



HUMANISTIC ANALYSIS OF RAM IN THE NOVEL RAM – SCION OF IKSHVAKU BY AMISH TRIPATHI

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Abstract

The paper engages with Amish Tripathi's novel "*Ram Scion of Ikshvaku*", particularly with the character of Ram as an efficient or ideal ruler, his responsibilities and his role in the society in the context of the Vedic system. The shades of his character under the lens of divine and mortal, social justice and caste dilemma, ideological beliefs of idealism versus pragmatism and institution of marriage problematize and address the anthropological framework of human society and functioning. The paradoxical interpretation of God, the plight of mortals and their deep divide and its disintegration through fiction is a hallmark. The state of social justice and problematic realities like caste still persist, and writers like Amish seek to readdress it with fresh perspectives in literary fiction. The shrinking landscape of political thought and ideologies concerns a vibrant society; thus, the novel propounds to elucidate its benefits and dangers to readers. Marriage remains a foundational building block of society; thus, its shortcomings and dysmorphia under the capitalistic and modernist influence need to be revisited. Amish models the marriage of Ram and Sita and contrasts it to the sifting of marriages in his own family to bring a radical change. Amish's character is located in the dynamic socio-religious belief of their setting with conflicts, distortion and the need for course correction. It also highlights ancient India and its socio-political realities. The article is replete with abundant instances and in-depth analysis of the characters and the events that address the readers and the problems that resonate in our contemporary times.

Keywords: Rig Veda, Upanishads, Dharma, Law, ruler, Smritis, Swadharma, Marriage, Institution, masculine, feminine, way of life, Ekam

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DOI: 10.53555/ecb/2021.10.03.09

Introduction

Among the holiest ancient Hindu scriptures, the epic of Ramayana is one of the most widely renowned legends celebrating the triumph of good over evil since time immemorial. In this earnest literary expedition, Amish Tripathi harnesses its rich heritage and legacy reasonably and creatively with a modernist take. Thus, employing his fictitious liberty as a socio-culturally conscious writer, he demystifies the traditional outlook on the character of Lord Shri Ram as an unattainable, distant divine figure. His humanistic point of view and analysis of multifaceted emotions, vices, and virtues bring this larger-than-life character on a much more personal and relatable pedestal with the ordinary mortal. Their intricately woven complexities, challenges and shared qualities break down the mortal-divine barriers. The hyperlink narrative technique deployed allows the author to weave an intricate web of events and circumstances that focuses upon a particular event and character to connect them by a common thread and assimilates the retelling of the story in the most unconventional manner. Amish borrows the socio-cultural conflicts, ethical dilemmas and existential crises from the sacred text to illustrate those mundane trials and tribulations of human life. A.K. Ramanujan states, "The epic tale of Ram can not be defined due to its magnanimous interpretations and sources across the world."

This induces retrospection and introspection in the ordinary to re-evaluate their assumptions and beliefs regarding themselves and their surroundings. His characters serve as mirrors to blur the line between divine and human by challenging the conventionally held presupposed religious notions rooted in orthodoxy, superstitions and misinterpretations of sacred texts. Amish's prompts offer fresh perspectives on the epic with a realistic and modernist perception to develop a more enhanced understanding of humanity's divinity and spirituality. By retelling the epic tale, the author wishes to rejuvenate the ancient culture and civilisational roots severed under the stress of colonial hangover and the worldly chaos of a globalised world. His RamChand series brings the testament of powerful storytelling deeply imbued in the colours of its social, political, cultural and economic realities to rekindle thought and imagination in young minds.

Divine and Mortal

Dr Payel Dutta Chowdhury and Rashmi Kumari state, "Amish' Ram comes to the fore not as a deeply divine figure, greatly revered and celebrated among the people of Ayodhya like his portrayal in Valmiki's text". Rather, his birth is

marked as a curse by the battle of 7,032, the rise of Ravana, the crushing defeat of Dashrath's arrogance and the doom of thousands of Ayodhyans into the deep gallows of destitute and darkness. He is isolated purposefully by his father, and society held responsible for something that was never under his authority. Loneliness accompanies his childhood with bitterness and anger towards his father, more precisely aimed at Ravan. Suppose his familial vows weren't enough; his social status as Kshatriya and title as a Suryavanshi prince pitied him against his brethren, who were his only source of comfort and solace, particularly Laxman. R.K. Narayan implores and contrasts Kamban Ramayana to illustrate the riches and pomposity of Kosala with Ayodhya as its capital blessed with exquisite architecture, geography and materialistic landscape, alluding to the city of Indira." However, unlike Valmiki or Kamban Ramayan, Ram here isn't endowed with great intellectual and martial art prowess; rather, he is sensitive and more vulnerable to changing tides of time and circumstances that cajoles him into adulthood, anger that robs him of his childhood and politics that at every step undermined his character by Manthara, his stepmothers and even his father. Like most ordinary people, he is deeply troubled and moved by the way of life, its prescribed regulations, lawlessness and the paradoxical dichotomy into cyclic existence as masculine and feminine. The tenants of "truth, duty, honour in a masculine egalitarian paradigm are contrasted against the liberal, accommodating principles of a feminine existence (Tripathi 85)." Where masculinity is "plagued by fanaticism and rigidity" (Tripathi 93), the feminine is ailed by "the lack of accountability and proper direction (Tripathi 93)." In contrast to being all-knowing and being omnipresent, he is clueless and confused about prevailing beliefs, customs and practices. Like most people of Ayodhya, he believes in the creation of the universe through the splitting of 'One Ekam', thus initiating the cycle of life and death. Brahman is the supreme deity that is formless and shapeless yet resides in all individuals alike, and their relationship persists in the form of 'Atma' and 'Parmatma'. The Hindu pantheon states the existence of a triumvirate as 'Brahma' the creator, 'Vishnu' the preserver and 'Shiva' the destroyer. The Rig Veda refers to "one God as 'Ekam' the culmination of every soul, into 'Parmatma' (Tripathi 91)."

The analogy of Asuras and Devas, their ideological strife and fallacious interpretation of Shukracharya's teachings become the primary site for Freedom of speech and expression in Ram as a conscious being. Rather than submitting one's

intellect to prescribed notions of rigid extremities and aimless liberalism, the Amish's character seeks to cement one's own beliefs through rational experience. The sects of monotheism and polytheism acquire primary currency in Ram's character as an ordinary individual who inclines towards a more balanced approach. Monotheistic beliefs invite rigidities and draconian customs and enslave the body, soul and mind of an individual unsuitable for a diverse thought or action, always adopting violence as a medium of communication. In comparison, polytheism leverages more autonomy to people's beliefs and negates hard-line interpretation of any ideas, particularly theological ones. Ram believes in placing the institution of religion and all others on the principles of well-defined coded laws rather than blind faith to avoid conflict. Though emanating from pure-existing theology, his beliefs are independent and fresh, challenging Shukracharya's. The segregation of one God into many and their culmination into one is a paradoxical understanding that skips many devoted intelligentsias and makes them commit the error of tyranny. God exists in all, even the minutest of animate and inanimate creation of the world, and he does not take sides to encourage war on the other. Amish character finds its relevance in a modern setting that exudes diverse cultural, political and religious thought emanating from Vedas and holy scriptures that uphold the sanctity of the Vedic lifestyle. They shun the egotistical interpretation of "Religious fundamentalism and intolerance play havoc in the contemporary world today, and Amish addresses the inhumanity and terrorism perpetrated in the misguided belief of God (Gap Bodhi Taru- Volume II, Issue II, 3).

Social Justice and Caste Dilemma

The character of Ram in Amish's novel, contrary to his divine persona, adopts a rather humane and ordinary disposition in his public and private conduct. His childhood is problematized by playing the estranged father-and-son relationship of abuse and neglect. Dr Sunita Nimavat elucidates that "Ram's is cursed with the blotched battle of 7032, that culminated into Dashrath's historic defeat the day of his birth (Tripathi 42)." The familial space of the parent-child relationship clashes with an individual egotistical worldview and social position in society. The estrangement of man from an artificial world and self-deception characterized by Dashrath implores the void of father-son attachments replaced by the attachments of materialistic need and greed of modernity. Ram is emotionally castrated and socially sensitive to this existing dysphoria in their conjugal bond and needs to find common ground. Amish allows the

readers to suture such estranged bonds by addressing emotions and rationale, and this vulnerable disposition of Ram as an ordinary individual relates to the mass audience. His divine persona is momentarily suspended by Amish's artistic liberty and creativity that makes divine-mortal connections permeable rather than restricted and estranged through the position of deity and devotee.

The existence of society connotes a pre-established form of governance and institutions that comes to the fore with its unique socio-cultural and political challenges. These undertakings in the realm of quantum fictitious time and space mirror the realistic struggles of the individual and masses at large. In Ram's world, they manifest as the misinterpreted evils of the prevailing caste system under the Vedic laws that have choked individual autonomy and sowed deeply rooted prejudices and biases against other castes and classes. Dr Sudhir Kumar illustrates this by highlighting how "Dashrath couldn't hide animosity towards the trading Vaishya's due to his prejudices." In the region of Sapt Sindhu region, Hardas Galchar and Dr Ankit Gandhi point to misconstrued notions such as "looted riches were sought as winning gifts through wars and justified, but wealth acquired through nefarious means was looted at with contempt and punished." The self-styled laws based on materialistic interest blind the ruling classes and breed hatred in social masses that leads the whole kingdom to its ruin, subtly indicated in Maharishi Vasishta's question to the four princesses. "what do they think about an excellent king who has fallen in despair? Who has transformed his loss into his people's? Should he be seen as a fair king? (Tripathi 68).

In Ram, Amish invokes the tenets of Manu Smriti, raising the question of validity and the divine right of the ruler upon its subjects. Deriving the pertinent question of relegating moral and ethical duties, the Amish introduce democratic notions in a historical context to trace its origins from infancy. Ram refers to lord Vishnu and his teachings that value suitable and rational virtues over notions of blood and customs as the most crucial factor, stating that "whosoever is needed to show direction to his people (Tripathi 67), to prosperity and a better future must be appointed. The kingship should be exercised with wisdom to serve and abstain from evil at all costs. His greatness in power should rival his goodness in bringer eager to serve nobly, thus being nearer to God. Like lord Vishnu and his predecessors, he must conform rationality with divinity and love with compassion to understand the needs of the ordinary. He should not indulge in the gluttony of base carnal human desires.

Circumstances question honourable men and reward the dishonourable, yet one must always have the spirit to judge themselves, accept one's actions, and rise above them.

In the character of Ram, he establishes that "true leadership should prioritise love for his nation above himself (Tripathi 41)." The principles of 'Swadharama' take root from the Vasya Upanishad, which says that "goodwill and service over self-marks presence of god in you" (Tripathi 51) and thus impart justice to oneself and others. The position of monarchy is the medium to introduce radical changes that are tuned to prevailing Socio-cultural, political and economic challenges. Following the Dharma and aligning it with your Swadhama becomes paramount to striking harmony. Dharma should flow by his nature and thought, to grow from within as Swadhama uplifts him and others in just action. Dharma holds memory, mind, intellect and inner soul under the overarching forces of cosmic energy in synchronisation that compliments and supplements one's growth by adhering to the principles of Swadhama. The Sacred text of Shrimad Bhagwat Gita leads us on to the path of our moral and ethical deities and protects us from getting disillusioned and disarrayed from the truth. The act of presiding over the masses should not come from the sense of entitlement or authority but from the contours of serving the people and not serving oneself.

High Idealism vs Cynical Pragmatism

The essence of community and society are forged in the sense of common agreements and adherence in the form of laws, rules and regulations. However, human nature is arbitrary, and so is the cosmos of the universe in nature that cannot be placated within comprehensively defined man-made laws. The individual human psyche, assessment and application of mental and emotional cognition are quite unpredictable, so much so that Ram assumes a curious observation and utters, "One wonders if we are helping such animals on our bi-weekly medical expedition or we are just soothing our egos (Tripathi 69)." Whereas Bharat sides to a cynical approach, underlining the hypocritical stance of humanity and questions "how we call out corruption among others but fail to see our own mistakes (Tripathi 73)." We hate others who do wrong and commit crimes, blithely blame Ravan for our problems, failing to realise these problems are of our own accord (Tripathi 73)." Amish contrasts idealism against pragmatism absolute Freedom contrary to absolute rules to chart the ambitious terrain of life. Bharat outlines the coded selfishness and fallacious perception of one's own biological nature that he intends to

capitalise upon with absolute Freedom in socio-cultural and political notions determined by materialistic thought. Yet he fails to propose a sustainable model, particularly in the face of a clash between public and self-interest.

He fails to counter Ram's observation as to how unchecked Freedom in the absence of law breeds conflict, chaos and bloodshed, for every individual is out for himself rather than the collective good. He is willing to sacrifice his moral and ethical virtues for temporary glory and satisfaction that outlives him, leaving nothing but sorrow and pain. Ram points out that "Freedom cannot be coupled with law. One cannot exercise absolute Freedom to decide whether they want to be part of a society or depart from it based on law. But as long one is living in one such society, they ought to obey the rules (Tripathi 73)." However, the distinction between Dharma and law precisely leads to their fallacious interpretations, breeding corruption and moral poverty. The fear of law can be easily bypassed in contrast to the fear of conscience if the two are treated as distinct entities. The character of Ram Amish elucidates the readers by saying that "despite the well-known Manu Smriti, people were mostly unaware of it; in similarity to other sacred texts like BrihadManu Smriti, Yajnavalkya Smriti, Narad Smriti, Aapastamb Smriti, Arti Smriti, Yam Smriti and Vyas Smriti and others (Tripathi 116)." Ignorance and disinformation amalgamated with the segregation of law and Dharma, and people framed redundant laws with loopholes to exploit them for their personal gains. They heavily invested in corrupt activities and indulged in immoral and unethical conduct that further degraded the social divide of caste, class and social status.

Ram, as the chief of police, questions the purpose of such laws and introspects on the larger aspects of life, such as whether absolute Freedom helps humanity. What goals would people have then? And how would they achieve them? He is terrified by the self-answers and realisations of how the strong would extinguish the weak in such scenarios. He finally comes to rationale, reasoning that "the purpose of law is not to punish but rather course correct individual as well as collective actions (Tripathi 85)." He emphasises the reintegration of Dharma in sync with the framed laws without any distinction. This would strike a balance between all sections of the masses without any appeasement to one that would jeopardise peace. This is put to the test in Ram's case with the heinous tortured death of his sister Roshini by the thugs of his society. The law found itself incompetent to punish the guilty, and the individual and the collective could not stop

themselves from taking the law into their hands and resorting to barbarism and anarchy. In Ram's character, the individual ordinary found himself at loggerheads with his subjective and objective duties, emotional dilemma and dysphoria of social and personal justice. Where Bharat gives into his lesser emotional callings, Ram struggles and holds his ground with impulsive, unethical actions. He suffers and tortures himself to find the appropriate response to a dilemma that ails many, yet few are able to rise above it with appropriate solutions. Ram understood that butchering an individual might satisfy the personal anguish, but it would collectively set a wrong example that violence must be met with violence that leaves nobody wiser or alive. He rather understands it is only with course correction, codification, and modification of existing laws put into action that concrete, viable results can be achieved. He wanted to purge the evil in Dhenkanal and not Dhenkanal himself, and the law must provide an opportunity to change for the better and bring a better change in the society, not to condemn itself to the same uncouth, barbaric violence and bloodshed. Amish elucidates the "pivotal role of law in fostering and contrasts it with the act of rape that presents a dichotomy in complexities of upholding and breaking the law" (A Forum for Debate on Contemporary Issues, 525). He sometimes criticises the characters for giving into two extremes: high idealism and cynical pragmatism of circumstance. Rather, it's in the character of Vasishtha that readers find a sensible answer to always aspire for balance and always inspire the public for the better.

Institution of Marriage vs Individual

The intuition of marriage has been problematised by Amish in his novel, which presents readers with questions that require careful thought and consideration. Ancient India had kingdoms and empires that were either in conflict or in alliance with each other. These relations with the state were marked by the institution of marriage that served as a necessary evil and an opportunity for the king to consolidate wealth, army, and power to safeguard the needs and interests of his people. However, it took an immense toll upon the individual bound in this institution, either with or against their consent. The plight of Kaushalya, Kaikeyi, and Sumitra post-Dashrath's defeat in the battle of Karachapa at the hands of Ravan drives a deep wedge between the familial space of Ayodhya, particularly the institution of marriage. Dashrath practised polygamy, for it was a necessary evil and his hour of need. However, it created a hostile environment for the queens who were pitied against one another along with their kingdom for their individual

prospects, love, and affection from their own husbands, whether it was Kaushalya's wish to deliver Ayodhya its prince or Kaikeyi's desire to anoint Bharat as the protector of Sapt Sindhu Empire by her dealings with Manthara. Despite being women, they share only formal cordiality and no sense of camaraderie, female bonding or sisterhood, which results in conflict and undermines and weakens the empire from the inside. All of this happens because society and the ruling monarch give into prevailing corruption, moral degradation, and distortion of the holy scriptures. Amish takes a stand to course correct this misinformation with his character Ram, who "believes marriage is sacred" (Tripathi 215) and pious instruction of communion and intertwining of two souls under the eyes of God bound by oaths and codes inscribed in Rig Veda. Dr A Srividhya remarks that "marriage must not be observed in light of a political alliance (Dr A Srividhya)." or just a political tool to advance one's own prospects or the kingdoms. He considers love to realise and achieve the "Parmatama" or "Ekam" one true God. He questions that if the right of polygamy is given to men, then it's only fair that women should be allowed to practice polyandry, both of which he neither supports nor considers to be by the Vedas. Dr Dushyant Nimavat voices that "the character of Ram contrary to his father holds the position of women with consideration and respect; thus he wishes to take only one wife and refute the long practice of polygamy (Dr Dushyant Nimavat)." Ram's concept of love and marriage reminds the readers about Kahlil Gibran's words: "make not another bond but love only me (Gibran: The Prophet)." Furthermore, marriage should not take place on mere bodily and lustful affections of carnal love and passion for one another. Rather, Amish puts it across to the reader via Ram "as wishes to bow his head in admiration towards a respectable women (Tripathi 216)." No one should be forced into marriage since nothing could be more tragic than being chained to an unwanted individual. One must marry someone he deeply respects and who will help them become better. The "Maangalyatantunaanena bhava Jeevanhetuh may", a Sanskrit verse, reverberates and echoes the Vedic ethos of love that binds Ram and Sita's ethereal words "become the purpose of life through this holy thread of matrimony.... (Tripathi 247)." The Rig Veda deals with the institution of marriage and dismisses the popular misinformation debunking the idea of forced marriage as a part of the Hindu faith. In fact, it propounds that a love marriage, with the consent of two individuals in all honest faith and will, is far superior to an arranged marriage. The concept of Swayamvar, both in the

sacred text as well as the novel, supports it distinctively. The custom of Swayamvar allows a woman the Freedom to choose her own husband in the presence of society, her parents, and God. The literal and etymological meaning of Swayamvar itself is the Freedom to choose a life partner by oneself (Rig Veda). The tradition of Swayamvar is marked by certain charted-out tests and requirements that need to be met and put in place with due consideration of the woman and her parents. They range from testing intelligence to martial arts skills and even testing the principles and values of a person that gives a better understanding of his character and personality and allows the woman to consider whether the person would be a suitable life partner for her or not. It demands the husband to prove his credentials, honesty and diligence in the eyes of the woman, her parents and the learned and experienced people of society and to uphold his Dharma.

Discussion

The role of leadership in the novel can be dealt with in selected readings of Plato's 'Republic' or Karl Marx's 'Das Kapital' analysed through the lens of a contemporary modernist setting in the 21st century. Plato argues in his Republic that a king should be a philosopher. As the future king, Ram fits the role and goes the extra mile to question the authority and prevailing structure of social, political and economic systems. The division of society into a hierarchy workforce with charted-out functions could be analysed through the capitalistic model, and the tension between the trading class Vaishyas and the masses with underlying prejudices and problems could be open for arguments. The laws are anthropological and social constructions by mankind, and in the face of forces of nature find themselves incapacitated. This paradoxical and redundant undertaking of morphing the entire universe into the limited understanding of human knowledge is an area deeply engaged in multiple domains from sociology, anthropology, science, and literature. Thus, interdisciplinary engagement on the nuances, characters and themes opens the problem for in-depth understanding and analysis. The existing codified framework of structures like Vedas provides an opportunity to be remoulded in accordance with the changing passage of time. However, it does not mean that they lose their relevance. The earliest and most nascent understanding of our universe and nature comes from the theology of religion as the first school of thought. However, it is necessary to take other disciplines and interpretations of our existing knowledge to find definite answers to indefinite

problems. Freedom and flexibility become the pillar and hallmark of any great civilisation or academic undertaking. The institution of marriage, particularly polygamy, can be problematised as it is and can be analysed under the lens of theoretical and literary criticism of homegrown thoughts like Nyaya, Vaishesika, Yoga, Purva Mimansa, Samkhya and Vedanta or Uttara Mimansa founded by sages Gotama, Kapila, Konada, Patanjali, and Vyasa and Jaimini guiding scholarly discourse in the country.

Conclusion

The paper makes an academic discourse on the prominent themes of an efficient leader that resonates both in contemporary settings and in the plot of the novel. The Vedic school of thought has challenged authority as not a prerogative of royalty but rather that of capability and necessity, debunking the dichotomy of good vs evil. The pervasive misinterpretation of law as either archaic or redundant is taken up. Revising the existing knowledge and weeding out discrepancies is the larger message that the novel resonates with. Revisiting the ancient knowledge and revising the approach to dealing with problems of caste, religion, and trade are made with modernistic and humanistic perspectives, demystifying the myth and making it surreal. Religion becomes the central figure around other administrative and social systems. Thus, the interpretation of God is problematised and pitied against existing distorted knowledge in the public domain. The conflict and problems in any established form of living are analysed rather than solidified or glorified. The author redlines the purpose of religion as an institution and what role it should play in the progress and maintenance of society. The institution of marriage is explored from the existing preview as well as inscribed in Rig Veda that propounds upon traditions like Swayamvar, a very radical and progressive thought given the times when analysed with the contemporary lens of modernity. The author has made the sincerest attempts to familiarise modernity with tradition in the humanistic and realistic essence to find solutions to existing problems in modern India.

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