

Revisiting the Voices of Women in Ramayana

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Abstract:

Despite the fact that the Ramayana's principles are ingrained in Hindu consciousness, efforts are being made to interpret this well-known epic in light of gender, identity and women voices among other topics. In the Ramayana, women's voices express concern about men's behavior of women and their place in the family and society. The emancipatory women of the Ramayana make an effort to free themselves from all social stigmas and their status in the family and society. The mythical Indian lady Sita is regarded as the ultimate example of virtues like purity, love, peace and compassion. The character of Sita might be viewed as an example of how a woman in the Ramayana had to fight for her identity and place in respect. The Indian goddess Sita is revered as the epitome of femininity and womanhood. She is also regarded as the ultimate example of virtues such as purity, love, peace and compassion. In Ramayana, Sita's character might be seen as an illustration of how a woman had to fight for her distinctiveness and respect. Several other characters in Ramayana like Mandodhari, Urmila Kaikayei, Mantahra Shoorpanaka and many others reveal their character, struggle in identifying self-dignity, following of their counterpart, compromising her desires etc. In her essay "Literature and Gender," Lizbeth Goodman asserts that "Gender refers to ways of seeing and representing people and situations based on gender difference." The emancipatory women of the Ramayana attempt to free herself from any and all constraints. " In these Conceptual article authors are making an effort to understand and revisit the voices of few women characters from Ramayana. The primary objective of the study is to demonstrate the connection between gender and identity, particularly in light of the intricate portrayal of femininity in the Ramayana. **Views expressed in this article is just based on the critical analysis and divergent thinking of available sources and not to hurt any sentiments.**

Introduction:

The Ramayana is one of the greatest epics of Indian mythology and literature, composed by the sage Valmiki. It tells the story of Lord Rama, and his journey to rescue his wife Sita from the demon king Ravana. The epic is not only a fascinating tale of adventure and heroism but also a profound source of philosophical, moral, and spiritual insights. The Ramayana has been a source of inspiration for generations, and its timeless wisdom and universal appeal continue to influence people across cultures and geographies. It is a cultural treasure that has been preserved and passed down through oral and written traditions for centuries and remains an integral part of the Indian literary canon. The epic's themes of duty, righteousness, devotion, and compassion resonate with people of all ages, and its characters and stories continue to fascinate and inspire us today. There are many ways to describe its eternity.

The Ramayana would go on for as long as there were mountains and rivers on earth. Rama himself tells Vibhishana, "You'll reign this kingdom as long as the sun, moon, earth, and my story remain." According to Sage Valmiki, "The gods in heaven, along with the Gandharans, siddhas, and renowned seers, listen to the Ramayana ceaselessly." According to the great Sanskrit dramatist Bhavabhuti, "People recount this sacred account of Rama in the morning throughout every age." This Ramayana appeal stems from the range of characters—both male and female—that it presents. It has been observed that the early patriarchal period of the Ramayana was characterized by men's dominance over Indian societies. All positions of social authority were held by men, including warriors, priests, and tribe chiefs. In the public and political spheres, women either had very little influence or none at all. They were brought up to be responsible wives and take care of their families. Being devoted, obedient, loving, and sympathetic to their husbands was the responsibility of the wife. Male authority was typically used to organize individual families, with the husband and father setting the essential parameters and making the crucial choices for the family's welfare. But in Ramayana we observe women played a predominant role; we find many women leader who are exhibiting their motivation, suggestion to their counterpart, sacrifice etc. This paper makes an attempt to understand and hear voices of selected women characteristics from Ramayana with special reference to Sita, Mondadori, Shurpanakha, Kaikeye and Mantara.

I.Shurpanaka:

A person with long, sharp nails. One of the most significant characters in the Ramayana is Shurpanakha. It's odd since she was initially referred to as Meenakshi because people thought she had eyes like fish and was only subsequently referred to as Soorpanakha because of her pointed nails. In fact, Valmiki verges on asserting that there would have been no Ramayana and no conflict with Ravana if there had been no Kaikeyi and Surpanakha. Actually, Surpanakha was the arrow that started the series of events that ended with Ravana's abolition. Like Kaikeyi, she is frequently accused of being the only instigator of the Ramayana battle and the malevolent

mastermind behind it. Shurpanakha, the youngest child of Rishi Vishrava and his second wife Kaikesi, divided her time between the jungles of Southern India and Lanka, occasionally travelling to see her Asura, or forest-dwelling, family. She encountered the young Prince of Ayodhya, Rama, who was in exile, during one of these visits, according to the Valmiki Ramayana, and was instantly enamored by his handsome youth. She boldly declares her attraction to Lakshmana after initially expressing it to Rama, for which she receives a horrifying and severe punishment. Her nose is cut off by Lakshmana. This could mean a number of things, but let's start with the common mythology: we have always seen Soorpanakha by way of a disfigured woman with a bleeding cut nose and blood covered face. Thus, a woman gets penalized for showing her sexuality or expressing her infatuation. She is vilified on top of being defaced because it is unsettling to think of a woman having affection and will towards man. The Soorpanakha enters dressed as a marvelously lovely person, but when Lakshmana attacks her, she transforms back into her ugly disgusting self as another example of how rakshasas could change forms. What does that mean? A wounded woman could be dangerous and show her nasty self? The unconventional, unorthodox, non-hegemonic, and forceful selves are all aspects of the ugly self. Cutting off the nose could signify a loss of female modesty because in many cultures the nose is a symbol of female honor. If the cut nose is assumed to be characterless, however, it might suggest that Lakshman, not Soorpanakha, was the one who approached the latter while she resisted him. But going back to the dominant depiction, when the nose is chopped, which results in mutilation, not only is the punishment justified by telling the story, but it may also have been embodied for a long time and is now a part of our collective unconsciousness. She travels back to Lanka, sees her brother and other family members, and raises awareness of the injustice done to her. She may be vilified in legend for this reason strong, outspoken women could be dangerous. Ravana might have been inspired to abduct Sita right away if she had been defiled or suffered face loss, which would have ultimately resulted in the epic battle that is the Ramayana's main event.

When seen in this context, she might even be charged with starting the argument. The ladies are always seen as the weak link in the majority of epic battles and wars, whether it be the Battle of Kurukshetra or the Battle in the Ramayana. But unlike Draupadi, this woman is demonised since it's assumed that, in contrast to Draupadi, Soorpanakha was vocal and prone to mischief., Soorpanakha is exceptional since it's probable that Lakshman was the victim of street harassment in this case, undermining hegemonic masculinity and justifying Soorpanakha's retaliation. Soorpanakha doesn't cringe or flee in shame. She doesn't scream out in agony or exaggerate how physically hurt she is, and she doesn't decide to kill herself to end the story. She has an action-oriented method in mind. Is Soorpanakha's indicated transformation and decline into a state of complete physical ugliness deliberate in order to highlight the contrast between good and evil at the level of appearance and thereby advance the contradiction between the two? What do we ultimately learn from Soorpanakha? What precisely is the epic attempting to teach us? Mythology would probably want us to internalise and normalise the passivity and submissiveness demanded of her in order to make a woman desirable and deserving of desire. But if you experience mental, physical, or psychological abuse, Shurpanakha says you can't hide behind a shell and take refuge in a cave, slander on the scene, and even if it implies war, it must be shouted from the rooftops and generate media excitement about it.

II.Mandodari:

Mandodari's birth is described in the Uttara Ramayana. When visiting Mayasura, Ravana develops feelings for Mandodari. Soon after, Vedic rituals are used to marry Mandodari and Ravana. Meghanada, Atikaya, and Akshaya-kumara are the three sons born to Ravana by Mandodari. Mandodari adores Ravana and is proud of his strength despite Ravana's flaws. She is aware of Ravana's prejudice against females. Mandodari, a good woman, tries to guide Ravana down a virtuous path, but Ravana consistently disobeys her counsel. She counsels him against taming the Navagraha, the nine celestial deities that determine one's fate. She also advises him not to seduce Vedavati, who would be reborn as Sita and cause the destruction of Ravana. Ravana kidnaps Sita, who was Vedavati in earlier birth. Mandodari advises Ravana to return Sita to Rama, but to no avail. Mandodari knows this lust will bring the downfall of Ravana. Mandodari is described as a beautiful woman in Valmiki's Ramayana. When Hanuman, the monkey messenger of Rama, comes to Lanka in search of Sita, he is stupefied by Mandodari's beauty when he enters Ravana's bed chambers and MISTAKES Mandodari for Sita. When Hanuman finally finds Sita, he finds Ravana threatening to kill Sita unless she marries him. Ravana raises his sword to behead Sita when she refuses. Mandodari saves Sita by holding Ravana's hand. Mandodari says that the murder of a woman is a heinous sin and thus Ravana should not kill Sita. She asks Ravana to entertain himself with his other wives and give up the idea of having Sita as his wife. Ravana spares Sita's life, but does not give up his wish to marry Sita. Mandodari acknowledges Sita's devotion to Rama and compares her to goddesses like Sachi and Rohini. When all attempts for a peaceful return of Sita fail, Rama declares war on Ravana's Lanka. Before the final battle against Rama, Mandodari makes a last attempt to dissuade Ravana, but to no avail. Finally, Mandodari stands by her husband in the final battle like an obedient and faithful wife, though she also advises her son Meghanada, alias Indrajit not to fight Rama. Mandodari appears at the death scene of Ravana in a disarrayed state and laments his death. In this battle, Mandodari loses her husband, her sons, and her kinsmen. She is a glaring example of a loyal wife and companion to Ravana in his thick and thin.

III.Manthara

With three body bends, Manthara entered Ayodhya Kadam. As she ascended the palace stairs, she observed the festively decorated streets of Ayodhya and its inhabitants. She talks very deceptively and is dishonest. She found out that Shree Rama would be crowned king tomorrow there. She got down on herself and thought about her position in the palace. She rushed to Kaikeyi's palace right away to inform her of Rama's coronation. In fact, Kaikeyi was overjoyed. She presented Manthara with a necklace she wore around her neck. But Kaikeyi was constantly reprimanded by Manthara and forced to consider what she could do to stop the coronation. Kaikeyi, on the other hand, responded that Rama was her favorite child, and that Rama loved her more than Kausalya and Bharath. She wasn't mean to anyone. He always acted morally and was adored by the populace. Manthara started injecting poison into Kaikeyi's mind. She insisted that because he was the eldest by birth, Rama had the right to the kingdom. Kaikeyi would become a slave owned by Kausalya and Sumitra if that took place. The two powerful brothers might send Bharatha to the wilderness. Kaikeyi was warned that she would become

Kausalya's slave and suffer in the wilderness if she did not act immediately to save Bharatha. Manthara explained to Kaikeyi the means by which Rama was moved to the forest. However, the Ramayana story would not have been possible without the character Manthara. If Rama went to the forest with Sita, Ravana would be the only one who could make the mistake of behaving badly toward Sita. This would give Rama a reason to kill Ravana and all the asuras from this planet and bring peace and happiness to the righteous. The **“parithranaya saadhunaam vinasaya chadushkritham dharma samsthapanarthaya ssambhavami”** is enormous. God knows the reason and purpose of anything he creates. It is possible to assert that Kaikeyi is held accountable for every calamity that befell the Ayodhya royal family, including Rama's exile and King Dasaratha's death. She was despised by everyone in the kingdom, except for Rama.

IV.Kaikeyi:

According to Altekari, she is the character in the Ramayana who, in a way, has altered the course of events and revealed to the world the ideal characters of Rama, Sita, Lakshmana, Bharata, Hanuman, and a number of others in this epic. She was Dasharatha's youngest and most adored queen. She loved Rama, who impressed her with his charming demeanor. She was overjoyed when Manthara told her about Rama's coronation and presented Manthara with gifts. Later prompted and exhorted by her, Kaikeyi enters 'Kopabhavana' and asks two shelters from Dasharatha which he had guaranteed her before. One boon she demanded was Bharata's crowning, and the other was Rama's 14-year exile. The king became unconscious for a while as a result of this, and he then reprimanded her for her dishonest demands. He pleaded with her to show compassion and mercy. He harshly criticized her when she refused to comply with her determined demand; However, Kaikeyi was as firm as a rock. She got him to do what she wanted and controlled him for two reasons: first, her spells and charms, and second, Ikshvaku's family oath to keep their promises. She took full advantage of his debtor status by making him fall at her feet. That demonstrates how far Kaikeyi allowed her wickedness to go. Dasharatha was emotionally manipulated by her at all times.

She is depicted in black by Valmiki, who claims that she misbehaved with the two older queens of Dasharatha because of her arrogance. When Rama arrived, she first ensured that he would do anything to keep his father's promise and then narrated the episode of her boons. When Sumantra came to take further orders of the crowning ceremony, she told him a lie that Dasharatha, in his excitement, couldn't sleep. She was devastated as a mother when enraged Bharata disregarded all of her plans and decided to rule Ayodhya as a trustee on Rama's behalf. Kaikeyi went with Kausalya and Sumitra to the forest with Bharata to get Rama back, but she didn't say a word. Sage Bharadvaja was introduced to Bharata by his mothers. He praised Sumitra and Kausalya but criticized Kaikeyi. The wise man said for the first time that Kaikeyi was not to blame and that Rama's exile would be beneficial in the future. Kaikeyi appears to have been forgiven by Valmiki for her wickedness. According to Rama, Dasharatha married Kaikeyi with the understanding that her son would inherit the throne, so Bharata should not hold her responsible. Kaikeyi made a legal demand for her right. Kaikeyi's wickedness is minimized

by Rajyashulka's concept. Kaikeyi, on the other hand, is never shown to have apologized for her demands anywhere in the Ramayana..

V.Urmila

Perhaps the Ramayana character with the least attention is Urmila. In the Valmiki text, she is only mentioned once, in two lines, to inform us that she was married to Lakshmana. She vanishes from view to the public. She also doesn't appear in any of the Sanskrit versions of the Ramayana after the nineteenth century, including those by Kalidas and a few other poets. The epic's only mention of Urmila is that she was King Janaka's biological daughter and is a wise woman, according to other sources. Urmila had a few excellent qualities. Because she was such a skilled painter, she could quickly sketch anything. She was absolutely stunning. In the Ramayan, Tulsidas described her as the pinnacle of beauty. Urmila lived happily ever after her marriage in Ayodhya. She devoted her entire being to serving her family and husband, but the pleasure was brief. She was without a doubt the most stunning female of her time. Her destiny had other ideas; she was made to surrender so she would need to get through the distress of detachment. Urmila wanted to go to the jungle with her husband, just as Sita had done with Ram, but Lakshman begged her to stay behind, telling her, "I'll be too busy taking care of Ram and Sita to have time for you." Stay in Ayodhya to help me out, and I won't have to worry about your safety. Urmila stayed behind to think about how she could help her husband help Ram, but she did so with regret. While Ram and Sita fell asleep the first night in the wilderness, Lakshman remained awake. Nidra, the sleep goddess, then approached him. He begged Nidra Devi to grant him fourteen years to himself so that he could guard Devi Sita and Lord Rama throughout the day and night. After being moved by his filial devotion, the Nidra Devi agreed. However, the natural law required that Lakshman share his portion of sleep. "Go see my wife, Urmila, and tell her the situation," Lakshman instructed. As stated by Lakshman, Goddess Nidra appeared to Urmila and explained the purpose. She agreed right away and asked to share her husband's sleep for fourteen years, as requested by Lakshman. Urmila replied, bowing her head, "Consequently, Lakshman can be up the entire time without being tired." Accordingly, for the whole time frame fourteen years Urmila rested relentless while Lakshman worked reverentially over the course of constantly to serve Ruler Smash and Devi Sita. In the fight with Ravana, this was also important. Meghnadh, Ravana's powerful son, was invincible. Only a man who had been awake for 14 years could defeat him. Lakshman was able to kill him as a result of Urmila. The Urmila story is derived from the folkloric Ramayana or Ram-katha tales; It is not mentioned in the Valmiki or Tulsi stories in Sanskrit or Avadhi. Be that as it may, significantly more captivating is the way the story is told, especially in the South Indian Smash Kathas. It serves as a reminder of how diverse, innovative, and provocative India's Ramayana tradition is, and how we frequently deny ourselves this variety in our drive for conformity. As the day of Ram's coronation approaches, Ram defeats Ravan, saves Sita, and returns to Ayodhya. As the carols were being sung and the crown was being presented to Lord Ram, Lakshman began to giggle, shocking everyone. Lakshman laughed and everyone wondered why he was making fun of them. Lord Ram and Devi Sita, as well as everyone else in the crown court, were overcome with doubt and remorse because they both felt

guilty about a mistake they had made in the past. Everyone could think of a time in their lives when they were embarrassed or thought Lakshman was making fun of them. When asked why he was laughing, Lakshman replied, "I had been waiting for this holy moment since last 14 years, and now as this very moment to be witnessed by me of Lord Ram being crowned king, the Devi Nidra is Infront of me reminding our agreement from that time." According to responsibility I want to submit myself to her at the present time and need to rest and let dozing Urmila get stir. I think that the moment's irony is hilarious. Urmila awoke to find Ram crowned king after Lakshman had drifted off to sleep. Relief filled the air as everyone exhaled. Her minor incidents have been assigned by a number of academics, but all of them portray her as someone whose only purpose in life was to carry out orders. The famous Hindi poet Maithili Sharan Gupta was so dissatisfied with Valmiki's portrayal of Urmila that he wrote his own epic, Saket, based on the Ramayana and featuring Urmila rather than Sita as the heroine! Rabindranath Tagore, a Nobel laureate, is also said to have lamented Valmiki's mistreatment of Urmila. By any description, how does Urmila's personality justify itself? Valmiki claims that Urmila's self-sacrifice was unparalleled.

VI.Sita :

Hindus have always held a high regard for Sita. She has been portrayed as an ideal daughter, an ideal wife, and an ideal mother in the blurring of religion and mythology, history and fiction. These depictions of her remain constant throughout a variety of texts, stories, illustrations, movies, and contemporary media. Numerous slurs are used to describe Sita. She is known as Jnaki because she is Janaka's daughter; Maithili as Mithila's princess; She is known as Ram because she is Rama's wife. Due to his capacity to transcend body consciousness, her father Janaka was dubbed "Videha." As a result, Sita goes by the name Vaidehi as well. Sita comes from the Sanskrit word sta, which means "furrow." Sita has been bestowed with all of a woman's potential charms by Valmiki. Her home is a harmonious combination of beauty, fidelity, tenderness of heart, extreme compassion, endurance, firm will, and unwavering determination. Because of her unquestionable fidelity, Ravana was unable to molest her. Rama was unable to prevent her from joining him in the forest because she was a tower of unwavering determination. Unfit to bear the distress and trouble of the heart, when Rama let it be known of Kaikeyi's aid to Sita, she, with a courageous woman's heart, persistently heard all the guidance of her discouraged spouse and snidely snickered at his ideas to her to remain in Ayodhya and serve the older folks. In point of fact, Sita criticized Rama as a cowardly woman dressed as a man and an actor who trusted others with his wife. Exemplary are Sita's actions, reactions, and instincts at every stage of her long and difficult life; The values of womanly virtue that have been held in high regard by numerous Indian generations are those that she enshrined and adhered to at all points throughout the course of a demanding life. She has been portrayed as a human being by Valmiki. While the Ramayana focuses primarily on Rama's actions, Sita also speaks numerous times during the exile. When Rama, Lakshman, and Sita came across the river Kalindi (Yamuna), Sita made a promise to donate a thousand cows and offer hundreds of jars of wine to the river if Rama would fulfill the promise made to his father. The first time is in the town of Chitrakuta, where she tells Rama a long-forgotten tale. In it, Rama promises Sita that he will never kill anyone without being provoked. This chapter as a whole

exemplifies Sita's mature thoughts and her unique approach to persuading Rama to avoid violence. She told Rama that three things in a man's life are bad: lying, lusting after another person's wife, and unjustified animosity. The second time Sita speaks prominently to Ravana, she cleverly suggested to Rama that his bravery and valor could not be used against the demons in the forest without being provoked by them. Sita tells Ravana that although he appears to be a Brahmin, he does not appear to be one. She is terrified to learn of his evil intentions; but reminds him of Rama's bravery and warns him about his impending demise. Hanuman's arrival in Lanka is one of her most significant speeches. Hanuman proposes to Sita that she ride on his back because he wants Rama and Sita to meet right away. Sita, eager to meet her beloved, is prepared to do so, but she declines out of concern for her husband's reputation. Instead, she would like her husband Rama to come and defeat Ravana in order to free her.

Hanuman goes to Ashok Vatika to tell Sita that Rama has won the war. He asks for permission to kill the female Rakshasas, demons who tortured Sita. But Sita stops him from doing so by saying that the demonesses had just followed Ravana's orders. Although her actions in previous births determined her fate, they were not responsible for her torture.

Even if Rama humiliates her, Sita is unable to endure it. After Rama won, you can see that she naturally reacted with ferocity to it. Rama boasts of his bravery and how he killed Ravana to avenge the insult when Sita is brought before him. He also tells her that the battle was not fought to win because he loved her, but to show the world that injustice should never be tolerated; As a result, she could go wherever she wanted. For Sita, this was like a lightning bolt. She strongly rebuked Rama because she was unable to take these harsh words.

When Rama abandons her as a result of a serious public scandal, her noble nature and generosity are shown. She conveys to him the message that rather than becoming enraged at his subjects for their defamation, he should treat them like family. She would dispel their suspicions and demonstrate her chastity following the birth. She was successful in this by swearing; but never went back to socializing. She begged Mother Earth to let her be alone, then she vanished, leaving behind a lasting legacy of purity, chastity and opulence. In terms of sociology, Sita's story is illustrative of an outraged woman. She was condemned, damned, and later deified by patriarchal society despite knowing that she resisted Ravana, her offender, with ferocity. Sadly, even in the 21st century, women who suffer mass atrocities are blamed and marginalized; whereas the violent criminals can move about freely in society. Instead of praising women, we should learn to empathize with them from history.

Conclusion:

The Ramayana continues to be a moral guide for the system in Indian society and has a significant impact on the way the Indian people think. However, at the same time, Ramayana gives women a prominent role and elevates their status by putting them in the center of action, adopting the "discourse of gender" to fight against patriarchy, male dominance, and male-dominated culture. According to Hole and Levine (1975, p.225), feminism questions the political, social, and cultural institutions, ways of thinking, and the very articulations of those thoughts. The women in the Ramayana come from a variety of sociocultural and anthropological

backgrounds. However, Hole and Levine believe that the socially unequal position of women throughout history is not the result of biology. Despite this, there is still hope that India will reflect and even apply its traditional values as it moves toward modernity. The woman is and always will be a source of love and strength. It's possible that Vanara are a totemic tribe similar to the Nagas because she will always be the embodiment of the values Dharma (righteousness) and Kama (love and care). Without attempting to glorify or exalt them, Valmiki presents the flaws in human psychology and behavior in a straightforward manner. There are human traces in Kaikeyi, the pretty, young queen who was subjected to Manthara's backbiting, and Ahalya, the sage's wife, who was an easy target for Indra's advances. Their actions are not at all abominable, savage, or odious. Both Shurpanakha's outburst of wrath in response to Manthara's insult and Manthara's suggestion to her mistress are reasonable responses that come from their deepest love and concern for their family. Valmiki is the greatest historian. Instead of writing history from the perspective of the winner, he presented the facts as they were. The Ramayana presents the events objectively and with fairness. It is still performed and studied for this very reason, without a doubt. While men were responsible for providing for their families' necessities, women's primary role in society was to influence their families by showing their husbands and children love and affection. Due to male-oriented societal standards, women have little or no room to express their interests and have an impact on society. In the past, it was expected of women to be submissive to their husbands and to have no interests of their own. The voices of several women characters in Ramayana make an effort to maintain their self respect, dignity along with managing family and its value. She has raised her voice, when it comes for her self protection and dignity.

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