



वैदिक इंडिया

This series takes a close look at facets of Vedic India that are alive even today.



राम नवमी

This article is a researched article and borrows heavily from printed and electronic encyclopedias as well as material provided by our panel of research scholars, astrologers, academics and pundits.

Sri Ram Navami is dedicated to remembering Rama, as the most Supreme with resolute Bhakti (devotion). It occurs on the ninth day, or navami beginning count from the "no moon day" or Amavasya, during the waxing moon duration called "ShuklaPaksha". Sri Rama Navami generally occurs in the months of March and April. Celebrations and festivities begin with prayer to the Surya Deva early in the morning. At midday, when Rama incarnated on that day in Treta Yuga, that duration is special and hence devotional service to him is performed with Bhakti and peity.

At some places the festival lasts the whole nine days of the Navratras, thus the period is called 'Sri Rama Navratra' It is marked by continuous recitals, AkhandPaath, mostly of the Ramacharitanamas, organized several days in advance to culminate on this day, with elaborate bhajan, kirtan and distribution of prasad after the puja and aarti. Images of infant form of Sri Rama are placed on cradles and rocked by devotees. Also, at temples special havans are organized, along with Vedic chanting of mantras and offerings of fruits and flowers. Many followers mark this day by Vrata (fasting) through the day followed by feasting in the evening.

In South India, in Bhadrachalam the day is also celebrated as the wedding anniversary of Sri Rama and his consort Sita.

SitaramaKalyanam, the ceremonial wedding ceremony of the celestial couple is held at temples throughout the south region, with great fanfare and accompanied by group chanting of name of Rama, (Rama namasmaranam), where asthis marriage is celebrated in Mithila and Ayodhya during another day on Vivaha Panchami as per Valmiki Ramayana.

The story of Lord Rama as told in the great epic Ramayana is one that most Indians know irrespective of caste, creed and religion. Lord Rama is a legendary figure, the epitome of all that is good and true, the man who vanquished the demon king Ravana. Lord Rama is an avatar of Lord Vishnu who came down to earth to battle the invincible Ravana in human form. Lord Brahma had been receiving complaints from all the gods about the havoc that Ravana was wreaking on earth, but because Lord Brahma had granted Ravana so many boons, he could not be killed by a god. But Ravana had become so overconfident that he would never expect an attack from a human being. So Lord Vishnu agreed to go to earth in the guise of Prince Ram, the son of King Dasharath and Queen Kaushalya.

Born as the eldest son of Kausalya and Dasharatha, king of Ayodhya, Rama is referred to within Hinduism as Maryada Purushottama, literally the Perfect Man or Lord of Self-Control or Lord of Virtue. Rama is the husband of Sita, whom Hindus consider to be an Avatar of Lakshmi and the embodiment of perfect womanhood. Rama's life and journey is one of perfect



adherence to dharma despite harsh tests of life and time. He is pictured as the ideal man and the perfect human. For the sake of his father's honour, Rama abandons his claim to Kosala's throne to serve an exile of fourteen years in the forest. After a long and arduous search that tests his personal strength and virtue, Rama fights a colossal war against Ravana's armies. In a war of powerful and magical beings, greatly destructive weaponry and battles, Rama slays Ravana in battle and liberates his wife. Having completed his exile, Rama returns to be crowned king in Ayodhya (the capital of his kingdom) and eventually becomes emperor, rules with happiness, peace, prosperity and justice - a period known as Rama Rajya.



Maryada Purushottama



As a person, Rama personifies the characteristics of an ideal person (purushottama) who is to be emulated. He had within him all the desirable virtues that any individual would seek to aspire, and he fulfils all his moral obligations (maryada). Rama's purity and piety in his intentions and actions inspires affection and devotion for him from a variety of characters from different backgrounds. For example, he gave up his rightful claim to the throne, and agreed to go into exile for fourteen years, to fulfill the vow that his father had given to Kaikeyi, one of King Dashratha's wives. This is in spite of the fact that Kaikeyi's son, Bharat, begged him to return back to Ayodhya

and said that he did not want to rule in place of Rama. But Rama considered his dharma as a son above that of his own birthright and his life's ambition. For such supreme sacrifices, and many other qualities, Rama is considered a maryadapurushottama. Some of his ideals are as follows:

1. At the time when it was normal for kings to have more than one wife, Rama gave ideal of having a single wife. After Sita was banished, he was doing penance with a gold statue of Sita. In Balakanda of Valmiki Ramayana it is written that Rama and Sita

resided in each others heart.

2. Rama always followed his promise at any cost. In fact, he went to forest to make his father's promise to Kaikeyi true. Another instance was when, he had promised the Spirit of Time that during their conversation, if anyone was to intrude, Rama would have pronounce an instant death sentence upon the individual. They were intruded upon by his beloved younger brother Lakshmana, and to keep his part of the promise, pronounced the death sentence. There are many examples of Rama's promises which he kept. Most important are the promise to sages to save their lives from Rakshasas, getting back Sugreeva's kingdom, making Vibhishana the king of Lanka.

3. Excellent friend: Rama had very touching relations with his friends irrespective of their status. Some of his friends are Nishadara-
raja Guha, King of Nishaadas (a caste whose profession was hunting the birds), Sugreeva (the Vanar king) and Vibhishana a Rakshasa.

4. Even towards his enemies, Rama showed great nobility and virtue. To gather information about the enemy army's strengths and weaknesses, Ravana sent two of his spies, Suka and Sarana, to the Vanara camps. Disguised as Vanaras they blended into the enemy camp, but Vibhishana saw through their deceit and presented the two spies to Rama who then asked them what their mission was and whether they fulfilled it. After listening to them, he sent for a Vanara to give them a proper tour of all the Vanara camps and give them all the information they desired. He then told the spies to give this message to Ravana. "Tomorrow morning, I will destroy all of Lanka. Keep all sides of your palace well defended and be ready with all of your men by sunrise."