

Things happened on its Own- Unexpected turn of events in Srimad Valmiki Ramayana

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Many a times, in everyone's life, certain unexpected things do happen not only through sudden turn of events but even through stranger who comes into one's contact in an unfamiliar circumstance. The resultant reaction may be beneficial or otherwise. But the underlying fact is that these events do occur in line with overall predetermined scheme of events of mother nature. The events unfold in and around our surroundings and in the wider world too subject to an inexorable law of action. Study of history of the nations or biography of individuals, with keen insight, do point out happenings of sudden bizarre events which had made or marred the future course of progress, as the case may be.

Coming into the point of this piece of writing, some of such an unexpected event occurred in the greatest epic of Srimad Valmiki Ramayana would be taken up to drive home the point of our inability to prevent except acquiesce and proceed with caution.

First incident in the list of unexpected events was sudden appearance of Manthara, faithful maid servant of queen Kaikeyi. She happened to witness spontaneous jubilation and joy of one and all on an unprecedented scale in the vicinity of palace and beyond.

ज्ञातिदासी यतो जाता कैकेय्या तु सहोषिता | प्रासादं चन्द्रसङ्घाशमारुरोह यदृच्छया || 2-7-1

Contrary to herself joining enthusiastically in the celebrations, she became jealous, irritated and vengeful to wreck a damage on Sri Rama for no plausible reason whatsoever.

सा विषण्णतरा भूत्वा कुब्जा तस्या हितैषिणी | विषदयन्ती प्रोवाच भेदयन्ती च राघवम् || 2-7-19.

Second incident was sudden hostility towards Sri Rama by otherwise affectionate queen Kaikeyi. Manthara cleverly lured the queen by invoking danger to her son and exaggerating impending loss of her authority in the governance of kingdom. These accusations touched upon the weak spot in Kaikeyi, who was known for her arrogant, dominating behaviour and revengefulness to any sort of views which diminish her status.

But, in Sri Rama's opinion, Queen Kaikeyi, was well known to be a well-wisher and confident adviser to King Dasaratha on all matters of governance of the country. Her knowledge and sharp intellect were in fact commended by Sri Rama to Sita devi as well as to Lakshmana. When he was informed, at the dawn of the day of impending coronation, by Sumantra, one of the ministers in the court of the king, that the king wanted to meet him in person, Sri Rama remarked to Sita devi that our mother Kaikeyi who always keen to align with the interest and welfare of the king would have planned necessary things to advance the wishes of Dasaratha.

लक्षयित्वा ह्यभिप्रायं प्रियकामा सुदक्षिणा | संचोदयति राजानं मदर्थं मसितेक्षणा ||

सा प्रहृष्टा महाराजं हितकामानुवर्तिनी | जननी चार्थकामा मे केकयाधिपतेस्सुता || 2-16.

Even to Lakshmana, Sri Rama emphasised that Mother Kaikeyi always conducted in a manner befitting the status of a queen.

However, the meeting on that day turned out to be the beginning of fourteen long years of testing and troubling time for Sri Rama. Why such a thing could even happen all of sudden? Sri Rama himself wondered aloud that he could never recollect any act of indiscretion either done to Manthara or mother Kaikeyi. He, then, stated that one can reasonably deduce any unexpected turn of event as act of invisible hand of destiny when sudden severest hostilities unconsciously emerge from otherwise amiable affectionate person or persons. In this context, he correlated that Kaikeyi who was a keen adherent to royal etiquette at all times, was suddenly seen bereft of all the niceties of conduct. She had stooped to a low level of disrespectful behaviour, act of embarrassment even to herself too. She behaved indifferently without feeling any shame and spoke harsh and hurtful words in the mannerism of a discourteous woman.

उवाचेदं सुनिर्लज्जा धृष्टमात्महितं वचः || तत् अप्रियम् अनार्याया वचनम् दारुण उदरम् || 2-19-18 & 19.

By hindsight, one may say that the conduct of Sri Rama refraining away and restraining others from blaming Kaikeyi or Manthara had put him to be a recipient of valuable and beneficial directions to alleviate his sufferings provided voluntarily by unrelated persons. Probably, the nature's way of compensating the afflicted.

Sri Rama, during his exile, diverted his attention to do service to the sages residing in the forests by eliminating demons, their tormentors and scourge on the earth. One may recollect that the main reason for advent of Lord Narayana as four sons of Dasaratha is to eliminate Ravana and his clan to enable safe living by good natured people. Sri Rama assured the sages that he came to the forest to bring an end to the misdeeds of demons also.

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

Calm approach even at the hour of witnessing justified grief of his dear parents, subdued demeanour and dignified conduct to convince his parents and citizens to the prospects of his exile are testament to his greatest qualities.

The next thing in the sequences of event in Ramayana was flat refusal by Bharatha to the unjust cruel demands of his mother. Not an even a bit of greediness could be seen in the noble conduct of Bharatha who stood firm from falling prey to pomp and show of the royal offer and to the endearing entreaties of important people nudging him to take up the mantle fallen on him unasked for. An entirely unthought of a turn of event from the expected acceptance of Bharatha to his mother's wishes.

Sri Nighamantha Maha Desikan in Paduka Sahasram eloquently put this event by writing that whereas Mother Kaikeyi wanted her son to be a prince of Ayodhya, the citizens wanted Sri Rama to be their undisputed leader, but the nature conferred the pride of honour to the sandals of Lord Rama as requested by Bharatha, a faithful devotee. Of course, this had shown the world modalities of a workable trust. Bharatha himself informed Sri Rama on the later return from exile that through holding office in fiduciary capacity as a trustee, he had increased the wealth of the kingdom by ten times over what it was at the start of the exile.

Next in the sequence was an unexpected request from the famous sage Atri to Sri Rama. The Sage, though understood the greatness of Sri Rama, urged him to ask Seetha Devi to meet Anusuya without fail. He openly talked about Anusuya's power of penance and wanted Seetha devi to seek her blessings. What comes out of that meeting was a gift to Seetha from Anasuya.

च प्रहर्षमते हन्त सीते करोम्यहम् || इदम् दिव्यम् वरम् माल्यम् वस्त्रम् आभरणानि च | अना रागम् च वैदेहि महा अहम् अनुलेपनम् || मया दत्तम् इदम् सीते तव गात्राणि शोभयेत् | अनुरूपम् असम्बलितम् नित्यम् एव भविष्यति || 2-118

Anasuya on her own presented a divine gift consisting of a garland, an apparel, jewels, perfumed cosmetic and cream, specially mentioning that the gift would be advantageous to Seetha. Needless to say, that this gesture had come handy during her captivity at Lanka. A divine dispensation in advance.

During the stay in the forests among various famous rishis, Sri Rama, himself, expressed his wish to meet Sage Agasthya and requested others about Agasthya's hermitage. He met him in the company of beloved Seetha and Lakshmana. Sage Agasthya voluntarily gifted an inexhaustible queer of arrows with bow though Sri Rama already possessed a bow and arrows. This unexpected gift was a precious and a thoughtful one. Agasthya knew very well that Rishi Vishwamitra had already bestowed upon Sri Rama all types of weapons with detailed instructions about their usage including retraction. Nevertheless, Agasthya specifically mentioned that with that invincible sacred bow and arrow, Sri Rama would easily triumph over demons in any battle. Profound significance of this unexpected foresighted action by Agasthya could be only appreciated on subsequent abduction of Seetha which forced Sri Rama to wage an impossible battle against colossal demon like Ravana and his entire courageous capable army. This, once again, underlines the fact that benefit of unexpected gifts may not accrue immediately. Nor utility of the event can be weighed in tune with prevailing circumstance.

As per the sane advice tendered by Agasthya, Sri Rama decided to spend remaining period of exile in Panchavati. When they reached the place and about to put up a hermitage to reside, they got introduced to Jatayu, by chance. Jatayu, on his own, informed them that he knew Dasaratha. He deemed his bounden duty to give protection to them to the best of its ability. Ultimately, Jatayu had given up his precious life in its attempt through a valiant fight with Ravana to thwart abduction of Seetha. But, the heroic death of Jatayu was itself a turning point in the things unfolded later.

One may recall that the group of Vanaras sent under the leadership of Angada in search of Seetha devi decided to go on fasting unto death on the shore of ocean because they could not find out

whereabouts of Seetha. In order to engage the troop, Angada started narrating events culminating into their present pitiable position. He too mentioned about futility of death of Jatayu in the course of his talk. This narration led them to have an unexpected meeting with Sampati, Jatayu's brother. Sampati became instrumental to direct them to cross over the Ocean to find Seetha held in captivity in Lanka. One may say that the meeting between Jatayu and Sri Rama is fortuitous one. However, Jatayu's fight and ultimate demise had a futuristic positive impact to the clueless Vanaras.

Sri Rama has to accomplish the purpose of his foray into the difficult forest undergoing innumerable physical discomforts, mental agony. His goal of destruction of Ravana and his team, once again, enabled by a chance sighting of these princes and Seetha by none other than Shuurpanakha, Ravana's sister. When Rama is joyously spending time, Shuurpanakha arrived at that place accidentally.

तदा आसीनस्य रामस्य कथा संसक्त चेतसः | तम् देशम् राक्षसी कचिद् आजगाम **यदृच्छहया** || [3-17-5]

She, single handedly, sown seed for downfall and demise of Ravana through her vitriolic speech chastising Ravana in his court in front of his capable ministers. Her reprimands were the sole reason for Ravana to prevail over the reasoned truthful advice of Marich dissuading him from his suicidal action of abduction of Seetha.

Next, we come across a chance meeting with Kabandha by distraught Sri Rama and Lakshmana subsequent to heinous abduction of Seetha. They were clueless about the strength, location and modus operandi to successfully defeat Ravana. Kabandha on its own volunteered and provided an invaluable guidance with a suggested plan of action for successful release of Seetha devi from Ravana. His voluntary advice was significant as he advised them to seek friendship with Sugriva, exiled Vanara king with four of his faithful ministers. He could have easily suggested to forge friendship with Valli, undisputed strong leader of Vanara tribe who had singlehandedly defeated Ravana in an earlier encounter. It may, thus, appear strange that Kabandha recommended alliance with Sugriva. At that time of his advice, Sugriva has no visible authority to assemble an indomitable army. In fact, he himself spending his time in fearful conditions without a trace of exercisable control on Vanaras, whatsoever. This unexpected turn of event only underlines yet another factor that good companion with an impeccable character is needed to forge a friendship even in difficult circumstances. It also establishes the fact that ways and means are equally essential to accomplish an end result. Between Sugriva and Valli, the former is more dependable and keener to adhere to virtuous path. Further, this incident also exposes the known fact that our understanding and reaction are limited in scope. Only with divine intervention can we get a valuable guidance in the form of unsolicited but apt advice, of course, if so destined!!

The fact that Sri Rama is destined to defeat Ravana was further facilitated by joining of Vibhishana after his summary expel from Lanka by Ravana. Vibhishana was truthful and faithful in his advices to Sri Rama during the period of long crueling war. Due to his keen interest to secure victory for Sri Rama, he also suggested ways and means to defeat Indrajeet. Vibhishana through Lakshmana prevented Indrajeet from his successful completion of a penance to gain upper hand in the fight between the two. Though the pious character of Vibhishana was known to Ravana, a momentary rude decision to expel him had adversely contributed his defeat.

All the above known incidents have one thing in common. Spontaneous occurrence leads to unexpected turn of fortune or otherwise though it was not foreseeable when such an event occurred. Destiny always holds the key and abides in strict adherent to the ways and means of conduct.

In this juncture, Sri Rama used the events to drive home certain eternal facts, understanding of which would help everyone to navigate through unfamiliar circumstances, hardships with courage, hope and optimism. Grip of destiny on human beings is beyond one's imagination. No one could escape and counteract its hold. यद् अचिन्त्यम् तु तत् दैवम् भूतेषु अपि न हन्यते ||...

It drives living beings to act differently, Sri Rama, in fact, hinted at play of rigours of destiny to the sudden change in behaviour of Queen Kaikeyi of royal lineage with a perfect temperament to talk like a commoner to disrupt the royal decree.

उग्रैः वाक्यैः अहम् तस्या न अन्यद् दैवात् समर्थये || कथम् प्रकृति सम्पन्ना राज पुत्री तथा अगुणा | ब्रूयात् सा प्राकृता इव स्त्री मत् पीडाम् भर्तु सन्निधौ ||

The whole spectrum of feelings such as pleasure and pain, passion such as fear and anger, earnings such as gain or loss, living such as birth and death etc comes under the sway of destiny whether one may accept or deny it.

सुख दुहखे भय क्रोधौ लाभ अलाभौ भव अभवौ | यस्य किञ्चित् तथा भूतम् ननु देवस्य कर्म तत् ॥

Even sages, fallen victim to pangs of lust, anger etc in a trice!! Those sages were known for their severest hard penance and earned name and fame for restraint painstakingly cultivated and assiduously practised by them.

ऋषयो प्युग्रतपसो दैवेनाभिप्रपीडिताः | उत्सृज्य नियमाम् स्तीव्रान् भ्रश्यन्ते काममन्युभिः ॥

Having said so, one has to take a subtle note from the conduct of Bharatha's refusal to adorn the throne of the kingdom, though occurred without any effort from him. If a resultant benefit accruing out of an unexpected action is against the rules of ethics and one's considered opinion, then, it would be prudent to refrain from acceptance. Very great message to stick to probity in one's life.

The above-mentioned episodes should in no way deter anyone from pursuing their dreams and undertaking strenuous efforts. It only underlines that beyond one's wishes and well deserving efforts, factor such as opportune time and place, act plays an important role. Fortuitous turn of event is beyond one's control. Such a matured thinking helps to keep sanity in day-to-day conduct. This is the advantage of reading critically epic literature such as Srimad Ramayana which graciously hints at human frailties and genuinely helps a reader to develop a healthier attitude and to maintain composure at all times irrespective of happenings in one's life.