

**Concept Of Formal, Non-Formal And Informal Aspects Of Education
Revealed In Adhyatma Ramayana**

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ABSTRACT

Adhyatma Ramayana is a scientific, vedantic book-which comprises all the basics in Vedanta. It is a masterpiece of Advaita vision. Adhyatma Ramayana was composed for highlighting the spiritual aspect in Valmiki Ramayana. The composition of Adhyatma Ramayana in Sanskrit Version is attributed to various other great souls such as Vyasa, Viswamithra, Vidyanaraya swami, Vararuchi etc. Ezhuthachan's Adhyatma Ramayana is the trans-creation of the work of the Sanskrit version. Kannassa Panikker, Keralavarma Raja and many others have narrated the Ramakatha in Malayalam apart from Ezhuthachan. But the widely accepted version of Ramakatha in Kerala is the 'Adhyatma Ramayanam Kilippattu' of Thunchath Ramanujan Ezhuthachan. It has played a vital role in reviving the spiritual values of the Keralites. Ezhuthachan, the legendary poet of Kerala is known also as the father of Malayalam language and literature. He has opened a new style and venue for Malayalam language and literature by adopting a novel way in the format of language, diction and thought.

1. INTRODUCTION

The message of Ramayana is the integration of different systems of education- formal, informal and non-formal in a natural way to achieve the cherished goals of education. Formal education is given to young men and women in accordance with the curriculum of the hermitage known after the presiding teachers such as Vasishtha, Viswamithra, and Agastya etc. But even after the formal education there is non-formal education through discussions, seminars, function such as 'yagas' and at the assembly of scholars. Most of the Upanishads are the outcomes of such discussions. Education as revealed through Ramayana was systematically and naturally integrated with life and environment so that it is very often difficult to distinguish between formal, non-formal and informal aspects of education. For example Adhyatma Ramayana itself is a narration by Lord Mahadeva to his sweet heart Parvathi Devi who wants to know the secret of Brahman by understanding properly the story of Rama. The glory and sanctity of the story of Rama is clearly illustrated by Mahadeva at the introduction, which is an ideal way of motivation necessary for effective educational process. The greatness of Rama is summarized very effectively for creating full attention and devotion in the student who tries to learn. The whole Ramayana is summarized in nutshell at the introduction. This helps the learner to get a gestalt view of the whole story. If Parvathi Devi herself learns it with great desire and interest from none other than Lord Mahadeva himself who is the teacher of teachers and the master of the Devas. Thus psychologically the introduction is ideal, perfect and very effective. This is a typical example for an effective introduction, which motivates the learner to the fullest.

2. FORMAL EDUCATION

Vasishtha, the great saint conducted the initiation ceremony of Rama and his brothers in accordance with the prescribed rules of Vedas. The content of their education consisted of Vedas, Vedangas (sciences), sub- divisions of sciences, rules of laws, and code of conduct (smrithies). The children learned these subjects very easily without any difficulty. It is wonderful to note that all these lessons are only the breathings of these great ones. This means that true knowledge is the ultimate knowledge, which is related to Brahman or Supreme Lord. For divine children, knowledge is inseparable like breathing and life itself. The education included physical training and warfare also. Education was imparted at the residence of the guru with strict discipline. Vasishtha, the guru was not only a great scholar in vedas and vedangas but also a role model for teachers with the qualities like humility, love and devotion to God. He was devoid of ego, selfishness, jealousy, hatred and desire for worldly pleasures. He is a typical representative of an ideal teacher.

Descriptions of the formal educational institutions are given regarding the ashrams (hermitages) of Bharadwaja, Valmiki, Athri and Suteeshna. From these it can be inferred that there were a large number of hermitages for imparting formal education. The teachers were generally great saints who lived in the deep forest isolated from the society so that the inmates were isolated from worldly pleasures and political disturbances. They lived in constant communion with Nature. These teachers were devoted souls who brought up the children in their own small households. The teacher was a spiritual father to the students. They did not get any rewards or fees, and led a very simple life. Ashrams were ideal places for education, where learning, research and extension work were conducted. These educational institutions guided the activity of rulers by giving advice whenever needed and the whole society including the emperor prostrated before the teacher who was respected equal to God. Women were also given education according to their need and nature. During the journey to forest Sita tells Rama about the duties of a wife and this shows the type of excellent value education imparted in those days, to women.

3. NON- FORMAL EDUCATION

After the formal education, the renowned sage Viswamithra subjected Rama and Lakshmana to an ordeal to see if they could safeguard his Yagna from the demons thereby proving their competency in facing crucial situations. Viswamithra visited Dasaratha and requested him to send Rama and Lakshmana for protecting his Yajna, which was polluted by Rakshasas (demons). The king hesitated at first, because he thought that Rama and Lakshmana were too young to face the demons. Sage Vasishtha advises the king to comply with the request of Viswamithra, who takes the young princes to the deep forest where his hermitage was situated. On the way they meet Thadaka, the terrible demon who obstructs their way and tries to eat them. Viswamithra tells Rama that this Rakshasi (she-demon) is the inhabitant of that part of the forest and nobody can walk through that way because of the fear about her. He requests Rama to kill her. The saint Viswamithra gives them further training and additional knowledge with regard to use of arms and techniques for defense. The capacity of the physical strength and mental stamina of Rama and Lakshmana were verified and their courage and mastery in the use of weapons were manifested in the killing of the demons and protecting the sacrificial fire of sage Viswamithra. The training given by Viswamithra is a typical example of non-formal education. This may be considered as a situational approach followed by comprehensive evaluation of the young ones by a sage, like Viswamithra.

During their journey the young princes feel thirsty and hungry. The sage prescribes some mantras (Bala and Athibala) for quenching the thirst and satisfying the hunger. Finally they reach the

hermitage and the sage reveals the secrets of some divine weapons for defeating the enemies and when he starts his Yajna, the demons appear on the sky and try to pollute the sacred fire by sprinkling blood and dirty materials like bones and lumps of flesh. Rama and Lakshmana face the demons boldly and one of their leaders, Subahu falls dead by the arrow of Rama. When the leader and all the followers are dead another chief namely Mareecha runs away; but wherever he goes the arrow of Rama follows him. When he finds that he cannot escape from Rama's arrow Mareecha implores for pardon at the feet of Rama who spares his life. After a few days, Rama and Lakshmana were taken to the court of Janaka where Rama breaks the heavy Saiva Chapa (Siva's bow), which nobody else was able to raise from the ground till then. With this performance, the training of Rama was completed. It has to be remembered that the great sage Viswamithra wanted to train the princes for facing any situation and to develop self-confidence through his guidance. Dasaratha now knows that his children are not common men but persons with unusual capacity for facing any situation successfully. Non-formal education is very often integrated with life situations as revealed in Ramayana is the 'Lakshmanopadesam' in three phases.: 1. In Ayodhya Kanda, 2. Aranya Kanda, 3. Kishkinda Kanda.

Lakshmana was fully devoted to Rama because he was aware of the greatness and quality of his brother. When the whole of Ayodhya was jubilant at the declaration that Rama would be crowned as the Junior King, Lakshmana was immensely happy. But later when he learns that Rama has to go to the forest for fourteen years and Bharatha will be crowned at the request of Kaikeyi, he becomes very angry. He says 'The King has become very old, insane and henpecked. If injustice is done by anybody, he should be punished even if one is a teacher. Here our father has done an injustice; I will put him in prison and crown you as the successor. I have the capacity to do that'. Uttering these words Lakshmana shivered with anger. Here Rama psychologically addresses him as his 'darling boy' and says that he is fully aware of his capacity and the devotion to his brother. Then he slowly tells him about the illusory and temporary nature of this world with riches and power. He convinces Lakshmana about the mistakes of actions based on emotions especially anger, which makes a man mad and blind so that he may kill even his mother, father and near and dear ones. With a long and convincing illustration he pacifies Lakshmana who accepts the advice of Rama and follows him to the forest.

After going to forest Lakshmana becomes more mature as a result of wide and enduring adverse experiences and understands that temporal knowledge is not valuable. So he wants to acquire Vidya or real knowledge. Very politely he approaches his brother and requests him to educate him on Vidya, and help him to distinguish between Vidya and Avidya. The Secret of the universe, the relationship between body, senses, mind, intellect and Soul; the code of conduct of a cultured person, the details of a disciplined life – all these are clearly illustrated here.

The third stage of advice to Lakshmana occurs in Kishkinda kanda where Lakshmana requests Rama to enlighten him how to worship Rama or God so as to attain Mukthi or liberation. The details of the worship and the spiritual discipline to be followed are given at this stage.

It has to be noted that at the first stage Lakshmana was subjected to emotions of anger, which made him immature. At this stage he was educated how to control his emotions exercising intellect. When Lakshmana became more mature he became deserving to know about real knowledge and how to be free from ignorance. At the third stage Lakshmana wanted to know the path to attain salvation. Here the educational principle of 'as you have so you are given' is highlighted. This is a typical example of non-formal education based on the need and aptitude of the individual. Plenty of

examples of effective non-formal education are available in Adhyatma Ramayana, which represent how non-formal education plays an important role in education. Some of them are stated below.

1. The conversation between Rama and Bharatha: When Bharatha understands that Rama has gone to forest renouncing the Kingdom, he is very much grieved and goes to the forest and implores Rama to come back to Ayodhya and rule the country. Rama convinces Bharatha here with logical arguments that they have to fulfill the promise of their father.

2. The meeting and the discourse with Sabari: Sabari was a devotee of Rama who had been worshipping Rama for a long time expecting his arrival. She was given enlightenment regarding the greatness of sincere devotion and as a result of this enlightenment she attained salvation.

3. The advice to Bali, Thara and Sugreeva: When the arrow of Rama hit Bali, he fell down and asked Rama 'why are you sending the arrow by hiding behind a tree, like an uncivilized forest dweller'. Bali denounces the righteousness in the action of Rama. To this question and the other complaints Rama gives convincing answers. Bali had committed a great sin by capturing the wife of his younger brother Sugreeva and driving him off the kingdom. According to Indian ideal Daughters, sisters, sister-in-laws or daughter-in-laws are equal to mother; so anybody who attempts to have immoral attachment with women of such categories is a great sinner. 'You have behaved like an animal by owning your brother's wife. Animals are hunted and so are you'. This convinces Bali who realizes his mistakes, repents and seeks salvation by the blessings of Rama.

At the death of Bali his wife, Thara is lost in grief and she weeps loudly. She requests Rama to kill her too because she believes that there is no life without her husband. Rama approaches, Thara and consoles her by imparting spiritual knowledge. After hearing the realities of life, Thara is freed from her sorrow originated from her ignorance and then attains solace. After consoling Thara Rama instructs Sugreeva, what he has to do as a King. Angada, son of Bali should be crowned as the heir and the people tended properly. The country should be safeguarded on the basis of ethical codes and the accepted values of the Society. The problems faced by Bali, Thara and Sugreeva were quite different. But Rama helped them to solve their problems by proper counselling. From this, it is clear that the same teacher should deal in different ways to solve the problems of different persons according to their situations and needs. The natural way in which the problems of different persons are solved is clear from these examples. In short this shows that the non-formal education should be natural, systematic, and psychologically suitable to the learner and socially integrated with the situation.

4. Guidance given to Hanuman by Jambavan: The army of monkeys was deputed in search of Sita Devi. Four batches were sent in four directions. The most capable persons were sent in the direction of South because of the inference that Devi might be in Lanka, which is located in the South. Angada, Hanuman, Jambavan, Nalan, Neelan and such mighty and wise leaders were included in the group despatched to the South. In the long run they reached the seashores of the South. If they return without seeing Devi, Sugreeva will execute them. So the monkeys lay fasting on the coast in disappointment. No-body was confident of jumping the gap of 100 'yojanas' of ocean between India and Lanka. Everybody was frustrated. Hanuman was also sitting without confidence. At that moment Jambavan came forward and addressed Hanuman. 'Are you not Aanjaneya, the embodiment of physical and mental strength? Don't you know that, you are the embryo developed in the womb of Dakshayani as the son of Mahesha himself? Why do you stay at the level of an ordinary monkey? What is impossible for you? Arise, awake and do your duty. Remember, Rama gave his ring to you for handing over it to Sita Devi? Don't you know that even

at your birth you jumped up to swallow the sun?'. This revelation helped Hanuman to gain insight. After having realized his potential, he grew up to the sky, roared aloud and jumped over the sea to Lanka. After the guidance of Jambavan, Hanuman has played his role in a heroic way. This is a typical example of effective non-formal education known as guidance. This example is a model for explaining the principle of guidance in modern pedagogy classes.

5. Statement of Sampathy or Sampathy Vakyam: When the monkeys were lying on the seashore, completely disappointed, Sampathy, the brother of Jadayu came there and advised them what to do. The narration of Sampathy regarding the birth of a child, growth and participation in the worldly life is a scientific and systematic narration. Finally he advises to renounce the desires related to the worldly life and live happily as a self-realized soul, free from the charms of the pseudo- pleasures of the world. He also told them that Sita Devi was in Lanka because, he could see far and wide clearly as a kite. Sampathy persuades the monkeys to fulfill their duty very boldly.

4. INFORMAL EDUCATION

The importance of informal education is evident in Adhyatma Ramayana. Rama is wedded strongly to moral values and Dharma, because he sees his father himself as a role model. Ravana has a negative approach in life because his mother herself tells him to take revenge on Kubera, his half-brother and Devas. There are several instances like these, which show that informal education has a great role in the development of personality of the individual. Some of them are mentioned below.

1. When Rama starts from Ayodhya to the forest Kousalya is completely in woe. Then he reminds his mother about the duties of a devoted wife and creates self-confidence.

2. Sita convinces Rama that it is her duty to accompany Rama wherever he goes. So in setting out for the journey to the forest she will be in front because it is the duty of a wife to share the sorrows and happiness of the husband.

3. Advice of Sumitra to her son Lakshmana to accompany Rama to the forest considering Rama as Dasaratha, Sita as Sumitra and forest as Ayodhya.

4. Vibheeshana, Kumbakarna, Mandodari and Malyavan advised Ravana to give Sita back to Rama and save himself and Lanka from destruction. But he did not accept their advice. This results in his complete destruction. Hence the generalization that, when misfortune approaches advices of good people will not be acceptable is well demonstrated.

5. When Vibheeshana requests for the protection, Sugreeva does not believe him and tries to punish him on the ground that demons cannot be trusted. But Hanuman says that good people are in every sector. Hence the generalization that a whole group is bad is illogical. Rama accepts this argument.

5. CONCLUSION

It is to be noted that the education is completely integrated with social and natural environment with a view to achieve the ultimate goal namely self-realization. In this process there was no contradiction between the experiences gained from home, society and educational institution. Hence education was completely integrated with situations in life. When education is isolated from the reality of life and society, it becomes meaningless to the students. Very often in our society there are contradictions and clashes in the ideas gained from formal, informal and non-formal approaches. Maladjustment and personality clashes are created when the home, school and peer groups have different and opposing approaches and concepts. Deterioration of values is mainly due to the lack of conviction in the value system. The conflicts, corruption, dehumanization, fissiparous

tendencies, selfishness, violence, jealousy and intolerance are mainly due to the contradictions which an individual faces among formal, informal and non-formal agencies of education. Since the aim of life and education are the same, experience gained by the individual from informal, non-formal or formal situations of learning should be supplementary and complimentary with each other.

6. REFERENCE

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