

Effective Leadership – A Ramayana Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Almost every other day we keep coming across horrifying and disturbing incidents through print and visual media. In such a disconcerting backdrop, two individual traits of Lord Rama, namely un-agitated thinking process and patience, become all the more relevant and contextual. This paper thematically analyzed famous epic “Ram Charit Manas”, written by Goswami Tulsidas . He neatly delineates these two traits of leadership by deftly using the medium of Lord Rama. Goswami Tulsidas, using the medium of Lord Rama’s persona, underscored a number of traits for effective leadership. Out of so many traits and dimensions of Shri Rama, he zeroed in on equanimity and patience to be of critical significance. Shri Rama exhibits that definitive quality of sobriety even as a precocious child. He respects all beings and obeys his parents and gurus cheerfully. Shri Rama remains even-headed even under adverse circumstances, and patiently resolves all the problems at hand. In this paper an attempt is being made to enunciate Goswami Tulsidas’s take on “art of management” in specific context of these two traits, which he expounded by narrating how Shri Rama responded exhibiting these traits under adverse and unfavorable circumstances.

1. Introduction

Ours are the times where we are on a short fuse even reacting to small and often insignificant events, wherein seniors and juniors of a hierarchical set-up lose their self-restraint and turn violent. We also keep coming across scenarios where parents and teachers are even wary of firmly advising and reprimanding their wards, fearing a negative, violent, or self-destructive response from the child; and their apprehension does not seem unfounded also as one regularly keeps hearing about scary incidents wherein a child’s response was entirely disproportionate to something thoroughly well-intentioned or trivial. Thus, in the context of all this, the two traits of “equanimity” and “patience” of Lord Rama’s personality become all the more relevant. Goswami Tulsidas had the foresight to see the relevance of these two traits in the times to come, and thus very aptly expounded them through Shri Rama.

In order to underline these traits, we will pick three events from the life of Shri Rama where, we surmise, Goswami Tulsidas narrated Shri Rama’s measured response laced with these two qualities under adverse circumstances. The three events that have been pruned out from the epic are:

1. Shri Rama accompanying sage Vishwamitra to protect the ‘Yagya’ against the frequent disruptions done by the demons.
2. Sri Parsuram’s seething anger and rage to avenge the “dhanush bhang” performed by Shri Rama.
3. Sudden turn of events wherein Shri Rama is banished to the jungles just before his coronation.

In the ensuing text we will attempt to analyze the role these two traits played in shaping Shri Rama’s response.

Shri Rama is the young prince king Dashratha dotes upon, yet how deeply and sincerely young Rama respects his guru is evident from the following couplet of ‘Ramcharitmanas’:

प्रातकाल उठि कै रघुनाथा । मातु पिता गुरु नावहिं माथा ॥¹

When sage Vishwamitra formally requests King Dashratha to take along the young prince for protection of ‘yagya’ and ‘sages’, King Dashratha consigns him to the sage (albeit with a heavy heart), but prince Rama gladly and eagerly gets ready to go. King instructs his son to treat the guru as father, and thenceforth young prince performs every act after taking permission of his guru.

पुरुषसिंह दोउ बीर हरषि चले मुनि भय हरन ॥

कृपासिंधु मतिधीर अखिल बिस्व कारन करन ॥208(ख) ॥²

Likewise, leaving behind the comforts of the palaces, Shri Rama and Lakshman, like ordinary warriors, guard the precincts of sage’s ashram to ensure smooth conduct of the ‘yagya’. This has been expounded by Goswami Ji in the following quartet:

प्रात कहा मुनि सन रघुराई । निर्भय जग्य करहु तुम्ह जाई ॥

होम करन लागे मुनि झारी । आपु रहे मख की रखवारी ॥³

There is another incident when, after annihilating the demons, Sage Vishwamitra, during his visit to Janakpuri, also takes along both the young princes. While staying there, Lakshman expresses the curiosity to see the great city and the palaces of Janakpuri. Though the princes would have gone to the city independently, still Shri Rama implored and sought muni’s permission to do so, as narrated here-in-below:

नाथ लखनु पुरु देखन चहहीं । प्रभु सकोच डर प्रगत न कहहीं ॥

जाँ राउर आयसु मैं पावौं । नगर देखाइ तुरत लै आवौं ॥⁴

In all the episodes narrated above, humility, unflinching adherence to the duty, and obeying the orders of the elders are the traits that prominently stand out in the character of Shri

Rama; even when he was a young budding prince. Humility and devotion to one's goal is one such leadership trait that enables a leader to inspire his followers, juniors, and colleagues. Even in the contextual scenario of today's workplace, workers tend to respect that leader more who gives appropriate respect to his sub-ordinates; and that makes the completion of the task at hand easier.

Patience also plays a key and vital role in the leadership competence of a great leader. History is testimony to the fact that only that management system is successful which exhibits patience. Decisions taken under momentary knee-jerk reaction, in anger, or without pondering over various aspects, usually end in disaster. Many a times one's opponents goad one to make instant reactionary decision, which may push a leader to make a wrong decision. Shri Rama's personality represents patience and equanimity under all such testing situations. Management and leadership skills required of a competent manager have been delineated by Tulsidas in narrating varied circumstances that Shri Rama encountered, and then responded with great finesse. At a very young age Shri Rama relinquishes all the royal comforts, and willingly volunteers to embrace an itinerant jungle life full of hardships with sage Vishwamitra. He diligently ensures safe conduct of "yagya" and bravely eliminates the marauding demons. Thereafter, Shri Rama, after taking his guru's permission, participates in Sita's "swayambar", and surmounts "Shiva Dhanush". This event enrages Parsuram so much that he she starts baying for the blood of the young prince. In this episode Goswami Tulsidas deftly elaborates, through Shri Rama's responses, that even extreme anger and a volatile situation can be won over by patience. This entire episode is very interesting, as Shri Rama had volunteered to surmount the bow only when Maharaja Janak- in his dejection on seeing that none of the prospective grooms could even manage to string the bow- had declared that this earth is bereft of braves.

अब जनि कोउ माखै भट मानी। बीर बिहीन मही मैं जानी।।
तजहु आस निज निज गृह जाहू। लिखा न बिधि बैदेहि बिबाहू।।
सुकृत जाइ जौ पनु परिहरऊँ। कुँरि कुँरि रहउ का करऊँ।।
जो जनतेउँ बिनु भट भुबि भाई। तौ पनु करि होतेउँ न हँसाई।⁶

Maharaja Janak even rues that, had he known that no one will be able to surmount "Shiva's Bow", he would not had put such a condition for the marriage of his daughter. He fears that his daughter may have to remain unmarried now. This statement angers Lakshman's sense of valor, but Shri Rama pacifies him and asks Lakshman to be dignified.

कमल नाल जिमि चाफ चढ़ावौं। जोजन सत प्रमान लै धावौं।⁶
तोरोँ छत्रक दंड जिमि तव प्रताप बल नाथ।
जौ न करौ प्रभु पद सपथ कर न धरौं धनु भाथ।।⁷
सयनहिं रघुपति लखनु नेवारे। प्रेम समेत निकट बैठारे।।⁸

Despite the high pitch of this emotional outburst of Maharaja Janak, Shri Rama remains placid, and asks Lakshman also to be so. Thereafter, after taking permission of his guru, Shri Rama surmounts and vanquishes "Shiva Dhanush", to great relief of the King. However, this, in turn, infuriates Parsuram so much that he challenges Shri Rama to face him in a combat for the temerity of touching Shiva's Dhanush. Matters get further exacerbated by Lakshman's

volatile response to Parsuram. Shri Rama modestly entreats Parsuram to forgive Lakshman for latter's fiery response.

अति बिनीत मृदु सीतल बानी। बोले रामु जोरि जुग पानी।।
सुनुहु नाथ तुम्ह सहज सुजाना। बालक बचनु करिअ नहिं काना।।⁹

Shri Rama also tries to pacify Parsuram by asking him to suggest what measures and steps will be sufficient enough to soothe Parsuram's nerves.

कृपा कोपु बहु बँधब गोसाईं। मो पर करिअ दास की नाई।।
कहिअ बेगि जेहि बिधि रिस जाई। मुनिनायक सोइ करौं उपाई।।¹⁰

However no amount of entreaty appeases Parsuram. He declares that Shri Rama is a "shiv-drohi", and challenges him to fight in a duel to settle the matter. Even then, Shri Rama refuses to be drawn in a fight with Parsuram, does not lose his temper, and keeps trying to pacify Parsuram in a very dignified manner. Shri Rama steadfastly refuses to fight Parsuram and asks the latter to behead him, putting the plea that he cannot fight his master. Shri Rama says he is insignificant in front of Parsuram, and asks him of forgiveness.

राम कहेउ रिस तजिअ मुनीसा। कर कुठारु आगे यह सीसा।।
जेहि रिस जाइ करिअ सोइ स्वामी। मोहि जानि आपन अनुगामी।।¹¹
प्रभुहि सेवकहि समरु कस तजहु बिप्रबर रोसु।
बेषु बिलोकें कहेसि कछु बालकहू नहिं दोसु।¹²
हमहि तुम्हहि सरिबरि कसि नाथा। कहहु न कहाँ चरन कहाँ माथा।।
राम मात्र लघु नाम हमारा। परसु सहित बड़ नाम तोहारा।।
देव एकु गुनु धनुष हमारें। नव गुन परम पुनीत तुम्हारें।।
सब प्रकार हम तुम्ह सन हारे। छमहु बिप्र अपराध हमारे।।¹³

Though Parsuram keeps ranting, yet Shri Rama says that being a "kshtriya" he is not afraid of a war but, simultaneously, respects and eulogizes brahminical divinity. At length, Shri Rama manages to pacify Parsuram, and latter has a change of heart.

छत्रिय तनु धरि समर सकाना। कुल कलंकु तेहिं पावँर आना।।
कहउँ सुभाउ न कुलहि प्रसंसी। कालहु डरहिं न रन रघुबंसी।।
बिप्रबंस कै असि प्रभुताई। अभय होइ जो तुम्हहि डेराई।।
सुनु मृदु गूढ बचन रघुपति के। उघरे पटल परसुधर मति के।।¹⁴

Third episode pertains to the sudden turn of events, when, at the last moment, Shri Rama is given a banishment of 14 years (*vanvaas*) just before his proposed coronation. Even in the midst of such turbulent events, Shri Rama keeps his equanimity and patience. This, incidentally, is in sharp contrast with the present times, wherein- even for trivial issues and disputes- blood-brothers start baying for each others blood; property dispute of Ambani brothers is a stark reminder of this. Conversely, Shri Rama was unhappy even when he was proclaimed the crown prince, as he loudly thought that all the four brothers grew up together but only one is being declared the crown prince just by the quirk of fate that he happens to be the eldest.

जनमे एक संग सब भाई। भोजन सयन केलि लरिकाई।।
करनबेध उपवीत बिआहा। संग संग सब भए उछाहा।। लवकीं
बिमल बंस यह अनुचित एकू। बंधु बिहाइ बड़ेहि अभिषेकू।।¹⁵

Such levels of elevated thinking are unimaginable today. Shri Rama's persona exhibits the exalted levels of thought needed in a man of great leadership qualities. This dramatic

turn of events surrounding coronation and banishment is highly illustrative even in the context of dilemma faced within the contemporary society. Maharani Kaikeyi's gullibility to the tricks played by wily Manthara is a common phenomenon in current times, when she invokes the promises granted to her by Maharaja Dashrath. She even tells Rama that she did what she felt best, and that in keeping these two promises Rama will do a great service to his parents by ridding them of the distress they are in.

देन कहेन्हि मोहि दुइ बरदाना। मागेउँ जो कछु मोहि सोहाना।
सो सुनि भयउ भूप उर सोचू। छाडि न सकहिँ तुम्हार सँकोचू।¹⁶
सुत सनेह इत बचनु उत संकट परेउ नरेसु।
सकहु न आयसु धरहु सिर मेटहु कठिन कलेसु।¹⁷

However, not so common is the response of Shri Rama. Present generation, when faced with such a situation, has an overwhelming propensity to react with phrases like, "only I have the right to decide what I should be doing with my life and why should I relinquish this right for some nonsensical promises given by my father", or, "was my consent taken before granting such a wish and why should I bear the responsibility for this". Shri Rama takes an exalted and unselfish stand, devoid of any selfishness. He feels he is fortunate to execute his father's diktat, and even goes on to enumerate the latent benefits that he will get during the "vanvaas of 14 years".

This is positive response at its best, which is hallmark of a great leader. Shri Rama envisages great virtue in following his

elders will to keep them happy. Moreover, he sees the situation as it stands, responds as selflessly as anyone can, and even sees benefits in a future which most will see as despondent.

सुनु जननी सोइ सुतु बडभागी। जो पितु मातु बचन अनुरागी।।
तनय मातु पितु तोषनिहारा। दुर्लभ जननि सकल संसारा।।¹⁸
मुनिगन मिलनु बिसेषि बन सबहि भाँति हित मोर।
तेहि मँ पितु आयसु बहुरि संमत जननी तोर।।¹⁹
भरत प्रानप्रिय पावहिँ राजू। बिधि सब बिधि मोहि सनमुख आजु।
जों न जाउँ बन ऐसेहु काजा। प्रथम गनिअ मोहि मूढ समाजा।।²⁰

Through this episode, Goswami Tulsidas chisels-out a classic example of the virtues of peace, patience, equanimity, and positive thinking in the face of great adversity. This defining trait of positive-ness sums up the leadership ability of Shri Rama, and makes him "Maryada Purushottam"

2. Conclusion

In our present chaotic times, wherein humanity is running blindly in a mad rat race of material pursuits, where brothers are bent on extracting revenge, where thought-process is getting steeped in negativity, one can draw solace and inspiration by Shri Rama's exalted character, conduct, persona, and thoughts. We also bow our heads to the vast knowledge Goswami Tulsidas puts on display about the art of leadership and management.

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