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Husband-Wife Relationship: Studying *Ramcharitmanas* in Translation

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Abstract:

Life is all about the relationship. These relations are the basis of any society. If there is sound relationship among the people then the society is also good and if the relations are not good then we cannot imagine a good society. Society is a net of different kinds of relationship woven in a complete whole. Literature is a depiction of society. Thus in literature we find the relationship of man with others. Tulsidasa has depicted a vast variety of husband- wife relationship in his masterpiece *Ramcharitmanas*. Here is an attempt to critically analyze the husband- wife relationship in *Ramcharitmanas*.

Keywords: Ramacharitmanasa, society, relationship, husband, wife.

Introduction

In literature we find the relationship of man with others. In the middle age, during the reign of *Mughal* emperors there is “flux and uncertainty” (168) everywhere. Brother killed his brother; son murdered the father or uncles for the sake of power. Where there was not any place for relations, love and affection in the society. Woman was considered an object of sensual pleasure. Power and richness are all in all for the people. Servants and soldiers were murdering their kings, at this time Tulsidasa set forth an example of a welfare state. In that state, all the relations are based on mutual love, affection and care. Tulsidasa, a myriad minded poet, philosopher, social reformer composed an epic in which he set forth, “the ideals of the relations of husband and wife, father and son, preceptor and disciple, master and servant, king and subjects” (Nagendra 148) regards Ramdatt Bhardwaja.

Apart from these relations *Ramcharitmanasa* presents relationship between brothers, between house- holders and holy man, friends and enemies, God and his devotee, master and servant, man with animals and birds, man with nature, etc. Thus a vast variety of relationships is presented by Tulsidasa. Tulsidasa depicted his society as a whole in which nature, animal and birds also assumed the highest importance. As N. K. Devraja points out, “the proper subject- matter of literature including poetry is the effective and moral relationships among human beings” (Nagendra154).

Ramcharitmanasa is replete with every kind of relationship. As the husband- wife relationship is the basis of Indian society. In India, marriage is considered to be an ideal institution. Tulsidasa has depicted a vast variety of husband- wife relationship in his masterpiece *Ramcharitmanas*. Here is an attempt to critically analyze the husband- wife relationship in *Ramcharitmanas*.

Husband and wife are the two sides of the same coin. We can't imagine one without the other. In Indian society marriage is an essential and significant institution without which the society can't progress further. In this institution husband and wife play the role of major characters. Tulsidasa presented the different dimensions of this relationship with the help of the characters of Rama and Sita, Dasharatha and his queens, Ravana and Mandodari, Janak and Maina, Shiv and Parvati, etc.

The relation of Rama and Sita has been depicted as an ideal husband- wife relation. At the time of Sita *svayamvara*, Rama and Sita notice each other in the royal garden of Janak for the first time. Even the melodious sound of Sita's anklets and other ornaments attracts the very soul of Rama. Even before they meet, they fall in love with each other. It seems as if the love between them was natural. After hearing this sound when Rama looks Sita, he loses his consciousness in love. Tulsidas describes it as, “His beauteous eyes became immovably fixed” and “his eyes feasted themselves on Sita's countenance even as the partridge gazes on the moon” (*Ramcharitmanasa* 132). Rama is filled with immense joy but he can't utter a word because of his overwhelming pleasure. He tells Lakshmana about Sita's *svayamvara* and the contest of the bow to divert his attention from the beautiful face of Sita. Tulsidasa describes the plight in these words, “While Rama was talking to his brother in this strain, his heart, which was enamored of Sita's beauty, was all the time drinking in the loveliness of her face as the bee sucks honey from the lotus (*Ramcharitmanasa*132). Rama's heart was overpowered by Sita's love. His heart that

never even in a dream thought of any woman was upset and restless after looking Sita. As K. P. Bahadur writes, “But in this case it is not only love at first sight. It is the voice of the prophecy and the fulfillment of destiny” (Bahadur 169). In this episode the relationship of Rama and Sita is depicted as a lover and beloved. Rama and Sita both are stricken with love. Sita in her miserable condition prays to ‘Girija’ to fulfill her desire of marrying Rama. She even prays to the lifeless bow to become light so that Rama may be able to put it and wed her. In her concern she repeatedly looks at the tender Rama and the mighty bow. After breaking the bow by Rama she becomes extremely happy but when Parshurama comes in rage, her heart again filled with fear of losing Rama.

When Rama has been exiled for fourteen years by Kaikeyi, she pleads Rama to take her with him to the forest. Rama addresses her with his wise and loving words to remain in Ayodhya. He tells her about the fears and hardships of the forest and advantages of the palace. He asks her to serve the feet of his parents and live comfortably in his palace. But as a dutiful wife she does not want to have the comforts away from her husband. She gives convincing and forceful arguments. She tells that it is the duty of a wife to remain always with her husband in every kind of situation. She says without him, all the worldly relations are dry and useless. She says:

O lord of my life, abode of compassion..., heaven without you would be as obnoxious as hell. Father and mother, sisters and dear brothers... and even sons, however good-looking, well- behaved and congenial, nay whatever ties of affection and kinship there exist, O my husband, to a woman without her husband they are far more tormenting than the scorching sun. Life, riches, home, land, city and kingdom all these are accouterments of sorrow to a woman deprived of her husband. Luxury to her is loathsome like sickness and ornaments a burden; the world is like the torments of hell. Without you, O lord of my soul, there is nothing in the world that would bring me joy. As a body bereft of life, as a river without water, so, my lord, is a woman without her husband. In your company, my husband, all are delights, as long as I can behold your countenance that vies in brightness with the immaculate autumn moon. (*Ramcharitmanasa* 241)

She again tells Rama that she will not be alone in the forest. The birds and beasts of the forest will be her friends and gods and goddesses of forest will be her parents like. Again she tells him that she will serve him in the forest in every situation and provide him comfort.

Her arguments make it clear that she will not remain in Ayodhya without her husband. If she remains behind then she will die. Her affectionate words compel Rama to take her with him in the forest. As a dutiful wife she abides by her 'stridharma' and lay down an ideal for an ideal wife. Rama also as a dutiful husband first tells her to remain in the palace. He does not want her to face the difficulties of the forest. He takes into consideration about the comfort and luxury for her but when she persists on going to the forest, he grants her permission to take her with him. In the forest also he takes care of her very much. When Jayant, the son of God Indira, disguised as a crow, pokes at Sita's feet, Rama gives him severe punishment. He looks after Sita and tries to give her happiness in the forest. For her pleasure he follows the golden deer and kills it.

When Ravana kidnapped Sita, Rama is inconsolable. His miserable plight was further increased by the full autumnal glory of the forest. In his distress, he asks the birds, animals, trees and plants of the forest about Sita. He is totally broken, his heart sinks into sorrow. When Sita is away from him, he can't find comfort in any aspect of his life. In his distress he says to Lakshmana:

The rains are over and the clear season of autumn has arrived; yet, brother, we have no news of Sita. If I could once know of her whereabouts, however it might be, I would conquer Death himself and recover her in an instant. Wherever she may be, if only she still lives, brother, I would strive to bring her back. (*Ramcharitmanasa* 437)

In his anguish, Rama even gets prepared to kill Sugriva, his newly made friend, for not helping him in searching about Sita. Sita is attached to Rama in the same way. She is completely immersed in him. She wails badly when Ravana carries her off and tells her husband will punish him if he gets know about it. In AshokaVatika also she remains totally absorbed in the thoughts of her husband. She totally refuses ravana's advances even at the stake of her life. Through Hanumana, when he goes to Lanka in search of Sita, we come to know about her miserable plight. Tulsidasa writes:

...emaciated in body, her hair knotted up in a single braid on her head, and was repeating to herself the host of Rama's excellences. With her eyes fixed on her own feet, she was mentally absorbed in the contemplation of Rama's lotus feet. Hanuman, the son of the wind, was mightily distressed to see Sita so stricken with grief. (*Ramcharitmanasa*452)

Sita does not even look at any other man besides her husband. Ravana provokes her to become his queen and use all the luxuries of his wisdom but she refuses it all and addressing him she says that she will kill herself but will not even look at any other man than Rama. She compares him as a glow worm and Rama as the Sun. She is a devoted wife who can't even think of any other man even in dream.

Tulsi describes the different dimensions of husband- wife relations through the characters of Dasharatha and his wives. King Dasharatha has three wives; Kausalya, Kaikeyi and Sumitra. Tulsidas has described three different kinds of husband- wife relationship. Kausalya is the eldest queen of all the three. She is the wisest consort of the king. All the three queens are loyal and faithful to their husband as Tulsidas writes, "Kausalya and his other loving consorts were all of chaste behavior, faithful to their lord and full of humble and steadfast devotion to Hari's lotus feet" (*Ramcharitmanasa*109).

All the queens behave friendly and lovingly with one another. We can notice the competition of rival wives in the episode of Rama's banishment by Kaikeyi. A maid servant Manthara provokes Kaikeyi against Kausalya as her rival wife and in her anger Kaikeyi demands a boon regarding Rama's exile. But apart from this episode, there is no any sign of their enmity. Kausalya remains a wise and ideal wife, co- wife, mother and mother- in- law all through the epic. Sumitra is also a good wife as well as mother. Though; Tulsidas has mentioned Sumitra only at some of the places. In the distribution of sacrificial pudding (kheer) provided by the Agni god, we see the husband- wife relations as:

He gave half of the offering to Kausalya and divided the remaining half into two parts. One of which he gives to Kaikeyi. What remained, he again divided into two parts, which he placed in the hands of Kausalya and Kaikeyi and after thus obtaining their approval, gave both the shares to Sumitra. (*Ramcharitmanasa*109- 110)

Thus in this episode it is very clear that Kausalya is the most favorite queen of king Dasharatha and he gives two shares to Sumitra only after getting consent from Kausalya and Kaikeyi. Dasharatha was very much fond of Kaikeyi. It is depicted in the Ayodhyakanda. She is the most beautiful queen of him. It is mentioned in the *Ramcharitamanas* that Kaikeyi also helped king Dasharatha, her husband in the battlefield. Two boons were due to that help done by

Kaikeyi. K. P. Bahadur asserts, “Kaikeyi was the extremely beloved of the king, in fact the most loved of all his queens” (*Ramcharitmanasa*231). The news of Kaikeyi’s anger filled her husband with terrible distress. Dasharatha kindles her with his hands and tries to please her with complimentary words and deeds. He pleases her in very soft-spoken words and even ready to punish even the gods if they have done something wrong to his wife. He is a fond husband. He is very loving, caring and respecting for his wives. In spite of being a great king, he yields towards the wills of his queens at once and tries to soothe her in every possible situation. But when Kaikeyi demands for Rama’s exile without any fault, he becomes terribly distressed. He has no objection to make Bharat king, but he can’t afford to banish Rama; his beloved son. At this aspect also, Dashratha controls himself and pleads with Kaikeyi to replace his second boon but she sticks to her decision. Dashratha even repents on his decision of crowning Rama without seeking advice from his wives. He does not consult about it to any of his three queens. He says at one place, “I arranged everything without asking you, and that is why my desires have been frustrated” (*Ramcharitmanasa*224). He thinks it is improper to make such an important decision without discussing with his wives. In his distress, he even tries to persuade Kaikeyi by clutching her feet, “He clasped her feet and persuaded her to be seated, crying; ‘be not an axe to fell the solar race’.”(*Ramcharitmanasa*225)

Here in this episode, we observe the relentlessness and obduracy on the part of Kaikeyi and ever loving and calm nature of her husband. He even dies for the sake of his word given to Kaikeyi. Kaikeyi again and again taunts on him and compels him to die.

With the analysis of Dashratha’s relation with his wives we come to know about the three-dimensional relationship. His relation with Kaikeyi was loving and caring but she becomes very harsh towards him and becomes the cause of his death. Throughout his life Kausalya remains a very wise, supportive and ideal wife who stands by her husband in every situation. Sunitra has been a polite wife. Dasharatha a loving, caring husband remains calm till his death. Though, in the end he curses Kaikeyi for her ill will yet he remains firm to his words. He tries to please Kaikeyi through all kinds of effort but remains fail. If he wanted, he would have punished Kaikeyi for her wrong doing but he would not as was his nature. His extreme love and blind faith for Kaikeyi may be one of the reasons for his distress.

Tulsidasa depicted the husband- wife relationship while describing Shiva's relation with his wife Sati and Parvati (in succeeding birth). As Sati when she has doubts in her mind about Rama and she disguises herself as Sita and goes to Rama. At this prospect Shiva does not accept her by heart and "sits down beneath a Banyan in the lotus- posture of meditation, and communing with his own self, he fell into an endless and unbroken trance" (*Ramcharitmanasa*40). Shiva's ignoring Sati creates distress in her mind and she thinks her life without her husband useless. She remains sad and does not utter a word. She feels very guilty and kills herself in the sacred fire of her father's *yajna*. She could not bear to her husband's blasphemy as a devoted wife. As a dutiful husband Shiva becomes very angry after listening the news of Sati's death and, "his attendants begin to destroy the oblations" (*Ramcharitmanasa*43). Shiva punished all the gods including Daksha. Sati, as an ideal wife prays that she would remain Shiva's wife in her coming births also, "As she was dying, Sati asked this boon of Hari that she might remain devoted to the feet of Shiva in every successive birth" (*Ramcharitmanasa*43). After getting born as Parvati she performed hard penance for getting Shiva as her husband. Although Shiva and Parvati relation is shown healthy yet at that time husband was considered all in all for a woman without him there is no existence of a woman and she is to be said 'the maid- servant' of his house as Parvati's mother says at the time of their wedding, "Always worship Shankara's feet; this is the duty of a wife for her husband is her deity, and there is no other God for her. As she spoke these words; her eyes filled with tears and once more she clasped the girl to her bosom" (*Ramcharitmanasa*63).

The husband- wife relationship of demons is also depicted by the characters of Ravana and Mandodari. Mandodari is depicted as a wise and beautiful woman. She sits with Ravana watching the *apsaras*' dance; she goes with him in *Ashoka Vatika* when Ravana tries to persuade Sita to come to him. Ravana even says to Sita in Mandodari's presence, "O wise and fair- faced dam! Mandodari and all the other queens- I will make your handmaids, I swear it, if you will look on me but once!" (*Ramcharitmanasa* 452-53). It shows the insignificant condition of Mandodari as his wife. Just for the sake of any other woman he was ready to make her Sita's *sdasi*.

Mandodari tries to persuade Ravana four times to prevent the battle with Rama. First, when Ravana persuades Sita and she refuses; second, Hanumana puts the city on fire; third, when

Rama's army crosses the vast sea and fourth when Angada humbles Ravana in his own council. But Ravana does not value her advice and laughs away taking it as a womanly fear. Upto Ravana's death she remains a, "devoted and the dutiful wife non- pareil, and in neither does she loses faith" (*Ramcharitmanasa*250) regards K. P. Bahadur.

Thus in *Ramcharitmanasa* various dimensions of husband- wife relation are described. He describes the monogamy and ideal relationship through the characters of Rama and Sita, the polygamy and its resultant evils are depicted through the relationship of Dasharatha and Ravana with their respective wives. He also describes this relation in gods, human and demons. In human, he describes the relationship of Rama and Sita; and Dasharatha and his queens; Kausalya, Kaikeyi and Sumitra. Various shades of this relationship are shown in their characters. Shiva's relationship with Sati and Parvati depicts the subservient position of women. In Ravana's relationship with Mandodari and his other wives Tulsidasa depicts the male domination.

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