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The Portrayal of a Righteous Demon in Sharad Tandale's Ravana: the King of Demons

Dr. Archana R. Banale

Associate Professor,

Venkatesh Mahajan Senior College Osmanabad

Abstract

Ramayana is an epic that portrays the strife between Good and Evil, God and Demon, wherein Rama represents God and Ravana a Demon. The book : **The King of Demons** by **Sharad Tandale** is keeping a pace with the literary trend that questions the socially accepted myths and legends. The author portrays Ravana as a dutiful king who committed a mistake that led to his destruction. The paper analyses the book as a literary piece with a new trend.

Key words: Myth, legend, Good and Evil, epic

Every country has a heritage which it boasts of. This heritage may be in the form of monument, person and literary or artistic creation. The old European civilizations like Rome and Greek boast of their philosophical, historical, sculptural and literary creations. Similarly India has to its credit many similar things among which the epics Ramayana and Mahabharata are one of the predominant things. An epic incorporates the whole national psyche and also defines the context of rituals as well as human behavioral patterns. These epics are embodiments of Indian beliefs and practices.

But when the authenticity of these long accepted beliefs, rituals and patterns are questioned, the society is shaken at the root and a series of challenging the authenticity of these epics taken place. This series is noticed in the

last few years in India, wherein the context of Ramayana and Mahabharata is being questioned and society is compelled to see what was always overlooked or never thought about otherwise.

Rama and Ravana are the integral part of Indian culture and the psyche; the one symbolizes the virtue and the other vice. Being an ancient epic of India it celebrates Dharma, Nyaya (Judgement), Niti (Morality). Right from the beginning, many writers have written on Ramayana and particularly about Rama as a virtuous and just king. They have all portrayed Ravana as a villain and demonic in nature, a symbol of vice and immorality. There has always been a debate about the originality of Ramayana as there are many versions of the epic. There have been discussions as to whether the first and the last volumes (Bala Kanda and Uttera Kand) of Valmiki's Ramayana were composed by the original author. In spite of the style differences and narrative contradictions most Indians believe they are an integral part of the epic.

Even now, Ramayana has a great influence on the religious and social life of Indian society. References are always drawn from his epic in order to demonstrate or illustrate a style of living, a point of attitude or any other social context. It has always been a great force in molding the socio-cultural life of the particular race. The esteemed principals and ideals explained in Ramayana are supposed to be religious teachings. Being an oldest literary creation, it is handed to the upcoming generations orally and later on in printed forms. The Ramayana songs and scenes are performed before huge audiences on certain occasions. Ramayana conveyed us various themes like eternal relationship and feud between good and evil, revenge, love, worship, divine powers, mystical experiences, war and code of conduct too. Generations have evaluated the characters and incidents of Ramayana through the lens of the cultural attitudes of the time. Some recent

approaches and studies of people around the world seem to be different than the traditional known approach to look at the epic and its characters. In this modern retelling of Ramayana the demarcation between hero and villain, good and evil, peace and chaos, right and wrong is seen with a different perspective. The modern Rama is like as the ancient one but the modern Ravana is far more changed than the earlier one. This research paper attempts to study Marathi novel **Ravana: the King of Demons** by Sharad Tandale, as an attempt to examine Ravana with the changed perspective or with an objective perspective. Nowhere there is a purpose to prove Rama as unjust and Ravana as a right. Nowhere his crime an act of abducting Sita can be justified. It is just the curiosity of the writer to know Ravana who is supposed to be the creator of 'Shivtandavastotra' in praise of Lord Shiva, the ascetic God, 'Ravansanhita' and 'Kumar Tantra'. We are told through many mythological stories that he created Chess, designed the lute known as the Rudra-Veena using one of his ten heads as the lute's gourd, one of his arms as the beam and his nerves as the strings. In the present novel Sharad Tandale tries to present Ravan as a son, bother, a husband a father of Indrajeet or Meghnaad and a king as well. In recent times there are certain other writers who have written from the same perspective like, Ravana:- Roar of the demon king by Abhimanyu Singh Sisodia.; Ravana The Great: King of Lanka by M. S. Purnalingam Pillai; My name is Ravana by Bala Sankuratri; Asura: Tale of the Vanquished by Anand Neelakantan; King of Lanka by David Hair and so on.

Since our childhood we are told that Ravana has ten heads, twenty arms, a flying chariot and a city of gold. Tandale in this novel tries to explain how he is as normal as any other human being having an enormous physical strength and strong will power which transformed him to a mighty king of Lanka. According to Tandale, It is his maternal grandfather who purposefully

spreads the rumor of ten heads and twenty arms just to exploit the feelings of many known and unknown races like Daitya, Asur, Danav and Naga tribes whom he wanted to bring under the influence of Ravana's power. Those were all Non-Arya who have been living in the deep forests. Ravana with the help of his grandfather brought them all under his influence while establishing his army. Tandale tries to stress out how Ravana while building the empire tried to establish the Demon-culture and a tradition different from that of Aryans Vedic culture.

The novel starts with Ravana's humiliation and insult by his father Rishi Vishrava. Vishrava rejects Ravana's natural right to be a son as he never married his mother. Vishrava says,

"No, you are not an Arya. Your mother is a servent, a Dasi. In that case you are a dasiputra. According to religion one cannot marry a woman who is not an Arya. I have only one wife, 'Devvarnini' and only son 'Kuber' who for his love of his father has sent many dasi's like your mother to serve me. By marrying dasis I cannot destroy my Dharma. Your mother belongs to a lower race and so you and your siblings can not get my name as a father. Crows should not think of becoming swans." (p 28)

Kuber the son of Rishi Vishrava offered Ravana's mother Kekasi and her sisters to his father. Till Sumali the once demon king and grandfather of Ravana attacks Vishrava's Ashram to find out his daughters. Ravana did not have any idea of the facts about his birth. Very much till that time he used to suppose himself as a natural son of Vishrava and an Aryaputra. This incident changes the whole course of his life. Till that time, he never understood why his mother and her sisters used to scold his father Vishrava, Kubera Vishrav's son and Lord Vishnu and other Gods as well. With the support of Sumali and Prahastha, his maternal uncle Ravana starts the battle of his life. It is Sumali who shapes his character and

personality as a king.

The entry of Sumali in Ravana's life brings forth the truth of life before Ravana. Even his paternal grandfather Rishi Poulatsya tries to mould his life by taking him to Bramhadev who is supposed to be the first guru who have studied and observed nature minutely. He has always told Ravana to keep away from the feelings of rage and revenge. At the same he tried to pacify the negativity of his mind by telling him that creation is always better than destruction. The first part of Ravana's life deals with his Struggle to know his own identity and his struggle to establish his own empire as a demon king. To establish the kingdom of demons and taking revenge on Kuber and all other Gods is his grandfather and mother's dream too. At every stage right from the beginning of his life till death he has to fight against or for one thing or the other. Nothing seems to be easy for him. After driving out Kuber from Lanka Ravana gets settle there as a king and makes delay to take revenge on God's but his grandfather Sumali reminds him of the object of their life and once again Ravana sets on the fight against Gods in which he gets victory over them.

Tandale describes Ravan as a dutiful king, with velour courage and devotion of a grand warrior. He explains how Ravan is anxious to keep Lanka safe and independent. Here the readers get overwhelmed by the love of a demon king for his fellow human beings. A real and dutiful king's characteristics like courage, pride, velour, and ambitious progressions are explained by the writer. Not only his own palace but he recreated the whole Lanka with gold and wanted his fellowmen should also live in gold houses. Tandale gives the detail description of how Ravana with the help of 'Maya Danav' recreates Lanka with gold. He portrays Ravana not only the dutiful king but a dutiful grandson, son and a loving and caring brother of his siblings. It is because of the utmost sense of duty and love towards his sister he takes an unworthy step to

abduct Sita. Ravana in his rage kills Shurpanakha's husband 'Vidyujiva'. Dispite of Ravana's instistance Shurpanakha doesn't marry anybody. It is when she sees Rama And Laxmana in the forest she gets attracted towards them and asks for marriage but when both of them rejects her proposal and in an rage of humiliation and insult she attacks Sita Laxmana cuts her nose and an ear.

When Ravana comes to know about the whereabouts of Shurpanakha Ravana gets surprized and shocked. Shurpanakha becomes the reason for the later tragedy. Already there is a sense of guilt that he himself spoiled the life of his sister Ravana has to take revenge of Rama and Laxmana. It is surprising to know despite of Ravana's knowledge, skills and his tremendous faith and worship of Lord Shiva, he remains the slave of his senses and a victim of his own ego. His judgments and assumptions about the power, war skills and knowledge of Rama and Laxmana all proves wrong. By abducting Sita definitely he commits blunder and despite of all his near and dear ones insistence of sending Sita to Rama he keeps sita in confinement and gets ready for war with Rama. Even his beloved wife Mandodari keeps asking him to send Sita with respect to Rama. In the later part of this novel it is Mandodari who tells him that he is no different than other male who with their power and strength spoils the lives of women. She bravely keeps him in the line of people or Gods like Kuber, Indra, Vishnu and his own father Rishi Vishrava who have spoiled lives of many women and the life of his own mother too. In the novel she asks Ravana if Rama and Laxman don't reach Lanka to take Sita back from the clutches of Ravana what Ravana will do of Sita. Ravana replies her he has not planned anything in that case but he will send her Ayodhya or to her father Mailthily.

Here Mandodari says,

"Rajan, will her life be happy then ? Will Aryans then accept her ? I don't think so. If

society won't accept Sita how Rama will accept her as his wife? Every male dominated society has made woman a thing to their enjoyment. Sita is beautiful and now she is in the captive of other man and who would believe her chastity and purity? Will her own husband understand her mind and assume her pure? The answer of all these questions is "No". Rajan, a character and chastity of a woman is not decided with her soul, thoughts and present situation but it is decided only with the body. Society won't look at her akrosh and suffering. It won't think of her feelings as well. Her character now has the ugly spots of abduction which will never be wiped out. The world knows till date you have oppressed many women and the life of Sita is also cursed"(p361)

When Ravana gets embarrassed with the harsh comments of Mandodari he asks her not to relate his past incidents with this one. To this once again she shows him a mirror by saying,

"Rajan to relate or not to relate but now you also used a woman as a medium of your revenge. The molestation of Shurpanakha's body by them and your molestation of Sita's Character are one and the same. Anybody may get the better off in politics, but there is always a loose of a woman. I see the same loose in Shurpanakha and Sita as well". (p362)

With the abduction of Sita the fall in Ravana's life begins. Now on one hand, he is a wrong doer and on the other, he becomes the sufferer of his wrong doings. Here Tandale tries to make a different argument through Ravana when he says that,

"———The injustice to my mother was a form of sensuality of male dominated culture whereas the rape of 'Vedvati' was a outbreak of male offence. The molestation of Shurpanakha is the death of her felling of love; and Sita is a puppet doll I used to teach them a lesson. The assassination of 'Tratika' was a conspiracy to destroy maternal culture. The rape of Kubera's daughter-in-law now seemed to me a cruel way

of my taking revenge on Kubera. I became restless. —-(p362)

While claiming himself as an adherent of Rakshas culture he tries to justify his own action of abducting Sita by saying,

"I have just abducted Sita, where have I molested her? If her body is the only means of her purity there won't be any disrespect from me". (p 362)

Tandale here tries to stress the fact that as a demon he could have violated Sita as he had ample period of time but he did not do such heinous act.

The novel later on gives detail description of later events of the sequence. It is surprising to read that the King like Ravana fails to understand the power and skills of Rama and Laxmana. Being the hero of the novel he gets the whole of attention of the readers. When the war begins then also he fails to guess the strength of Rama and goes on sending his siblings and children on the battlefield instead of going his own person. When his beloved son Meghnad is killed in the battlefield Mandodari furious with grief and rage questions the brevity and velour of him. She condemns Ravana when she says,

"Vali and Akshaykumar were killed, Lanka was burned, and Monkeys built the bridge over the sea. What were you doing when Bibhishan went to the enemy's? You kept thinking and thinking! Excessive physical pleasures have made you heavy and idle. You have sacrificed Prahasta, Kumbh, Mahaparshwa, Akshaykumar and now my beloved Meghnad for the sake of Shurpanakha's revenge. You have done this for the sake of your sister but isn't there any sense of compassion for all of us. Won't you understand the simple thing that the mean Bibhishan will tell all the secrets of Lanka to the Aryans?" (pp418-419)

At the very end When Ravana tries to pacify Mandodari and asks her to be calm she says,

"The war on both the sides in Chess is false; still we meet with all the pawns at once. But you won't understand this. The enemy before us is gaming with all the pawn at once. Each enemy pawn has urge in it to fight. Their all pawns were supporting each other; but you don't touch the other pawn till the one you don't kill. You confined all; you kept silently watching like the pawn King. You took sacrifices of your own pawns one after the other. You started this game, but did not understand the simple thing. You lost the elephants like Kumbhakarna and Prahasta; you threw the fast, horse like Dhumraksha and Mahaparshwa before death. Like a pawn king you did not made any offenses nor used any diplomatic moves. You lost all your time in childish things to frighten Sita. Rajan, wars cannot be won with mere psychological knowledge, to win a war you need the techniques of war. Queen like Meghnad was killed with conspiracy. If in game of chess I might have played with these moves, you have proved me foolish but you have played with all these lives. To win a lost game of chess one can begin it to play again but in the battlefield of real life once it is lost it cannot be restored. You claim yourself as a knowledgeable person and still such a simple thing did not consider."(pp 421- 422)

Ravana has always called Mandodari his mirror and at the end also she proves herself as the mirror of his life. In Tandale's novel depicts that Ravana was killed with his wrong doing and also with the ambition of Bibhishan meets his end. Though born as a Rakshas Bibhishan, the brother of Ravana practiced Vedic culture for his own. He is the most religious and spiritual person in Lanka. Even Ravana has given him all his liberty in his case of religion and religious practices. But here we see him as an ambitious person who proves fatal for his own siblings and becomes the reason of Ravana's death who tells all the secrets of Lanka to Rama. At certain level Tandale overlooks the abduction of Sita, Rama's journey towards Lanka, Rama's

courage to fight with all powerful King of Lanka. But the hero in this novel is Ravana and his life struggle without any heavenly advantage and the tragic death of him.

As has been said by, Celia De Lago in her post on December 19, 2014 on Rama and Ravana's Divine Antagonism, "But Ravana is not evil through and through; Ravana is more akin to Satan, a fallen angel capable of goodness but prescribed by the fates to committing negative deeds until his death."¹

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