Voices of the Opressed: Ravana and the Women of Ramayana

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Abstract—

This article provides an insight of how the power politics works insides epics such as Ramayana. The article focuses upon the oppressed female voices and their retellings.

Keywords— Ramayana, Sita, Kumari, Urmila. Female characters.

I. INTRODUCTION

Ramayana is the greatest epic to be written. However, it is called Ramayana due to its focus on the heroic figure of Lord Rama, the protagonist around whom, all the incidents occur. Thus, it is evident the other characters would be over shadowed by him From the ancient time, India used stories to preserve the history of the land. The tales were told in verses. Thus, the epics were emerged. These are the mythology of Hindu religion. Ramayana, Mahabharata, were two major texts. Others were Manasha Mangal, Durga Sapta Sati, Shiv Puran, Shree Krishna Kirtan etc. These texts describe the undivided ancient India, from Nepal to Shri Lanka, and Pakistan to Bangladesh. These were the parts of Indian subcontinent as a whole. As Manasa Mangal describes Behula's journey to swarga from the ghats of the river Ganges, and Ramayana describes the land of gold Shri Lanka.

There was one commonality that were addressed in all the epics mentioned, that was the bestial portrayal of creatures called '*Asur*'. The term '*Asur*' has first appeared in the texts of Vedas in around 1500 BCE in mainly *Rigveda* one of the four ancient Vedas (*Rigved, Samved, Yajurved*, Atharva,) in this text, the term was used 88 times in a positive way. The term *'Asur'* initially meant an individual with power, strength, who leads. The Sanskrit term 'Asur' which also has Iranian lineage to it '*Ahura*' is broken into two parts, "*A*" which refers to '*Atma*' which refers to soul the immortal part of an individual, and '*Sura*' or '*Hura*' refers to the body that secures the soul into it. Therefore, the term refers to the preserver of soul which is immortal part of the body. In Iranian mythology *Ahura Mazda* is a deity of equally light and darkness. The term in Hindu mythology refers to a class of beings who opposes the suras or devas the gods of Hindu scriptures. The Vedas, which are verses written in a poem form where the Asuras were worshipped, as we see in the verses of *Rigveda*, the hymns referred to the gods Varuna, Mitra and Savitar "…O Varuna, we deprecate thine anger...Wise Asura, thou King of wide dominion, loosen the bonds of sins by us committed.''(Hymn XXIV. Varuna and Others, *Rigveda)* is where we first come across the description of an asura, which is a great divine leader for the mortals, as well as Varuna is the god of water, which can be similar to Poseidon, who is also a king of water, similarly, we see that Varuna hasn't been described as a god but a leader, similar to Mitra and Savitar. Varuna has been described as "The Hero, Lord of warrior might, … the far - seeing Varuna?''

The discussion so far concretizes the crimes against the Asur tribe. Thus, it is needed to look forward through a tale. In this dissertation, I have picked up the tale of *Ramayana*, and its retellings. Although there are 300 retellings of this epic, in this dissertation, I have chosen the Sanskrit epic, and the Retelling of *The tale of Vanquished; Ravana and his people*, the epic tale revolves around the main protagonist Ram and his journey of winning his wife from the tyrant Asur king Ravana. Whereas, in *The Tale of the Vanquished*, the tale revolves around those who have been oppressed by the Aryans,

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and how Ravana becoming a king would salvage their long yearning. There lies the difficult question as Ramayana itself as well shows Ravana to be a great king of Lanka, a kingdom of Gold, tending to his people. He also had to regain his kingdom from the half-brother whom his father gave the kingdom and never looked at the family he next created with an asura woman as they were not conventionally fair looking humans, he himself had given the name of Surpanaka where he says she is "the most ugly child he has seen"(Neelakantan,). From the life of poverty, Ravana had become a king of Lanka. However, on the contrary to Ram's life he grew up as a prince in a castle with his three brothers. However, on the day of coronation, he had to leave his kingdom in order to save his father's dignity to his step mother. There we can see reverse similarities in both the characters of Ravan and Ram. As *Ramayana* the epic tale is through the perspective of Ram and his struggle to gain the name of *Maryada Purushottam Ram*, the tale of Ravan gets hidden under the glorified tale of Ram's adventure and his encounter of obstacles during his journey. The villainified character of Ravan gets hidden. Thus, this dissertation. Takes up the retelling of Anand Neelakantan to look forward of the struggles of Ravan through *Asura the tale of the Vanquished; the story of Ravana and his people.*

The epic tale of *Ramayana* is of seven kandas, since the birth of Rama and his brothers Bharata, Lakshmana, and Shatrughna. The four brothers as Rishi Valmiki describes, the four equal parts of the Lord VishnuRam was born in the kingdom of Ayodha in the house of Raghu. When the king with three queen was childless. A sage gave him the boon fruit for conceiving the child asked him to give equal parts to the three queens. However, the third queen Sumitra was king's favorite and thus, he offered her two portions of the fruit through which she conceived Lakshmana and Satrughna. Ram's great tale of vanquishing the king of Lanka starts with him getting married with Sita, princess of Mithila. She was destined to marry the man who strings the lord Shiva's divine bow which Ram did not only achieves however, also breaks the bow as well. With which the Swayamvara of Sita concluded. Lakshmana and other two brothers of Ram married the three siblings of Sita respectively. Sita's own sister Urmila was married to Lakshmana.

CONCLUSION

The epics are written to show the duties of an individual, while being a tale. We do not have any knowledge of the truthiness of it. However, mythology works in that way, when we take up a children literature of the west, we see didactic lessons, of the fear of god, one individual performs their duties. In an epic like **Ramayana** also focuses on such. However, if discerns an individual and that is women, the sufferings of Sita in Ashoke Vatika has been put into question by the husband while she had to perform a fire ritual so that her purity stays as well just the word of mouth from the 'Praja's have impacted so much so that she had to leave her own house. From a princess to a woman staying in the forest with her twin.

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