

Men in Chitra Banerji Divakaruni's the Forest of Enchantments

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Abstract: Since times immemorial lord Rama is hailed as an obedient son and Sita as an obedient wife. India has always revelled in the glorious treatment of women during Rigvedic times. Everybody adores Ram for his reverence that he has towards his parents as a son and his people as a king. He sure does receive his due of flak for time and again for conducting agni Pariksha for Sita but his role as a sacrificing son and as a suffering man receives but little attention. This story is similar with Dashrath and even Ravan. The present paper focuses on the men characters in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Forest of Enchantments*. This book does a great favor to society as it presents every character in the novels sans their divinity that is generally attached to these characters.

Keywords: Character assessment, keen observation, sacrificing attitudes, and refined sensibilities.

1. Introduction

In contemporary times there is a spate of glorifying the mythical women characters like Draupadi Ahilya, Seeta and Surpanakha. There are very rare examples of the glorification of men characters. Raavanputr Meghad: The Prince of Lanka by Kevin Missal and Ravaan: The Enemy of Lanka by Amish Tripathi and also his Ramchandra series are the few books available which make an attempt to deeply read and justify the characters of men otherwise. Therefore it becomes necessary to read and understand other men characters as well in order to gain a complete view of the Ramayana. Through the ages to the contemporary times all the major women characters have received attention for their due share of sorrows. It is about time that even the sorrows and sacrifices of men characters be brought to the fore and granted their fair share of concern.

Ram over the ages has always been lauded as the dutiful son, a wary husband, a caring brother and an exemplary king. Divakaruni's *The Forest of Enchantments* reveals Ram's character not only as a dutiful son to his father but also a doting son to his mother. His promise to Sita of not marrying anybody else other than her was like a revenge that he took from his father for keeping her in the palace like a commodity. He tells Sita that he did it for the sake of his mother. His act depicts his refined sensibilities as a man and his reverence for his mother as a son. As a child Ram could not spend much time with his mother because Dashrath wanted to prepare him to be a king

Adapt in using all the weapons. His departure to Ashram for his further education made him feel miserable because as a son he wanted to stay with his mother but could not. Ram mentions to Sita that he could not enjoy the food made by his mother even during vacation because invariably his father called him away from practicing archery or discussing some issues of the kingdom with him. To keep up the promise of his father Ram gave away his kingdom without a second thought, removed all his fineries and dressed in tree bark clothes. This depicts his sacrificing disposition and his fortitude to remain calm. Ram's advice to Sita for not looking back at a forlorn and crying Dashrath, "spare him at least this much respect." This further indicates his refined sensibilities and his love and respect for his father. Ram's wait for his father to approve Sita as his bride also indicate the respect for his father and customs and traditions.

Sumitra's condition is very well discussed in the book but it is necessary to refer to Dashrath's condition. In his eagerness to expand the empire he marries Keikai and promises the throne to her son. Staying henpecked under Keikai's tantrums and crying desperately for Ram, forgetting Sumitra after marrying Keikai, denying Sita and Urmila to take maids from their maternal house indicate a fickle and proud mind. He does not come to the fore as majestic a king as Ram.

The character of Ravan has garnered a negative review from the society from the times immemorial. Ravan was a learned Lord Shiva Devotee and he befittingly behaved in life. Divakaruni has indicated a valid reason for Sita Haran. Chopping of Surpanakha's nose and killing other Rakshas mercilessly, justifies Ravan's act of abduction. He forcefully takes Sita away but he waits for her to accept him. Despite being such a learned scholar and Shiva Bhakta, a powerful Rakshasa who knew all illusions he patiently waited for Sita to be his queen. Even if Sita did not agree he repeatedly requested her to accept him. It a great triumph of Divakaruni that she inverts the hitherto followed story line of Rakshas and tries to inform the reader about the feelings and emotions of even the Rakshas. After a war of few days Ravan knew that it was difficult for him to win the war but he did not flinch and kept sending his sons and best fighters to win over Ram. He kept up his heroic vigor and was ready to sacrifice everything for winning the battle

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even in the last moments.

Vibhishan urge to follow the right path and the righteous in helping Ram to win over the battle shows his desire for the right action to take place. History know vibhishan as the one who bach stabbed his own brother but he ardently followed the right path and did whatever was right to do. He was ready to bear the heartache of losing a brother but was not at all ready to support the wrong. This indicates a high moral character of vibhishna and all the stereotypes attached to the character of a Rakshsa come undone. Bharat's dedication towards his elder brother Ram is surely impressive but hi short temper towards his mother certainly disqualifies him as a candidate for kingship. Running to the forest just after the death of his father and arresting his own mother in her chambers indicate of an immature behavior. His inability to control his anger presents him as unfit for becoming a ruler.

Lakshman is always adored as a dutiful and obedient brother. His sacrifice as a newly married man is seldom paid any attention. Since times immemorial Lakshman's character has

been portrayed as angry and fuming but His advice to his wife of staying back for fourteen years and taking care of his mothers portray him as a dutiful son. The Forest of Enchantment is a fine commentary on the women characters, their sufferings and virtues but it is also necessary to scan the fine qualities, sensibilities and refined dispositions of men characters. Only a balanced approach will evince a complete and justified analysis of all the characters of Ramayana.

2. Conclusion

This paper presented an overview of Men in chitra banerji divakaruni's the forest of enchantments.

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