

Revisiting Roots of Spirituality and Indian Tradition from Ramayana: A Social Perspective

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Abstract:

Through ages the bedrock of India was connoted as Bharat. Significantly Bharatham has a unique vivacity of tradition blended with cultural magnanimity epitomizing fundamental source and inspiration of human life. From time immemorial Indian traditional legacy has evolved as the nucleus of elevated values and ideals visualizing humanity and peace in the global ecosystem. The quest for exploring the essence of human enrichment in intricately embedded within the scriptures of Indian epic Ramayana-the core origin of Indian tradition and religiousness. The paper unfolds the revitalizing insights of Ramayana bridgewaying tradition-spirituality with past and present. The life-learning doctrines of the epic acts as a torchbearer of knowing one's own self and provides direction towards controlling human mind for individual escalation and growth. The geminal treasure of Ramayana is equipped with life-learning lessons connecting unique aspects of human attributes exploring the cycle of good and evil. Keeping in tune with the epic's universal message of humanity the paper throws light on the meaningful lessons of austerity; family-rituals; religious-offering; devotion; sacredness all culminating glorious Indian tradition and spirituality. The paper makes a realistic attempt in mirroring timeless truths and morals of Ramayana wherein the epic has emerged as the perennial inspirational-fountain in the pathway towards holistic progression of Indian tradition and spirituality.

Keywords: Tradition, Spirituality, Ramayana, Epic, India

Uncovering Roots of Tradition & Spirituality: An Introduction

Tradition is the way of life. It is the manifest form of human and spiritual creation. The humanistic hymns of 'Survey Bhavnatu Sukhinah- Survey Santu Nirmaya' as enshrined in Indian scriptures echoes equanimity of mind and welfare. Indian tradition and culture reflect the ideological and spiritual excellence of humans. From time immemorial Indian tradition has emerged as the life-

line of tolerance, compassion and equality beyond geographical boundaries and making unique across the world. Indigenous traditional morals are the geminal source and inspiration of human-life embracing every individual with a free-heart and adopting with open-mind. The cradle-land India is considered to be the treasure-house of world's oldest and glorious cultural tradition enriched with spiritual ideological contributions. The core of Indian culture is embedded within the layers of 'Atithi Devo Bhavo' proclaiming 'Guests are God'

celebrates generosity, humanity and harmony towards the entire mankind including all beings. The diverse extravaganza of Indian culture and heritage is identified with the wisdom of ancient epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata which serves as a beacon light to the seekers of spiritual bliss. In the present era engulfed with anarchy, discontentment, mechanization and competitiveness the thought-provoking perennial learnings of Ramayana acts as a life-enriching source of inner tranquility and happiness. The present paper focuses the relevance of India's rich diverse culture and tradition through visionary essence of epic Ramayana and in the words of George Bernard Shaw

“The Indian way of life provides the vision of the natural, real way of life”.

Revitalizing Catalyst of Indian Tradition: Spirituality and Humanity

Indian Culture offer eternal wisdom and valuable insights which propagates the ideas of unity in Diversity and teaches everyone to have a holistic view of life. India is the cradle of the human race, the birthplace of human speech, the mother of history, the grandmother of legend, and the great grandmother of tradition that are believed, followed and handed over down the generations. Indian culture culminates live and let live as its soul identity of oneness and harmony. The diverse spectacular of Indian culture rejuvenates ‘peace with purity’ through harmonious existence of all and everyone in the global eco-space. The timeless philosophy of ‘Karma’ which postulates that ‘good action yields fruitful results and the evil desire results unpleasant consequences’ – embedded in the very root of rich Indian culture and tradition. The crux of Indian philosophy is the quest for searching purpose of our existence in this planet that leads to the path of self-realization. The history of mankind is marked by the history of spiritual evolution. Spirituality indicates how human life can be lived happily in the best possible way overcoming distress and pain in day-to-day lives. Cultivating humanity is the core of spirituality paving the way towards attainment of purity, peace and upliftment within oneself.

Humanism in essence is sum-total of kernels of all the religious traditions of the world, which encompasses most of the spiritual tenets of the world. It is difficult rather impossible to imagine of any faith or dharma without humane touch or humanistic consideration. In the words of Confucius *“the first ingredient of humaneness is to have an attitude of reverence in human relationships as if one were taking part in a religious ceremony, or at least to behave with the ceremoniousness and sense of propriety required when receiving an honoured guest. The second ingredient is to show consideration for the feelings of others by not doing to them what you would not like them to do to you”*. Through ages the core of human potentials has been showcased even in the 'Vedas' – the life-line of Indian traditional knowledge system. The sacred Vedic Hymns of 'Yayur veda' proclaims

*“Behave with others as you would with yourself.
Look upon all the living beings as your friends.
For in all of them their resides one soul
A person who believes that all are his soul mates
And loves them all alike, never feels lonely.
Divine qualities of such a person
Such as forgiveness, compassion and service
Will make him loveable in the eyes of his associates
He will experience the intense joy throughout his life”*.

Harnessing ethical doctrines and its relevance the call of the hour. Meaningfully the real spirit of Indian tradition in tune with epics always serves as a life-learning visions for humanity. The Indian heritage focuses on cultivating positive actions and following the path of righteousness in life-learning-living in the present fast-changing global ecosystem and beyond.

Roadway to Ramayana: The Mother-ground of Indian Tradition and Culture

Ramayana is human experience. The magnificent epic portrays a life-enriching journey between life and death. The introductory quote of the epic asserts

*“Idam pavitram papadnam punyam vaidaischa sammitam
Yah pateda ramacharitam sarvapapai pramuchyate”*

“One who reads this sacred account of Rama which can purify and erase all sins and which is equal to Vedas, he is relieved of all sins.” Ramayana represents perfection in terms of an ideal hero Rama and his perfect consort Sita in admirable ways, ideal relationship may it be brother, friend or obedient son connected with values and principles. Ramayana defines the relationship with every living beings of mother earth comprising birds, animals and other elements of the nature. The epic Ramayana depicts Sita and Ram as metaphors for *Prakriti* (nature) and *Purusha* (mankind). Ramayana tells us that both man-woman and *Prakriti-Purusha* should strive to live in harmony despite many obstacles in life. The magnificent epic serves as a backbone of human ideologies that inspires to follow a meaningful life and beyond. After all life is all about managing of self beginning from birth and ending with death. Ramayana is more than a story. The tale of Rama has pervaded deep into the humanistic philosophies speaking the spirit of people and reflect people’s value. Ramayana is essentially as story visualizing the evolution of man elevated to the throne of God. The appeal of Ramayana as one of the supreme literary creations and universal because it is an expression of man’s eternal quest for abiding human values. The epic is the repository of ancient Indian heritage which has travelled across geographical boundaries epitomizing as the fountain-head of ethical conduct and truthfulness. Ramayana expound the doctrines of righteous conduct facilitating people in improving their lives and living a growth-oriented life filled with tradition, culture and rejuvenation as the base.

Objectives of the Study:

- To analyze the concept of tradition and spirituality illustrated in Ramayana
- To evaluate the contribution of Ramayana insights in rebuilding the foundation of Indian tradition & spirituality

Methodology of the Study:

The study is conceptual, extensive, analytical and descriptive in nature. Qualitative research method has been applied. The conceptual literature

concerning Ramayana and ancient philosophical knowledge along with its application for human well-being has been explored. The study is based on secondary data collected from texts, books, journals, e-resources of Ramayana and spirituality.

Findings and Analysis:

Findings I: Tradition-Family Ritual

King Dashrathas Yagna for Putrameshthi Ritual

Shloka:

संभाराः सम्यगायताः सर्वे तस्य महात्मनाः ।

ऋत्विजाः संननयुक्ताश्च सर्वे वेदवर्दो जनाः ॥

हुताशनस्य संभारान् दृष्ट्वा राजा महायशाः ।

प्रहृष्टवदनो हृष्टाः शीघ्रं होमाय चोदयत् ॥

(Source: *Bala*

Kanda, Sarga 14.26 to 14.27)

Translation: "All the required materials were properly arranged for the great Yajna. The officiating priests, who were well-versed in the Vedas, were appointed. Seeing that all the offerings for the sacrificial fire (Agni) were ready, the illustrious King Dasharatha, filled with joy, ordered the ritual to begin immediately."

Meaning: Being a King, Dasharatha performed different kinds of sacrifices and ritual to ensure the prosperity and well-being of his family and kingdom. Being childless, he performed the Putrakameshthi Yagna with the desire of obtaining sons under the guidance of Sage Rishyasringa on the advice of Vasishtha. As a result of the yagna, Dashratha received prasada which he distributed among the three queens: Kausalya, Kaikeyi, and Sumitra. This yagna proved to be pivotal point in Ramayana since it led to the birth of Sri Rama and his brothers.

Implications: This incident sheds light on the ancient Indian tradition where people performed different kinds of rituals to invoke the blessings of the supreme power. This shows how some things are beyond the normal human capacity and require divine interference which is achieved through religious practices. This Yagna can be seen as a symbol of faith in the divine power and a sense of

duty towards one's family and lineage which forms an important part of the traditional and societal fabric of India.

Findings II: Tradition-Religious Offering

Rama's worship to Goddess Durga for divine boon to conquer Ravana

Shloka:

शरणागतां शरण्ये त्राहह मां करुणामये ।

शरण्यं सर्ववभूतानां ननाःसृतां त्वां नमाम्यहम् ॥

(Source: *Yuddha Kanda Sarga 103.6-103.7*)

Translation: "O Divine Mother, the refuge of those who seek shelter, protect me, O compassionate one. You are the supreme refuge of all beings. I bow before you."

Meaning: Sri Rama prayed for the blessings of Goddess Durga to secure victory in the impending fight against Ravana. This act of praying reflects upon the deep moral and religious values which form a central theme of Ramayana. Sri Rama who being an incarnation of Vishnu seeks the blessings of the Goddess which transcends arrogance or self-sufficiency depicting how even the righteous and capable individual also seek the divine when facing adversaries in life.

Implications: The act of praying to Goddess Durga also shows the humility of Rama and how the war was being fought to uphold the ideals of Dharma and sustaining the cosmic order. This throws light on the practices of spirituality and religious offering in India where people since time immemorial have seek divine aid in everything they do. It showcases that no victory or success is entirely the result of one's own effort and is dependent on divine grace and blessings.

Findings III: Spirituality-Austerity

Sage Atri's wife Anusua's spiritual power to get Tridev as sons and gifts to Sita during foresthood

Shloka:

शरणागतां शरण्ये त्राहह मां करुणामये ।

शरण्यं सर्ववभूतानां ननाःसृतां त्वां नमाम्यहम् ॥

शरणागतां शरण्ये त्राहह मां करुणामये ।

शरण्यं सर्ववभूतानां ननाःसृतां त्वां नमाम्यहम् ॥

(Source: *Ayodhya*

Kand, Sarga 117.10 to 117.11)

Translation: "O Lord Rama, there lived Anusuyas, the most blessed and virtuous woman, who had renounced all desires for material pleasures and was committed to truth and righteousness. She was engaged in the welfare of all living beings, And through her great penance, she had gained immense spiritual power. She was an exemplary chaste wife, the great and illustrious daughter of Sage Daksha.

Meaning: Anusua, wife of Sage Atri, was considered to be one of the most virtuous and revered women in Hinduism widely acknowledged for her deep spirituality, piety and austerity. The three Gods- Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva visited her in the form of ascetics to taste her spirituality and challenged her to feed them but on the condition that she must serve them while they were naked. In spite of impossible and highly disrespectful task, Anusua through the power of her austerity was able to turn them into small babies and feed them. Another episode of Anusuya's wisdom and spiritual guidance occurs when she gifts Sita a special garland, a divine mantle (Chadar) and blessings for protecting Sita from the harsh and malevolent forces which she might have to encounter during her period of exile

Implications: This incident proved the strength in Anusua's Bhakti and virtue which transcended this worldly challenge thereby shedding light on how being disciplined and fulfilling one's duty by following Dharma can lead to divine power and grace. Anusuya through her guidance provides Sita with the understanding of maintaining one's purity and resolve even in difficult circumstances which also symbolizes the supportive bond between women in the larger narrative through life.

Findings IV: Spirituality-Devotion

Shabari's Devotion towards Lord Rama

Shloka:

शरणागतां शरण्ये त्राहह मां करुणामये।

शरण्यं सर्ववभूतानां ननाःसृतां त्वां नमाम्यहम्॥

(Source: Aranya Kanda , Sarga 74.17)

Translation: "O Lord of the Universe, through truthfulness, supreme dharma, and great penance, And with pure devotion, I have been blessed to see you. What more can I ask for?"

Meaning: The tale of purification and devotion of Shabari is unfolded in the epic Ramayana. Shabari belonged to the Bhila caste was a disciple of sage Matanga. She used to adore Hari with devotion in the forest. She daily collected new and fresh fruits and kept them carefully, waiting for the arrival of the Lord. Rama went to her place. Shabari was kind-hearted and affectionate host who fed Rama and Lakshmana with water, fruit, flowers, leaves etc. Thereafter Lord Rama spoke to her "You ask for anything you desire". Then Shabari said "Oh Lord take me under your protection and let me achieve salvation" and then voluntarily relinquished her life and proceeded to Vaikuntha, the eternal abode of Vishnu.

Implication: The character of Shabari in Ramayana serves an unparalleled example of how true devotion comes from the soul of a person. She rightfully embodied the idea of selfless devotion. Her profound love and care for Sri Rama devoid of any expectations or ego shows that devotion and faith of a person are not dependent on any formal education or wealth and it transcends social and religious norms overcoming all barriers.

Findings V: Tradition-Sacredness

Sita's Fire Trial

गभे रक्षमस लोकानां साक्षक्षणं चालनमात्मनाः।

यहद मे सत्यसङ्कल्पं भक्तं रामे च दृढाम्॥

(Source: Yuddha Kanda, Sarga 118.17)

Translation: "O Fire God (Agni), you are the witness of all beings in this universe. If I have remained truly devoted to Rama with unwavering faith, then protect me!

Meaning: Sita, the central character of Ramayana, is regarded as a symbol of virtue, chastity and sacredness. By following the path of Dharma her entire life despite facing the grave difficulties like the exile, abduction by Ravana and the fire test she represents the highest standards of virtue and integrity. After she was rescued from Ravana's captivity she had to go through Agni Pariksha because the public doubted her chastity since she had been living in Ravana's palace for such an extended period. However, in that poignant moment when she steps into the fire the flames don't harm her signifying that she was not only innocent but also divinely ordained.

Implications: The fire-trial also signifies how women since ancient period have faced societal and moral pressures to prove their integrity. Sita while undergoing this trial had to sacrifice her dignity and undergo immense hardship just to validate her moral standing in the public eye. This showcased her strength, selflessness, sacredness and devotion towards her husband Sri Rama and the moral commitment towards truth, despite the suffering it brings to her.

Findings VI

Harmonizing Tradition and Spirituality with Ramayana Vision

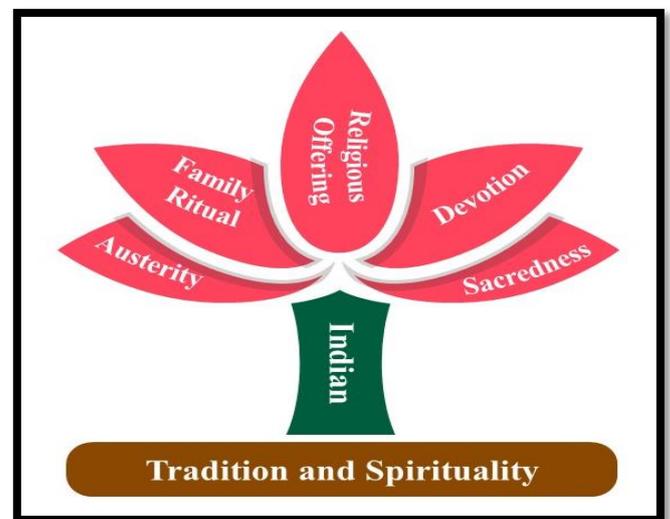


Figure 1: Golden Lotus of Indian Tradition and Spirituality

Implications of the Study:

Indian epics are a collection of timeless treasures of life-enrichment learnings that are deeply woven into the fabric of Indian culture and tradition. The central theme of the paper portrays valuable insights of Ramayana as they serve profound sources of life-line doctrines of ethics, austerity, devotion and sacredness and humanity acting as a torchbearer in the present socio-economic global landscape. The authors made a realistic attempt to visualize the lives of diverse characters of Ramyana and thereby upholding the magnificent Indian tradition of integrity, perseverance and compassion for all ages to come.

Concluding Remarks:

In the present digitalized world, the relevance of Indian epics acts as a treasure-house in showcasing the magnificent extravaganza of culture, knowledge and tradition offering valuable visions of peace, harmony and brotherhood worldwide. Being characterized with a pluralistic society, a wide range of languages, art forms, food habits and traditions co-exist together and the epic propagates the ideas of unity in diversity which teaches everyone to have a holistic view of life. The epic's universal message of mindfulness and renunciation have been propagated worldwide visualizing the rich cultural and spiritual heritage of India- the homeland of universal religion and culture. The paper portrays a unique glimpse of glorious Indian culture and tradition as can be rightly connoted in the words of Swami Vivekananda "*The land where humanity has attained its highest towards gentleness, towards generosity, towards purity, towards kindness – it is India*".

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