

Urmila and Lakshmana: Conversation between them upon Rama's Departure

Ranganatha Ramayanam by Gona Budda Reddy, in Telugu (13<sup>th</sup> century)

Urmila, the beautiful wife of Laksmana, was an exemplary artist. She immersed herself daily in painting canvases. No one except Laksmana was allowed anywhere near her when she was in her painting frenzy. She had been painting her favorite couple, Rama and her sister Sita, that fateful day. It was a rather serious depiction – the coronation of the most exquisite couple in the universe!

In fact, she had just finished painting it. Urmila considered it her masterpiece and had planned to gift it to the royal couple as soon as they returned from their coronation. A clatter somewhere nearby had startled the sensitive Urmila. The bowl of wet paint in her hands had splashed all over the painting, defacing it completely. Her masterpiece had been ruined.

Angrily, she had turned around to see what had made her jump right into her priceless painting. Her anger had dissipated the moment she saw her husband.

“Look what just happened! I was painting Lord Rama's and Sita's coronation scene. This is an inauspicious omen. What do I do now?”

“You can now paint it 14 years from now, Urmila. Rama has been exiled to the forest for 14 years, and Bharata will be king instead.” Lakshmana spoke in an attempt to pacify his beloved wife.

“What? How could this happen?”

“You will understand everything with time. What you need to understand now is that the delicate Sita will accompany Rama to the forest. And, to serve Them both. I must go, too.”

Urmila had grasped the situation and immediately gathered herself.

An awkward silence followed. Laksmana had nothing to say. But, before the hush could stretch too long, Urmila had said something that would remain etched in Laksmana's heart and be his beacon of hope through the next 14 years.

“Opportunities to serve superiors come unsought to ones who yearn for them. Creating an atmosphere for another to serve in a focused manner is also service. I would love to accompany you to the forest, but I will not. My joining in would invariably come in the way of your service to Rama. Your duty could be compromised because of my presence.

The duty of a wife is to constantly be in the company of her husband. But to fulfill my duty, how can I obstruct yours? Performing a duty serves its purpose only when the

object of duty is pleased. If I insist that I do my duty to you by accompanying you, you will be displeased because the object of your duty, Rama, will be displeased with your negligence. So, my duty now is to facilitate the perfection you can attain in your responsibility by staying away.

The essence of your going with Rama is sacrifice. You are sacrificing your comforts, your wife, your wealth, your opinion and your pleasures. Following your example, I am sacrificing my desires and my duties. The real duty of a wife is to understand the mood of her husband.”