

THE LIFE AND GLORY OF HANUMAN

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The life of Hanuman is the life of a superman, and unless we can understand what a superman is, we cannot appreciate the dignity and the exploits of this epic celebrity. The Ramayana of Valmiki gives us the details of the life of this mastermind. The importance of this superhuman person can be assessed from half a verse in the Ramayana of Valmiki where he says Hanuman has been chosen as the next Brahma in the coming cycle of creation. It is surprising indeed that in the whole of creation God could not find a better person than Hanuman to be elected for this great post of the Creator for the next cycle. Master of the eight powers of yoga was he, and that is enough to explain the meaning of his exploits.

Tradition tells us that he was born of a superhuman lady, Anjana, of celestial descent. Incidentally, it appears that when some messengers came to Anjana and told her of the terrific exploits of Hanuman and praised him saying, "Great indeed is your son, Mother," she retorted, "Great indeed is my son? Look," she said, it seems, and she pressed her nipple, from which milk jetted forth with such strength

that it dashed against a distant mountain and broke a cliff off it. “Such milk this man has drunk, and you are telling me he’s a great man?” This is what his mother said when the messengers extolled the glories of this marvellous hero in the war of the Ramayana.

We are told that as a child Hanuman rose to the skies to catch the sun, and thinking that it was a bright and delicious fruit, wanted to eat it. He rose up to the skies in the direction of the sun to grab that substance and swallow it. The story goes that Indra, the ruler of the heavens, was startled at this adventure of a mortal trying to ascend to the heavens and grab the solar orb, so it appears that he gave such a blow on the chin of this little boy with his weapon called Vajra that his chin lengthened a little bit, protruding forward, and he fell down unconscious. ‘Chin’ is called *hanu* in Sanskrit, and one who has a pronounced and a projected chin is called Hanuman.

He is the son of Anjana through the wind god Vayu, the presiding deity over air, and when the child fell unconscious due to the thrust of Indra, the lord of the celestials, his father Vayu got annoyed. “My son has been treated so badly by these gods. He has been cast down on the rock, and is lying helpless and unconscious. I shall teach these fellows a lesson.” Vayu, the wind god, withdrew himself from all parts, and everyone stopped breathing. Nobody could breathe. There was suffocation and agony everywhere, and even the celestials ran to Brahma, the Creator: “There is some terrific suffering. Our throats are being caught, as it were. We cannot breathe, and we are stifled almost to the point of death. This wind is very angry.

Please go and give him blessing, satisfy him, appease him, speak to him a few good words.”

Brahma then condescended and summoned Vayu: “Don’t be afraid. Your child, with my blessing, will be an immortal hero.” When these words were uttered by Brahma, Vayu was satisfied. “Rise up, my dear child,” said Brahma, and the child woke up as if nothing had happened. Not merely this, Brahma showered a rain of blessing on Hanuman, saying, “No weapon can hurt this child. Not even the five elements can harm him. Not even celestial missiles except my own Brahmastra can have any effect on him, and that too for a few moments only as a mark of respect. Excepting this proviso, he shall be invincible and no one can stand before him.” When this was told, everyone was satisfied. Hanuman’s father and mother were excited over these blessings, and everything was fine as it was before.

But an unfortunate situation arose. Somehow this child with mighty powers received by the boon of the Creator, for reasons God only knows, began to play some pranks with the great Rishis, the sages who were doing meditation in their cottages. He threw their water pots, desecrated their *yajnasthalas*, cast mud and stones over their cottage, screamed, and became such a nuisance that the rishis did not know what to do with him because he was invincible. He had the blessing of Brahma that no one could do anything to him. So the rishis were nonplussed. “What to do with this little urchin? He is a nuisance. He won’t allow us to sit.” They thought of a wise plan which prevented Hanuman from doing this kind of deed and yet did not in any way contradict the blessing of Brahma. “You shall not

know your power. This is our curse upon you.” And with a compassionate touch of the heart of a rishi, they also added, “until you are reminded of your powers by someone else.” This curse had such effect that Hanuman immediately forgot his strength, and docile, humble, as if he was a nothing, he started crawling. He had all the powers that were bestowed upon him by Brahma the Creator, but the curse deprived him of the consciousness of that power. Wonderful indeed!

So in this condition of the forgetfulness of his own powers he was roaming about in the forest and by chance happened to get into the company of Sugriva, who was the king in those days, and he became the minister of this king. Now, here it is that Hanuman happened to meet Rama and Lakshman for the first time. These two brothers were wandering in the forest and were sighted by Sugriva on the top of a hill, to his consternation, and he sent his minister, Hanuman, “Go and find out who these strangers are, so brilliant, handsome and young. Two lads are standing there far off, on the top of a mountain. Who are they?”

Hanuman had all the powers; but that he was not aware of his powers is something we have to remember. Such was his learning and such was his mastery over all the arts and sciences that there was none to equal him. He dressed himself like an old messenger Brahmin and went to Sri Rama who was standing there with his brother Lakshmana, and Valmiki in his Ramayana tells us that he enquired of them as to their whereabouts. But he spoke with such precise words and with such chosen style and language that, after hearing these words of Hanuman, Rama said to Lakshman: *na an rigveda viniitasya na yajurveda dharinah,*

na sama veda vidusah shakyam evam vibhasitum (Ramayana 4.3.28). These are the words of Valmiki. “One who is not a master of the Rigveda, Yajurveda and Samaveda cannot speak like this.” After all, he did not give a sermon. He only spoke a few words enquiring who they were, from where they had come, what their mission was, and so on – some common things. But those common things were expressed in such a way, in such chosen words and diction, that Rama knew the worth of this man. Anyway, so goes the story. And as they were both renown, they were introduced in the court of Sugriva. Then many events took place in which Hanuman had no role to play.

But he rose to prominence when messengers were to be sent in all directions in search of Sita. One of these messengers was Hanuman himself – that Hanuman who was tremendously powerful but knew not his power. So they were running in all directions in search of the lost Sita, but could not find her anywhere. They reached the shore of the sea, and all the monkeys were sitting there, very much dejected and not knowing what to do. It is said that they wanted to do prayopavesa, which means fasting to death. “What is the good of our going back and saying that we cannot find Sita anywhere? Shameful indeed is this message of failure. Let us sit here and fast and die.” They were sitting there on the shore of the ocean in a highly dispirited mood. As they were thinking of fasting to death, they were speaking among themselves their misery. “Look at this fate of ours. What a miserable plight we are in. Rama lost Sita, and Sugriva is searching for her; Ravana carried her away, and Jatayu the bird met him and died at the hands of

Ravana, and now we are dying for no reason and no fault of ours.”

At that time a vulture was sitting on a nearby tree. It was muttering, “I have good food today because they are fasting to death. I shall have a good meal, at least.” When the vulture heard that Jatayu the bird had died at the hands of Ravana, it spoke. “Who are you, speaking about my brother as if he is dead?” Jatayu was the brother of this vulture.

The monkeys looked up and recounted their sorrow: “Here we are, in this condition. This is what has happened, and Jatayu died in this manner. We do not know who you are – looking at us, wanting to eat us – and we are in search of lost Sita.”

“Oh, is that all? She has been carried away across the sea. She is there in the garden of King Ravana.” The vulture which spoke like this had no wings; the wings were burnt. This is another story altogether. It appears this was a divine bird which soared up to the skies, almost near the sun, and got its wings burnt due to the heat of the sun. It was blessed with a boon that its wings would sprout forth automatically into action, become alive, the moment it conveyed the news of the whereabouts of lost Sita to the persons concerned, and it did this immediately. It got its wings, and it flew away. This is by way of a digression.

Now these messengers were sitting like this, helplessly, wanting to fast unto death, but here was a message of comfort. “After all, we know where Sita is. Up to this time we never knew where she is. Now from this vulture we know she is there, but across the vast ocean. How to go?” One of them said, “Well, I can jump a little distance, but I

will sink there only. I cannot come back.” Each one was trying to measure his strength. Some said, “I may go, but I cannot come back.” So everyone was looking like this, helplessly. Some cannot go at all, some can go a little distance, some can reach the other shore but cannot come back. So what is the good of all this? It was a very miserable plight.

Then it was that Jambavan, the bear chief, spoke to Hanuman, bringing an end to the curse. When Hanuman was reminded of his powers, he would assume his original strength. The bear chief, Jambavan, accosted and addressed Hanuman: “Why are you sitting like a pusillanimous nobody? Do you know who you are? You are the son of Vayu and Anjana. You have the blessings of Brahma. You are an invincible hero.” When these words were uttered, Hanuman gained his consciousness which was lost by the curse of the rishis.

Immediately, as if he rose from a deep sleep, he woke himself to the consciousness of immeasurable strength. The poet says that he rose up to the height of a mountain, and struck his tail with such force that the earth shook, as it were. “Well, now I know where I am. Let Sita be in Ravana’s harem, in the forest, let her be in the nether regions, let her be in heaven; I have the strength to bring her. I can pluck the whole earth and take her, if I want.” With these words he rose to the top of a hill. Majestic is the first chapter of Valmiki’s Sundara Kanda, which is the longest of the chapters, running to some 200 verses. Poetry, diction, and depth of feeling, force of expression and detail of miracles – all these are charges infused into these words

of Valmiki in the first chapter of the Sundara Kanda, and each one has to read it to enjoy it.

Kicking the cliff of a hill, breaking it to pieces, Hanuman leapt into the empty space with such force that the poet tells us that some trees also flew with him, and trees followed him because of the force of his movement. Beautiful, grandiose is the description of all the exploits he performed even on the way – the rising of the mountain in the middle of the ocean, his being tested by a celestial force called Surasa, and his encounter with another demon called Simhita. Finally he entered into the ramparts of the fort of Ravana. He became very small with his power of yoga, almost like a cat or a mosquito, and entered every nook and corner of the palace, not finding Sita anywhere, to his chagrin.

Then again he had a sorrow. “I have come here with all my energy and have done my best, but I have not succeeded in my mission. What will I tell Rama when I go back? I will tell him I have not seen her.” Here Hanuman sat and went on thinking, “If I go back and tell Rama that I have not seen her, Rama will die immediately with heartbreak. Lakshmana will not live afterwards, having seen the plight of his brother. Having heard the death of these two sons, the mothers in Ayodhya will not like to live afterwards. The whole of the population of Ayodhya will be stricken with grief. Will Sugriva like to live afterwards? Never. He will strike his head on the ground and die. The other monkeys who are his followers will also like to jump into the ocean or fall from the mountain, beat their breasts and break their heads. This is the calamity that will take place the moment I

go and tell this unfortunate news that I have not seen Sita at all.”

Then Hanuman thought, “I will sit here and become a monk. This is also one way of living. They will think that the man has not come, and with the hope at least of getting a good message they will be alive. Why should I go there and tell this unhappy news? Anyway, effort is not to be exhausted. Let me see again throughout Lanka.” So by chance he went to Ashoka Grove and saw Sita in a state which the poet felt impossible to describe. Glory decked in sorrow. The radiance of celestial beauty covered with the dirt of sorrow and grief. All the powers of poetry are used here to describe her condition.

“Well, this is Sita indeed, there is no doubt. But what shall I do now, after having seen her?” Hanuman sat on the top of a tree, reducing his size to the smallest possible extent, and was thinking in his mind, “What shall I do now? Can I speak to her? In what language shall I speak? If I speak to her, she may scream in fright. Already she has been frightened by Ravana and the ogresses around, and the moment she screams all the demons will come and attack me. All my efforts will fail in one second. How can I speak to her?” Suddenly a brain wave occurred to him. He said, “Well, I shall not speak to her. I shall only sit here, and sing the glory of Rama: There was a king called Dasaratha; he had a son called Rama....” and he went on recounting this tale. “He went to the forest and his queen was taken away by a *rakshasa*, and she is here sitting under the tree, and I am happy to see her.”

Sita looked up. She did not know what to do. “Am I dreaming, or am I awake? How can I hear the story of

Rama in this hell? Who are you?” There was a conversation between them. Finally somehow Hanuman succeeded in introducing himself as the real messenger of Rama, though in the beginning she suspected that he was one form of Ravana only. She did not want to speak to him. “You are a cunning fellow, once again coming in this form.”

When Hanuman succeeded in handing her the ring of Sri Rama, she was satisfied. He said, “Now Mother, why are you sitting here? Be done with that. I shall take you back to Rama. In one minute your sorrow shall end.” He was a small, tiny fellow, a very small, diminished form, and he told her, “Sit on my back, and I shall fly across the sea and place you before Rama.”

“What a funny thing you are speaking, such a tiny fellow that you are. You want to carry me on your back? Are you talking sense?” When Hanuman heard these words and felt that Sita did not know him fully, he descended from the tree and assumed his gigantic mountain-like form. He shone like the radiant sun and looked like an iron hill, as it were, placed before her. Then he spoke to Sita, “Divine Mother, I have the strength to carry not only you but the whole of this Lanka, and even a hundred Ravana cannot shake me.”

But Sita said, “Well, I understand your greatness and am happy to see you in this majestic form, but let Rama come and take me. That is dharma. I cannot sit on your back. Go and tell him.”

But Hanuman’s mind started working in a different way after that. He bowed before the celestial Mother and went a little distance, then thought, “Let me show my power a little bit here before I go. Why should I go silently?” Then it was

that he started moving like a cyclone in that forest, destroying everything, uprooting trees, plucking fruits, and creating such a havoc that there was an encounter of the whole battalion and the forces and the army of Ravana, which he routed with his fists and with his physical strength. Then he was carried to the palace of Ravana where he was teased in many ways, and then his tail was set afire. He burned Lanka, and came back across the sea and conveyed the blessed news to Sri Rama: “Found I Sita.” He used the word ‘found’ first so that there may not be any anxiety in the mind of Rama. “I have...” Why should he say “I have...”? Afterwards what has happened? “I have found...” he did not say. “Found have I Sita.”

And so is the glory of the great superhuman Hanuman, whose birthday we celebrate today. Glory to Hanuman!