DEPICTION OF DIFFERENT SHADES OF FEMALE CHARACTERS IN THE RAMAYANA

Dr. Manisha Dwivedi¹, Sarika Soni²
¹HOD English Dept., ²M.Phil. Scholar
Dr. C. V. Raman University

Abstract: - The Ramayana is also referred as the ‘Striprasanga’ as it deals with the story of woman despite the fact of the epic. A study of the women characters in The Ramayana will bring to light not only their individual characteristics but also the subtle contrasts and the ideals for which they stood. Woman characters can be studied from different viewpoints: their relationships, their position at home and in the society, attitude of men towards women, their education, freedom and rights and the norms which they were suppose to follow. This epic not only stand for the main of the age but also for the women who supported their husbands as well as all other family members. The lesion of the epic is steel repeated in most of the Hindu families.

Keywords: - Striprasanga, woman despite, subtle contrast, ideals, viewpoints, relationship, attitude.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Ramayana is a mythological book by R. K. Narayan. It was first published by Chatto and Windus, London in 1973. The book is a shortened, prose adaptation of the Tamil Kamba Ramayanam. The writer has been inspired by a Tamil- version of the epic written by an eleventh century poet, Kamban. It offers the reader a compact yet unhurried retailing of degrade epic, and succeeds marvelously in evoking its literary luster which has shown undimmed through the century.

He explores the roles and duty of women and what it takes in order to be a good woman in Indian society. He explores these roles through the women throughout the epic whether it is the wife of a King or some form of deity. While in general women were viewed as subpar to men and were seen as second-class citizens, the women in the book shape the men into who they become and account for much of the manipulation of the individuals and the caretaking of the individuals. Women such as Sita and Kausalya demonstrates those women that are good. These women were regarded as beautiful, not only for their physical attributes, but for their behavior in regards to the males in the epic. They had everything that women should have- they are kind and respected by the males in their lives above all else. However these women are also met with their opposite women who have much improvement to make before being recognized as good women in the Indian society. These women, like Kaikeyi and Soorpanakha go against all Indian ideals. They use their sexuality in order to attempt to manipulate the men of the epic. They do everything in their power in order to get their way, even if it is at the cost of others.

“The Ramayana is an epic poem. The main protagonist (Rama) gives us many morals about human being. Rama is an incarnation form of Vishnu to kill the demons. Rama had a great father named Dasaratha, and he made a mistake to exile Rama for fourteen years. Rama did not rebel, but obeyed. This shows how people have to respect their parents.”

This epic’s impressions on Hindus family

Respect elders and be duty bound towards parents, remain united with siblings even during the toughest of times, be loyal to your spouse, be deeply committed to your duty, choose the path of
righteousness, remain humble no matter how powerful you become, never consider anyone inferior, all that glitters is not gold, embrace all irrespective of caste, creed or colour.

Why women portrayals had been depicted in this research paper?
Most storytellers were male, as women were kept away from the written world. Social constraints also meant that being a woman was not compatible with the nomadic existence of most bards/storytellers – so obviously the stories were told from a male point-of-view. Valmiki, being a man of his time, saw nothing wrong in portraying his women characters as subordinate to their men, recognised only as mothers, wives, sisters and daughters, tied to their duty in those roles: revered if conforming to these expectations (Sita), and vilified if they didn’t (Surpanakha). Arshia Sattar, a Ramayana scholar, who has an acclaimed prose translation of the Ramayana to her credit, says in an essay, “Sita and Surpanakha exemplify two types of women … Sita is good, pure, light, auspicious and subordinate, whereas Surpanaka is evil, impure, dark, inauspicious and insubordinate.”

Woman is the main basis on which the concepts of society and culture rest. Ramayana is the epic in which the Indian Culture is enshrined. It depicts the difficult arduous path of bringing about the public weal as the path of subordination of human instincts. The characters are drawn from all section of society. There is on the one hand, the wifehood and generous motherhood of Kausalya and, on the other hand, the dominating wifehood of Kaikkeyi who is proud of her beauty and her motherhood. There is tender feeling of dedication of Sita and the kshatriya’s quality of Sumitra who is like a lioness. There is Manthara motivated by selfish considerations and Sabari engaged in the process of self upliftment. This diversity of life situations gives varied dimensions of the different women characters of the epic.

The name “Sita” has been derived from a Sanskrit word meaning, “furrow”, to indicate her being found by King Janak while plowing the field. It is also connected to a Vedic goddess of fertility of the land. There has been a long dispute regarding the birthplace of Devi Sita. An interesting fact about Sita is that she is also considered to be a reincarnation of Vedvati, whom Ravan had tried to molest while she was under penance, so as to become the consort of Lord Vishnu. She then cursed Ravana to become the cause of his destruction in her next birth. It has also been mentioned in the Puranas that Devi Sita was the first born of Ravana and Mandodari. Astrologers had predicted that the first born of Mandodari will be the cause of the destruction of his entire lineage. Hence, Ravan had abandoned her and ordered the child to be buried away in a distant land, who was then discovered by King Janak and his wife to be raised as the princess of Mithila. Sita while playing with her sisters had unknowingly moved the table over which the "Shiva Dhanush" had been placed; which was something no one in the palace could do. This incident was however observed by King Janaka and he decided to make this incident as the backdrop for swayamvar.

"If you had been banished to the Dandaka vans, then so have I. I will go with you, Rama; my place is at your side. With you, I would walk down the paths of hell. The jungle will be like heaven for me. I must disobey you in this, my love; forget my disobedience, as you do the water you leave behind in a glass after drinking."

-Pg. 89
Sita makes this speech to Rama after he tells him that he has been exiled. He initially asks her to stay behind and look after his mother, but she loves him too much to be parted from him. In this quote, she beautifully explains her love and loyalty to him, refusing to abandon him even when he is sent into exile. This quote exemplifies the virtues that have made Sita so renowned in India: her loyalty and her love for her husband.

"Muni, I never doubted Sita's purity. I beg you, do not accuse me of a sin I never committed, to add to the one that I did. Indeed, I did banish my queen for fear of what the people were saying about her. But then, my lord, I am a king, and my first and final dharma is toward my people. It would never have done for them to have doubted their king, for even a moment: that he was weak and took back a tainted woman."

-Pg. 649

In this scene from the seventh book of the Ramayana (which is not always included as part of the text), Rama has exiled Sita to the forest after his people suggested that she actually slept with Ravana. Sita returns along with the sage Valmiki and her two sons by Rama. Rama argues that he banished his devoted wife in order to be a better king to his people. Sita does not accept this explanation, and vanishes into her mother, the earth.

Two incidents from the Ramayana are frequently cited the subjugation of women: Sita’s ‘Agni Pariksha’, trial by fire, and her ‘Banishment’ to the forest. Sita’s Banishment of the forest is described in a section of the Ramayana called Uttara Ramayana. In those times, social standards were much stricter than the “anything-goes” attitude common in today’s world. Sita is often characterized as submissive, never opposing her husband. According to which a wife’s place was always with her husband.

Kausalya the first wife of Dasaratha and mother of Rama. She is the oldest wife, and very kind and wise. She does not have a close relationship with her husband, but she loves her son Rama very deeply. When Dasaratha marries Kaikeyi and Sumitra, Kaushalya happily accepts them without any jealousy. She tells Sumitra about Kaikeyi that you both are like my sisters. In the 'Ayodhyakaand', it is said that Kaushalya was delighted when it was decided that Lord Rama would be crowned as the new king of Ayodhya. King Dasaratha had once made a promise to Kaikeyi, another wife of him to grant her two boons. Kaikeyi had utilised the occasion of getting her boons granted. When Rama was declared to be the would-be king she deceitfully claimed compelled

Kaikeyi, a great warrior and a wife cum comrade of Dashratha under the influence of Manthra did not let Sri Ram’s Rajya Abhishek (crowning of the prince) happen. She put her foot down and sent him into an exile (Vanvaas), for fourteen years. And during that period, a lot of demon kings (asuras) were eradicated. Kaikeyi chose to be the cause of the exile. And while she as a soul took this responsibility, she became the cause of the biggest saga. She took the responsibility of taking all hatred from not only that era, but also from eras to come. Whoever has read / heard the Ramayana, knows the entire drama and the chaos she created before the Abhishek (crowning). It takes a great deal to be taken as the evil and the most hated person not only by one person but by eras to come. And while she took the pain of being hated, she also subtly changed the future of generations to
come. She let Ram establish his Maryada Purushottam (the greatest and the noblest amongst men) image. She was the prime cause of being the villain and let Sri Ram eradicate all demons.

**Manthara** poisoned the mind of sweet-nature Kaikeyi, who was a step-mother of Lord Rama but still the most doting one. The words of Manthara were so ensnaring that Kaikeyi lost all discrimination power. Manthara in the epic Ramayana, is the maid who convinced Queen Kaikeyi that the throne of Ayodhya belonged to her son Bharata and that her step-son crown-prince Rama (the hero of the Ramayana) should be exiled from the kingdom. Manthara is said to be hunch-backed and ugly in appearance. Manthara, it appears, is an expert talker and a cunning woman who can manipulate her way to get what she wanted. Manthara appears only once in the Ramayan after Rama's banishment. Having been rewarded by Kaikeyi with costly clothing and jewels, she is walking in the palace gardens when Bharata and his half-brother Shatrughna come upon her. Seeing her, Shatrughna flies into a violent rage over Rama's banishment, and assaults her murderously.

**Ahalya** was Sage Gautama’s wife. She was very beautiful. Even, Indra, ruler of the celestial kingdom, got enamoured by her looks. One day he visited her when the sage was away. But he masqueraded as Gautama because he had an evil design. Anyone would mistake him for the real Gautama. His impersonation was thorough. Yet, Ahalya could identify him despite his meticulous replication. But vanity seized her. ‘See, even Indra is making advances for amorous sport with me’, she said to herself. She was flattered. She succumbed to the temptation.

The real Gautama returned when Indra was leaving after perpetuating the sin. First, Gautama was perplexed by his looks. Indra rushed out without greetings. Gautama understood the entire occurrence. He cursed Ahalya… “For the sin you have committed, I forsake you. Live here, alone, formless. Rama will release you from the curse, one day. Then, you would have atoned for the sin and you will get back your form!”

**Mandodari** is the daughter of Mayasura, the King of the Asuras (demons), and the *apsara* Hema. Mandodari bears three sons: Meghanada (Indrajit), Atikaya, and Akshayakumara. According to some Ramayana adaptations, Mandodari is also the mother of Rama's wife Sita, who is infamously kidnapped by Ravana. Despite her husband's faults, Mandodari loves him and advises him to follow the path of righteousness. Mandodari repeatedly advises Ravana to return Sita to Rama, but her advice falls on deaf ears. Her love and loyalty to Ravana are praised in the Ramayana.

**Surpanakha** the sister of Ravana, she is a powerful rakshasi. She attempts to seduce Rama and kill Sita, but the princely brothers attack her. She tries to muster the rakshasa army against Rama. It is said that Valmiki did not elaborate on Surpanakha post her role in inciting a war between Ram and Ravana but, some authors of an alternative Ramayana state that she later lived in Lanka with Vibheeshana who was crowned as the new king of Lanka after Ravana's demise in the war. A few years later she was found dead in a sea along with her half sister Kumbini, although how she met her end is unspecified.

It is also interesting to note that in' Bhramavaivrata Purana' it was written that Surpanakha prayed to Lord Brahma in order to get Lord Ram as her husband in her next birth to which Brahma obliged. She was reborn as the maiden *Kubja* who served Krishna (the Avatar of Rama or Vishnu) with sincere devotion as one of his wives.

### II. CONCLUSION

This research paper highlights the different shades of women characters such as Sita, Mandodari and koushalya show the unconditional love for their husbands. They are very submissive and positive
nature women. On the other hand Kaikeyi, Manthara and Surpnakha expose the nature of jealousy. Kaikey and Manthara are very conspiracy women in The Ramayana who were liable for Rama Banishment. It depicts the difficult arduous path of bringing about the public weal as the path of subordination of human instincts. The characters are drawn from all section of society. Two incidents from the Ramayana are frequently cited the subjugation of women: Sita’s ‘Agni Pariksha’, trial by fire, and her ‘Banishment’ to the forest. Sita’s Banishment of the forest is described in a section of the Ramayana called Uttara Ramayana. In those times, social standard were much stricter than the “anything-goes” attitude common in today’s world.

Sita is often characterized as submissive, never opposing her husband. According to which a wife’s place was always with her husband.

REFERENCE


V. Chakravarti,Rajagopalachari,"Ramayan"(translated by Pradip Saikia,Banalata2004)