

Royal and loyal Friendships of Sri Rama with Sugriva

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In everyone's life, friendship plays an important role. Sympathetic nature, mutual interests, perceived values, keenness to render assistance to one another as the occasion demands etc., add solidity to an everlasting relationship among the friends. Needless to say, friends act as a shock absorber to deflect the stress and try to give solace to the sufferer. Thus, one can say that friends are chosen by one's choice.

The friendships which ensued between Sri Rama and Lakshmana with Vanara King Sugriva is the most celebrated one in Srimad Valmiki Ramayana. A look into that friendship as it unfolded in that literature gives one valuable insight which will be briefly described below.

As we all know Sri Rama had come to know about Seetha Devi's abduction by Ravana from Jatayu. Without informing other important details, Jatayu had succumbed to injuries. With the scanty details, both started their search in the Dandaka Forest. With divine dispensation, they come across one Kabandha who, due to the curse inflicted on him, was in desperate wait for many long years for arrival of Sri Rama to get release from the curse. As a token of his service to his benefactor, he, before his ascendancy to his realm, instructed Sri Rama to seek friendship only with Sugriva who can alone render faithful service to Him in the successful search and restoration of Seetha Devi from the clutches of Ravana.

Interestingly, Kabandha having understood the divinity of Sri Rama wanted solace to the suffering Sugriva which can only be done by Sri Rama. Hence, he proposed a prospective friendship by informing Sri Rama that Sugriva too undergoing forceful separation from his spouse with seething experience of painful sorrow, helplessness, bereft of his kingdom and in need of trustworthy understanding friend. Six ways of forging friendship normally employed among the royal as indicated in this context in the verse are षड् युक्तयो लोके याभिः सर्वम्

विमृश्यते || (3-72-8a) They are a) covenant with adverse monarchs, b) continuance of hostile activities, c) waging war, d) encouraging and fomenting internal division and anti-national sentiments in the enemy country, e) retreat and wait for opportune time and f) resorting shelter with similarly placed equally positioned kings.

Sri Rama who had set up on his mind to render service to the afflicted sages in the forests, to make the world a liveable space by getting rid of demons known for their misdeeds gladly accepted the prospective friendship with Sugriva.

विप्रकारम् अपाक्रष्टुम् राक्षसैः भवताम् इमम् || पितुः तु निर्देशकरः प्रविष्टो अहम् इदम् वनम् || (3-6-23)

It is important to understand that Sri Rama always looked upon other peoples' miseries as his own ignoring his own immense problems. He always struck a chord of friendship and support to the afflicted and made efforts to redress their grievances, although they are just small troubles and pales into insignificance in comparison to His own distress. उपकार फलम् मित्रम् विदितम् मे महाकपे || (4-5-25)

Seetha devi too enquired Hanuman on this aspect whether Sri Rama had put behind his sufferings and whether ready to come to the help of the needy. She was very particular to understand that he did show his great quality of sublimating his own troubles and exhibits confident and helpful demeanour in his conduct.

Swami Tulsidas in his SriRama Charita Manas in chaupais 4-6-1 onwards very nicely put the philosophy of friendship as expounded by Sri Rama to Sugriva. The same is written below in brief.

“The Vedas proclaim the quality of friend as follows.

For a man of friendly disposition, his great mountain like problems looks insignificant like a mere speckle of sand. At the same time, very small problem of his friend weighs in his mind as a problem of immense nature like Mount Sumeru.

Everyone would incur sin even by seeing a person who though claims to be a friend but not distressed to see his friend's distress.

Persons who are not of such noble temperament vainly thinking themselves as friends are really fools and should never enter into friendship with anyone.

A friend is duty bound to guide and assist his friends from straying into any evil path. He should guide him on the path of good. He should never shy away praising his friend's good qualities but boldly reproach him to wean away from his faults which would bring him defame. मम स्नेहात् च सौहार्दात् इदम् उक्तम् त्वया वचः ॥ परितुष्टो अस्मि अहम् सीते न हि अनिष्टो अनुशास्यते | (Srimad Valmiki Ramayana 4- 10-20b-21). He should never desert him when in need and shower him love and affection hundred times more when his friend is in distress.

On the contrary, one who speaks pleasing words in front of you and does harmful acts behind your backs, similarly contrive to deceive through evil mechanism would be a unworthy friend.

You should courageously get rid of such friends as they are like snakes with venom to cause troubles at any cost.

A stupid servant, a miserly monarch, a false friend and a bad wife are tormenting like pike.”

However, it is to be noted that Sugriva by himself was truthful, courageous, good friend and able leader with sway over other Vanara, a hard taskmaster etc. आत्मवान् वीरःवानरेन्द्रो महावीर्यः तेजोवान् अमित प्रभः | सत्य संधो विनीतः च धृतिमान् मतिमान् महान् || (3-72-12..13) In other words, his present predicament was not due to any lacunae or inherent undesirable qualities or attitude. This was known to Sri Rama. Sugriva rendered the service to His master reverentially with an intensity of a noble friend. His words to Sri Rama at the times of important events like occasional despair of helplessness expressed by Sri Rama, व्यसने वा अर्थ कृच्छ्रे वा भये वा जीवितान्तगे | विमृशन् वै स्वया बुद्ध्या धृतिमान् न अवसीदति || Courageous people would not let themselves down rather analyse and introspect in the

times of financial loss, entanglement, at the end of life, fearful circumstances (4-7-9), words of encouragement spoken to Sri Rama while lamenting on the crossing of Ocean, friendly sincere advice to Sri Rama on the request of Sri Vibhishana's surrender to Sri Rama's camp just before the start of war etc were all attest the confidence of Sri Rama in according good friendship with Sugriva. These details worth a separate article for the benefit of understanding sagacious advice of a friend.

For the moment, let us savour the friendship of Sri Rama with Sugriva and let us aspire through our conduct to get the everlasting grace from Lord Sri Rama.
