light of one’s short span of life, what happens may not be the desirable one. The temporary hiatus created amongst the relations may be due to our unconditioned mind and looking outward for relief. Herein, Srimad Valmiki Ramayana or various Puranas through innumerable life incidents projected therein points out the essence of addressing the stress or the possible conditioning of the mind.

What is being described below is the gist of the life learning conversation which took place in Ashoka Vanam between Seetha Devi and Hanuman. Going through that conversation would help one to understand the moot point of reducing the intensity of stress when confronted with. The following paragraphs brings out some important points of the circumstances existed for proper appreciation of the context which was the focal point of the conversation.

Seetha Devi, as many of us, aware had underwent the harshest confinement at Ashok Vanam which is beyond one’s imagination. The Princess of the Kosala kingdom, though unaccustomed to the rigours of harsh forest living, willingly accompanied Sri Rama out of her martial status and extreme love and affection. As the divine couple predetermined the future happenings, Seetha Devi was abducted by ten headed Ravana and put her in Ashoka Vanam. The place was tastefully developed with highly captivating gardens, ever presenting Spring times, plenty of trees with fruits and scented flowers, creepers, silently flowing rivers, lotus ponds, well-ventilated places of residence furnished with gold, silver decorations in an attractive scenario, artificial plants adding to the beauty, so many forest animals like deer, antelopes, birds frequenting the place and last but not the least melodious songs making a feeling of comfort and ease.¹ Even the climate is so conducive and the ogress guarding her proudly proclaims that all the natural forces like wind, hot air, coolness abides the implicit authority of the demon and dare not to dwell unless invited by him².

Notwithstanding the so-called wonderful ambience, Seetha Devi was carefully guarded by cruel ogresses. Barring a few, all the rest always adopted intimidating tactics of threatening, abusing and creating a sort of fear and uneasiness in her. In addition, all of them presented a gruesome picture of aversion to look at. Some of these giant ogresses were with elephant-like

¹ अशोक वनिकाम् जग्मुः मैथिलीम् परिगृह्य तु ॥ सर्वकामफलैर्वृक्षैर्नानापुष्पफलैर्वृताम् - यद्वा -सर्व काम फलैः वृक्षैः नाना पुष्प फलैः वृताम् | सर्व काल मदैः च अपि द्विजैः समुपसेविताम् ॥ (Aranya kanda Sarga 56)

²यस्य सूर्यो न तपति भीतो यस्य च मारुतः ॥ (Sundara kanda Sarga 23)

ears, some of them had three eyes, some of them without nose or big sized noses, some of them whose legs are shaped like giant cow, horse, elephant etc. Just a tip of awesome fearful and dreadful description to bring home the point the existence of gloomy contrast in Ashok Vanam. These people were quarrelsome by nature. The Princess who was brought up in the companion of gentle congenial respectful servants attending to her needs , nay, even her whispers, found the situation most nerve braking. She was made to remain under utter state of constant fear and mistrust as to what would happen the next moment. Intolerance resulted in nagging doubt constantly in her thought as to whether Sri Rama and Lakshmana could locate this place situated in the midst of ocean. Valmiki stated that She was oblivious to the beautiful surroundings of trees, flowers, birds, and equally of the presence of dreadful people. She only set her mind in full contemplation of Sri Rama.³

Inherently cruel ogress got a liberal license to employ their tactics of harassment on Seetha Devi on express command of Ravana to drive her to concede by any ways and means to his unjust demand to marry him. Sadistic ogress left no stone unturned and had continuously in constant practice of inflicting verbal, mental injuries, threatening to take her life out, eat her alive and so on. Hanuman who had successfully spotted her at Ashok Vanam witnessed all these happenings by hiding and looking from a tree. Kind hearted and devoted to Sri Rama and Seetha Devi, he was vehemently angry to look at. He nursed a grudge to teach them a proper lesson as retribution. Such an occasion was presented before Hanuman when he returned to Ashok Vanam after the end of war. He came to convey the happy news of liberating Seetha from the captivity and the destruction of evil forces and death of Ravana etc. Highly elated and sober Seetha profusely praised highly deserving Hanuman. She expressed her willingness to meet her master at the first opportunity.

At this happiest moment, Hanuman recollected the untold cruelty of the ogress guarded her and wanted her kind permission to assault them and kill them in one lot. He had rightly reasoned that these female demons had clearly exceeded their brief and inflicted untold misery to her. Their action deserved the same kind of retaliation. He wanted to employ all the attacking skills and kill all these deformed, ugly shaped female demons as they were the perpetrator of sadistic attacks on her just at the command of their master. ⁴ As Valmiki repeatedly mentioned that she was irreproachable one and deserves praise worthiness from one and all.⁵ In fact she was the victim and the sufferer.

Seetha who by nature very much compassionate, kind to the miserable⁶, spoke to Hanuman the important point of life learning conduct which is the main point of discussion in this article.

³ न एषा पश्यति राक्षस्यो न इमान् पुष्प फल द्रुमान् | एकस्थ हृदया नूनम् रामम् एव अनुपश्यति || (Sundara kanda Sarga 23)

⁴ इमास्तु खलु राक्षस्यो यदि त्वमनुमन्यसे || हन्तुमिच्छामि ताः सर्वा याभिस्त्वं तर्जिता पुरा | विकृता विकृताकाराः कूताः कूरकचेक्षणाः || इच्छामि विविधैर्घतैर्हन्तुमेताः सुदारुणाः | राक्षस्यो दारुणकथा वरमेतं प्रयच्छ मे || (Yuddha kanda Sarga 113)

⁵ ताम् देवीम् राजपुत्रीमनिन्दिताम् || लक्षयामास लक्ष्मीवान् हनुमान् जन्कात्मजाम् | (Sundara kanda Sarga 17)

⁶ कृपणा दीनवत्सला ... (Yuddha kanda Sarga 113)

In spite of horrendous horrible treatment meted out to her by those female demons , she preached Hanuman that we should not harbour any ill will to these wrong doers as they did that in deference to their master's command. One should consider their action as an obedient performance of the duty. These people now no longer haunt me as there was change in their master.⁷ They deserve my forgiving.

Importantly, she told him that all her sufferings or the bad fortune was culmination of the effects of past misdeeds done by her. The ways of the God are inexorable and inexplicable. No one can escape from its grip. As you sow so you reap the fruits.⁸

In other words, she remarked that she would rather like to console herself that these sufferings were indeed the divine play to counter the ill effects of the fate which follows one as one's shadow.

She went on narrating a story as told by a bear in the presence of hunter to a tiger. Once upon a time, a hunter chased by a tiger took shelter in a branch of a tree where already a bear was resting. The tiger on arriving at the spot addressed the bear that hunter was their common enemy and did not deserve sympathy. So, it requested bear to push him down as its food. The bear flatly refused on the notion that his arrival at its place was a sign of surrender to it and would do no harm. After some time, the bear went into a nap. Tiger now in turn pleaded to the hunter to push bear as he would go after eating it. When the ungrateful hunter started to push, the bear woke up and steadied itself from the possible falling down. Now, the tiger preached the bear about ungratefulness of the hunter and argued that he should be given the punishment for betrayal. The story ends that the bear did not agree and stick to its considered dharma or worthy conduct. In the same manner, though these ogresses exceeded to excel in their act of causing misery and grief, having understood the nature's way of working, it would be befitting to forgive and let them live their life.

In brief, Seetha Devi underlined that an understanding of the following tenets would give one the direction to subdue the stress and refrain from succumbing to anger. At the maximum, one should try to deflect the anger and divert to the positive things to develop gratefulness within. The response should be treated on issue basis rather on personal angle.

A gentle person does not indulge in retaliating to other's evil offence by evil means. Instead by thinking within, the righteous one always gives an importance to good conduct and cherish it as an ornament⁹. Both a sinner deserving harshest punishment like death and a good doer would be treated with kindness by a noble person as there is none in the world who never commits a wrong¹⁰. The above noble act should be followed even towards habitual sadistic offenders who continue to perpetrate their sinful act as they can hardly get out of the snares of iron fist of fate.

⁷ मैवं वद महाबाहो दैवी ह्येषा परा गतिः । प्राप्तव्यं तु दशा योगान्मयैतदिति निश्चितम् ॥ (Yuddha kanda Sarga 113)

⁸ भाग्यवैषम्य योगेन पुरा दुश्चरितेन च । मयैतेत्प्राप्यते सर्वं स्वकृतं ह्युपभुज्यते ॥ (Yuddha kanda Sarga 113)

⁹ न परः पापमादत्ते परेषां पापकर्मणाम् ॥ समयो रक्षितव्यस्तु सन्तश्चारित्रभूषणाः । (Yuddha kanda Sarga 113)

¹⁰ पापानां वा शुभानां वा वधार्हाणां प्लवङ्गम ॥ कार्यं कारुण्यमार्येण न कश्चिन्नापराध्यति । (Yuddha kanda Sarga 113)