

Sense, sensibility and responsibility - Conduct of Sri Rama immediate after abduction of Seetha

T S Krishnamachari

In this series of articles on Srimad Valmiki Ramayana, an analysis of conduct of Sri Rama in the aftermath of abduction of Seetha is taken up in the following paragraphs.

In deference to the fervent appeal of Seetha, Sri Rama went after chasing elusive golden deer to get hold of it. But he had to contend with devious plans of demon Maareecha. Maareecha gave up the assumed form of a golden deer the moment he was caught within the range of attack. He breathed his last crying out calling names of Seetha and Lakshmana mimicking voice of Sri Rama.

स प्राप्त कालम् अज्ञाय चकार च ततः स्वरम् | सदृशम् राघवस्य एव हा सीते लक्ष्मण इति च || [3-44-19]

Such a deceitful imitation, an illusory voice, however, created a very strong suspicion in the mind of Seetha. She came to a conclusion that Sri Rama was in a life-threatening situation. Lakshmana tried truthfully to convince her about Sri Rama's exceptional strength and invincibility.

पन्नग असुर गन्धर्व देव दानव राक्षसैः || अशक्यः तव वैदेही भर्ता जेतुम् न संशयः | (3-45-10)अनिवार्यम् बलम् तस्य बलैः बलवताम् अपि ||

She neither wanted to acknowledge ways of trickery employed by the demon nor to wait for Rama's return on his own. Nothing lessened her fear. Instead, she expressed her suspicion on Lakshmana's conduct. Ultimately, against his conscience and opinion, Lakshmana had to forego his duty of protecting her. He went deep into the forest to meet Sri Rama. Thus, Seetha who was left alone unprotected was easily abducted by Ravana.

Sri Rama's first reaction was that Seetha would definitely be misled by mimicry. She would force Lakshmana to leave her and to move in search of him. Even such a thought itself made him feel sad brooding over the dangers which may befall on hapless Seetha.

लक्ष्मणः च महाबाहुः काम् अवस्थाम् गमिष्यति | इति संचिन्त्य धर्मात्मा रामो हृष्ट तनू रुहः || [3-44-24.]

तत्र रामम् भयम् तीव्रम् आविवेश विषादजम् | [3-44-26]

It can be described as emotional knee jerk reaction with numb mind bereft of logical thinking.

In fact, on seeing Lakshmana coming towards him, he was *unsparing in his criticism of dereliction of duty done by Lakshmana*. Lakshmana politely indicated some of the wounding words hurled at him, like "he has malicious intentions" and "habitual behaviour of cloak and dagger".

त्वत् विधेषु नृशंसेषु नित्यम् प्रच्छन्न चारिषु || [3-45-23]

Most damning accusation for any self-respectful person.

However, Sri Rama made his position clear that though there were justifiable provocation to move away, he should have shown a level of maturity to ignore tantrums employed by Seetha in overall interest of protection and safety to her. *A high level of tolerance was expected from Lakshmana by his elder brother even in the face of demeaning utterly untruthful accusations by Seetha.*

कुद्वायाः परुषम् श्रुत्वा स्त्रिया यत् त्वम् इह आगतः ||

Lakshmana should have deemed it as emotional outburst and brushed it aside. He also laid down a valuable lesson to his younger brother that the main objective should not be lost sight off or deserted in the face of an imaginary accusation made on spur of the moment. He hinted indirectly that offensiveness as a best form of defence, even if employed by close persons, should not be given importance in desperate situation.

Sri Rama was also conscious of Lakshmana's selfless service and commitment against all odds. Lakshmana too was sympathetic and stood solidly behind his elder brother. A high degree of brotherhood exhibited by him. This type of behaviour is in stark contrast to human being's egoistic outburst without a sense of empathy. Help amongst kith and kin is taken for granted. It is rarely remembered, recognised and appreciated.

Aranya Kanda of Srimad Valmiki Ramayana contained extensive details on mood of Sri Rama. Thoughts of probable intimidating condition of abducted Seetha assailed him leading to moods of incendiary as well as pathetic sorrowful state of mind. Thus, *as a human being in the grip of having lost dearly held things, he exhibited an unbelievable sense of pessimism and wrath on everyone and*

everybody. Lakshmana heard patiently and gave support and *advice in a highly conciliatory tone to bring solace and kindle ray of hope and confidence.*

He reminded that one has to learn *to bear unexpected grief without accusing others or indulging in injurious act to others.* He calmly defused the situation and injected a sense of reality to Sri Rama.

शोकम् विमुञ्च आर्य धृतिम् भजस्व सह उत्साहता च अस्तु विमार्गणे अस्याः ।

उत्साहवन्तो हि नरा न लोके सीदन्ति कर्मसु अति दुष्करेषु ॥ (3-63-19)

Even in case of impracticable endeavours, one should never give way to anguish. Instead, one may get imbibed with determination not to let-up in engagement to the task. In other words, one has to factor in the fact that opportune Time is the inevitable encompassing factor and no one can countervail it.

It is not that Sri Rama did not know about these things but Sage Valmiki wanted to convey that it is easier to lose one's control in the face of calamities. *He also underlined the need for listening to sane friendly advice of others at that time.* Another subtle hint of beneficial conduct of others in times of need.

Slowly but surely initial emotional outburst does give way to clarity in thinking. Sri Rama, in the company of sympathetic and considerate Lakshmana, made valiant efforts to trace her in the forest. This was the next stage noticed in the conduct of Sri Rama. Sri Rama came to know about abduction by Ravana from Jatayu. With divine intervention in the form of valuable guidance from Kabandha, he forged a friendship with Vanara king Sugriva.

Hanuman's first reaction on witnessing utter discomposure of Sri Rama was a spectacle of wonder and beyond his belief. The anxiety about missing Seetha Devi got reduced in the company of Sugriva. But the scar lingered on in the depth of his mind. Sugriva too used mild compassionate advisory requesting Sri Rama to control his emotion befitting his stature as a mighty monarch.

Such a delicate state of grief beyond the realm of normal sense and sensibilities was experienced by him. Hanuman, later confided to Seetha that Sri Rama would feel pangs of separation on and off. He fondly remembered her on every occasion whenever he happens to see beautiful things, flowers etc.

Agitated mind could be calmed only if one is sure of remedial actions to retrieve bad situation. Same thing could be noticed in the conduct of Sri Rama who having made a pact of friendship with Sugriva was rest assured of sincere assistance.

As it was the beginning of rainy season, Sri Rama gladly allowed Sugriva to wait till end of the season. He permitted him to plan for modalities for a search by the end of rainy season. As was the case with human beings, he was constantly apprehensive of timely help from Sugriva by recalling that *many a times people would avail the services of the other but forget to honour the commitments.*

A normal trait seen and bemoaned by one and all. Lakshmana dispelled gloomy thoughts of Sri Rama and advised him to bid for time.

True to the genuine apprehension of Sri Rama, Sugriva did not adhere to the planned schedule. This prompted Rama to send Lakshmana as an emissary to remind him of the commitments. Sugriva apologised for the indiscretion. He also informed of the arrangement already put in place enlisting services of valiant monkeys in millions. Mere sight of the vast number of monkeys reported for duty calmed him. Sugriva humbly dedicated to him the services of multitude of Vanaras including himself. It underscores a point that *a distressed person can get calmness only when ability to plan and move forward for success becomes a possibility. This may be either through action initiated by him or through others. Of course, such efforts do require time.*

He profusely thanked Sugriva proclaiming in front of massive crowd of monkeys that sun may fail the world some days but friends like Sugriva would never fail. Sri Rama indicated *the necessity of expressing gratitude to the doer who was otherwise duty bound to do it.*

Sugriva requested Sri Rama to give orders to the battalions as he deemed fit. A true leadership quality of giving respect to the ability of the other associate as Sri Rama is renowned prince. However, Sri Rama politely declined. He requested him to proceed with his plan about what should be done and manner by which can it be executed. He further remarked that no one knew better than Sugriva as to

how to render help in the given circumstance. *Mutual trust is the bedrock of confidence and better relation between two individuals.*

King Sugriva efficiently deployed group of equally capable monkeys under competent leader to each direction commencing from east, south, west and north. Not only, he had given each group a detailed topography of places they would see but also a set of precautions expected to be adhered to. He informed them that the work of tracing whereabouts of Seetha was indeed to be construed as a service rendered to their King. He cautioned that any type of lapse or lack of sincerity would be dealt severely. He also set a time limit of a month to complete the search and report to him. In a way, *he underlined proper execution with unwavering dedication to the task entrusted to them.*

He, further, exhorted each and every chosen leader of each group praising them openly about their prowess and his confidence on them. He reserved special accolades to the team deputed to Southern direction. He candidly remarked to them that he had selected the very best among the lot as in all probability Ravana might have gone in the direction of South. He also in the same breadth told the other leaders that Ravana can stay anywhere. He might have hidden her in any of the caves in any direction. Hence, he cautioned them that there should not be let up in their efforts. *Such an elaborate guidance and directions keeping in mind the strength and weakness of each chosen leader can surely be foundation stone for success.* By hindsight one can surmise only King Sugriva could have given such an elaborate guidance and direction.

Sri Rama, after departure of the Vanaras admired him for such a detailed information and guidance. In other words, Sri Rama's reluctance to take up the command immediately stems from a fact that *detailed knowledge of operation is a must to give direction to the subordinates.* Further, *it should not suffer from want of microlevel knowledge.* Sugriva had complied with both these requirements in an exemplary manner indirectly validating Rama's opinion.

Now, let us compare the mood of Sri Rama once he was informed of location of Seetha in Lanka in captivity. He thanked Hanuman. He was glad and relieved. But, he was for a moment apprehensive of crossing over the sea to render a fight with Ravana. It was short lived.

एष शोकः परित्यक्तः सर्व कार्य अवसादकः |

He reminded himself that distress is regressive. Then, he enquired Hanuman about strength, weakness of Ravana's army, his preparedness to counter any attack, number of battalions under each category, his soldiers' readiness etc.

One may wonder that when Hanuman was about to go out in search and when Rama had entrusted his ring as an insignia to be handed over to Seetha, he did not then instruct him about this. *Having thoroughly understood and evaluated Hanuman about his intellectual acumen, commitment to the task, he wanted to give him a free hand to do as the situation demands and unfolds to him.* He refrained from adding pressure of performance arguably to one of his ablest lieutenants. A true mark of delegation of duty enabling unhindered way of functioning.

Another aspect worth mentioning was that he did want to lead from front with adequate knowledge about Ravana. He relied on firsthand knowledge of Hanuman and decided accordingly. Understanding, intuition, trust always be the watchwords exhibited by him.

He ordered through Sugriva, delegation of various tasks under each valiant Vanara in his army exhibiting his assessment, confidence in them to lead. He also elaborated the way in which such a vast army had to proceed without evoking any suspicion. He outlined precautions to be exercised to avert any attack on them. Not only that, he asked those appointed leaders to look after welfare needs of all members under them. He also advised that no misadventure to be attempted to.

Even before commencement of the expedition, he identified the weaker ones as they would prove to be weak link in otherwise strongest line of attack. He also gave an importance to comforts of staying with provisions to make available required foods, water, medicines etc. Timely quicker medical aid to be dispensed regardless of hierarchy. After the defeat of Ravana, he conveyed his sincere appreciation and expression of gratitude to vast number of monkeys. By this act as a leader, he had ensured a large pool of faithful monkeys waiting for their call for duty and to serve him at any time.

Sage Valmiki brought out in detail in Yuddha Kanda Sri Rama's clear insight about waging a war. As consensus decision maker how, he took the team |with him in all crucial matters etc. In other

words, *both the portrayal of diffident and later diligent Sri Rama was given to convey that a true leader would always act in tune with circumstances sparing no efforts.*

These events unmistakeably underline the fact that multiple issues requiring attention do exist at all times in everyone's life.

Sri Rama's earlier frailties are due to his acute sensitivity to perceived failure of duty. Similarly, his later dominant resolve to fight his way out is equally a result of his infallible conviction of justice and a reflection of self-esteem in the need of hour. Sometimes, without fortuitous situation, taking charge and organising any planned action is near an impossibility. Nature does provide catalytic environment. Further, life is not static. It undergoes tremendous upheavals every now and then which indeed is a saving grace and blessings in disguise to temper wayward thinking to matured thoughtful actions.

Hesitance in the face of teething trouble leads to indecisiveness in leadership. More often than not in everyone's life there may be happenings which devastate one on the event of occurrence but with the passage of time, it will lead to clarity to face the aftermath. Being conversant with this view, one may rationalise the pursuit objectively and intelligently at all times in all events.

तत्त्वतो हि नरश्रेष्ठ बुद्ध्या समनुचितय | बुद्ध्या युक्ता महाप्राज्ञा विजानन्ति शुभ अशुभे || (4-66-16)

This process could be quickened with adequate support and an intuitive feeling of success with support mechanism. Lakshmana spoke to Rama in a positive manner to dispel any signs of mental lethargy in him. Even Sugriva took liberty as a friend and reminded him to introspect as a courageous people would resort to in the event of riddle or financial loss or at the end of life etc.

व्यसने वा अर्थ कृच्छ्रे वा भये वा जीवितान्तगे | विमृशन् वै स्वया बुद्ध्या धृतिमान् न अवसीदति || (4-7-9)

Remembering these simple facts from the pages of *Srimad Valmiki Ramayana* would automatically fortify such person to manage any type of the problems irrespective of degrees of difficulty or intensity.