



Multidimensional role of women in shaping the great epic Ramayana

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Abstract

We look for role models all around, but the truth is that some of the greatest women that we know of come from Indian mythology Ramayana. It is filled with women who had the fortitude and determination to stand up against all odds ones who set a great example for generations to come. Ramayana is full of women, who were mentally way stronger than the glorified heroes of this great Indian epic. From Jhansi Ki Rani to Irom Sharmila, From Savitribai Fule to Sonia Gandhi and From Jijabai to Seeta, Indian women have always stood up for their rights and fought their battles despite restrictions and limitations. They are the shining beacons of hope and have displayed exemplary dedication in their respective fields. I have studied few characters of Ramayana who teaches us the importance of commitment, ethical values, principles of life, dedication & devotion in relationship and most importantly making us believe in women power.

Keywords: ramayana, seeta, Indian mythological epic, manthara, kaikeyi, urmila, women power, philosophical life, mandodari, rama, ravana, shabari, surpanakha

Introduction

The great epic written by Valmiki is one epic, which has mentioned those things about women that make them great. There are many women in Ramayan who played the role of women with proper devotion. These women are worshipped even today. The major female characters of Ramayan include Sita, Kaikeyi, Kausalya, Sumitra, Ahilya, Urmila, Ansuiya, Shabari, Mandodari, Trijata and Surpanakha, Lankini and Manthra. Out of all these women, Sita, Urmila, Ansuiya and Mandodari have a special place. Besides them, other women who are an embodiment of devotion are Shabri and Trijata. I try to explore them in this paper with an intention to bring some motivation, philosophical inspiration to generations to come and keeping morals in our modern day life.

Research Materials & Method

I have studied Valmiki Ramayana and explored many new concept and learnings from it through the philosophical point of view. I found that women power and their crucial role is been under shadowed in front of heroic male characters, women influence and their role is been ignored at certain points.

Limitations of the Study

There are few limitations needs to be mention here before discussing the critical analysis, that starts with the facts involved in Ramayana, as it's a mythological epic happened in 5000 BC, so the evidences are based on the book itself. Secondly Ramayana was wrote in the form of 24000 verses with over twenty female characters, who are influential and can be studied through the aspects of philosophical research but because of limitation of time and content, I had to focused on major female characters rather than other female sub characters.

Scope for Further Research

Definitely there is a vast scope over the study for modern day youth to learn and implement the ethical philosophical practice keeping Ramayana's female character as a role model. Ramayana not only teaches us the moral and values but also figure out the power of women that brings the inspiration in modern day busy life to become a responsible human being. Further scope can be concluded to an extensive study on other female characters of Ramayana, who are ignored but equally intellectual and ethical beings Ahilya, Kaushalya, Trijata, Manthara and Sumitra.

Analysis

The position of women can be studied mainly from the three important aspects of their life and character, namely their maidenhood, wifhood and motherhood. Till the Vedic period, a girl child was received well in the family

Sita

According to mythology, Sita is believed to be the daughter of the Earth. Her father King Janak had found Sita from under the ground. Sita in the Ramayan is tolerant, wise, virtuous wife, a good multi-efficient housewife and the best female. All these qualities make her a great woman. A woman who picked up the *Shiv Dhanush Pinaak* by one hand when she was a kid, Sita was not only physically strong, but also displayed emotional and mental strength. She never shied away from taking challenges and would always face life head on. When it came to facing distress, she stood by her husband like a rock and not once did she take a backseat. Later on she raised her kids single-handedly and when it was time to give them back to their father she chose not to go along with them. It's hard to find any other woman like her in Indian mythology. Sita

refused Ravana's offer to be his lady hundreds of time and waited for Rama to bring her back to *Ayodhya*. After the defeat of Ravana, when Rama doubted on her character, she gave *Agnipariksha* (test of fire) to prove her loyalty towards her husband Rama. She teaches us how a human being has to live under hard times and how responsibility and devotion needs to be carried in ethical ways while living in society and in family.

Surpanakha

Surpanakha is regarded as one of the most significant characters in the Ramayana. Once *Lakshmana* cut off Surpanakha's nose in anger, because she was trying to seduce Rama and made abusive remark about *Sita*. To avenge this insult, she went to Ravan's court and proclaimed *Sita*'s goodness and beauty, praising *Sita* as a worthy wife for Demon king Ravan, and forcing him to abduct her by force and marry her. Ravan, despite several advices from his brother, *Vibhishana* and son *Indrajit*, he kidnapped *Sita* causing the war with Rama. Actually, she was the arrow that started the chain of events leading directly to the destruction of King Ravana. We can learn a lesson from Surpanakha's life that woman who makes relations with many men has to live in shame forever. Therefore, one should always have morals and devotion in life and relationship.

Urmila

According to Ramayana, Urmila was *Sita*'s younger sister and *Lakshman*'s wife. She got married at a very young age, in just few months, her husband left her and went to the forests for 14 years with his brother Rama. She, although, lived in the palace, but preferred to live like an ascetic woman. Unlike the stories, she actually didn't sleep for 14 years. Responsibly she performed her duties as a daughter in law, and spent rest of her time in praying to Lord *Shiva* for the safety of her husband. But, we history had ignored her sacrifice. She never demanded her rights as well as a place in the history. Urmila's sacrifice is considered to be bigger than of *Sita*'s. We can learn the value of sacrifice from her life, the dedication towards our duties and keeping morals in our responsibility.

Mandodari

Ramayana says that Mandodari, Ravana's wife, was blessed silver tongued speaker and had the skill to influence people by the power of her golden words. Despite being the queen of Raavan, Mandodari was very religious, devotional and a faithful woman. It was Raavan's mindless act that he did not pay attention to Mandodari when she had warned him before abducting *Sita*. Ramayana also say that it was because of Mandodari's intervention that *Sita* managed to stay peacefully in Lanka for such a long time. There are many instances when she stepped in to stop Ravana from hurting *Sita* and was even successful. Despite all of Ravana's flaws, she loved him like a loyal and faithful wife and tried her best to make a better person out of him.

Kaikeyi

While she is known as the villain of Ramayana, one who plotted for Rama's fourteen years exile, Kaikeyi was actually a very intelligent, strong-willed and brave woman. She was the

princess of kingdom Kaikeya, youngest wife of Dasaratha and mother of Bharata. Kaikeyi was a warrior from a young age and she saved Dasaratha's life in a battle, in which she fought like a real queen. This is why Dasaratha was indebted to her for life and asked her to wish for anything that she desired. However, Kaikeyi dismissed the request that time and used it when Rama was to be crowned the future King of Ayodhya. Although it was an unacceptable decision against the Rama, but the point to be noted here is after all she was a loving mother, who thought of betterment of her son to become the king of Ayodhya, henceforth she sacrificed her goodness in the influence of Manthara, who gave her the idea of sending Rama to exile and making his son the king.

Shabri

Shabri is an inspiring example from the treasure house of Ramayana bearing testimony to the deepness of true devotion and divine grace. Shabri was a daughter of a hunter. She wasn't a good looking woman at all, but her heart was sheer gold. Shabri stayed alive in anticipation of Lord Rama, She would get up early morning every day and go to the forest to collect the berries to serve Lord Rama, she didn't know when Rama would come, and she would go to the forest and collect berries every day. In that manner she spent many years. When she met to Rama, she offered him the berries that were half eaten by Shabri just to confirm that the berries are sweet. In spite of half eaten berries from an unknown person, Rama ate them to please her feelings and devotion towards him. Shabri teaches us the importance of patience and power of belief. She also teaches us the source of energy comes from devoted love and how a person can become so great with keeping pure feelings for someone who we love the most.

Conclusion

The Valmiki Ramayana is productive guide with several lessons through several female characters in the development human being through motivation, principles, ethics, devotion and playing their duty with sincere commitment. This study explores the real way of living in today's modern day hurting life, where people are frustrated with relationship and so called professional behavior that is destructing personal life, family values and being a part of the team. These moral values make us a responsible and caring human being, that world needs desperately in today's atomic environment. Ramayana should be implemented in Indian schooling education system to teach moral, ethics and values from the childhood in our future generations. To bring peace and love in modern technological world, we need to learn from our golden ancient history that built the greatest civilization in human history like Indus valley.

Reference

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