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Socio-Ecological Aspects in The Ramayanam

The project entitled 'Socio-Ecological Aspects in The Ramayanam' is an attempt to comprehend the Ramayana from sociological and ecological perspective.

This project comprises four chapters including introduction. The first chapter deals with the general introduction of Ramayana and its impact on living a righteous life. The attitude of ancient people towards nature is also exhibited in this work. They maintained an attitude of gratitude towards nature. Ancient religious scriptures consider protection of environment to be dharma. This work highlights perspectives of religious scriptures on environment.

The second chapter titled sociological Perspectives on the Ramayanam focuses on the role of the Ramayana to teach a man for performing dharma in his life. It is very easy to collect a great deal of examples of characters in the epic who were faithful to their dharma and those who violated their dharma.

The Ramayana is not only a story but also an educational medium to

demonstrate the importance of values such as loving and respecting one's family, keeping his promises, protecting the weak and so on. One can use the magnum opus of Hindu mythology, the Ramayana, as a medium to teach his child about values and ethics here.

The third chapter titled 'Ecological Reading of The Ramayanam' envisages briefly how the ancient sages looked upon the nature and lived with the nature acknowledging its importance. The Ramayana gives an exclusive example on the existence of inseparable bond of man and nature relation. The epic puts forward many stories highlighting this inseparable man and nature relationship. Man is not alien from nature, but an integral part of it.

The great epic Ramayana envisages the purity and greatness of Bharateeya culture. The Stories of the Ramayana can make the world aware of the path laid down by Rama. In this modern world human values are deteriorating. Individuals become self-centred. Youngsters have no time to look after and nurse the elderly man in the families. Terrorism is another face of inhumanity.

Today people are suffering from the lack of spiritual knowledge. To some extent religious scriptures can give solution to these problems. It can make brutal and selfish man unselfish and can aid man to behave with conscience.

For the development of peace, prosperity, happiness and the moulding of a strong society it is essential to induce spiritual knowledge in to the minds of the people. This mission can be fulfilled through the epic Ramayana. The moral principles such as humility, integrity, respect and trust are quintessential for the success in the modern world. They are classified under the theme of Dharma. In Hindu scriptures it is said that man should do his duty without expecting reward because it affects everything from the society as a whole to the individual . In society every individual has a dharma according to his role in the world.

In this modern technological world nobody is aware of the necessity of religious belief in life. Hinduism is often termed as environmental friendly religion. Hindus believe that everything in nature is enveloped with Divine presence. According to our ancestors Nature is the manifestation of God. Therefore they pay gratitude towards nature. Hinduism stresses environmental ethics. According to it Earth is our mother.

In Vedic period Protection of environment was considered to be dharma.

Religious centred education can make the people aware of the environmental protection. A sustainable society is the one which functions and lives in harmony with the environment. In such a society deterioration will not happen in the quality of life. Religious scriptures can make change in the attitude of the modern world who give much emphasis on right and not on obligations.

Today the shift from traditional nature centered world to man centered world paves the way for the destruction of nature. Ramayana gives messages for the preservation of environment and ecological balance. Actually man is not given any right to exploit and conquer nature. He is taught to live in harmony with nature and recognize the divinity prevails in all living and nonliving things.

All the ancient Hindu scriptures emphasis that human beings cannot be separated from nature. Vedic seers always exhort mankind to consider the welfare of all beings while he thinks over his own satisfaction. In this modern technological world man is taught to pay heed to the words of Vedic seers that all life is sacred and its existence rests on the harmonious life in the nature, the

world can be rescued from the current deplorable condition. Propagate basic values of Hindu culture is one of the helpful measures to fulfil this aim.

Scientific discoveries and technological development paved the way for a shift in focus from God to the secular domain. Current societal condition emerged from the mounting pressure for success, deteriorating family life and lack of spiritual knowledge can be changed if man is convinced of sociological and ecological aspects of the Ramayana.

The Ramayana brimmed with universal principles of righteousness can give a perfect solution to the problems of modern times. Hence it is relevant to modern generation. Modern generation aim at acquiring success for which they have emulated the systems of the west depended on the advances in science and technology. Actually this can assist man to embrace success and happiness. But that will not be in a comprehensive manner. It can withstand the test of time. The profound teachings in the Ramayana can help an individual to achieve a comprehensive success.

In modern nuclear family life people are not bothered about giving any importance to basic values such as respect for elders etc. Moral lessons in the Ramayana are sufficient enough to mold the life of a man and to make a man an ideal human being. Dharma, ie righteousness, is highlighted throughout the Ramayana.

Modern man is running after materialism and sense pleasures. The Ramayana makes it clear that man should not sacrifice dharma for these two things. On the other hand *ardha* and *kama* must be sacrificed for retaining dharma. The life of Rama in the Ramayana envisages how a man can become respectable in a society. Dasaradha showed willingness to be separated from his beloved son to keep his promise and to adhere to truth. This is part of dharma. Ramayana through these characters teaches the world to live ecologically by protecting dharma.

Respect parents and keep one's promise are seemed to be the highest dharmas in society. Sree Rama denied the kingdom and decided to leave for forest embracing the words of His father and Kaikeyi. In society man must not pay any heed to the vicious counselling. If he does so it will contaminate his

mind, disrupt his dharmic life and create ecological imbalance in society.

Kaikeyi-Mandhara relationship is the best example for this.

Man has to perform diverse roles in society to become an excellent social being. The Ramayana portrays man's various duties and responsibilities as father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, brother, sister, master, servant, teacher and so on. In the fast race for material gains man is least bothered about Sanathana Dharma which are essential to get back to the fundamental principles of life.

The Ramayana portrays a son who denounces the throne to fulfil the words of his father, a father who sends his beloved son to the forest to keep up his promise, an ideal wife devotes to her husband and shares his adversities, a brother who follows his brother in the forest giving up all pleasures of the palace and spearheading the way to ward off all dangers.

In modern era corruption is rampant in all the fields. If modern man is convinced of threefold dharmas relating to the individual, the family, and the society envisaged in the Ramayana society can be relieved of these

corruptions. The true identity of the individual, real significance of the family and the sanctity of the society are splendidly portrayed in the Ramayana.

If a man becomes a victim of desires, it will bring disaster. The life of Ravana in the Ramayana is the best example for this. He has lost everything, his son, clans and even kingdom. That is why man is said to follow the trajectory of truth, righteousness and divinity. Speak the truth sweetly and softly is the social value. Our society needs people with bravery, efficiency, and proficiency. The Ramayana pictures Rama as the embodiment of efficient scholar, self-control and wisdom. The people who own these qualities are essential for the dharmic uplift of society to sustain ecological balance. To keep dharma in life and thereby maintain ecological balance man should put the teachings of Ramayana in to practice.

Sree Rama sacrificed his life for upholding social values. His life is actually a message for the human beings in our modern society. Lord Rama is supposed to be incarnated in human form to teach people the practical methods to be observed in all walks of life. From the character Dasaradha man can be

convinced of an important fact that life is an amalgamation of happiness and sorrow. There will not be incessant happiness in one's life.

Modern man who aspires power even though he doesn't actually deserve it should follow the path of Rama who relinquishes his power even though he deserves it and should annihilate evil qualities. Rama goes to the forest in exile wholeheartedly to keep the dharma of a son. He annihilates demons which is the dharma of a kshatriya-a warrior- and he kills Bali, the invincible, to keep his dharma as a friend. He kills Ravana to keep the dharma of the brave and when he attains his throne after 14 years of exile, he sticks to the dharma expected of a king all through his remaining life. This way Rama adheres to dharma in all phases of his life in his land and gets justice and peace.

The characters in Ramayana are unique. Sita symbolizes the all-forgiving nature of women. She sacrifices all her happiness for the family and takes refuge in the earth only when she is overwhelmed by circumstances. Sumitra, wife of Dasaratha, is sidelined all through her life in spite of being more able than the three wives of Dasaratha. She never complains all her life. Ravana is the demon king who has ten heads, which stand for tenfold arrogance. He has

all the bravery in the world and yet he is smitten with lust. Our scriptures say man can have power, position, all the great qualities in the world, but if he lacks poise and virtue he is going to fall. This is what the Ramayana teaches the world. All those who abandon beautiful wives and run after the wrong women are only Ravana's incarnation. It is lust in man which prompts him to forget the beautiful wife at home, run after a married woman who is attached to her husband and living a life of righteousness, abduct her and cause so much adharma in the world.

Ecology was sacred for Vedic man. There is nothing more repugnant for him than to dominate or subjugate the earth. As far as he is concerned earth is an entity to worship and not to exploit. The scientific study of the interrelations between living organisms and their environment, including both inter-specific and intra-specific relations is said to be ecology. Our forefathers hailed the earth with great exuberance of joy. Ecology is the scientific study of the interrelations between living organisms and their environment, including both inter-specific and intra-specific relations. In olden days there existed a rapport between Human beings and Nature. The idea of ecological balance of a particular place in a period can be discovered from its flora, fauna and water elements. The Ramayana has strongly acknowledged Supremacy of Nature.

The Ramayana has provided vast and interesting information about Nature in all her variety. Living in close affinity with nature is the way of the civilized and this was welcomed by all. Live against Nature is considered to be unethical and disastrous. The holy sages living in forests and meditating on the banks of rivers were honoring Mother Nature. Those who made the forests and sacred spots their hideouts for unscrupulous activities were put down by Rama with an iron hand. This was part of the scheme of maintaining ecological balance in the universe.

Nature has been given undue importance in Ramayana. When Rama reached Chitrakut with his brother Lakshmana and wife Sita, the kingdom of nature welcomed him with the kinshuk tree laden with blossoms from all sides. Branches of Beil tree had gone down due to the weight of its flowers and fruits. Valmiki has mentioned many big and small rivers flowing there. Thamasa, Sarayu, Saraswathi, and Yamuna are well known among them. Trees, mountains, animals and birds also play very important role in the healthy flow of man's life. Our ancestors, during the Ramayana period were very close to

them and they were well aware of the impact of environment on the life. Their enthusiasm and love for nature were boundless.

This epic presents quite a different view of the forest. It puts forward many instances of sages who practise austerities in the forest. During His childhood Rama was asked by Viswamithra Maharshi to come to the forest to protect the holy jainas from the onslaught of demons. Rama went to the forest to fulfil the duty of a prince, that is to give protection to the subjects in the city and to the holy men who have renounced city life in order to pursue religious penance in the forest for the welfare of the society. In the forest Rama slew the demoness Thataka. Her presence disturbed the fertile beauty of the forest. When Rama kills the demoness the forest comes back to life. Here there is an exquisite ecological message.

The Sage Vishwamitra took the two princes, Rama and Lakshmana, to his ashram, to help him in slaying several Rakshasas that have been harassing him and several other sages living in the area. Rama's first encounter is with a Rakshasi named Taataka who is a celestial nymph cursed to take the form of a demoness. Vishwamitra explained that she has polluted much of the habitat

where the sages reside and there will not be any contentment until she is destroyed. Rama has some reservations about killing a woman, but since Taataka poses such a big threat to the Rishis and he is expected to follow their word, he fought with Taataka and killed her with an arrow. After her death, the surrounding forest became greener and cleaner.

Vishwamitra presented Rama with several astras and sastras that will be of use to him in the future, and Rama masters the knowledge of all the weapons.

Once there was a conference of the Devas in heaven to put forward a complaint against Ravana who was causing untold misery, hardships and menace to them. They have told Brahma that they were unable to subdue, conquer or kill Ravana. He has grown wicked and insolent and ill-treated all even women in the security of Brahma's boon. Devas begged Lord Hari to be born as a man and put an end to Ravana and his atrocities. Lord Hari agreed to be born as the son of King Dasaratha.

It was felt deeply in ancient times that human beings have close affinity with nature. The Ramayana is brimmed with the reflection on supremacy of Nature. Rama's fourteen years of exile and sita's abduction to Lanka have revealed this

point. There is an elaborate account of different landscapes with description of biological and non-biological phenomena. Ecology is the scientific study of the interrelations between living organisms and their environment. Ramayana has strong overtone on supremacy of nature.

Technological advances paved the way for substantial economic growth and many opportunities for individuals to pursue high profits. If one goes through recent history, one can realize that the scientific progress has largely concerned with the improvement of the quality of life through commerce. People dedicated their time and energy towards professional fortune. Hence they did not give any importance to God, family and society.

The interaction between man and nature is quite evident throughout the poem. The very first instance, the source of the epic poem, is the episode of Valmiki cursing a hunter who shot down bird when it was in union with the female counterpart. This suggests the importance attached to the preservation of life in forests. None has been given any right to kill any living things in the vicinity of the *tapovana* or even the forests unless it was absolutely necessary.

The most striking features of the land surface are forests. During the Ramayana period there were dense forests abounded in wild life. A very interesting and eventful part of Rama's life is associated with his wanderings in the dense forests of India. The Ramayana points out that natural vegetation can be classified into forests and grasses.

In Ramayana period preservation of environment was of great importance. Each and every one was very conscious of the utility of forests. Great importance was given to afforestation. The Sundarakanda elucidates the destruction of the prestigious Asoka Garden of Ravana by Hanuman. This enraged the demon king. In the Yudhakanda Hanuman brought Sanjivini Mountains brimmed with medicinal plants and helped the survival of Lakshmana.

The demons and demonesses lived in the forest disturbed its peaceful ambiance. When Rama reached Dandaka forest the sages became happy because he protected them by destroying the demons. Some of them fought with Rama. Surpanakha was living at Janasthana. On account of her

misadventure with Rama and Lakshmana, the entire tribe of rakshasas had to meet with their end.

The characters of Rama and Sita in Ramayana are those of ideal man and woman. Their images exist as an inspiring source of guidance on righteous conduct. Reading about their virtuous lives arouses our consciousness to refine and elevate our own selves. The renunciation, surrender and sacrifices made by Bharatha and Lakshmana for noble causes remain unparalleled in human history and stand as milestones along the path of the evolution of humanity.

The teaching based on Ramayana is the best way for moral education and social reformation of the large number of illiterate and backward people living in the villages of India. The preaching of Ramayana is beneficial for the ideal and social development. Modern man should adopt the ideals of Ramayana in his own life and imbibe the nectar of the lessons from Ramayana for the moral enlightenment, guidance and welfare of the people across the globe.

Nala built a bridge across the sea on the advice of the ocean. The heroes with a large army of monkeys crossed the ocean and reached Lanka. Vibhishana

joined them and told them how to destroy Ravana and his army.

Kumbhakarna, Indrajit and Ravana were killed in battle. Sita was rescued.

Vibhishana was then crowned as king. Sri Rama's kingdom was called Rama

Rajya. During his reign there was righteousness everywhere. Everywhere there

were plenty and prosperity. There were neither dacoits nor thieves. There was

neither disease nor sorrow. There was no cheating in the markets and shops.

There was no adultery. The pilgrims visited the sacred places and shrines

safely. Property and life were quite safe.

Rama also frees Ahalya, the wife of Gautama Maharishi, from a curse. She was

cursed to turn into stone by her husband after a displeasing incident. However,

the dust on Rama's feet touched the stone and turned it back into a woman

again. Gautama Maharishi was gratified that everything was back to normal

again.

Ramayana upholds principles and righteousness and has the foundation for a

family structure. It is a universal and perennial source of knowledge. Hence it

becomes relevant to modern times. The universal principles of Ramayana can

give us a perfect solution for success and minimize any side effects. These

solutions are applicable to individual life, family life, business life and to larger dimensions of social and national issues. It can help us in management and in various other aspects of life of human personality. This is because Ramayana assimilates principles of science and psychology within its broader fold of spirituality and wisdom and thus affords an all-inclusive solution.

Ramayana gives us a message that tears of a woman can destroy a family. If a ruler rules the country without knowing ruling and social service, that country will have the condition of Lanka. Enticed by the beauty of a woman Ravana, treasure house of knowledge and wisdom, destroyed his family and clans.

The essence of the Ramayana can be summed up as the victory of good over evil, virtue over vice. In the Ramayana there are stories within the story which offer valuable lessons. They present every aspect of the ideals of life and living, the true meaning of duty and sacrifice, happiness and sorrow, devotion and selfless service. Lord Rama emerges as the ideal human being performing all the societal roles simultaneously.

The epic gives a message to all that nature is a place for peaceful and pleasurable abode for man of all ages. Nature is not to be trodden by human beings but to be preserved and protected to make it fit for comfortable living of all the beings. The Ramayana presents a great deal of descriptions of nature scenes presenting ideal man and nature interactions. Reading Ramayana from socio-ecological perspective can satisfy the purpose of reminding man about his duties and responsibilities to the 'mother nature' in the vortex of present environmental crisis. The reading of the text also provides man with a scope for orientation for his activities towards the protection as well as preservation of nature for sustainable and ecological living on the earth.