

Ramanavami



Sri-Ramnavami is dedicated to the memory of Lord Rama. It occurs on the ninth day (navami). The festival commemorates the birth of Rama who is remembered for his preperous and righteous reign. Ramrajya (the reign of Rama) has become synonymous with a period of peace and prosperity. Mahatma Gandhi also used this term to describe how, according to him, India should be after independence. Ramnavami occurs in the month of March. Celebrations begin with a prayer to the Sun early in the morning. At midday, when Lord Rama is supposed to have been born, a special prayer is performed. In northern India especially, an event that draws popular participation is the Ramnavami procession. The main attraction in this procession is a gaily decorated chariot in which four persons are dressed up as Rama, his brother Laxman, his queen Sita and his disciple Hanuman. The chariot is accompanied by several other persons dressed up in ancient costumes as work by Rama's solders. The procession is a gusty affair with the participants shouting praises echoing the happy days of Rama's reign.

On the face of it Sri-Ramnavmi appears to be just a festival commemorating the reign of a king who was later deified. But even behind present-day traditions there are clues which unmistakably point to the origin of Ramnavmi as lying beyond the Ramayana story. Sri Ramnavami occurs at the beginning of summer when the sun has started moving nearer to the northern hemisphere. The Sun is considered to be the progenitor of Rama's dynasty which is called the Sun dynasty (Raghukula or Raghuvamsa, Raghu means Sun and Kula or Vamsa mean familial descendant). Rama is also known as Raghunatha, Raghupati, Raghavendra etc. That all these names begin with the prefix Raghu is also suggestive of some link with Sun-worship. The hour chosen for the observance of the lord's birth is that when the sun is overhead and is at its maximum brilliance. In some Hindu sects, prayers on Ramnavami day start not with an invocation to Rama but to Surya (sun). Again the syllable Ra is used in the word to describe the sun and brilliance in many languages. In Sanskrit, Ravi and Ravindra mean Sun. Significantly, the ancient Egyptians termed the sun as Amon Ra or simply as "Ra". In Latin the syllable Ra is used to connote light. For example, we have Radiance which emission of light, or Radium which means any substance emitting light or brilliance. The common element is the syllable Ra which in many languages is used to derive words for describing Sun or light. The occurrence of this syllable

in most names used for Rama alongwith other clues is strongly suggestive that the festival Ramnavami antedates the R- ayana and it must have originated much before the Ramayana, as a 'Sun-festival' for invoking the Sun who was recognised as the source of light and heat even in ancient times. The importance of the Sun was much more in the higher latitudes from where the Aryans are supposed to have migrated into India. Many royal dynasties portrayed symbols of virility like the Sun, Eagle, Lion etc. as their progenitor. Rama's dynasty considered themselves to have descended from the Sun. This could have led to the tagging on, of Rama's birthday to a festival devoted to the sun. There is some link between Lord Rama and Sun Worship. The Sun is considered to be the progenitor of Rama's dynasty which is called the Sun dynasty (Raghukula or Raghuvamsa, Raghu means Sun and Kula or Vamsa mean familial descendant). Rama is also known as Raghunatha, Raghupati, Raghavendra etc. That all these names begin with the prefix Raghu is also suggestive of some link with Sun-worship. The hour chosen for the observance of the lord's birth is that when the sun is overhead and is at its maximum brilliance. Significantly, the ancient Egyptians termed the sun as Amon Ra or simply as "Ra". In Latin the syllable Ra is used to connote light. For example, we have Radiance which emission of light, or Radium which means any substance emitting light or brilliance. The common element is the syllable Ra which in many languages is used to derive words for describing Sun or light.