
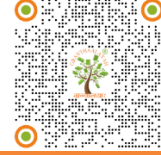


Original Article

## SRI RAMAKATHAMRTA SARA AN ANALYSIS

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### ABSTRACT

As a testament to the benediction of Brahmā to Vālmīki that the story of Śrī Rāma would flourish as long as the mountains and rivers exist, innumerable literary works on the life of Śrī Rāma by the poets of yore as well as those of contemporary poets continue to sanctify this world. The huge stock of Rāmāyaṇa based poems is further enriched by the Śrī-Rāmakathāmṛta-sāra, a recently composed devotional poem in the form of an abridgement of the Rāmāyaṇa. The author of this work, Śrī Kṛṣṇa Premī Svāmigaḷ (1934-2023) was one of the greatest exponents of bhakti-sampradāya of the 20th and the early 21st century, who has to his credit, over a dozen Sanskrit works belonging to different genres such as kāvyas, stotras, philosophical texts etc. Each of these are noted for their poetic richness and the profound devotional fervour.

### INTRODUCTION

As a testament to the benediction of Brahmā to Vālmīki that the story of Śrī Rāma would flourish as long as the mountains and rivers exist<sup>1</sup>, innumerable literary works on the life of Śrī Rāma by the poets of yore as well as those of contemporary poets continue to sanctify this world. The huge stock of Rāmāyaṇa based poems is further enriched by the Śrī-Rāmakathāmṛta-sāra, a recently composed devotional poem in the form of an abridgement of the Rāmāyaṇa. The author of this work, Śrī Kṛṣṇa Premī Svāmigaḷ (1934-2023) was one of the greatest exponents of bhakti-sampradāya of the 20th and the early 21st century, who has to his credit, over a dozen Sanskrit works belonging to different genres such as kāvyas, stotras, philosophical texts etc. Each of these are noted for their poetic richness and the profound devotional fervour.

Śrī-Rāmakathāmṛta-sāra is not only an abridgement of the Rāmāyaṇa, but also an exposition of the philosophy of bhakti and the tenets of bhakti-mārga through the glorious life of Śrī Rāma. It reflects a profound impact of theistic commentators on the Rāmāyaṇa such as Govindarāja as well as that of various Vaiṣṇava-ācārya-s. It consists of 105 verses set in different metres such as śārdūlavikriḍita, mandākrāntā, śikhariṇī and upajāti.

<sup>1</sup> यावत्स्थास्यन्ति गिरयः सरितश्च महीतले ।

तावद् रामायणकथा लोकेषु प्रचरिष्यति ॥ (Vālmīki-Rāmāyaṇa. 1.2.36)

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The poet commences, stating that the very purpose of Viṣṇu's descent as Śrī Rāma, a mortal was to instil devotion towards him in men through his transcendental pastimes<sup>2</sup>. Rāmāyaṇa is also mentioned as a portrayal of various bhakti-s such as piṭṛ-bhakti, pati-bhakti, etc. Lakṣmaṇa, Śrī Rāma, Sītā, the subjects of Kosala, Sumantra, Sugrīva, Jaṭāyu and Rāvaṇa are stated as examples of bhāṭṛ-bhakti, piṭṛ-bhakti, pati-bhakti, rāja-bhakti, svāmi-bhakti, mitra-bhakti, prema-bhakti and śatru-bhakti respectively<sup>3</sup>.

Following the line of Vaiṣṇava preceptors, the poet regards the Rāmāyaṇa as a scripture of the bhakti-mārga and enlists characters from the Rāmāyaṇa as examples of the nine forms of bhakti. He says, "Śrī Rāma himself set an example of sraṇa, his sons of kīrtana, while Sītā exhibited smaraṇa. Bharata was an example of pādasevana, Sabarī was that of arcana, Hanūmān was that of dāśya, Sumantra of vandana, Vibhiṣaṇa of ātmanivedana and Sugrīva of sakhyā<sup>4</sup>.

Texts on the philosophy of bhakti define bhakti as "ultimate love towards God"<sup>5</sup> which necessitates the establishment of the divinity of Śrī Rāma to make him the object of such devotion. The poet therefore enlists a few instances from the Rāmāyaṇa which betray the divinity of Śrī Rāma such as 'the redemption of Ahalyā', 'the breaking of Śiva's bow', 'disempowering Parasurāma', 'the delusion of the citizens of Ayodhyā', 'granting liberation to Jaṭāyu', 'curbing the pride of Varuṇa' and 'Śrī Rāma allowing himself to be bound by the brahmāstra'<sup>6</sup>. The poet establishes Śrī Rāma as Bhagavān i.e who possesses the six bhaga-s or opulences viz. Dispassion, freedom, fame, prosperity, overlordship and dharma by citing instances from the Rāmāyaṇa that illustrate the opulences. He says, "Your dispassion was exhibited when you left for the forest. With Sītā as your inseparable self, you possess prosperity. You bestowed liberation upon Jaṭāyu, the vulture. Your battle with Rāvaṇa bears testimony to your fame. Your inclination towards dharma is well known. Your overlordship is known from your being worshipped by the hosts of Devas. You are therefore none other than Bhagavān"<sup>7</sup>.

The poet further refers to Śrī Rāma as the bestower of the four Puruṣārthas, viz. dharma, artha, kāma and mokṣa. He says, "Śrī Rāma imparted dharma through many of his conversations. He bestowed mokṣa upon several pious beings during the course of his exile. He bestowed kāma upon Sugrīva by fulfilling his desire and artha upon Vibhiṣaṇa by making him the king of Laṅkā<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>2</sup>लीलानाट्यनिदर्शनेन कृपया लोकस्य भक्तिं परां दातुं मानुषभावमेत्य चरतो नानाविधां ते कथाम्।

कः शक्नोति तवामलञ्च हृदयं ज्ञातुं जगत्यद्भुतं ब्रह्मेन्द्रादिसमस्तदेवनिकरैर्नाद्यापि यन्निश्चितम्॥ (Śrī-Rāmakathāmrta-sāra.6)

<sup>3</sup>सौमित्रेर्भातृभक्तिर्दशरथसुत ते तातभक्तिश्च देव्याः सीताया भर्तृभक्तिः सुखयति हृदयं राजभक्तिर्जनानाम्।

सूतस्य स्वामिभक्तिर्महिरकुलनिधे मित्रभक्तिः कपेश्च गृध्रस्य प्रेमभक्तिर्निश्चिरपतेः शत्रुभक्तिश्च राम॥ (ibid.92)

It is noteworthy that the poet considers even Rāvaṇa as a covert devotee who chose to secretly worship her while outwardly threatening her, only to incur your anger -

नारी कामपि कामुको यदि हरेः शीर्णं भवेत्ते शिरस्त्वेवं पदमभुवापि दत्तमहितं शापं स्मरन् रावणः।

सीतां भक्तियुतो भजन् प्रतिदिनं ध्यायन् सदा मातृवत् त्वत्कोपं समवाप्तुकाम इव तां सन्तर्जयामास च॥ (ibid.78)

<sup>4</sup>चारित्रश्रवणे स्वयं रघुपतिः सङ्कीर्तने तत्सुतौ सीता च स्मरणे तदङ्घ्रिभजने कैकेयिपुत्रोऽप्यभूत्।

पूजायां शबरौ प्रबञ्जनसुतो दास्ये सुमन्त्रो नतौ सर्वस्वात्मनिवेदने निश्चिरः सख्ये प्लवङ्गाधिपः॥ (ibid.96)

<sup>5</sup>सा परानुरक्तिरीश्वरे॥ (Śaṇḍilya-bhakti-sūtra.1.1.2)

<sup>6</sup>नारीशापविमोचनाच्छिवधनुर्भङ्गाद् भृगुस्तम्भनात् पौराणाञ्चविमोहनात्खगपतेर्मोक्षप्रदानादपि।

नीलाम्भोनिधिरुद्धर्पदमनाद्ब्रह्मास्त्रसंमाननात् नानारूपनिदर्शनात्प्रकटितं लोके रहस्यं तव॥ (ibid.12)

<sup>7</sup>वैराग्यं विपिनप्रयाणसमये सीतामनन्यां श्रियं गृध्रस्यापि विमोक्षदानमतुलं पौलस्त्ययुद्धे यशः।

धर्मं चापि रतिं सुरैश्च निखिलैः सेव्यत्वमेतादृशं चैश्वर्यं च विलोक्य वच्मि भगवान् श्रीराम एव स्वयम्॥ (ibid.93)

<sup>8</sup>संवादैर्बहुभिः स्वधर्ममहिमा साकेतधाम्नि स्तुतः

कान्तारे चरता त्वया करुणया मोक्षश्च दत्तः सताम्।

सुग्रीवाय समाश्रिताय सहसा कामो वितीर्णः प्रभो

हयर्थश्चापि विभिषणाय विहितो हत्वा च लङ्कापतिम्॥(ibid.12)

Of the endless auspicious qualities of Bhagavān enlisted by the Vaiṣṇava saints, the most important ones are the eight viz. *saundarya* (elegance), *sauśilya* (courtesy), *saualabhya* (accessibility), *gāmbhīrya* (profundity), *audārya* (magnanimity), *vātsalya* (parental affection), *ārjava* (straightforwardness) and *kāruṇya* (compassion). The poet recalls these qualities of Śrī Rāma with respect to various characters. The poet refers to Janaka, Daśaratha, Guha, the presiding deity of the ocean, Vibhīṣaṇa, Hanumān and Śūrpaṇakhā as testament to the qualities of elegance, courtesy, accessibility, profundity, magnanimity, motherly love and straightforwardness. At last, he calls himself as the recipient of the Lord's compassion<sup>9</sup>.

While referring to the auspicious qualities of Śrī Rāma, the poet also takes into account a few instances from the epic over which ethical questions are raised by cynics. The poet disproves the aspersions by establishing such acts of Śrī Rāma as transcendental *līlā*s of Śrī Rāma either to indirectly confer his grace or with a view to instruct mankind. This is effectively achieved through the use of *alamkāras* such as *utprekṣā* and *nidarśanā*. For instance, in the case of *vāli-vadha*, the poet gives various reasons in defence of the killing of Vālin by Śrī Rāma. He refers to *vāli-vadha* as a self-inflicted censure by the Lord to establish in the universe that a single blemish amidst several excellences does not diminish a person's reverence<sup>10</sup>. He further states that, Śrī Rāma perhaps chose the pretext of hunting to eliminate Vālin, since waging a war with him would have resulted in the destruction of the monkeys who were divine incarnations born only to render service unto Śrī Rāma<sup>11</sup>. Referring to the idea of the Gods rewarding fruits of man's *karmā* invisibly, the poet says that Śrī Rāma must have forgotten his mortal role and must have punished Vālin by remaining out of his sight as that was his true nature as the God.<sup>12</sup>

The poet states that Śrī Rāma's allowing himself to be bound by the *nāgāstra* and the *brahmāstra* were purely intended to reveal the greatness of devotees viz. Garuḍa and Hanumān<sup>13</sup>. According to the poet, Sītā's fire ordeal too was permitted by Śrī Rāma only to establish the greatness of Sītā for Śrī Rāma must have been fully aware that the fire cannot consume Sītā whose compassion turned the fire of Hanumān's tail cold<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> सौन्दर्यं जनकाय तातसविधे सौशील्यमादर्शितं  
सौलभ्यञ्च गुहाय वारिनिधये गाम्भीर्यमत्यद्भुतम्।  
औदार्यञ्च विभीषणाय कपये वात्सल्यमप्यार्जवं  
राक्षस्यै च मयि प्रभो रघुपते कारुण्यमव्याजतः॥ (ibid.88)

<sup>10</sup> नानासद्गुणसंयुतोऽपि मनुजे दोषोऽपि संदृश्यते  
तस्मात्तस्य तु पूज्यता तु भुवने न प्राप्नुयात् संक्षयम्।  
एवं दर्शयता वधस्तु विहितः सुग्रीवशत्रोस्त्वया  
लीलामानुषविग्रहस्य भवतः को वेद गुह्यं परम्॥ (ibid. 54)

<sup>11</sup> देवानां कपिरूपिणां रचयितुं साहाय्यमेवात्मनो  
जातानां निधनं भवेद्यदि रणं कुर्यामहं वालिना।  
मत्त्वैवं निहतस्त्वया हि मृगयाधर्मेण शक्रात्मजः  
स्वामिंस्ते हृदयं प्रगल्भममलं जाने कृपासागरः॥ (ibid. 55)

<sup>12</sup> देवः कर्मफलं ददाति हि नृणां पारोक्ष्यमाश्रित्य हि  
त्वं देवोसि मनुष्यनाटककरो विस्मृत्य वेषं त्वया।  
स्वाभाव्यं तव चेष्टितं हि भुवने सन्दर्शितं वालिनः  
पारोक्ष्येण वधेन राघवरविर्भात्येव मेघावृतः॥ (ibid. 58)

<sup>13</sup> भक्तानां भवबन्धमोचनकरस्यैवं भुजङ्गेन च  
ब्रह्मास्त्रेण च बन्धने तव विभो किं कारणं मे वद।  
पक्षीन्द्रस्य च मारुतेश्च विभवं भक्तोत्तमस्यादरात्।  
लोके दर्शयितुं कृपाजलनिधे बद्धोऽभवंस्त्वं स्वयम्॥(ibid. 72)

<sup>14</sup> यत्कारुण्यरसेन पूर्वमनलः शीतोऽभवन्मारुतेः  
दग्धुं तञ्च विदेहराजतनयामग्निः कथं शक्नुयात्।

As far as the episode of Sītā-tyāga is concerned, the poet asserts the incident was a mere līlā as Sītā, who is Śrī is inseparable from Śrī Rāma<sup>15</sup>. He further states that the whole episode of Sītā-tyāga was enacted only to establish that the story of Śrī Rāma confers sovereignty (sāmrajya) even upon the destitute through the example of his own son who were raised as kuśīlava-s<sup>16</sup>.

The poet considers the fire in Laṅkā was a direct consequence of bhāgavatāpacāra in the form of offending Hanumān, the greatest devotee of Śrī Rāma<sup>17</sup>. As far as the greatness of bhakti is concerned, the poet refers to the ability of Hanumān to cross the ocean as a result of his devotion towards the one who enables men to cross over the ocean of saṁsāra<sup>18</sup>.

The Vālmīki-Rāmāyaṇa clearly speaks of Dasaratha ascending the svarga after his demise. This leads to a very pertinent question as to “if the name of Rāma is the tāraka mantra that bestows liberation, why was not Dasaratha who gave up his life in grief upon being separated from Śrī Rāma?” To this our poet says, “If a sinful Ajāmila could attain mokṣa for uttering the name of Nārāyaṇa unwittingly, does your father not deserve? It is by his own choice that he resides in svarga, only to witness your coronation”<sup>19</sup>.

It is also noteworthy that the episode of vibhiṣaṇa-śaraṇāgati which is considered as a perfect example of the doctrine of prapatti is described in an extraordinary manner by highlighting the six aṅgas of śaraṇāgati viz. ānukūlyasya saṅkalpa (to conduct oneself in a manner that pleases the Lord), prātikūlyasya varjanam (avoidance of things that are contrary to the pleasure of the Lord), rakṣiṣyatīti viśvāsa (conviction that the Lord will protect), goptrtva varaṇa (seek the Lord’s protection), ātma-nikṣepa (surrendering oneself) and kārpaṇya (the feeling of helplessness). The poet says, “Considering the service unto the feet of Śrī Rāma anukūla and abandoning his kinsmen who were opposed to it, with faith in the Lord who protects the three worlds, the humble Vibhiṣaṇa took refuge in the Lord and attained great felicity.”<sup>20</sup>

एवं वेति तथापि देव भुवने माहात्म्यमस्या भवान्  
ऊरीकर्तुमवाप कोपमधिकं भूत्वा कृपावारिधिः॥(ibid. 74)

<sup>15</sup> लोकाराधनकारणेन दयितात्यागश्च रक्षोगृहे  
वासश्चापि ददाति दुःखममितं लोके कथां शृण्वताम्।  
सा हि श्रीरमृता कदापि भगवन्न त्वां जहाति प्रभो  
लीलामात्रमिदं स्मरामि निखिलं देव्याश्चरित्रं त्वहम्॥(ibid. 79)

<sup>16</sup> दूनानामपि पुण्यरामकथया सामान्यसिद्धिर्भवेद्-  
इत्यर्थं भुवने प्रदर्शितुमहो निश्चित्य पुत्रेण हि।  
सीतां प्रेषितवानसीति विपिने पूर्वं मुनेराश्रमं  
मन्ये मूढजनापवाददुरितव्याजेन सीतापते॥ (ibid. 80)

<sup>17</sup> वालाग्रस्थितवह्निना रघुपते दूतस्य ते मारुतेः  
दग्धाभूद्रजनीचरेन्द्रनगरीत्येवं प्रथा कित्वहम्।  
मन्ये तादृशवैभवं दशमुखाद्भीतस्य नास्तीति च  
स्वामिंस्तावक किङ्कराय विहितं पापं ददाह स्वयम्॥(ibid. 63)

<sup>18</sup> यन्नामस्मरणेन केवलमहो संसारवारान्निधिं  
तीर्त्वा यान्ति परं पदं रघुपते वाञ्छन्ति यदयोगिनः।  
दूतस्ते लवणाम्बुधिं परिमितं त्वद्भक्तमुख्यस्त्वयं  
क्रीडन्नेव ततार वायुतनयः किं चित्रमत्र प्रभो॥(ibid. 61)

<sup>19</sup> पुत्रव्याजकृतातु नामभजनात् संप्राप मुक्तिं परां  
पापी कश्चिदजामिलोऽपि भगवन् किं ते पिता नार्हति।  
स्वच्छन्दं नृपतिः प्रियं सुतवरं पट्टाभिषिक्तं प्रभो  
द्रष्टुं त्वामिह काङ्क्षया निवसति स्वर्गे सुरैरर्चितः॥(ibid. 30)

<sup>20</sup> त्वत्पादाम्बुजसेवनं रघुपते सर्वानुकूलं त्विति

Apart from Vibhiṣaṇa, the poet considers the brothers of Śrī Rāma as ideal prapanna-s representing the different approaches to prapatti. The two main approaches to prapatti are characterized by effort on the part of prapanna in pleasing the Lord by following the scriptural injunction and complete surrender to the protective grace of the Lord with no effort on the part of the individual. These are illustrated through the analogies of the baby monkey that holds the mother tightly (markaṭa-kiśora-nyāya) and that of the kitten that is carefully held by the mother cat (mārjāra-kiśora-nyāya). According to the poet Lakṣmaṇa represented the first approach and Bharata, the latter. Śatrughna is said to have represented the third approach i.e. ācārya-niṣṭhā prapatti or seeking refuge in a Guru through his devotion towards Bharata<sup>21</sup>.

Apart from the emotional and theistic aspect of bhakti, the poet also discusses the aesthetic aspect of bhakti i.e. the bhakti-rasa. Among the twelve types of bhakti, authorities on bhakti-rasa such as Rūpa gosvāmī have recognized five principal types of devotion or mukhya-bhakti rasa-s based on different forms of love. They are - vātsalya (parental love), mādhyura (conjugal love), sakhyā (friendship), dāsyā (servitude) and śānta (neutral love). According to the poet, the mothers of Śrī Rāma, Dasaratha, Vasiṣṭha and Jaṭāyu are examples of vātsalya, Sītā of mādhyura, Sugarīva and Guha of sakhyā, Hanumān of dāsyā and the sages of śānta<sup>22</sup>.

The subservience of the Lord to his devotees which is a well known idea in the bhakti-sampradāya-s is alluded to by referring to Śrī Rāma's remembrance of the virtues of Bharata along with Lakṣmaṇa at Pañcavaṭī. In this context the poet refers to Śrī Rāma as "bhakta-bhakta" i.e. "the devotee of a devotee"<sup>23</sup>.

The work gives an insight of the poetic genius of Śrī Kṛṣṇa Premī Svīmigaḷ who was more popular for his oration and exposition of sacred scriptures. True to its name, the work encapsulates the essence of the nectarine story of Śrī Rāma and conveys the doctrine of bhakti through the immortal epic. It also is a testament to the fact that Sanskrit literature continues to thrive with the same spirit of classicism as it used to a millennia ago.

स्मृत्वा तत्प्रतिकूलबन्धुसुहृदां सङ्गं विहायापि च।  
विश्वासेन विभीषणस्त्रिजगतां गोप्तारमेवाश्रयन्  
स्वामिंस्त्वां शरणङ्गतः सुविनयः सम्प्राप्य सौख्यं परम्॥(ibid. 65)

<sup>21</sup> कैकेयीतनस्त्वदेकशरणो मार्जालवत्सो यथा  
सौमित्रिस्त्वयि भक्तिमान् दृढमतिः कीशस्य वत्सो यथा।  
शत्रुघ्नो भरतस्य पादकमले विन्यस्तभारो महान्  
एतेषामभिरक्षणे तव विभो दीक्षा स्वधर्मस्य च॥ (ibid. 100)

<sup>22</sup> वात्सल्यं मातरस्ते गुरुरपि नृपतिर्गृध्राजस्तथैव  
माधुर्यं जानकी तु प्लवगपतिरपि व्याधराजोऽपि सख्यम्।  
कैङ्कर्यं वायुसूनुर्मुनिजननिकराः शान्तभावं त्वनन्यं  
कृतैवं प्रेमभावं भवति रघुपते पूर्णकामा भवन्ति॥(ibid. 97)

<sup>23</sup> गोदावर्या विमलसलिले कञ्जकल्हारलोले  
स्नात्वा देव्या मधुरमधुरं भाषमाणं प्रभुं त्वाम्।  
आत्रा साकं भरतचरितं भावयन्तं प्रभुं त्वां  
स्मृत्वा स्मृत्वा द्रवति हृदयं भक्तभक्तं कृपालुम्॥(ibid. 43)