

|| ŚRĪ SĪTĀ-RĀMO'SAU SADĀ VIJAYATE ||

Neither did Śrī Rāma, The Supreme Absolute Truth, the embodiment of all bliss, reject Sītā from being His wife nor did Śrīmatī Sītā-devī, His eternal consort, reject Him as her husband and lord for even a moment as is evident from the most authentic versions available of Śrīmad Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa. Hence when there is no rejection from either side and only the deepest love and affection which has only further deepened and taken the form of pangs of separation (on account of being (apparently) physically separated because of an adverse situation), even on earth how can this be viewed as divorce.

There is of course unfounded propaganda that Rāma is unjust based on incomplete or perverted versions of this episode by various categories of the misinformed, to wit. the atheists, feminists, socialists and so on. On the other hand there are scholars (and at least one Ramanandi, Śrī Tulasi Pīṭhādhiśvar Jagadguru Ramanandācārya Rāmabhadracāryaji) that say that the whole Uttara-kāṇḍa is a later interpolation falsely ascribed to Vālmiki. I don't think this claim is true but as of now cannot prove conclusively its falsity. But surely it can be easily shown that even the Uttara-kāṇḍa as available to us does not foster such a notion if taken in entirety.

Of all fantasies that lead to this misgiving it must be the following that are at the very root. 1) **That Rāma, just on overhearing the words of a washerman's reproachful conversation with his wife, decided to banish Sītā.** 2) **That Rāma banished Sītā and had Lakṣmaṇa abandon her in the wilderness of some remote forest infested with wild animals.**

Often paying heed to details helps see through the smoke. Let us consider these one by one in association with details provided in the Uttara-kāṇḍa of Vālmiki-Rāmāyaṇa.

The first one serves to extenuate the very situation that necessitated their apparent physical separation. Yes it was only physical separation. This time there was no Rāvaṇa but a formidable situation in the way of Rāma's being the spotless emperorr of His beloved subjects. The perspective of Rāma from which to respond to a situation of such gravity may hardly occur to us who are part of today's hedonistic world.

In the 43rd sarga (chapter) of the Uttara-kāṇḍa we find Śrī Rāma asking one of His attendants Bhadra to tell him what the citizens and the village folk say about Him, about His wife Śrīmatī Sītā-devī. about Lakṣmaṇa, Bharata, Śatrughna and about mother Kaikeyī, and His own mother. "...kāṇ kathā nagare bhadra vartante viṣayeṣu ca || ...kiṃ nu mātaram| vaktavyatām ca rājānaḥ vane rājye vrajanti ca ||" <7:43:4-6>. To this, attendant Bhadra replies that there is mostly talk of Your victory over Rāvaṇa, the ten headed demon. But Rāma asks him again saying "...kathayasva yathā tattvaṃ sarvaṃ niravaśeṣataḥ ||" ('tell me everything without spare') <7:43:9>, as if to dig something out of him. Bhadra comes up with a more detailed list (7:43:13-19) and at last mentions the issue about Sītā (17-19): "kīdṛṣaṃ hrdaye tasya sītā-bhogajaṃ sukham | aṅkam āropya tu purā rāvaṇena balāddhṛtām || 17 || laṅkāṃ api purā nītāṃ aśoka-vanikāṃ gatāṃ | rakṣasāṃ vaśam āpannāṃ kathāṃ rāmo na kutsyati || 18 || asmākaṃ api dareṣu sahanīyaṃ bhaviṣyati | yathā hi kurute rājā prajāṃ tam anuvartate || 19 ||" ("How is it that Rāma does not reject Sītā in spite of Rāvaṇa having carried Her away by force to Laṅkā and She having stayed there in the Aśoka grove under the custody of the

demons?. We would also have to become similarly lenient with our wives. It is only natural that the subjects follow the example the king.”). At this Śrī Rāma was heartbroken and appearing to be in the deepest distress (paramārtavat) asked all the other counselors if this was true. All of them got down on their knees and bowed their heads touching the floor and replied to the already afflicted Śrī Rama saying yes this is so. Lord Śrī Rāma dispersed the assembly. Then having come to a conclusion, with a heavy heart summoned Lakṣmaṇa, Bharata and Śatrughna. While announcing His decision to them with eyes laden with tears He also speaks about Sītā's purity reminding them how it was proven by Her entering the agni and coming out unscathed, how Vāyu himself had announced from the sky and how the Sun and the Moon had attested to it in the presence of all the demigods and sages and how He had always known by Himself of Her purity and flawlessness (‘antarātmā ca me vetti sītāṁ śuddhāṁ yaśasvinīm’ <7:44:10>). He then explains the allegations heard from the citizens which have brought about the helpless situation to rescue which it has become necessary to give up Sītā. If the people are lead astray and become lax and groundless in dharma on account of their King defamed by allegations (even false ones), then, Śrī Rāma says, He knows nothing (even giving up His own life or one of His brothers or Sītā) to be more miserable than that (‘nahi paśyāmy ahaṁ bhūtaṁ kiñcid duḥkham ato ’dhikam’ <7:44:16>). Such are the standards of Vedic polity as shown by Lord Śrī Rāma and Kings akin to Him.

Hence we see that it was only after fervent deliberation that Lord Śrī Rāma had to resort to such a solution. He may have also gone Himself in disguise and heard the washerman speak but He took decision only after confirming it from all the counselors that such allegations that rob His image as their ideal King are widespread among the masses.

The second one can also be similarly clarified by simply looking at the actual verses (7:45: 16,17,18 which recount Rāma's words when He is asking Lakṣmaṇa to leave Sītā at Sage Vālmiki's Āśrama. (“...śvastāṁ prabhāte saumitre sumantrādhiṣṭhitaṁ ratham||.....viṣayānte samutsrjya | gaṅgāyāstu pare pāre vālmikestu mahātmanaḥ || āśramo divya-saṅkāśaś tamasātīramāśritaḥ | tatraitāṁ vijane deśe.....”). Hence Sītā was not banished into wild animal infested forest wilderness but placed under the care of Sage Vālmiki.

Just before Śrī Rāma entered the assembly where He heard the allegations, He was with Sītā. Knowing that She was pregnant Rāma was asking if She cherished any desires which He could fulfill (7:42:32,33). This as a custom can be seen even today in Bhārata that all the family members, especially the husband, strive to fulfill all the desires of a pregnant woman. Mother Sītā expressed Her desire to visit the āśramas of the sages located on the pleasant, beautiful, lush green banks of the Gaṅgā and serve them staying there for some time(7:42:33,34,35) and Rāma had agreed (7:42:35,36). Hence when it became necessary for Him to send Her away Rāma chose to leave Her there (7:45:23).

No where is it mentioned or left to infer that Lord Śrī Rāma didn't want Sītā for His wife or vice-versa. Sītā's words in this connection, when she was finally informed by Lakṣmaṇa on reaching the other shore of the Gaṅgā, of what had befallen, are recorded in the verses 7:48:2-19. Verses 12-28 which form Her message to Rāma are to be highlighted and

|| ŚRĪ SĪTĀ-RĀMO'SAU SADĀ VIJAYATE ||

the verses 12 and 13 need special attention. From them anyone would know there is no question of their bond as couple being broken. On actually hearing those words from Mother Sītā even a stone hearted person would melt with all his faculties of speech and expression arrested.

Morover personally Śatrughna was at Vālmiki's āśrama on the occasion of the birth of Lava and Kuśa (7:65and 66).

When Rāma asks Bhadra as to what the subjects speak about Him and so on in sarga 43, in the last half of the sixth verse He uses the word 'vaktavyatām'. Although it can be translated as "the state of being a subject matter to be spoken about or against" here the meaning is seen to lean more towards the derogatory side of it. So the verse half amounts to mean 'Kings are often the subject matter of (loose) talk of both the citizens and those that dwell in the forests'. Then again after 3 verses He asks Bhadra "...kathayasva yathā tattvaṁ sarvaṁ niravaśeṣataḥ ||"as if exactly looking for something particular. It is believed that He intended to dig out those very allegations Himself so that His separation from Sītā as per the curse of Bhṛgu can be brought about. The story behind the curse is roughly as follows. Once when in battle the demigods, with the help of Lord Viṣṇu, vanquished the demon army, some of the demons sought shelter at the āśrama of Bhṛgu's wife, mother of Śukrācārya. She accepted to give them shelter. Then when Indra arrived there in search of those demons she refused to allow him harm them as they were sheltered by her. She threatened to curse him. So he left and approached Lord Nārāyaṇa to request Him to act on the situation. When Lord Viṣṇu arrived there she told Him also that they were under her shelter and that it would be inappropriate for Him to kill them. So it became necessary that she be killed first. The dharma-sūkṣma behind this act is easy to understand. After accomplishing this by His Sudarshana-cakra Lord Viṣṇu killed all the demons hiding in the āśrama. When sage Bhṛgu saw his beloved wife lying dead he was overcome by grief and cursed Viṣṇu that He too would have to suffer separation from His wife. Lord Viṣṇu willingly accepted the curse. The separation of Lord Śrī Rama and Sītā was in this way predestined as a consequence of that. Sumantra relates this fact, as he heard it from a conversation between King Daśaratha and Dūrvāsa, to Lakṣmaṇa on his return journey to Ayodhyā after having left Sītā at Vālmiki's āśrama (in the verses 7:51:10-18).

In this way all this can be seen as brought about by Rāma's own will. But for this prelude, such a blemish on the citizens of instigating the painful episode of Sītā-viyoga becomes a difficult pill to swallow. Their love for Śrī Rāmā is conspicuous in Rāmāyaṇa. Here is a verse describing the mindset of even a common man in the kingdom of Lord Rāma in a way as simple, beautiful and complete that would be difficult to describe even by long essays. **yaś ca rāmaṁ na paśyet tu yaṁ ca rāmo na paśyati | ninditaḥ sa bhavet loke svātmāpyenaṁ vigarhate ||** "Such a person who does not see Rāma or whom Rāma does not see is despicable not just to the outside world but to his very own self!".

The following verse from the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam speaks of Lord Rāma, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa on the platform of the Absolute truth, as relished by the self-realized and without

|| ŚRĪ SĪTĀ-RĀMO'SAU SADĀ VIJAYATE ||

the ultimately unnecessary effort to prove the flawlessness of Lord Rāma's actions in terms of their conformity with mundane conceptions of propriety.

na vai sa ātmātmavatām suhṛttamaḥ saktas tri-lokyām bhagavān vāsudevaḥ |

na strī-kṛtaṁ kaśmalam aśnuvīta na lakṣmaṇaṁ cāpi vihātum arhati ||

“(Translation by Śrīla Prabhupāda) Since Lord Śrī Rāmacandra is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Vāsudeva, He is not attached to anything in this material world. He is the most beloved Supersoul of all self-realized souls, and He is their very intimate friend. He is full of all opulences. Therefore He could not possibly have suffered because of separation from His wife, nor could He have given up His wife and Lakṣmaṇa, His younger brother. To give up either would have been absolutely impossible.” (SB 5.19.6)

It is commonplace that people with world views of very limited perspectives try to drag the completely independant , majestic Absolute truth down to their level and in the process severely distort it. For instance, there was one mātāvadī who was asking ‘how to understand that the Bhakti stance of accepting that there are real differences between the individual soul and the Supersoul, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, is not Schizophrenia!’. Of course there is no end to the number of such misunderstandings. And getting down to their level to answer them may be tantamount to acceptance of such perspectives. On the other hand reasoning it out only as much as the valid pramāṇas provide as was the question put here with a request to stick to references is definitely very healthy and should be welcome. Thank you very much for engaging me in this service.

(If it is some Anna DMK Karunanidhi fellow that is asking this then it can be settled simply by saying : “Well, it is not a divorce because it is not covered under *Indian Divorce Act, 1869* or under *The Parsi Marriage and Divorce Act, 1936* or under *Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act, 1939* or under *Special Marriage act, 1954*. Not to speak of the *Hindu Marriage act, 1955*. Nor are the grounds for divorce stipulated under these or any other national or international acts met.”

The svārasya in this is understood on the background of Karunanidhi (The dishonourable chiefminister of Tamilnadu)’s anachronistic remark that Rāma could not have built a bridge across the ocean simply because he did not qualify as an engineer from the IITs or one of such other Universities.)