

**Musings on  
YOGAVASISHTHA  
PART 1  
DETACHMENT**

About the Book

Yogavaasishta is a treasure house of the ancient Indian philosophical wisdom. It offers logical and practical answers to questions like: What is Mind? What is world? What is the purpose of existence? What is Brahman?  
It is a poetic classic by the Sage Valmiki explaining the nature of The Supreme Self expounded in his own inimitable and graceful way as a Discourse between Maharshi Vasishtha and Lord Sri Rama.

The present volume, “**Musings on Yogavaasishta**” – **Part I Detachment**, is a presentation by Brahmasri **Kuppa Venkata Krishna Murthy**, the Vidyadhikari of Avadhoota Datta Peetham, Mysore and Chairman, Institute of Scientific Research on Vedas (I-SERVE) and forms a part of his lectures on “Yogavaasishta” telecast by GEMINI T.V. in Telugu. This volume is a rendering of the same into English by Dr. Vemuri Ramesam. In it:  
The 1500 stanzas of the First chapter on Detachment (VairAgya prakarana) have been ably condensed and lucidly explained in simple words.

After explaining the points - how the book is originated, what are its contents and who is eligible to read this book, the detachment of Rama is elaborately described in this chapter, to emphasize that Rama is the fittest student to receive the teaching of YogavAsishta.

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**Musints on**  
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**VAIRAGYA PRAKARANA**

Of all the books on spirituality that teach the essence of Truth, two stand out in their uniqueness. The first one is the *yogavAsiShTha* in which the highest philosophy is taught by a human being (Sage Vasishtha) to the divine Lord (Sri Rama) as an offering. The second one is the Bhagavad Gita in which a sermon is given by the God (Sri Krishna) to a human being (Arjuna) as a teaching. Both the texts are quite comprehensive and very lucid. Neither of them indulges in complex technical debates. *yogavAsiShTha* is a text based on the discourses that went on at a leisurely pace for several days. Consequently, it had become a 32,000 verse strong classic. Bhagavad Gita, in contrast, was a message delivered in a hurry on a battle field just before the commencement of a furious war. Hence it's a brief text of only 700 verses.

*yogavAsiShTha* is also known by other names such as Jnana Vasishtha, Uttara Ramayan, Vasishtha Ramayan, and Maha Ramayan. Tradition attributes the authorship of *yogavAsiShTha* to Maharishi Valmiki. A few of the modern scholars consider it to be later than the Bhagavad Gita. The reasons given to ascribe a later date to *yogavAsiShTha* , however, do not appear very convincing.

The conciseness of the Bhagavad Gita has given scope for varying interpretations of its teaching. Maharishi Valmiki did not leave any room for such an eventuality to come up in the *yogavAsiShTha*. He not only dealt exhaustively with all the concerned philosophical topics but also took care to explain the intricate points of Vedanta through illustrative stories. Thus he left no opportunity for any ambiguity or doubt to arise both in the theory and the praxis of Advaita Vednata.

The post-Bhagavad Gita period is characterized by the development of a systematic argot in the presentation of the principles of Vedanta. We come across many precise and well defined technical terms like 'adhyAsa' (illusion), 'upAdhi' (substratum), 'saviseSha' (matter with specific internal aspects), 'nirviseSha' (matter without distinctions), 'bAdha' (sublation of the effect along with its cause) and 'anirvachanIya' (indefinable) coming into vogue in the works of philosophy that are later than the Bhagavad Gita. But we do not find any such terminology in the *yogavAsiShTha*. On the other hand, words such as 'spandana' (vibration), 'sphuraNa' (occurrence), 'vAsana' (impressions from past action), 'ullasa' (manifestation) 'Illa' (play), 'vivarta' (creation by changeless change), 'AbhAsa' (experiencing a non-existing thing) which are common to the Upanishads are often found in *yogavAsiShTha*.

It is reasonable to conclude that *yogavAsiShTha* was authored by Maharishi Valmiki himself based on the style of narration, word usage and the structure of the presentation followed therein.

## 1. ORIGIN OF THE BOOK:

Now let us examine when and why Maharishi Valmiki undertook to write this book. A critical evaluation of the various clues that are available within both Srimadramayana (an undisputed text by the Sage Valmiki) and *yogavAsiShTha* help us answer the questions.

Sage Narada had preached the essence of Rama's life to Maharishi Valmiki when Sri Rama was the reigning King of Ayodhya. Further, Lord Brahma was said to have encouraged Maharishi Valmiki to undertake the writing of the epic Ramayana for the benefit of posterity. So the Maharishi began the writing of Ramayana. When the work was in progress, Princes Lava and Kusa (sons of Sri Rama) were born. The Maharishi originally intended to start with the childhood of Rama (*balAkAnda*) and end with the canto on War (*yuddhakAnda*). Accordingly, he narrated the beneficial effects that would accrue by listening to Ramayana at the end of *yuddhakAnda*. But, after the birth of Lava and Kusa, the poet changed his mind and added the *uttarakAnda* (later part). He later on taught Ramayana to Lava, Kusa, his chief disciple Bharadwaja and a few others.

The Maharishi had a dilemma at the beginning itself while writing the *balAkAnda*. The popular story is that Maharishi Viswamitra requested the services of Sri Rama for protecting the proceedings of his sacrificial ritual (*yajna*) from demonic characters. During those days, Sri Rama was very much a withdrawn person with a strong desire to become an ascetic. He was indifferent to worldly things. The Sages Vasishta and Viswamitra together helped him to overcome his sense of disinterest by providing answers to his gnawing questions on the philosophy of life. Only thereafter Sri Rama did perform memorable deeds like destroying the demon Tataka, marrying Sita and so on. Had the part on Rama's ascetic desires been introduced in the *balAkAnda* itself, it would have become necessary for the Sage to narrate the teachings of the Maharishis on the essence of Vedanta right there for the sake of completion. If he were to do so, the book would have been full of involved philosophical discussions in the opening chapters themselves. That would have made the text very imbalanced because the subsequent poetic descriptions, embellishments, stories planned to be told by him would have looked pale compared to the serious philosophical exposition.

Therefore, Maharishi Valmiki discreetly skipped to include the teachings of Sage Vasishta in his first work, Ramayana. However, the Sage knew in his heart the philosophical value and spiritual significance of the discourses given by the Sage Vasishta. So, he planned to write a book exclusively devoted to Vedanta. After a time, he proceeded to give effect to it in a leisurely way. But his advancing age and certain developments like Sita (Rama's consort) entering into the womb of Mother Earth made him lose the vim. As a result, the book writing slowed down.

[**Note:** What one should note is that such great scriptural works as *yogavAsiShTha* do not happen because of the wishes of a person nor do they stop because of the lack of enthusiasm on the part of a writer. They are the outcome of a divine inspiration, unaffected by the human failings or joys. The following story bears this out.]

Bharadwaja, an ardent disciple of the Maharishi had been first taught Ramayana as a part of his training in austerity and meditation. Enchanted by the poetic beauty in his teacher's writing, he used to travel to different kingdoms promoting the celestial Ramayana. Because of his austere and meditational practices, Bharadwaja attained many yogic siddhis. Therefore, he was even able to visit different worlds (*loka-s*), not merely different countries, singing the song of Ramayana.

During one of such travels, he happened to sing the glory of Ramayana at a congregation of the gods on the Mount Meru. He was fortunate to have had Lord Brahma Himself in the audience at that time. Lord Brahma was very pleased with the lyrical beauty of Ramayana, a work that had taken shape from His initial encouragement to Valmiki. He also appreciated the style of Bharadwaja in rendering it. The Lord profusely congratulated Bharadwaja and directed him to ask for a boon. Bharadwaja, a noble intellectual he was, requested the Lord, to please suggest a way out of sorrow for all the living beings in the universe. Brahma replied in these words:

***tasmin śrutē narō mōhāt samagrāt santariṣyati  
sētunēvāmbudhēḥ pāraṃ apāraṅga śālinā .. (vairāgya sarga 2, ślōka 10)***

“Why do you have to ask me for that? Your Teacher has already started writing a new book on this subject. You can as well pray to him. If you get initiated into the message of that great treatise, you can cross the ‘*saMsAra*’ (worldly bondage) as easily as walking over a bridge on a treacherous stretch of sea.”

Thus Lord Brahma praised this holy scriptural treatise even long before it was completed. Unlike in the present times, the disciples in those days, in spite of their best intimacy with their Teacher, never took liberties to demand any particular subject to be taught to them. Spiritually advanced students like Bharadwaja could confidently talk even to Lord Brahma, but would hardly dare open their mouth in front of their own Teacher. It was not out of any fear, but that was a mark of showing unreserved reverence towards one's own teacher. Their devotion to and trust in the Teacher was so exemplary. Being aware of this and having understood the predicament that Bharadwaja would land in case he had to take the matter with Sage Valmiki, Lord Brahma happily gave an assurance that He would Himself talk to his Teacher. No sooner, Lord Brahma went to Maharishi Valmiki with Bharadwaja in tow. Maharishi Valmiki went into divine ecstasy with the sudden appearance of Lord Brahma at his ashram. He was so overwhelmed with devotion to the Lord, that he was not even aware what he was doing. Yet the Sage worshipped the Lord in a befitting manner.

Lord Brahma was, however, quite unmindful of the services of the sage. He addressed the Sage thus: “Oh Great Saint! The book you are writing now is a great one. You might think that it is just a philosophical study. No. It is the description of the true character, the true nature of Sri Rama. So do not feel tired and stop the writing midway. All the ‘*loka-s*’ (worlds) will be benefited by that book. It will serve as a boat to cross the ocean of life. People would be able to effortlessly navigate the course of their life with the aid of this ‘boat’. I came all the way here to exhort you to complete this extraordinary work. It will benefit the entire mankind. Do not stop it.” So saying He left for his abode.

Maharishi Valmiki could not immediately grasp what had happened. He was aghast. Things went so fast like a wave that rose high in the sea and in a trice fell back and merged in the waters even before one could notice it. His divine ecstasy gradually receded. Gaining back his normal composure, he called his disciple and asked him, “My boy! Tell me clearly what it was that Lord Brahma said.” Bharadwaja repeated Brahma’s instruction verbatim. Maharishi Valmiki understood the significance of Brahma’s advice. He slowly began explaining the content of the book to his disciple, Bharadwaja.

Bharadwaja took the opportunity to get some of his doubts on Ramayana clarified. He posed a few questions in all earnestness. “Oh my divine Teacher! If we study the Ramayana, it sometimes seems to me that Rama was swept away by the trials and tribulations of the material world like ordinary people. But at some other times, I feel that he was showing wisdom par excellence like a great philosopher. Revered Mother Sita’s bearings too were similar. Kindly tell me Sir! Did Sri Rama, Sita, and his brethren Lakshmana et al behave like spiritually mature individuals or they were like the ordinary ignorant laity?” Spurred by these questions of his disciple and also remembering the specific direction given by the Lord Brahma, Valmiki decided to reveal the essence of the new book to Bharadwaja. In addition, the Sage also kept him informed of the progress in writing the book each day.

In the light of the background explained above, we may say that the classic text *yogavAsiShTha* emerged as a result of the combined strength of the decree of Lord Brahma, Maharishi Valmiki’s own inner philosophic urge and Bharadwaja’s genuine longing to find the ultimate Truth.

## **2. WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO READ *yogavAsiShTha*?**

Does it then imply that *yogavAsiShTha* is a work meant only for spiritually advanced people like Bharadwaja, who are capable of talking directly with great divinities like Lord Brahma? If so, ordinary folk like you and me will be ineligible to go anywhere near to it. Such thoughts would keep us away from this noble work. But, certainly that was not the intention of Maharishi Valmiki.

What the Sage would want to convey in all humility is that he was just an instrument in writing the book and it was Brahma’s will that enabled the emergence of it. That was the basic reason behind his narration of this incident to us. In order to dispel any doubt on our part, Maharishi Valmiki described one more event at the beginning of the book in order to nudge us to read this book.

## **3. STORY OF ARISHTANEMI:**

King Arishtanemi entrusted the responsibility of running his kingdom to his sons because of his advancing age. He retired to a forest to perform austerities. He spent all his time in deep meditation. Lord Indra came to know of it. Indra had the responsibility to evaluate anyone who takes up intense meditation. Not being aware of this fact, some people in modern times speak disparagingly about Indra and accuse him of being jealous of others.

By the time Arishtanemi's meditation reached a ripe stage, Lord Indra sent a divine vehicle along with a messenger. He sent the message that the saint-king had become eligible to live in the heavens with his physical body and so he could use the divine plane to reach the heavens. The old king was, however, quite insightful. He expressed his gratitude first to Indra and then to the messenger. He then enquired from the messenger, "What is so significant about the heaven and how is it superior to the earth? Will I be allowed to live permanently in the heavens? If I were to be sent back, what procedure would you adopt? "

The messenger from Indra thought for a while and said, "Oh Monarch! You have been practicing deep meditation. So I would not lie to you. The heaven is full of luxuries. The comforts and luxuries in the heaven go up in proportion to one's virtues. But everyone is afflicted by jealousy there. As a result, sometimes quarrels and fights do take place. The Haves feel happy looking at those inferior to them. On the other hand, the Have-nots are jealous of the superiors. None of them know how much virtue stayed in balance in their account. The day the balance of virtue goes nil, they get thrown out of the heavens. If any one refuses to go and make fuss over it, he will be forcibly pushed out. They return to their pavilion in deep distress. So Great King, no one can secure a permanent residency in the heavens. It will be the same with you too. People depart from there with a heavy heart. It is inevitable for anybody. Moreover, once you enter into the heavens, you can't do any deep meditation or pursue meritorious deeds. All you can do is to be lost in a luxurious life. That sums up the situation there. Please do come and board the plane."

Arishtanemi profusely thanked the messenger for his response and said, "Oh Messenger of the Lord of Gods! I do not want any heaven. I am grateful to you, to your heaven and also to your Lord. As long as I remain in this physical body, I will like to continue my deep meditation here on the earth. If possible, I would merge with the Supreme Consciousness right in this life itself. Otherwise, being born again, I will resume my deep meditation. I do not want any kingdoms or powers either on the earth or in the heavens. Please do not misunderstand me. Bless me and kindly convey to Lord Indra my prayers for his blessings."

The messenger returned to the heaven wondering about the reply of the king and reported everything that happened to Lord Indra. Lord Indra felt very happy listening to the messenger.

Indra was highly appreciative of Arishtanemi's sincerity, dispassion, and purity of mind. He thought of helping him in one way or the other. It is also one of the responsibilities of his position to help those who meditate without expectation of any rewards. Indra, that's why, critically examines the intentions behind the deep meditation of anyone. If he considers the deep meditation being done is beneficial to the universe, he proceeds to assess whether the doer is worthy of receiving a boon or not. He subjects the meditator to intense tests to know their worth. In case he finds that the person's intentions are harmful, he would try to interrupt their deep meditation. It was very clear to Indra that Arishtanemi was pursuing his austerities and meditation without any selfish motives. So, he felt obliged to helping the king.

Indra recalled in his mind the incident of Bharadwaja reciting Srimadramayana at the congregation of gods on the Mount Meru. He heard Lord Brahma speaking very highly about *yogavAsiShTha*, even though the text was still incomplete by that time. So he felt curious about

its content and desired to keep himself abreast with what Maharishi Valmiki wrote in it. He constantly monitored the progress made by the Sage and used to cherish wholeheartedly the writing of Maharishi Valmiki. He felt that this noble treatise would be the most appropriate teaching for Arishtanemi. So he asked his messenger to go back to King Arishtanemi by that very plane immediately and escort the King to Maharishi Valmiki's hermitage. Further, he asked the messenger to convey to the Sage that it was Indra's prayer to the Maharishi to preach *yogavAsiShTha* to the King.

The messenger accordingly went back to the King Arishtanemi and informed him about the instructions he received from Indra. Arishtanemi was extremely pleased with the kind gesture of Indra. The messenger then took him to the Sage Valmiki and left him in the care of the Maharishi. Arishtanemi prostrated before Maharishi Valmiki saying:

*mumukshurvai sharaNamaham prapadye -- vairAgya prakaraNa,*

He prayed to the Maharishi to accept him as his disciple and initiate him into the philosophy. Maharishi Valmiki consented and taught the philosophy expounded in this classic work to the King.

The narration of the above incident makes it clear that *yogavAsiShTha* is a text meant for all those who are dispassionate in attitude and perform actions without a desire for reward. Further, the story is also illustrative of the fact that unless one develops the trait of detachment, Vedantic instruction would serve no purpose. But does it also mean that one is eligible to study *yogavAsiShTha* only if he or she has completed intense practices of austerities and meditation like Arishtanemi did? Should one read *yogavAsiShTha* only after he develops such a level of renunciation that he could decline going to heaven in the physical body? Is that the purpose of the Maharishi in telling us the story of King Arishtanemi right at the beginning of this valuable text? In order to relieve us from entertaining any such doubts, the Sage incorporated another story in the narration.

#### **4. AGNIVESYA AND SON KARUNYA:**

There was a Self-realized man by name Agnivesya. Though he was a householder, he used to meditate regularly. He had a son called Karunya. He was very intelligent. He completed his studies in various branches of learning at the Gurukul (Saintly Vedic School) and returned home. He was not yet married. Ever since he reached home, his behavior had been very strange. He gave up performing even the day to day ritualistic worship. He had been very dull and had no interest in or enthusiasm for anything. His father inquired from his son the reason for his attitude after having observed him in that state for some days. The boy opened up about the 'stormy turbulence' that was raging in his mind.

*kurvannēvēha karmāṇi*

*jijīviṣē cchatagṃ samāḥ* - *IshAvAsya upaniShad, mantra 2.*

Thus the *shAstra*-s and the scriptures stipulate at some places that a man has to continue to perform good deeds till his death. The scriptures also teach us that

***na karmanā na prajayā dhanēna***

***tyāgēnaikē amṛtatvamānaśuḥ (yajur)***-- *kaivalya up, mantra 2*

(Meaning: Liberation, the ultimate result, does not come from doing any number of good deeds).

The boy Karunya said with a tone of desperation: “I have read all the *shAstra*-s and the Vedas. Everywhere I get a doubt with respect to *moksha* (liberation). So I am indifferent to doing any rituals or discussing Vedanta (philosophy). So, I remain silent”.

After listening to Karunya, his father thought over the matter deeply. He replied to him thus: “My boy! You will obtain a clear and unambiguous understanding in such matters only from a study of a standard work and that is the *yogavAsiShTha* authored by the Sage Valmiki. I will preach that to you. You may take your decision after listening to it”. So saying he taught *yogavAsiShTha* to his son. Based on this teaching, Karunya could grasp the subtle aspects perfectly without an iota of doubt. He first worked for the attainment of a pure mind through righteous deeds and later achieved liberation following *jnAna yoga* (The Knowledge Path).

Thus the stories of Arishtanemi and Karunya appearing at the opening of *yogavAsiShTha* inform us that it is an authentic scripture which received the approval of Lord Brahma and Lord Indra, and that it benefited not only noble practitioners like King Arishtanemi but also it was useful to offer proper guidance to ordinary seekers like Karunya. We can therefore conclude that *yogavAsiShTha* is a valuable spiritual text which can reliably lead us to the final goal.

## **5. IMPORTANCE OF THE BOOK:**

We may still entertain certain reservations after knowing the stories described so far because they were about spiritually evolved persons meritorious enough to reach the heavens. Our confidence in the book may be enhanced if we are to know the view on *yogavAsiShTha* held by other sages, scholars and Pundits contemporary to Sage Valmiki. It is to answer that the Maharishi added one another story at the beginning of the book.

Sage Valmiki gave a detailed description in his earlier work Ramayana, in the canto of Aranya (chapter on the forests), about the visits paid by Sri Rama to the hermitages of many holy sages during the times of his exile in the forests. A wild forest called Dandakaranya had developed dividing the northern and southern parts of India in the previous era of Tretayuga as a result of a curse given to King Dandaka by his teacher. The southern part of India became a safe haven protected by this dense forest for the demons in those days. Consequently, the Vedic culture in these parts of India suffered a setback. Many great Sages of the day strove hard to redeem the situation apolitically without the involvement of any rulers. Maharishi Agastya was the foremost of the sages at that time. He traversed on foot along the courses of the Krishna, the Kaveri and the Godavari rivers and established several temples of Agastyeswara. He rejuvenated the language and culture of the people in those areas and worked hard for the reestablishment

and promotion of the *sanAtana dharma* (eternal righteous values of ancient times). In addition, he guided innumerable number of seekers on the path of Self-Knowledge. Sri Rama happened to visit Sage Agastya too during his sojourn in the forests.

While writing about this, Maharishi Valmiki mentioned three names:

***sutīkṣ ṇam cāpyagastam ca***

***agastya bhrātaram tathā ..*** (RAamAyaNa, Balakanda, 1<sup>st</sup> sarga)

They are Suthikshana, Agastya, and Agastyabhrata. To date, nothing is known about Agastyabhrata. It has now become, therefore, proverbial to refer to any highly learned scholar who fails to make a name for himself as “Agastyabhrata” (brother of Agastya).

## **6. SUTHIKSHANA:**

Sage Valmiki had not provided any details on Maharishi Suthikshana in Ramayana. Neither any mythological texts (*purANa*-s) nor any other extant literature talks of this sage. One can find the details of Sage Suthikshana in Agastya Samhita, a classic work that spells out the method of Ramopasana (Worship of Rama). Suthikshana was one of the disciples of the Sage Agasthya. He was living in Dandakaranya long before the incarnation of Sri Rama. Strangely, out of all the disciples of Agastya, only Suthikshana could not achieve the ability to focus his mind even after considerable practice. He became old and was vexed with his own plight. He went to his Guru, told him about his miserable state and sought his guidance.

Touched by his sincere pleas, Maharishi Agastya told him, “My dear Suthikshana! Lord Vishnu is going to incarnate as Sri Rama. You will not die before you can get an audition from Him. Therefore, continue to meditate on Sri Rama, the future incarnation of Vishnu.”

Suthikshana was heartbroken at the suggestion of Sage Agastya. He appealed to him saying: “Sir! I have already become old. I have followed many different practices. Do I need to implement one more now? How can I meditate on a form that has not even manifested and will appear only sometime in the future? Further, my age has already advanced so much, what benefit will any *upAsana* (worship) bring to me? Maybe Yoga or Self-inquiry would be more appropriate for me at my age.”

Maharishi Agastya responded to him by giving a magnificent exposition on different methods of worship and how they converge in giving the result. This explanation occupies a good half of Agastyasamhita followed by a description of different ways of worshipping Rama. Instructed thus on Agastyasamhita, Maharishi Suthikshana went about the worship of Rama for a very long time.

## **7. KARMA (action) versus jnAna (Knowledge):**

Suthikshana followed the meditational practices for considerable length time and one day went back to the ashram of his teacher, Maharishi Agastya. He addressed the Sage thus: “Oh Eminent Master! Please tell me what is it that is required to attain liberation -- pursuit of action

or knowledge or both? You have initiated me into the method of worship but also taught me *jnAna* (Self-Knowledge). Yet you have asked me to take up the ritual of worship. Kindly make it absolutely clear whether the path of action or Knowledge is suited to the seekers like me who aspire for liberation only and nothing else.”

Maharishi Agastya replied: “ My dear! A bird requires two wings for flying. The wings provide the thrust of air for flying. The movement of air is possible only if there are two wings. Similarly, for the liberation of mind, man requires both the ‘wings’ of action and Knowledge. Of them, with the ‘wing’ of action comes the benefit of purity of mind and with the ‘wing’ of *jnAna*, the ignorance gets eradicated. The two benefits together take one to the goal of liberation.

Let me give you another example. If you wish to see your face in a mirror, two things are required. Firstly the dust on the mirror has to be wiped out. Secondly, light has to fall on your face. Similarly, for liberation, the dust i.e. the impurities on the mirror of your mind should be removed. This can only be obtained by action. Next, your face (the individual, *jIva*) has to be illuminated. This is done by Knowledge. So, both action and Knowledge are essential.”

Since you desired to know which of these two is important, I shall tell you of a way that will bring clarity in the matter. Lord Sri Rama, whom you are worshipping, also had once the same doubt. Maharishi Vasishta initiated Him onto the right path. Maharishi Valmiki wrote it all down in detail in his book, *yogavAsiShTha*. I will teach you the message of that *magnum opus*. That work is the most appropriate one for you to reach perfect understanding.”

When a great saint like Maharishi Agastya could vouch the value of *yogavAsiShTha* for the benefit of sincere aspirants for liberation, does one need to speak even a word more about the importance of this classic treatise in the world of spirituality?

By incorporating the stories of Bharadwaja, Arishtanemi, Karunya, Suthikshana in the beginning itself, the great poet Valmiki, not only made it clear to us as to who are eligible to study *yogavAsiShTha*, but also brought to our awareness the significance of the book in spiritual matters. Resorting to writing in prose when necessary, besides the usual style of poetry, sage Valmiki made sure that the salient take-home lesson of the stories is not missed by the reader.

Tradition stipulates that any scriptural text should comprise four fundamental elements which are the indispensable requisites for a work that is worthy of serious study. They are the Subject matter of the book, the Benefits that accrue from a study of it, Connection of the content discussed with the overall field of study and Target audience who is qualified to study the work. These four aspects are known by the name ‘*anubandha catuShTaya*’. The subject in *yogavAsiShTha* is Self-Knowledge; the Benefit is the attainment of Liberation; Connection is expounding the Knowledge of Self; Target is the eligible person worthy of initiation into this study. The stories narrated thus far already contain the necessary information regarding the eligibility of the reader. However, in order to make matters clearer, the Maharishi says further:

***ahaṃ buddhō vimukta ssyām iti yasyāsti niścayaḥ***

*nātyantamajñō nōta jñāḥ sōsmin śāstrēdhikāravān .. (vairāgya sarga 2,ślō*

2)

Meaning: One should have a strong resolve that “I am enticed in this life. I want liberation from it.” He should also possess some knowledge about this enticement and liberation. Only such a person is entitled to read this book. A commoner completely ignorant of such philosophy is not at all worthy of it. Also, a philosopher who knows all the philosophy does not require this book.

Thus Maharishi Valmiki says that this book has been exclusively written for those who fall in-between these two extreme ends. The Sage adopted a style of writing that befits this aim of addressing the seeker who is in an intermediary position. What he desires to teach is conveyed clearly through a number of stories. He also adopts simple sentences of prose for making sure that the point is brought home unambiguously. As a result, the book has become very voluminous; but it leaves no scope for doubt or incertitude in our minds. Because of the fact that the intricate philosophy is narrated in the form of absorbing stories, the reader’s interest is always retained. Because of this reason, this great epic has received admiration from several noted teachers including those of the modern times like the Paramacharya of Kanchi mutt, Malayala Swami, Sri Ganapathi Sachchidananda Swamiji, Ramana Maharishi and others.

## **8. SPELLS ON SRIHARI:**

Sri Rama is said to be the divine incarnation of Lord Vishnu. How then does a need arise for some human being to teach Him the essence of philosophical truth? This is a doubt that may come to anyone. King Arishtanemi who was initiated by Maharishi Valmiki too got such a doubt. He humbly appealed to his Guru, “Reverend Teacher! On one hand, you say that Sri Rama is the incarnation of Lord Vishnu. On the other hand, you also say that He has been initiated into Vedanta by Maharishi Vasistha. Is Rama really bound by the cycle of birth and death? Is He not the incarnation of the Ever-free, Pure and Supreme Srihari? If He is eternally free, He doesn’t need any initiation. If He is bound by *saMsAra* (worldly life), He is like any of us. What is there then to speak so greatly about Him?”

Maharishi Valmiki gave a very convincing reply to Arishtanemi’s questions. He said: “Oh King! Rama is undoubtedly the incarnation of Srihari. He took birth as a human being ostensibly under the pretext of certain spells cast on Him. He assumed ‘ignorance’ also as a part of experiencing the effects of one of the curses. Therefore, there arose a need at that time for initiating Him into Self-Knowledge. In the process, all the seekers of liberation got benefitted too.

As a matter of fact, Srihari suffered four curses.

### **The First Curse:**

Once Lord Vishnu visited Brahmaloaka. The presiding Lord Brahma and others accorded him a grand welcome. But Maharishi Sanatkumara who was also present there, stayed aloof and

quiet. Lord Vishnu knew that Maharishi Sanatkumara did not have any desires. But desirelessness should not lead one to be so egoistic as to be indifferent towards the elderly. Hence Lord Vishnu thought of teaching him a lesson. Lord Vishnu showed His annoyance at his indifference and cursed him to take birth as Kumaraswamy, to be lustful and get married to two women. Sanatkumara woke up from his meditative state with the thundering words of Vishnu. Sanatkumara was not an ordinary man. He riposted a quick curse on Vishnu. "Oh Vishnu! You are proud of omniscience. I was in a state of samadhi and was unaware of the surroundings. You did not observe me properly. On the top of it, you were angry and cursed me. So, may you become ignorant for a time losing your omniscience!"

This was the first curse that Lord Vishnu had received.

### **The Second Curse:**

In one of the wars between the gods and demons, Lord Vishnu happened to chase the demons away. The demons were very much frightened and sought refuge from the wife of Maharishi Bhrgu. She gave them shelter in her home. The entire lot of demons were conveniently present at one place and it was therefore, advantageous to Vishnu to finish them there at one stroke. If the demons were not exterminated, they would later escape and would create havoc to the whole universe. But Bhrgu's wife stood guard at the door preventing Srihari from entering her house. Though she was the wife of a saint, she opposed Srihari and was helping the vicious demons. So Vishnu thought of ignoring the sin that might accrue to Him if He killed Bhrgu's wife in the interest of the universal good. He killed her, entered the house and slew all the demons. Maharishi Bhrgu was aware that his wife committed a mistake by trying to protect the demons. Yet in his uncontrollable sorrow of losing his wife, he cursed Srihari, "Oh Srihari! May you also suffer like me from the pangs of being separated from your wife!"

This was the second curse that Lord Vishnu got.

### **The Third Curse:**

Once, a maiden called Brinda from Goloka sought a boon to live with Srihari. In her intense love for Srihari, she missed asking Vishnu to take her as his wife. Radhadevi, the consort of Vishnu, was mad at Brinda for entertaining such impious desires. So she cursed Brinda to become a demon. In a later birth, Brinda became the wife of demon king Jalandhar. She led a pious life committed to her husband. Her husband Jalandhar, however, was a wicked and cruel demon who used to pillage the people in all the worlds. Because of the piousness of Brinda, Jalandhar escaped death and he could not be killed. So it became necessary to make a dent in her piousness by succumbing her to adultery.

In spite of knowing the dangerous consequences that He would have to face, Lord Vishnu assumed the guise of Jalandhar and seduced Brinda. Now that Brinda lost her piousness because of the adulterous relation with Vishnu, Jalandhar faced death in a war. Brinda then understood

that she was deceived by Lord Vishnu. In a fit of sorrow having forgotten her own mistake of asking for copulation with Vishnu in a past birth, she faulted Vishnu to be the cause of her widowhood. So she cursed Him: “Just as you caused me to lose my husband, may you also be tormented by losing your wife.”

That was the third curse.

### **The Fourth Curse:**

Long ago, a householder by name Devadatta used to live on the banks of the river Payoshni. He was an ardent devotee of Lord Narasimha (an incarnation of Vishnu with lion’s head and a human body). Pleased with his deep meditation, Lord Narasimha eventually manifested before him. Normally, the gods would be visible only to those who were the worshippers. The gods would be invisible to others. But this time, strangely, Devadatta’s wife also could have a clear audience of the Lord Narasimha. She was very much frightened by the fierce image of the Lord Narasimha. She fainted and died on the spot. Devadatta, however, completely forgot himself in the joy of seeing his favorite deity. When he came back to his senses, he realized that his wife died on witnessing the scary form of the Lord. Overtaken by the deep sorrow of losing his wife, he lost his discretion and blamed the Lord for her death. He cursed the Lord that He too should suffer separation from His wife.

That was the fourth curse for Srihari.

Three of the four curses pertain to the separation that the Lord had to suffer from His consort. Out of love for His three devotees, the Lord did not mind their curses. He underwent through the suffering of separation from His wife by taking birth on earth as a human being. Sri Rama was that human form of the Lord Vishnu. And Sri Rama went through the suffering of separation three times. The first time was when Ravana abducted his wife Sita during their exile in the forests. Though they were united after vanquishing Ravana, Rama had to again abandon his wife when rumors were spread casting doubts on the chastity of Sita. The second separation took place at a time when Sita, was pregnant with his children (twins). Later they were united when Rama performed a sacrificial ritual. The third and final separation came about with Sita merging into the earth soon after. Thus the three curses were fulfilled.

### **9. DETACHMENT OF SRI RAMA:**

The first curse was by Sanatkumara and according to that Lord Vishnu had to suffer a phase of ignorance. He benevolently accepted to go through a period of being enveloped by ignorance concerning Self-Knowledge when he was a boy of 12 in order to fulfill the demands of the curse he received. He needed the teaching of Maharishi Vasishtha at that time to recollect his true Self. The story in brief is as follows:

The four brothers, Rama, Lakshmana, Bharata and Satrugna completed their studies by the time they were 12 year old. They learnt the four Vedas, six *shAstra*-s, the sixty-four arts etc. They acquired exemplary skills in several martial arts, war strategy and related matters too. It looked as though their taking up the studies under a Guru was a mere formality and all the

branches of knowledge unfolded by themselves to them without having to learn. The young lads of 12 returned home as full-fledged scholars and were enjoying their holidays free from any obligations to be met. Things were all going jolly well for a time; but Sri Rama began to face some imperceptible change within himself.

One day Rama approached his father, King Dasaratha, and expressed a desire to take up a pilgrimage tour. His father could not understand the reason behind Rama's wish. Dasaratha wondered if his sons should go on a pilgrimage at such a tender age. He was in a dilemma whether to give his consent or not. So, he asked the Royal Priest, Maharishi Vasishtha, for his advice. The sage advised the king to send the four sons on a pilgrimage. Rama accompanied by his three brothers and a retinue visited several holy centers, *Ashram-s* (hermitages) of Rishis and many other pious places. But ever since he returned home, Rama preferred to spend his time in solitude.

Maharishi Vasishtha had already been observing the change taking place in Rama's attitude. The Sage could decipher that Rama was going through a phase of doubt and self-introspection. That was why he encouraged King Dasaratha to send Rama on a pilgrimage. Anyone seeking Self-Knowledge has to first obtain purity of mind that comes with the performance of sacrificial rituals, and such other procedures. Rama had not by then reached an age that warranted him to take up those deeds. Yet, he attained the philosophical awareness of Self-inquiry. The question was what should Rama do for obtaining the purity of mind which was an essential pre-requisite?

Let alone Rama, it would not be possible to perform *yajna-s* (sacrificial rites) for most people. Some might have crossed the eligible age. For some others, circumstances might not have been favorable to undertake such missions. For many of us in the Kaliyuga (The epoch of Kali), it may not be possible at all to undertake the holy and ceremonious performance of many rites. Does it mean that there exists no way out for attaining the purity of mind for the ordinary folk like us? Certainly, there is. There are many sacred and ancient pilgrim centers on the earth. Elders and Seers relate each of the pilgrimage centers with the capacity of bestowing to the visitors specific benefits equivalent to the performance of a particular sacrificial ritual. The verse given below was quoted by Shri A Swami in his Commentary in support of this claim:

***ētē bhaumāmmayā yajñāḥ***

***tīrtha rūpēṇa nirmītāḥ ..||*** - (Sloka quoted by the commentator)

Meaning: The centers of pilgrimage on this earth are the manifest forms of sanctified *yajna-s* created by Brahma.

Maharishi Valmiki said at the beginning of the text that both '*karma*' (action) and '*jñāna*' (Knowledge) were required for attaining liberation. Because this was an inviolable fact, we may infer that Maharishi Vasishtha made it possible for Rama to perform *yagnas* in the form of visits to holy shrines and pious places, thereby obtaining purity of mind, prior to taking up the study of scriptures.

The children of Dasaratha went back to their routine works after returning from their studies. Sri Rama used to offer his daily prayers and then proceed to his father's court in order to learn the intricacies of statecraft. No specific responsibility was given to him nor did any occasion arise for him to assume responsibility. He used to go for hunting along with his brothers in the afternoons. He spent the remaining time along with his friends.

Soon, Rama completed 12 years of age. Bharatha used to visit his maternal uncle occasionally. The remaining three brothers never left their kingdom of Ayodhya. Dasaratha desired to celebrate their marriages considering their all-round progress, though they were still very young. He consulted his ministers on this.

As days went by, Rama stopped attending the Royal court proceedings in the mornings. He cut short even the company of his brothers. He lost weight and became thin and pale. He often sat alone in his room lost in deep thought. He performed his daily ritualistic ablutions only after much persuasion by his servants. Dasaratha was much worried about Rama's condition and queried him often about his problem. But Rama never revealed anything to his father. King Dasaratha discussed the issue with the Sage Vasishta. Vasishta after making enquiries from Rama, appraised Dasaratha that great men did not get angry over trifles nor would they experience joys or sorrows. He said that Sri Rama was a great individual. Therefore there had to be a strong reason for his depression. Dasaratha was upset more after listening to the sage. The entire royalty was concerned about Rama's state. In the meanwhile, Rama was losing his vim and vigor day by day.

At that time, Maharishi Viswamitra arrived unexpectedly at the court of Dasaratha. He requested for the services of Rama to protect his sacrificial rituals from the demons. He desired that Rama should lead the fight against the thugs. Dasaratha tried to avoid committing his son for this job. That annoyed the Sage Viswamitra very much. Looking at the gravity of the situation, Maharishi Vasishta intervened and persuaded King Dasaratha to concede to the request of Maharishi Viswamithra. Dasaratha dispatched a messenger to fetch Rama and Lakshmana to the court.

The messenger came back alone. He reported to the King in these words:

“Oh King! I am unable to understand Rama's attitude. When I informed him of my errand, he appeared to be very wavering in his decision whether to come here or not. Sometimes he seems to be inclined but soon he changes his mind and refuses to come along. His behavior has been very strange ever since he returned from the pilgrimage trip. He does not perform even the daily obligatory prayers etc. He feels very bad even at the sight of luxurious goods. He repeatedly tells his friends that all the worldly comforts are unreal and one should not fall for them. He gives away in donation whatever is available to him. Whenever he comes across any Brahmin scholars, he exults in saying that the world is impermanent. He gets visibly irritated if one talks of relationships like that of father, mother, or other relatives. His brothers, Lakshmana and Shatrughna are also going in his line. Oh King! Children cannot be allowed to go astray in this manner. Please get help, use the services of knowledgeable experts and save your children from falling into a rut.”

Viswamitra also listened to what the messenger had said. He thought over the matter considerably and advised the King as follows:

“Dasaratha! I see that Rama’s state bespeaks of pure sense of dispassion and it does not indicate ignorance. Please get Rama here. I will dispel all his doubts. He will obtain profound bliss.” Dasaratha passed necessary instructions to the messenger again. But they found Rama coming over to Dasaratha’s court by himself.

Rama, on entering, offered his obeisance to all the elders there as per the custom. Dasaratha seated him comfortably by his side and said, “My Son! You are very wise, but you seem to be unnecessarily worried like an ignorant man. If there are any problems, you should discuss with your elders and not behave like an unwise person. Otherwise, it will lead to a great harm only.” Both the Sages Vasishta and Viswamitra supported what Dasaratha said. Viswamitra further posed a few more searching questions to Rama.

Sri Rama heaved a sigh and spoke of the storm going on in his mind. “Revered Sir! I do not know how I was born. Ever since my birth, I learnt whatever my elders taught me. I studied whatever education was provided to me. I travelled to different places. I went on pilgrimages. As I accumulated more and more knowledge through study and observing the world around, I am less and less able to understand the meaning of this life. Everyone struggles in this world to secure comforts and luxuries. In fact, it seems to me that ‘life’ is nothing but running after comforts. That appears to define what the world is.

***kiṃ nāmēdaṃ aita sukhaṃ yēyaṃ saṃsārasantatiḥ  
jāyatē mṛtayē lōkō mriyatē janānāya ca .. (vairāgya sarga 12,ślō 7)***

People go on talking about happiness. What is happiness? So many take birth in this world. What for? Only to die. And why do people die? To be born again! I do not find any sense other than this in this journey of life. I am said to be a ruler in this world. Who is a ruler and who is the ruled?

***kiṃ mē rājyēna kiṃ bhōgaiḥ kōhaṃ kimadamāgatam  
yanmithyaivāstu tanmithyā kanya nāma kimāgatam .. (vairāgya sarga 12,ślō 15)***

“What is the use of this kingdom for me? Are the luxuries of Royalty so essential? What for are these luxuries? Who am I actually? What is this world? Am I an imagination? Is this world an illusion? The end result is the same whichever of the two is an illusion,. Whatever is an illusion, let it be an illusion. How does it matter to the other? There is neither a harm nor any advantage to the other if one of them is unreal?

“If I am an illusion, what is the purpose of having a kingdom for me? Why to have even a body? If this is an illusory world, why should I go after the illusory comforts of this illusory world? So O Maharishi! From whatever angle I may consider, I do not find any meaningful thing that makes sense to me. A traveler in a desert may mistake a mirage to be an oasis and run for it. How long does he run? He will eventually understand its falsity. Then, even if he sees large rivers, he would not run for them anymore. Now my situation is like that.

“All said and done, who is it that takes a birth in this world? What is it that dies? It looks to me that some things appear for a time, and then disappear. What prevail in this world are only these two – appearance and disappearance. Beyond that, there is nothing like anyone being born or being dead. Does that mean that I am not alive? What about everyone that thinks he or she is alive? Are they not in the same position?

***acētanā iva janāḥ pavanaiḥ prāṇānāmabhiḥ***

***dhvanantaḥ samsthitā vyartham yathā kīcaka vēṇavaḥ .. (vairāgya sarga 12,ślō***

**20)**

Let me say what the situation feels like. There is a forest of bamboo shrubs. The bamboos that are aged develop cracks in them. When speedy breeze enters the cracks, creaky sounds are produced. The meaning of the sounds made by people when they talk is no different from the creaky sounds that emanate from the bamboo bushes. Just as the wind passing through the cracks in the bamboos, life-breath enters the bodies of humans. Because of that people are able to make sounds like these bamboos. What meaning can be given to the human speech?

“Maharishi! As I notice the pitiable state of this world, I cry within myself and my eyes shed tears.

***nijalōka bhayādēva galadbāṣpaṃ na rōdimi .. (vairāgya sarga 12,ślō 22)***

I am not giving vent to my feelings, for fear of disturbing the peace in our household.”

Opening up himself thus, Sri Rama narrated methodically how he observed everything very keenly in the world, how subtly he investigated each issue and what inferences he drew from his analysis.

A sage and a poet that he was, Valmiki dedicated an entire chapter of his book *yogavAsiShTha* to a description of Sri Rama’s sense of utter detachment. *yogavAsiShTha* is truly exceptional in its examination of each topic from every conceivable angle and then provide a comprehensive multidimensional outlook. Sometimes a reader may feel certain redundancy; but a closer look will reveal subtle variation in the nuance of the treatment of even the same subject matter, whenrepeated.

## **10. STRUCTURE OF *yogavAsiShTha*:**

A seeker aspiring to obtain the Knowledge of the Self goes through usually six phases. First and foremost, he has to develop an intense detachment (*vairāgya*) towards the visible and also the invisible worlds. *vairāgya* leads him to intense yearning for liberation – called ‘*mumukshatva*’. He then begins an inquiry into the creation of the visible world and its real status. This stage is known as ‘*utpatti*’. From his inquiry into the origins, he comes to know about the state of the reality of this universe. This is the stage of ‘*sthiti*’. As he moves on with his investigation, he discovers that the universe retracts into the dimensionless “Absolute.” This

process is known as ‘*upashama*’. What remains after *upashama* is “whatever that Is (exists)” into which the world has retracted. For instance, say, a wave has risen from the sea. No sooner, it subsides and retracts into the sea. Similarly, this whole world also merges back into that “Absolute.” This is called ‘*nirvANa*’, the Ultimate position.

Accordingly, Maharishi Valmiki divided his exhaustive work comprising 32,000 verses (nearly 8,000 more than what his first work, Ramayana contained) into six Chapters. They are:

1. *vairAgya prakaraNa* – gives a detailed discussion on detachment
2. *mumukshu vyavAhAra prakaraNa* – contains the details on the conduct of a seeker
3. *utpatti prakaraNa* – details the creation process of this universe.
4. *sthiti prakaraNa* – explains the sustenance status of this universe in detail.
5. *upashama prakaraNa* – explicates on how the acquisition of the true Knowledge serves as a lever to understand the process of retraction of the whole universe into the Absolute.
6. *nirvANa prakaraNa* – expounds at length about the attainment of liberation. This chapter has two parts, viz. the first part or *pUrvArdha* and the second part or *uttarArdha*.

## 11. What is *vairAgya*? -- A Discussion.

The principal pillar on which the entire philosophical edifice of Advaita develops is detachment. Accordingly, Maharishi Valmiki provides us a comprehensive exposition on Detachment in the context of Sri Rama’s experience. What is *vairAgya*?

The Sanskrit word ‘*rAga*’ means love. The antonym of it is ‘*virAga*’. *vairAgya* is *virAga*. Many consider the opposite of love is hatred. Thus ‘*virAga*’ is taken to mean hatred. But is it really so? A few people may hate their spouses and think it is ‘*vairAgya*’. In a fit of disgust they may even join a band of unenlightened ascetics. Some others, unable to face the swarm of difficulties and sorrows enveloping them, become swami-s (mendicants). Still some others, thinking that liberation is a position of magnificent bliss, and that it can be achieved by deserting their spouse and family, join the gangs of ascetics out of greed. None of such actions is ‘*vairAgya*’. Because a man embracing renunciation out of anger against his wife, will want to be a householder back again the moment his anger cools down. If one becomes a renunciate (sannyasi) because he has been unable to withstand the difficulties or face the problems of life, he would crave for comforts and would like to give up sannyasa when good times return. If one that takes up sannyasa runs to occupy a prestigious position, it is clear that he had not lost his ambition for name and fame. It is obvious that a person, even if he wears the apparel of a hermit, is clearly fond of high status in the society and not in renunciation or detachment. Therefore, none of these actions will fall under ‘*vairAgya*’.

## 12. RIGHT INQUIRY:

An in-depth investigation into what is the ultimate reality will lead one to realize that this world is ephemeral and impermanent. As a consequence of this, one should be propelled to take up the next step in the inquiry. It is to find out the relationship between himself and the world he

interacts with. Right inquiry conducted without any bias would result in being completely disinterested in any worldly object. Such a disinterest developing after a thorough analysis only can be called as “*vairAgya*.”

Even after knowing that the world is impermanent, it is not uncommon for a man to think that one may experience the good things of life at least as long as they last. But the question is, is there a single good thing in this visible world that is worthy of experiencing? Once again, this question demands a serious inquiry.

One may ask impatiently: “Why do you beat around the bush, you may as well say that there is nothing good or worthy of expending your time in this materialistic world. Why don’t you come to the point directly?” That is a valid question. But the more valid point is that it does not matter what someone says or does not say. What is important is what you understand in your own heart of heart, in every cell of your body. In order to arrive at a fully convincing answer, you have to find out by yourself the truth of the matter by thoroughly probing into each issue.

How does a thorough probe proceed? Everything in this world has some good as well as some bad part within it. Moreover, what is good or bad very much depends on the perspective from which a thing is viewed. Obviously then any value judgment arrived at is highly contextual. It has only a relative validity. Then, what is it that is absolutely good or bad? This will require us to assess things from an absolute point of view. How does one go about it? It is rather difficult for the ordinary folk to bite into it. Hence, Maharishi Valmiki shows the way through an example. He illustrates by narraing how such an inquiry went on in the mind of Sri Rama. The Sage describes the process in such a great detail that he devoted nineteen cantos (*sarga-s*) – from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 32<sup>nd</sup> in the first chapter titled *vairAgya prakaraNa* for this topic! But we shall here provide a brief sketch only in order to give a feel of his approach.

### 13. WEALTH:

The Sage tells us in the 13<sup>th</sup> sarga about Rama’s thinking with regard to wealth. Sri Rama found from his analysis that acquiring or losing wealth are both causal to unhappiness. Saving money is as much of a problem as spending it, according to him. He deliberates on the ills of wealth from about 20 different angles and finally sums up his analysis in the following words:

*na śrīssukhāya bhagavan  
duḥkhāyai hi vardhatē .. (vairāgya sarga 13, ślō 10)*

“Wealth does not give comforts even in this world. Therefore, wealth is a source for eternal sorrow.”

### 14. LONGEVITY:

After wealth, people generally ask for longevity. Everyone wishes to live long. What is the purpose of a long life? One doesn’t know the answer. But under the belief that he would live long, he undertakes many a work. Working harder every day thus, he contributes for his own sorrow.

***bhārō vivēkina śśāstram bhārō jñānam ca rāgiṇaḥ  
asāntasya manō bhārō bhārō nātma vidō vapuḥ .. (vairāgya sarga 14, ślō 13)***

What does a man achieve from a long life? He will read many *shAstra*-s (scriptures). Some people may even get them by rote but hardly assimilate anything. The scriptural knowledge will be merely a burden, like the load of a bundle of firewood on the head, for such persons. They struggle to retain the text in memory by repeated recitation.

Even if by chance a little understanding is achieved, they would like to derive some or other benefit out of it. These greedy people are constantly worried about obtaining adequate rewards for their knowledge. Consequently, their own knowledge becomes their burden. As a result, both, i.e. those who got the *shAstra*-s by heart and those who acquired some partial understanding, do not have peace of mind. A mind without peace is like an organ with an affliction. A mind without peace is ever busy with unending stream of meaningless thoughts. Such a mind will only be a burden.

The main cause for all the trouble is his ignorance of who truly he is. He does not know what for he studies the scriptures, why he thinks or where is the end for his desires. Hence, every action he takes becomes a burden for him. Ultimately, he finds that his own body is a burden for him. What then is the purpose of achieving longevity for this body?

[Thus did Rama analyze the human craving for longevity and established the hollowness of such a desire.]

## **15. EGO:**

[Sri Rama next examines the ego.]

Ego comes in two shades. One is familiar to everyone – the pride of one’s own self. The other ego is the belief that ‘I am the body.’ This ego is at the root of the first one. Because of this belief, many crimes are committed by the human beings.

The belief that ‘I am my body’ is the long time enemy of man. Because of this belief, people lose their sense of equanimity. It prevents people from considering others as their own self. Consequently, peace of mind eludes everyone. If a man thinks that everyone in this world is like himself, he would have realized that everybody passes through happy and sorrowful times. But his ego comes in way from coming to such an understanding. Because of the absence of this understanding, the haves dominate over the have-nots under the illusion that it would bring them more happiness. It may give them a short-lived happiness but ultimately, they end up in misery only. Further, the weak may resort to sycophancy in order to curry favors from the strong. But that too misfires eventually. So thinking of others as either superior or inferior to oneself results only in sorrow. The principal reason behind the perception of inequalities is one’s own sense of ego.

The nihilistic view of the Buddhists is far better in this respect. Though, their philosophy of nihilism does not hold waters, at least it pleads for the equality of all beings and exhorts people to think of coexistence on a level playing field.

The ego, the root cause of sorrows, has entered me also. But I am pushing it away and keeping it at bay, on the strength of my discretion.

***nāham rāmō na mē vāñchā bhāvēṣu ca na mē manah***

***śānta āsītu micchāmi svātmanīva jinō yathā .. (vairāgya sarga 15, ślō 8)***

I am not Rama. I have no desires. I have no thoughts in my mind. Though, I do not exactly know who I am, I also feel like the Buddhist philosophers that all the people are equal, no one being higher or lower. I try to remain peaceful without enmity towards anybody.

Though, following the Buddhistic thought of equality of all people, I have been able to get rid of my ego completely, I am unable to understand fully who really I am. I feel very sad that my ignorance is worrying me. So, I beseech you to teach me that which in your judgment is best suited to me.

[**Note:** As a reference to Buddha was made in the above narration, some scholars argue that *yogavAsiShTha* should be ascribed to a post-Buddhistic period. What is to be noted here is that all the preachings of Bhagavan Buddha, the son of Shuddhodhana, were not his own. Buddha himself declared that what he taught had been in existence for a long time. It was not that the Buddha found them. He only helped in the propagation of what already existed. From the evidence found in “Dhammapitakam” and also in the Jathaka stories (stories describing the previous births of Shuddhodhana) we can infer that there were several Bouddha Acharyas (teachers) in existence much before the Buddha known to history. So, mere reference to the preachings of Buddha, should not lead one to the conclusion that *yogavAsiShTha* should be dated to a period later than Shuddhodhana-Buddha. We may understand that such preaching of equality of all people was prevalent in during the age of Sri Rama and that Sri Rama showed appreciation of the same.]

## **16. MIND:**

[Sri Rama next probed into the nature of mind. This is described in the 16<sup>th</sup> canto. He says that there is not much difference between the mind and a stray dog!]

Like a dog on the street, the mind runs fast hither and thither as if it's doing some important work. Neither has it any work nor does its running have any meaning! Controlling the mind is as difficult as caging a lion.

Out of the horrendous acts the mind does, the most harmful one is not to allow us to accept that the one and the same Consciousness dwells in all of us. It brings about a dualistic view at every opportunity and thrusts it on us. I have already mentioned that the differentiating dualistic view leads us inevitably to sorrow. The mind normally goes by whatever it is accustomed to. But if it is exposed to a new temptation, it forgets all its good behavior it was

habituated in a trice. It may be possible to swallow an entire ocean, one may uproot the Mount Meru and balance it on one's own head, burning embers could possibly be gulped, but it is impossible to control the mind.

If you ask me what for is the desire to control the mind, I submit that, from my observation and analysis, it is clear to me that it is the mind alone that is responsible for the entire universe and the matter therein.

***cittam kāraṇa marthānām tasmin sati jagattrayam  
tasman kṣīṇē jagat kṣīṇam taccikitsyaṃ prayatnataḥ .. (vairāgya sarga 16,ślō  
25)***

Mind is certainly responsible for all the visible things in this world. As long as the mind exists, there exist the three worlds. If the mind is withdrawn, the universe too is folded up. *suShupti* (deep sleep) is the best proof for this. So, whatever cost it may take, everyone should treat the affliction of the mind, which happens to be the root cause for the entire universe.

## **17. AVARICE (*tRShNA*):**

[*tRShNA* is excessive greed. Sri Rama had already observed that the relationship between mind and greed was like that of a husband and wife. They are very closely associated. He explores *tRShNA* further in the 17<sup>th</sup> *sarga*.]

Greed is like dark nights. Dark nights make the human eyes blind. But they open the eyes of the bats which hang upside down. Similarly, the 'dark night' of avarice muffles our discretion and raises the bat-like feelings of love and hatred.

Howsoever mighty be an ox, it surrenders once the noose is tightened. Likewise, I inescapably surrender to greed. Greed does not leave any virtues in us. It makes people ignorant. It is like a frightful disease. It does not allow anyone to sit at ease even when put in the most comfortable mansion and makes him run to the wilderness.

Everyone in this world wants robust health. It is also because of *tRShNA*. Lust for women is also the result of *tRShNA*.

***rōgārti raṅganā tṛṣṇā gambhīramapi mānavam  
uttānatām nayantyāśu sūryāṃśava ivāmbujam .. (vairāgya sarga 17,ślō 45)***

A man, even of haughty looks, becomes suddenly woebegone, once his health gets affected. Similarly, a man who appears very dignified easily succumbs to the temptations of a

woman and falls at her feet. *tRShNA* is so powerful that it can blow away even a well-established nobleman or a great scholar or an awe-inspiring warrior as if he were a blade of grass.

*tRShNA* is not an ordinary disease. It is an obnoxious pox. Medication will only worsen it. Doctors advise against administering any medicines to such diseases. They counsel to ignore the disease so that it would subside by itself. It is the same way with *tRShNA* also.

***tr̥ṣṇā viṣūcīkā mantrāḥ  
cintātyāgō hi kathyatē .. (vairāgya sarga 17, ślō 43).***

Just as there is a mantra for the disease smallpox, there is a mantra as a remedy for *tRShNA* also. The mantra for both the problems is to give up thoughts over enjoyable things. Because elders say that running after objects is at the root of *tRShNA*. (Later on in Bhagavatgita also the same thing was emphasized in the following sloka

***dhyāyatō viṣayān puṃsaḥ  
saṅgastēṣūpa jāyatē  
saṅgātsañjāyatē kāmaḥ--*** Bhagavd-Gita II-62)

If we go on thinking about a thing, we develop a bond with it. A bond in turn breeds a desire for it. A desire fortified is *tRShNA*.

## 18. BODY:

[Sri Rama analyzes the nature of human body in the 18th *sarga*.]

It was already said earlier that all desires are detrimental. Sri Rama had already discussed the desire for longevity in the 14<sup>th</sup> *sarga*. Longevity concerns the body only. What was the need of examining the body once again specifically? The issue in relation to the body is taken up repeatedly because of the special attachment humans possess to their body.

“*jīvan bhadraṇi paśyati*” is an adage meaning that if we manage to stay alive, someday dame luck may come to us by herself. People firmly believe that the body is the basis for defining all the comforts so much so that everybody loves his/her body. So Sri Rama expounds on the nature of body in 62 verses. He finally concludes:

***satata bhaṁgaru kāryaparamparā vijaya jāta jayam hathavṛttiṣu  
prabala dōṣa midam tu kalēvaram ṛṇa mivāhamapōhya sukham sthitaḥ ..  
(vairāgya sarga 18, ślō 62)***

There are certain things in this world, which compete with each other in the rate of their degradation. Some things like lightning, clouds, castles in the air etc. succeed easily in such a competition. Body outdoes even those in the speed of its disintegration. The body could excel

over them because it has not only the defects found in those things but also some additional flaws as well. So, I have come to the conclusion that this body is not even as worthy as a blade of grass.

## 19. CHILDHOOD, YOUTH AND OLD AGE:

[Next, Sri Rama takes up a detailed look at the different stages of aging of the body -viz. childhood, youth and old age - and related matters in the *sarga*-s 19<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup>.

Some opine that because of its innocence, the childhood is blemishless. Some others consider the little children as absolutely divine. Yet others say that it gives tremendous happiness to look at small kids. But the question is not about how others feel looking at children. The important point for in-depth examination is what type of experiential understanding an individual (*jIva*) has during childhood. Looked at from this perspective, childhood is a period of ignorance, uncertainty, wants, angst etc. It is characterized by several defects like foolishness, inability, dependence on others, lack of knowledge and so on. Rama asserts that there is very little happiness for the individual in that phase. Therefore, he determines that:

***śaiśavam bhaya mandiram .. (vairāgya sarga 19, ślō 30)***

Childhood is an abode of all fears.

Sri Rama continued his investigation to find out whether these shortcomings of the childhood disappear as one would become a youth. He felt that the adulthood too typically comprises not only those very defects but some more too. The additional defects he noticed were ambition, pride and jealousy, likes and dislikes and lust. He surmised that being young and to be without those drawbacks was as impossible as having a forest in the skies. So, he concluded that youth was also not a period of happiness. ]

[**Note:** Young age is the time when men and women are attracted to each other. Lust plays a prominent role at that age. Because of their passion, they commit many mistakes. It does not mean that an accusing finger is being shown toward the females when the matter is discussed in relation to “man.” It is not in the Indian culture to blame the ladies for the basic instincts of human beings. It is also wrong if a lady is assumed to be merely an object of enjoyment by the man. In spiritual texts, whenever a discussion of the sexual relations arises, we should understand that it is about the mutual attraction of both the genders and that all such discussions are applicable equally to both men and women.]

Sri Rama considered also the sexual desire of men for women in his analysis. He summed up his findings to say:

***āpāta ramaṇīyatvaṃ kalpyatē kēvala striyāḥ . (vairāgya sarga 21, ślō 8)***

Both men and women develop a natural attraction to each other without much thought and there is no true love within that.

Thereafter Sri Rama considered the life in old age. After examining from different angles, he stated thus:

***aparyāptam hi bālatvam balātpibati yauvanam  
yauvanam ca jarā paścāt paśya karkaśatām mithaḥ .. (vairāgya sarga 22,ślō 1)***

A human being in his childhood is interested in playing and before that interest is fully satiated, youth overtakes him. Even before the sexual desires and other enjoyments of the youth are fulfilled, old age overtakes him. See how different stages of man's life themselves act unkindly against each other!

***vārdhakē vardhatē sprhāḥ (vairāgya sarga 22,ślō 8)***

No sooner old age comes, no strength remains; but desires continue to grow.

Hence, Sri Rama declared that the old age would predominantly be occupied by sorrow, infatuation, separation, tragedies, distress, and insults.

Thus did Sri Rama determine that all the worldly things including the physical body as well as subtle body were full of shortcomings and defects. The significance of losing interest in the subtle body meant that he had no interest even in the comforts that could be enjoyed only by the subtle body. The comforts that can be enjoyed only with the subtle body are those that are available in subtle worlds like the heaven.

Maharishi Viswamitra could clearly assess from Rama's detailed exposition that he had already crossed the first stage, *ihAmutra phalabhoga virAga*, on the path of seeking.

*ihAmutra phalabhoga virAga* is the first of the four eligibility requirements that one has to qualify in the pursuit of Self-Knowledge. These are known as the *sAdhana catuShTaya sampatti* (The Fourfold Aids of Seeking). They are:

- i. *ihAmutra phalabhoga virAga* (Renunciation of the worldly desires and desires pertaining to the Heaven).
- ii. *nityAnitya vastu viveka* (Discrimination between the eternal (Truth) and the ephemeral (the objects of the world).
- iii. *shamAdi Shatka sampatti* (Attainment of The Sixfold Treasures like the control of the internal organs, control of the external organs etc.).
- iv. *mumukshatvam* (Unceasing Desire for Liberation).

Sri Rama continued with the narration of his findings arrived at after a very subtle and critical examination of the reality of things in the world. His presentation on the nature of time comes next.

## **20. TIME:**

I talked about thus far with regard to the different stages from childhood onwards in a man's life. They occur due to the passage of time. Time promotes every illusion in this world. Time provides the support for desires. I think I have a want now. I equip myself in the present with necessary ways and means for the fulfillment of my want, and then time gives me scope to enjoy the fruits in the future for what I do in the now. Thus time has a great contributory role in compounding the desires of the people. But time may also take away all the pleasures of people. There is nothing else in this world as cruel as Time. There is nothing that Time cannot devour.

[Rama mentions with a wry sense of humor that Time behaves as irresponsibly as a Prince without any Royal duties. Thus he makes fun of the attitude of the Princes living at his time. Sri Rama elaborately analyzed the nature of Time in four *sarga*-s. Finally, he pronounces that he lost completely all charm for the worldly life after examining the nature of Time.]

## 21. NOTICING THE DEFECTS:

Sri Rama did not mince words in describing the transitoriness of all the visible things in this world in the 27<sup>th</sup> *sarga*. Sri Rama established in the 28<sup>th</sup> *sarga* that all those things, which were believed to give pleasure, ultimately caused sorrow only. He averred that there was nothing in this world that could really bring true happiness.

Sri Rama further said that there seemed to be no end to the cycle of life and death. While one might feel happy being born as a human being as a result of one's past virtuous deeds, one could see the truth that the same being might be born later as a beast if he or she committed a serious sin. He expressed that the Trinity – Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra were also sliding down towards self-destruction. After a thorough inquiry from different angles, Sri Rama was unequivocal in expressing the sense of utter detachment in his mind. He said:

***iti mē dōṣa dāvāgni dagdhē mahati cētasi  
prasphuranti na bhōgāsāḥ mṛgatṛṣṇā ssarassviva .. (vairāgya sarga 29,ślō 1)***

Thus I see only blemishes in everything of this world. These accumulated defects turn into a forest fire (*dāvāgni*) and its heat has burnt my mind. So no seeds of desires for enjoyment of this worldly life sprout in my mind.

***nābhinandāmi maraṇaṃ nābhinandāmi jīvitam  
yathā tiṣṭhāmi tathaiva vigata jvaram .. (vairāgya sarga 29,ślō 8)***

Neither I wish to die nor I wish to live. I will just be as I am. That seems to be the best way out of this suffering.

I am bewildered to see people falling to the temptations in life, though they are fully aware of the evils. I do have some discretion; yet, I am unable to get a firm hold on it. I am afraid that my mind too might succumb to the temptations. I am still not sure of the discretion I have and the wisdom I possess. My position is very similar to that of a wife who is married to a weak

husband. Such a wife will live forever with the fear that the husband may not be able to protect her. So also is my fear about my mind.”

Baring his heart thus, Rama made an ardent appeal to both the Maharishis for guidance. Citing King Janaka, he said that a few virtuous people in this world, in spite of being involved in the worldly affairs, appeared to live in perfect peace. He wondered how it could be possible. He desired to know the means to achieve it.

***athavā vyavahārasya brūta tām yukti muttamām  
tatkatham kēna vā kiṃ vā kṛta muttama cētasā ..  
brūhi mē sādhavō yēna nūnam nirduḥkhatām gatāḥ .. (vairāgya sarga 31, ślō  
19).***

“Great Sages! Please do teach me the way how those great men could attain a sorrow-free state.”

Rama asserted that he would not do anything, nor would he eat, wear clothing, or talk to anyone. He gave a decisive ultimatum: “I will even stop breathing gradually till I can find the way!”

## **22. APPLAUSE BY THE MAHARISHIS:**

Thus ended the narration by Sri Rama in the congregation of noblemen, Saints, Maharishis and others. Maharishi Valmiki provided an exhaustive list of all the great men, saints and sages who were present at Dasaratha’s court. They were all astonished by the in-depth presentation on an inquiry into the essence of Truth by a lad who was hardly 12 years old with an acumen that rivalled knowledgeable Pundits. The Sages like Narada, Vyasa, Viswamitra, Vasishta, Pulaha and so on were very much pleased and heartily blessed him. Gandharvas, Siddhas and others showered flowers from above on Rama as a mark of their admiration. The assembled dignitaries held their breath anxiously awaiting the response from the Maharishis Viswamitra and Vasishta.

[**Note:** One may wonder how it could be said that Sage Vyasa was present in the Royal Court of Dasaratha at the time of these proceedings. Sri Rama belonged to *tretAyuga* and Vyasa to *dwAparayuga*. Some modern scholars would even argue that *yogavAsiShTha*, therefore belongs to a period later than Bhagavad-Gita.

The fact is that the term Vyasa is the title of a position. It is not the name of a person. Currently it is the ‘*shwetavarAha kalpa*’, the first of the series, running in the 51<sup>st</sup> year of Lord Brahma. Of it, so far six ‘*manvantara*-s’ have passed and the 7<sup>th</sup>, the ‘*vaivaswata manvantara*,’ is presently on. Of this ‘*vaivaswata manvantara*,’ 27 *mahAyuga*-s have passed and the 28<sup>th</sup> is going on now. In the 28<sup>th</sup> *mahAyuga* -- *kRta*, *treta* and *dwApara yuga*-s have already passed. The celebrity born at the end of *dwApara yuga* who assumed the position of Vyasa is Krishna Dwaipayana or BadarAyana. It has been said in the Mahabhagavatha that this Veda Vyasa will assume the honored position as one of the seven Rishis in the forthcoming ‘*sAvarNi*

*manvantaram*'. Further, it is said in our Epics that at the end of every *dwApara yuga*, one Vyasa Bhagavan will be born and he will have a very long life and that he will occupy important high positions in the future ages.

So we need to be careful in attributing the name 'Vyasa' to any specific individual the moment we come across that word. To understand clearly, the reader should know the cycle of *yuga*-s (Epochs and Periods of time).

There are four *yuga*-s. They are:

1. *kRta yuga*
2. *treta yuga*
3. *dwApara yuga*
4. *kali yuga*.

Four *yuga*-s make one *mahA yuga* (Greater Era).

Time goes in cycles repeating these *yuga*-s much like the same seven days cycle in each week or the same twelve months repeat every year.

Hence, it is not correct to think that the Vyasa of the previous the *dwApara yuga* attended the congregation of Rama, the moment a mention of Vyasa is made. We have to understand that one of the Vyasas of the past epochs attended the congregation.

Sri Rama himself raised a question about this matter in a later *sarga*. We shall have a more detailed explanation when we come to that part.]

Sri Rama remained unaffected by the praises showered on him. Maharishi Narada urged Vasishta and Viswamitra to reply to Sri Rama's queries. They took his counsel as a directive. Maharishi Viswamitra responded first.

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Here ends the first Chapter titled *vairagya prakaraNa* in *yogavAsiShTha*. This chapter is just a prelude to what Maharishi Valmiki is going to pen in far more detail in the upcoming chapters. The second Chapter opens with the sermon given by Sage Viswamitra. It serves the purpose of an introduction to the substantially weighty discourses of Sage Vasishta that come up in the later Chapters.

A point to be noted here is regarding the pre-requisites - *sAdhana catuShTaya sampatti* (The Fourfold Aids of Seeking) - that have to be met before undertaking a serious spiritual study. Sage Valmiki declared publicly that Sri Rama had already achieved the first two, viz. *ihAmutra phalabhoga virAga* and *nityAnitya vastu viveka*.

How about the remaining two? Did Rama fulfill them also?

A poet does not always tell things in a direct manner; he tells them with an elan and beauty that can hardly be surpassed. Sage Valmiki was not only a philosopher but also an unparalleled poet. So we find that the Sage talks about the achievement of *shamAdi Shatka sampatti* and *mumukshatvam* by Rama in an indirect manner. He stated that Rama was in an extremely detached state of mind and that he emphatically said that he would not eat, wear

clothes or talk to anyone until he learnt the subtle philosophical truths. From these words we can clearly infer that Rama had had total control over his inner and outer organs of the body (i.e. *shamAdi Shatka sampatti*). His declaration that he would gradually even stop breathing indicates to us how intense was his aspiration for liberation (i.e. *mumukshatvam*). Thus did Maharishi Valmiki establish that Rama was fully ready for initiation into the ‘*Atma vidya*’ (Self-Knowledge), having achieved the Fourfold Aids of Seeking.

## REVIEW OF THE CHAPTER ON DETACHMENT:

Sage Valmiki, the Poet and Author of the magnum opus *yogavAsiShTha*, divided this classic Advaita text into six chapters. The chapters are:

1. *vairAgya prakaraNa* – 1500 verse
2. *mumukshu vyavAhAra prakaraNa* – 1000 verses
3. *utpatti prakaraNa* – 3000 verses
4. *sthiti prakaraNa* – 5000 verses.
5. *upashama prakaraNa* – 7000 verses
6. *nirvANa prakaraNa* – 14500 Verses

The first two chapters are of an introductory nature. The real meat of the Advaita teaching commences from the third chapter. An important point to be borne in mind is that the study of a philosophical text is unlike reading a novel or fiction. In order to experientially understand the depths of the philosophy, the reader has to have attained stainless detachment. On the pretext of establishing that Sri Rama, the main student receiving the teaching, was already endowed with supreme detachment, Sage Valmiki begins the first chapter of the book with an exposition on what exactly is detachment (*vairAgya*) and what is its nature for the benefit of ordinary readers like us. The Sage also introduced the broad outline of the plan of teaching, and a few technical terms and concepts in the first chapter.

All classic philosophical scriptures conform to a specific structure. It is called the Fourfold Intention. It comprises:

1. *viShaya* – the subject matter of the book
2. *adhikAri* – the target reader who is qualified to study the work
3. *sambandha* – the connection between the subject and the content of the book as a whole
4. *prayojana* - the benefits accruing from a study of this text.

Sage Valmiki clearly spelt out the above four aspects in his own style in the first chapter of the book. Through the story of Bharadwaja, the Sage indicated the subject matter of the work to be a presentation of the means of remedying the sorrow and suffering of the mankind. He established through the stories of Arishtanemi, Karunya, and Suthikshna the eligibility requirements of a student who can benefit from a study of this scripture. He said:

*nAtyantamajnyo no ta jnaH so ‘smin shAstre ‘dhikAravAn || -- ch I, sarga 2, shloka 2.*

Meaning: (The seeker who can study this text would be) neither a total ignoramus nor a complete Knower of Truth.

The Sage illustrated the connection between the topic of the study and the total work with the story of Lord Vishnu. He told us about the four curses received by Lord Vishnu, how, as a consequence to the curse by Sanakumara, He would be enveloped by ignorance as a twelve year old boy by the name Rama, how He would develop detachment spurred by His own internal good quality (*satvaguNa*) and then would proceed to keenly observe the world thereby attaining eligibility to obtain the Knowledge of the Self. Thus the Sage not only establishes the connection between the aim of the work and the content of the book but also describes in detail about detachment which is the fundamental requirement in the study of Vedanta.

The Sage demonstrates the path for the development of detachment in the seeker through the dialogue between Rama and the Sage Viswamitra. Every aspect of the worldly life gets examined in minute detail during that conversation. At every stage it clearly shows that there is nothing worthwhile to be pursued in the worldly life.

Sage Narada recognizes the mature state of Rama who lost interest in enjoying himself in this and also the next world. The chapter ends with the Sage Narada encouraging the Sages Viswamitra and Vasishta to impart the Knowledge of the Self to Rama.

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