

Education is not merely acquiring information and an ability to earn a living. This only fosters individualism. To inculcate humane qualities in the new generation, complementarity should be recognised as the real essence of education by our teachers. Raja Dashratha's sons received this kind of education in Guru Vashishtha's ashram.

Rishi Vishwamitra wanted Ram's assistance to protect his *Yajna* from an attack by a group of dreadful demons. But because of his paternal affection for his sons, Raja Dashratha was in a dilemma. Guru Vashishtha reminded him of his Royal Duty, after which the King allowed Ram and Lakshman to go with Rishi Vishwamitra.

On the way to Siddhashram, the boys saw heart-rendering scenes caused by the atrocities of the demons. After he saw a huge pile of skeletons, the innocent victims of the demons, Ram took a vow — "I will wipe out all these tyrants from the world with all my might."

On the way to Siddhashram, the gigantic and dreadful demoness, Tratika, suddenly attacked young Ram. Alert and consummately skilled, Ram killed her with a single arrow. Whether it is a man or a woman, a tyrant's annihilation is a sacred duty for all of us.

Ram assured Rishi Vishwamitra that he and Lakshman alone would wipe out all the demons. Rishi Vishwamitra responded, "I do not doubt your valour, but this is not a permanent solution. It is essential to inspire confidence and courage in the local people so they will not tolerate any form of oppression. This is the way of true leadership."

The common people suffered as greedy administrators protected the corrupt. Ram could not tolerate this. He sentenced the highly placed official, Bahulashwa, to death, and set an example for other rulers to follow. This was the unique feature of *Ram Rajya*.

Demons physically abused young women for their pleasure. These afflicted girls were ostracized by their own families and society. Their condition perturbed Ram. He consoled the young women, and told them not to blame themselves for their plight. After wiping out these demons, he restored their honour to them.

Ahalya, the wife of Rishi Gautam, was an exceptional beauty. Indra molested her when she was alone. An irate Rishi Gautam abandoned her and left the *Ashram*. The *Ashram* was on the way to Mithila. On his way to Mithila, Ram saw Ahalya in meditation. When she opened her eyes, she was overwhelmed to have Ram's *Darshan*. Ram paid his respects to her. At an opportune time, he reunited Ahalya and Rishi Gautam.

Rishi Vishwamitra took Ram and Lakshman to Mithila where the *Swayamwar* ceremony for Sita was to take place. The condition for her hand was to string the great bow, *Shiv Dhanush*. After all the kings failed in their attempts, Raja Janak got worried. Rishi Vishwamitra asked Ram to do it. Ram strung *Shiv Dhanush*, breaking the great bow in the process. In a joyous atmosphere, Sita garlanded Ram.

Parashuram had kept the *Shiv Danush* in Raja Janak's custody. Outraged at seeing it broken, Parashuram stepped forward to punish Ram. Passionate Lakshman challenged Parashuram. Seeing the situation getting out of control, Ram came forward and pacified Parashuram in his humble and skillful manner.

The people of Ayodhya were overwhelmed with joy after being informed of Ram's coronation. Houses were gaily decorated. Men, women and children in colourful garments, gathered to greet Ram and Sita.

In Koppbavan, a dishevelled Kaikeyi bellowed, "Fulfill both your promises! Send Ram into exile for fourteen years, and enthrone Bharat immediately." Raja Dashratha was devastated. Ram, who arrived at the palace to seek his father's blessings, realized the gravity of the situation. He immediately offered the kingdom to Bharat and gladly set out for his exile in the forest.

Ram, the preventer of familial strife; Sita, the epitome of a dedicated wife; and Lakshman, the symbol of brotherly love; set out for the forest. This was the ultimate example of dutifulness, as opposed to a 'hankering after power'. Though people wailed and saddened youth tried to hinder their progress, nothing could stop the duty-bound souls. This was Ram's message for the whole of mankind — Duty above all other considerations.

Bharat was called back from his maternal grandfather's palace. A macabre veil of silence had descended on the whole of Ayodhya. Only Kaikeyi's palace was buzzing with activity. Aggrieved by the death of his father and Ram's exile,

Bharat became furious when his mother tried to explain her strategy to him. The throne did not attract him. He left Ayodhya to bring Ram back.

Ram reached the banks of the Ganga with Sita and Lakshman. The *Nishad* (boatmen), were overwhelmed by Ram's *Darshan*. Joyously, Nishadraj touched his feet. Ram embraced him. The discrimination between high and low castes vanished. The boatmen took them across the Ganga.

As Ram, with Sita and Lakshman, had to live in the forest for many years, they went to the *Ashram* of Bharadwaj Muni at Prayag to seek his advice. Arriving at the *Ashram*, they bowed before him. He received them and they enjoyed his hospitality. Bharadwaj Muni advised them to go to Chitrakoot and seek the guidance of Atri Muni and Anusuya.

The news of Ram's arrival spread like wildfire. Groups of tribals, both men and women, began to gather from different directions to have Ram's *Darshan*. Without any discrimination, Ram embraced them all. Everyone felt as if they were one. They were overwhelmed by Ram's affectionate behaviour.

Ram, Sita and Lakshman reached the hermitage of Atri Muni and Anusuya situated on the beautiful banks of the Mandakini. They sought their blessings and were advised to stay in Chitrakoot.

Ram embraced Bharat when the latter arrived in Chitrakoot. An aggrieved Bharat requested Ram to return to Ayodhya. Ram said, "I will return to Ayodhya only after the fourteen years are over. Till then, you will have to reign in Ayodhya." Bharat was disheartened. It was evidence that only duty-bound people can be honest leaders and successful rulers.

Bharat said in anguish, "Brother! At least give me your *padukas* (sandals). I will place them on the throne as your symbol, and will serve the people of Ayodhya, and rule in your place until you return."

After living in Chitrakoot for a few years, Ram, Sita and Lakshman left. They reached a beautiful forest, Panchwati, at Nashik, and began to live there in a thatched hut. One day, while Lakshman was on guard, Sita suddenly spotted a golden deer. As she desired it, she asked Ram to catch it for her. Ram went in chase of it.

Shortly after Ram's departure, Sita and Lakshman heard him call out in distress. Sita was frightened for Ram. Lakshman, however, suspected a demonic ploy to catch them off guard. Sita disagreed, and forced Lakshman to go find Ram and help him. After warning Sita not to cross the boundary of the hut's compound, Lakshman went in the direction of the voice. The conspirator, Ravan, appeared before Sita in the guise of a monk and lured her outside the compound. Innocent Sita crossed the compound boundary and was abducted.

When Ram and Lakshman returned, they found Sita missing. Stunned, furious and grief-stricken, they went in search of her. Along the way, they found Jatayu, lying mortally wounded. As Ram consoled him, Jatayu told him of his fight with Ravan, who had abducted Sita. He handed over the ornaments that Sita had dropped to Ram and breathed his last. Ram respectfully performed his last rites.

While Ram and Lakshman were searching for Sita, they came across a hut. It was the hermitage of an ascetic tribal woman called Shabari. They stopped there to enquire if she had seen Sita. Shabari offered them sweet fruits. After accepting the hospitality and blessings of the old woman, they proceeded with their search.

Ousted from his throne by his brother Bali, Sugreev lived in exile in the forest. In their search for Sita, Ram and Lakshman had, by chance, entered the same forest. Hanuman, a friend of Sugreev, saw them. His first sight of Ram impressed him deeply. He took Sugreev to Ram. Ram promised Sugreev that he would avenge him. He killed the immoral Bali and coronated Sugreev.

It was impossible to cross the inviolable ocean and enter Lanka. Hanuman, with his exceptional skill, intelligence and courage, made it possible. He successfully entered Lanka.

Hanuman scanned the whole of Lanka in his search for Sita. Ultimately, he found Sita mourning in the garden, *Ashok Van*. He presented Ram's signet ring to her and introduced himself. Sita was reassured that she would be reunited with Ram.

Convinced of the superiority of Ram's army, Vibhishan requested Ravan to ask Ram for a truce. A furious Ravan refused and unceremoniously expelled him from Lanka.

Exiled, Vibhishan went to see Ram. All of Ram's army was suspicious of the stranger. Hanuman met with him first. After being convinced of his intentions, he allowed him to meet Ram. Before a sacred fire, Ram declared him the monarch of Lanka.

Ram's army reached the coast. The ocean had to be crossed. Nal, an architect in the army, found a shallow path in the seabed. Ram, alongwith everyone in the army, helped in the construction of the bridge. It was ready in no time at all. The army marched towards Lanka.

All the commanders of Ravan's army were killed. Mounted on a chariot and armed with various weapons, Ravan came out himself, to fight Ram and his army. Ram was on foot and armed only with his bow and arrows. Vibhishan was apprehensive, as it appeared to be an unequal fight. Ram asked him to have patience. The fight was a terrible one. Ultimately, the arrogant Ravan could not withstand the onslaught and Ram killed him with a well-aimed arrow.

“Lakshman! I do not doubt her piousness. As Ram, I have the same love and affection for her. But Lakshman! I am now King Ram. I cannot allow my personal feelings to affect my actions. My only duty is to maintain the moral fabric of society.”

The aim of education during *Ram Rajya* was to inculcate human values in the next generation. It was not only to enhance their capacity to earn a living.

During *Ram Rajya*, familial feelings and complementarity was practised in every locality. As a result of this, no one in society was neglected or penniless.

There was no place for discrimination in *Ram Rajya*. The whole populace lived as one family, caring for each other with innate affection.

Due to administrative honesty and efficiency during *Ram Rajya*, there was no corruption, immorality or discrimination.

During *Ram Rajya*, the interest and pleasure of the people, was the interest and pleasure of the King. The security of the people was not separate from the security of the King. There were no separate pleasures of the King from the pleasure of the general populace. This was the practice in *Ram Rajya*.