

Signs of greatness of people from the verses of Srimad Valmiki Ramayana – First part T S Krishnamachari

When confronted with problematic issues underscoring certainty of failure, it is normal human tendency to shift blame onto external sources or find a fault with others. More often than not an opportunity to look within intensively to address the root cause of perilous situation is given a miss.

There are people of rare characteristics whom overwhelmingly feel guilty for someone's misdeeds. Interestingly, the people surrounding those rare individuals never even suspect them of any wrong doings. This category of people could only be noticed in epics like Srimad Valmiki Ramayana.

It is a common knowledge that Queen Kaikeyi, prompted by insinuation of her close maid servant, forcefully extracted King Dasaratha's compliance for her evil plans in exchange of two boons conferred to her by him long time ago. One of them was Sri Rama's fourteen years' exile and the second one was her son Bharatha to be installed as Prince Regent of the kingdom instead Sri Rama who was the eldest son and otherwise eligible to take over the position.

It is also a fact that neither Bharatha had any desire to usurp power from his elder brother nor at any point of time had he requested his mother to act on his behalf to fulfil any such desire. In fact, he was not at all aware of evil design of his mother including the proposed event of coronation of Sri Rama. Further, he was away from the kingdom when such a preposterous proposal was demanded by his mother.

Coming to the point of greatness, Maharishi extensively portrayed noble qualities of Bharatha through extensive depiction of his spontaneous reaction on various occasions, such as Bharata, a righteous man with a noble descent, an honest man, a great majesty etc.

तत् श्रुत्वा भरतः वाक्यम् धर्म अभिजनवान् शुचिः | 2-72-16 महाबाहुर्बाहु विक्षिप्य वीर्यवान् ||

On reaching Palace at Ayodhya, Bharatha enquired his mother about his father, King Dasaratha, as he could not see him. His mother, queen Kaikeyi replied without any sense of grief, as a matter of fact, that his father had attained an abode of death which normally happen to human beings.

Of course, she had added that the King would have attained the highest altar of abode, heaven, as he studiously practiced and discharged his three debts with care and interest. She quipped that having performed innumerable yagnas with abundant wealth conferred to the priests, he was sure to attain the status. Bharatha was shocked and utterly devastated to hear such insensitive remarks from his mother. He politely remarked that Sri Rama was indeed fortunate to be at the bedside of dying king. He expressed his desire to meet him immediately as he wanted to take shelter at the lotus feet of his elder brother in this terrible hour of grief. His exact words are worth to recollect. He said that his brother indeed was his guru, a guide after the king and expressed his heartfelt desire of serving his elder brother.

पिता हि भवति ज्येष्ठो धर्मम् आर्यस्य जानतः | तस्य पादौ ग्रहीष्यामि स हि इदानीम् गतिर् मम || 2-72-33

Queen Kaikeyi having discarded ways of modesty and honour, immodestly spoke that his elder brother was not with the king at the time of his demise. This had added further layer of grief to already grieving Bharatha. His mother then narrated the events which led to the sudden demise of the king namely, his announcement of installing Sri Rama as a prince Regent, her demand to the king to honour two boons bestowed on her against wishes of the king himself, an abrupt end of the celebrations etc. It is like "beneficiary demanding things which on compliance go against even the ultimate survival of benefactor".

The casual way of contemptible stupidity in informing such a grave news by his mother infuriated Bharatha. He was quick to denounce what had been done by his mother. He informed her that he was pained to notice inequity inflicted on the people by her reckless and cruel action.

न ह्यहम् पापसम्कल्पे पापे पापम् त्वया कृतम् | शक्तो धारयितुम् पौरैरश्रुकण्ठे निरीक्षितः || 2-72-32

Bharatha used strong words of condemnation accusing his mother that she was in the family only to bring about destruction of the race like the night before deluge and end of the world, Dasaratha had unknowingly embraced a burning charcoal.

कुलस्य त्वम् अभावाय काल रात्रिर् इव आगता | अनाारम् उपगृह्य स्म पिता मे न अवबुद्धवान् || 2-73-4

Not only he wept loudly, contrary to his dignified steady state of mind, he never minced words to point out injustice done to Rama, mother Kausalya and King Dasharatha. He felt that his mother's action of inflicting calamity one after another was just like rubbing salt on a wound.

दुहखे मे दुहखम् अकरोर् व्रणे क्षारम् इव आदधाः | 2-73-3

He pained so much that he narrated to his mother how mother Kausalya would be undergoing grief due to her beloved son's exile for fourteen years for no fault of him through a story of suffering of Kamadhenu in Indira's abode for the sake of a bullock on the earth.

Once, when Indira on his way to his chamber, few drops of scented tears fallen on him. Instinctively, he looked up and saw tearful Kamadhenu. He enquired about the cause for worry and wanted to take remedial action. Kamadhenu assured that she did not face any problem in Indira's abode but she was feeling immense pain and unbearable grief on seeing one of her tribe, bullock was made to toil under scorching rays of sun with no respite in sight. Quoting this incident, Prince Bharatha chided his mother that when Kamadhenu despite having millions of her tribe living on the earth felt keen pain due to a mere sight of a bullock on earth put to cruel task. He questioned her that could she, Queen Kaikeyi, understand how much unbearable grief was inflicted on mother Kausalya who had only one child?

सदाऽप्रतिमवृत्ताया लोकधारणकाम्यया | श्रीमत्या गुणनित्यायाः स्वभावपरिचेष्टया ||

यस्याः पुत्रसहस्राणि सापि शोचै कामधुक् | किम् पुनर् या विना रामम् कौसल्या वर्तयिष्यति || 2-74-27&28

The first shock of the general perception was encountered by him when queen Kausalya, Sri Rama's mother, blamed that Bharatha was instrumental to thwart the coronation ceremony. Bharatha calmly tried to establish his innocence in whatsoever had happened. He voluntarily took solemn vows inviting hardest, nerve wrecking punishments onto himself if he had a role in dethroning Sri Rama. Queen Kausalya immediately understood reality of the situation as none other than an innocent person can utter such grave vows. She, ultimately, felt sorry for her impulsive accusations. In fact, later, she publicly remarked that she somehow goes through motion of living only due virtuous Bharatha and his devotion towards Sri Rama.

When Sage Vashist proposed to Bharatha to accept rulership to comply with his father's wish, Sri Rama's offer and desire of one and all, namely, eminent ministers of Dasaratha, well known sages, numerous kings of other provinces, businessmen and the masses. The proposal of Sage Vashist seconded by the assembled people itself a powerful motivator for anyone to be carried away. But Bharatha vehemently disagreed to such a proposal and called it as preposterous since the throne rightfully belongs to Sri Rama. He further clarified that he had no desire and wanted everyone's cooperation to persuade Sri Rama to accept the rulership. Everyone assembled shocked but appreciated big hearted genuine dutiful Bharatha for his determination. Appreciable glimpse of greatness of Bharatha not enticed by pomp and show of royalty thrust upon him unasked for.

Bharatha again faced such type of misconception in his meeting with Guha, head of a tiny village who mainly benefited by the largesse of the royal kingdom. Guha questioned his intention asking for about whereabouts of Sri Rama. He, impudently, asked whether he was conspiring to eliminate Sri Rama since he was marching ahead duly accompanied by strong battalions of army. A great indignation, indeed.

कच्चिन् न दुष्टः व्रजसि रामस्याक्लिष्ट कर्मणः। इयम् ते महती सेना शन्काम् जनयति इव मे॥ 2-85-7

Guha, due to his overwhelming respect, love and adoration towards Sri Rama, ignored that Bharatha was much superior in his devotion towards Sri Rama than him. But, Bharatha true to his humility just apologetically told him that he loves his brother and only intended to request him to come back and assume the position of king of Ayodhya. Guha, completely carried away by the unalloyed brotherly love and respect towards Sri Rama. Without any hesitation, he commended Bharatha's greatness by remarking that there would be nobody like him as he had declined to accept the rulership of such a vast kingdom literally given to him on a platter without any efforts.

One more such type of incidents was occurred during his meeting with sage Bharadwaj when he expressed his longing to meet Sri Rama personally. With humble disposition, he had already voluntarily adopted attire of a sage betraying his status as a prince. But the sage noticed that he was accompanied by army, ministers, royal sages and people from all walks of life. Bharadwaj, then, politely cast a shade of doubt on Bharata by inquiring him whether he was intended to carry out any harm to the already exiled Sri Rama.

By now, having acquiesced with his position in the eyes of the people, Bharatha sobbingly replied that he wanted to humbly request Sri Rama to come back and assume the reign of the kingdom. He informed the sage that he had enlisted support of all the people including sage Vasisht to persuade Sri Rama. Bharadwaj consoled him by saying that he knew his genuine intention but inquired only for the benefit of other people to have a glimpse about his greatest quality. Subsequently, not only, he hosted

a grand dinner in honour of Bharatha but also praised that both Sri Rama and Bharatha through their selfless actions embellished the greatness of their father.

The sterling character of Bharatha was also spoken about by queen Kausalya. When she saw unconscious Bharatha on the floor on the banks of Ganga in the presence of Guha, she wailed loudly that she was feeling consoled with the company of Bharath in absence of Sri Rama and could not afford to lose him. Similarly in spite of Lakshmana's allegation against Bharath to the entire unpleasant happenings, Sri Rama clearly expressed that his younger Bharath was unaware of the happenings. He confided that once Bharatha came to know what had happened, not only he would be repenting but also would come to the forest to compel me to return to Ayodhya. This is the greatest compliment from none other than Sri Rama.

Bharatha left no stone unturned to persuade Sri Rama to come back to Ayodhya with genuine arguments with true intensity. His polite down-to-earth appeals, humility of servitude towards his brother, repeated pleadings to swerve away Sri Rama from his firm determination to go on exile, captivated everyone and they started sympathise with him.

Sri Rama very affectionately assuaged Bharatha's hurt feelings. He told him that he knew very well the Bharatha was not responsible at all for the happenings. He conceded to the suggestion of Bharatha that he would govern the kingdom for 14 years in a fiduciary capacity. Bharatha, to honour his brother, installed the sandals of Lord Rama on the throne and ruled for the next fourteen years in true letter and sprits of trusteeship. He took vow on the spot that on the day after the end of 14years, he would immolate himself in the event of Sri Rama not returning to Ayodhya.

The conduct of Bharatha brought forth some important life learning lessons for all.

Clarity of mind, steadfastness to probity in personal life regardless of pressure from any quarters, sincerity to arrive at a judicious decision.

Bharatha through his arguments with Kaikeyi underlined the fact that striving for something profound by anyone for their kith and kin ought to follow proper means to achieve an end result. Propriety and honesty should be the guiding principle.

Self-esteem and fear of loss of honour should be the touchstone before acceptance of a request even if it is submitted by blood relations when there is a remote possibility of stigma or strings attached to the request.

Never can one try to justify acceptance of non-entitled gains or position by dubious logical reasonings.

Standing for truth and not to swerve by pomp and show of the spoils of any grand offer ought to be cultivated. Necessity of proper procedure has to be pointed out even when somebody wanted to do an apparent favour.

Sense of justice and determination to follow one's chosen path was demonstrated by him. Greatness of Bharatha would be better understood if one recollects the words of none other Sage Vishwamitra spoken on the occasion of marriage proposals to King Janaka. He said that all sons of King Dasaratha including Bharatha and Straughan are equally strong, capable princes, with valour comparable to Vishnu.

पुत्रा दशरथस्येमे रूपयौवनशालिनः | लोकपालसमाः सर्वे देवतुल्यपराक्रमाः || 1-72-7

Even Sri Rama, while leaving the city on exile, proudly proclaimed to the worried citizens that Bharatha should be given unequivocal support by them to him. He would definitely carryout beneficial services to the kingdom. Though young in age, he is matured, knowledgeable, virtuous and valiant king worthy to be the prince of the kingdom.

या प्रीतिर् बहुमानः च मय्य् अयोध्या निवासिनाम् | मत् प्रिय अर्थम् विशेषेण भरते सा निवेश्यताम् ||

ज्ञान वृद्धो वयो बालो मृदुर् वीर्य गुण अन्वितः | अनुरूपः स वो भर्ता भविष्यति भय अपहः || 2-45-6 & 8

As the events unfolded prior to the bold decision of Bharatha's refusal attest to the above fact that there was an overwhelming support from one and all of the kingdom for his ascendance to the throne and for his capability to govern the kingdom in the absence of Sri Rama.

It is, therefore, very much essential to understand that willingness to abide by truth is arduous as there would be tremendous pressure from many quarters including one's parents, preceptor and eminent personalities forcing or put to emotional stress for implicit approval for their action done unasked for. Pleasing others sensibilities by overlooking one's consciousness is not a right course of action.

Besides, Bharatha, though know by heart about his non-involvement, did bear insults and accusations of his imaginary complicity with calm mind and dispelled notions in a dignified manner. Silence to the unwarranted accusations sends stronger signal than rebutting vehemently to establish one's credentials.

In other words, he put himself in the shoes of Kausalya and other well-wishers of Sri Rama. He expressed sympathy to them. He was compassionate and showed empathy in spite of being hurt personally by the demeaning responses of others from all walks of life.

Though he initially scolded his mother, he took upon himself the mantle to set right the wrong doings. Without much fanfare, he made up his mind that he would get solace only if he saw Sri Rama accepting governance of Kingdom.

अहमप्यवनिम् प्राप्ते रामे सत्यपराक्रमे | कृतकृत्यो भविष्यामि विप्रवासितकल्मषः || 2-72-34

Acting on the spur of the moment for justice is easier but to adhere to it for a long period of time calls for inborn character. Undoubtedly, Bharatha had the courage and conviction to walk the talk. However, it is essential that constant reminder of genuine hurt feeling of injustice meted out to other can only give one courage to fulfil the promise committed. Towards that objective, Bharatha set an example by adopting to live like a hermit on the outskirts of the kingdom as well as holding the kingdom as a trustee. He underwent tremendous hardships to fulfil the vow and remedy the wrong committed by his mother queen Kaikeyi.

No wonder Sage Valmiki in Srimad Ramayana wrote as one of positive boons of reading the epic would be that every mother would be blessed to beget child of an impeccable character like Bharatha. Even Sri Desika in his Paduka Sahasram also hails Bharatha worthy of worship by us as he is the foremost example among those with devotion to Paduka of the Lord.

