Moral Duty Leadership and Exile in Valmiki's Ramayana

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The literary text taken for analysis is *Ramayana,* an epic poem written by Valmiki. The intellectuals and critics hold *Ramayana* in high regard and consider it to be one of India's greatest epic poems. The epic poem lies parallel to the Hindu tradition and narratives of the events of the past, which are mostly centered on the different teachings that Hindu scholars instill in their people, such as the way of life. The current paper analyzes the incorporation of Hindu ideologies into the narrative to highlight the influence culture has on its people.

Rama's Exile and Sita's Abduction

Before delving into the analysis of the given chapters from the mentioned excerpt, a brief overview of the epic poem will be given. In the epic, Valmiki tells a story of a man named Rama and Sita, who have been cast out to spend ten years in the forest due to a promise that Rama's father had made to his second wife. Rama is a virtuous man with incredible strength and is respected by both man and beast. On being exiled, Rama, along with his brother Lakshmana and his wife Sita, lived in the forest. While in the forest, both Rama and his brother slay numerous demons who had been troubling humans, and their stories spread far and wide both in the human world and in the realm of the beasts. One of the demons that Lakshmana injures in the forest is related to the demon Ravana. Ravana has heard rumors of Sita's beauty, and as revenge on the young prince, Ravana abducts Sita and takes her away. However, Sita is recovered safely with the help of the monkey king.

Public Judgment After Sita's Return

The excerpt focuses on chapters 42 through 49 and follows the scene after Sita has been recovered safely from the demon's grasp. On returning home, Rama is surrounded by his friends and wishes to know what his people are saying about him, which can be seen from the following lines,

"*Tell me all truthfully without reserve, what reports, good or ill, do the people of the city circulate regarding me?*" (p. 521).

His eagerness to know about public opinion shows how much he likes being known as the good king. However, the reply shocks Rama as people judge his decision about bringing Sita back home. Society

doubts that Sita has been faithful to Rama since she was found to be on the demon's lap. This causes Rama great sorrow, and as his culture dictates, Rama does what is expected of him. Before Rama sends his wife away to the Hermitage, he addresses his people so that they know that he is a righteous king who cares for his people. The following lines show Rama's insistence on clearing the doubt from his men's hearts,

"*This is what people are saying about me concerning Sita! The inhabitants of the city as also those of the country censure me severely and their criticism pierces my heart!*" (p. 524).

Rama's Conflict Between Marriage and Kingship

From the way the king acts, it is evident that Rama gave in to public opinion instead of staying true to his wife, as he should have done because he had pledged his love to her. This act of the protagonist then points toward the Hindu thought regarding the kind of actions people should take in a critical situation and how one should live. The conflict that arises due to the public's opinion becomes the center of attention throughout the epic poem. Rama is left in a state of conflict as his principles are questioned, which forces him to have his brother Lakshmana lead the princess into the forest and leave her there. The author's depiction of the Hindu culture in the epic poem shows that people held high regard for the opinions of others. The way Rama quickly decides to send his wife away to bring an end to the rumors about him shows that public opinion was taken seriously even if it doubted the faithfulness of one's spouse (Hindery). The treatment of women in Hindu culture can also be seen in the narrative as Sita's faithfulness accounts for nothing in front of society's opinions. However, she follows Rama's commands and leaves him alone forever, as can be seen from the following lines,

"*The husband is as a God to the woman, he is her family and her spiritual ·preceptor, therefore, even at the price of her life, she must seek to please her lord*" (p. 530).

Spousal Duty and Hindu Ideals of Righteous Life

Sita's treatment shows that the Hindu culture was strict in terms of a wife's devotion and duty to her husband. Furthermore, a link can be seen between the epic poem and the Hindu way of life. Hindu society was deeply engrossed in following Hindu ideals and principles, which can be found in the text, as there are some characters such as Rama and his brother who are taken to be the models of proper behavior. Another example is Sita, who is faithful to her husband through and through, as her religion desires her to be. However, the doubt that has been sown in Rama's mind turns Sita into a bad woman, and her loyalty is called into question. While the epic poem mostly revolves around the relationship between the husband and the wife, it also points towards societal values as a conflict-inducing factor. According to Hindu ideals, every member of society has to be loyal to his or her spouse. Secondly, following the Hindu religion as the main goal in life was considered to be righteous behavior. Lastly, Hindu followers perceived suffering and sorrow to be part of the righteous life as

prescribed by their religion (Bhalla). Rama's actions show that he made rash decisions instead of thinking things through. If society said that Rama's wife was not pure anymore, Rama followed their words and solved the conflict.

Culture, Loyalty, and the Cost of Moral Duty

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that the author's purpose in writing the epic poem was to address the Hindu way of life. By depicting characters such as Rama and Sita, the author highlights how important the relationship between a husband and wife is, and it also shows that loyalty to the spouse is given the highest regard in Hindu culture. Furthermore, society's perspective matters the most as Rama sends Sita away due to people doubting her faithfulness. Rama readily accepted being separated from his wife and accepted a life of loneliness. According to Hindu ideology, the husband has to stay true to his culture and religion instead of his wife, as can be seen in the case of Rama and Sita. In addition, the epic poem asserts that the protagonist leads the life that has been set out for him by his religion even though it causes him to suffer. Rama's acceptance of the Hindu laws shows his devotion and highlights the fact that men during that time strictly followed their cultural values. While the epic poem mostly centers around the relationship between a husband and a wife, the views of the Hindu people regarding the way of life run parallel to it.

Works Cited

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