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Sisterhood and Dharma among the Four Sisters in Kavita Kane's *Sita's Sister*: A Deviation from Male-Camaraderie

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Abstract:

Ramayana, one of the great epics, the centre of many revisionisms and retellings, has always universally and philosophically nurtured our mind. Very interestingly, not all the characters have received ample attentiveness and space. In Kavita Kane's *Sita's Sister* although Urmila, the forsaken wife of Lakshman, holds the centre stage, her sisters Sita, Mandavi, Shrutakirti are also brought to light in the retelling. *Ramayana*, only celebrated for its brotherhood and dharma of the male, *Sita's Sister*, in this context deviates from the Ram-centric and the Sita-centric *Ramayanas* and uses the peripheral character always referred to as Sita's sister and Lakshman's wife. The objective of this paper is to shed light on the more subtle layer of sisterhood and the dharma of the four sisters Sita, Urmila, Mandavi and Shrutakirti, the relation between them while in Mithila, how the dynamics between the sisters change after their marriage in Ayodhya and how each of them fare in the face of crisis and tribulations in those fourteen years of exile and separation while following their own dharma.

Keywords: Myths, Sisterhood, Dharma, Abandonment, Separation.

Introduction:

Claude Levi-Strauss claims that it is "not men think in terms of myth but it is myth that operates in men's minds without their being aware of the fact" (12). Myths are popular realities and appear alluring because whenever complexities arise and things seem difficult to understand or grasp, they make it seem uncomplicated and outright. The two great epics *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* similarly, have a great impact on the human mind. The two epics are the embodiment of dharma, karma, brotherhood, sisterhood, war, good winning over evil. *Ramayana* have always mainstreamed the theme of ideal brotherhood, dharma of a son, chastity, victory over evil. It's an exposition of brotherly love, of respect and devotion towards

elder siblings, greed and selfishness sacrificed at the altar of dharma of being a brother and son. The dominant theme of brotherhood runs among the four brothers Ram, Bharat, Lakshman, Shatrughna, between Vali and Sugriva, between Ravan, Kumbhakarna and Vibhisan; the dharma of a son is evident through Ram bequeathing his right to being the heir of Ayodhya to Bharat and leaving for exile for fourteen years to keep the word given by his father; the importance of *vaachan* is portrayed through King Dasharath and Queen Kaikeyi. Chastity is projected through Sita and victory over evil is established through killing of Ravana. But is this all about *Ramayana*? If *Ramayana* is about brotherhood, is it not about sisterhood too? If it's about dharma of a son towards his father, then what about the dharma of a son towards his mother and wife? It's very strange that the concept of sisterhood and amity has never been given much boost and importance and till now is treated as a subject that is strange.

The various shades of sisterhood in the *Ramayana* remind us of affinity, kinship and empathy that exists among women, a sense of allegiance; a friendship whose hold is genuine and forever. The narrative as well as the society has always highlighted male to male companionship showcasing them through thick and thin of relationship, both positive and negative- be it Ram and Lakshman on one hand and on the other Ravan and Kuber. On the other hand, female companionship is not given so much of a positive portrayal. Be it Kaikeyi and Kaushalya, Sita and Surpanakha. Kavita Kane's *Sita's Sister* brings a new novelty in its retelling of the epic by keeping Urmila, the sister of Sita in the centre and weaving the events and happenings of *Ramayana* from her perspective. In Valmiki's *Ramayana*, she is relegated to sleep for fourteen years, but Kane's Urmila, tries to pick up the broken pieces and mend the family after Ram, Lakshman and Sita leave for exile, rather than sleeping. Along with Urmila, Mandavi and Shrutakirti's life too is brought to the forefront showing us how they stand, support, sacrifice and raise their voices for each other. Broken by dharma and yet, together in solitary. *Dharma* derived from the root "dhri" means "to support, hold or bear" (Wikipedia) and since ages dharma of a king, son, and prince has always been held up in high esteem, but never the dharma of a woman, princess, daughter and wife. Reading Kavita Kane's *Sita's Sister* forces us to question ourselves. We always talk of male camaraderie, but why not female camaraderie? Under laid along with the four sister's bond is their dharma. Beatifically depicted, Kavita Kane rather than idealizing it, she entwines the four sisters fate and bond with each having a different meaning of dharma for themselves, as they travel together both on the smooth and rough path of their lives and relationships, each struggling to find their own existence, humanizing their flaws and standing together despite all misunderstandings and mishaps.

Numerous articles, journals, book-reviews on Kavita Kane, the author of six mythological fiction, talks only about the emancipation of Urmila as an individual, but the theme of the four sisters camaraderie, their individual struggles in following their own dharma is negligent enough. This paper will try to read if the underlying theme of sorority and dharma can be delineated from the main dominant theme of the retelling of Ramayana from Urmila's prospect. Explorative and qualitative, the study will be made to understand how the three sisters- Urmila, Mandavi and Shrutakirti fare, with their situation, fulfilling their duties, thrust on them forcefully by destiny- after being left behind in Ayodhya for fourteen years by their husbands as Lakshman, Bharat and Shatrughna set out to follow their own dharma.

The equation between the four sisters Sita, Urmila, Mandavi and Shrutakirti was unique as was their personality, always frank and even blunt every now and then, often engaging in playful banter without any malice. While Urmila cared and loved Sita more and always worried for her, Mandavi was strangely possessive about Urmila, even idolizing her cousin despite their polar opposite nature. The four sisters brought up differently in Mithila than in other kingdoms "were well versed in the Vedas and the Upanishads, politics, music, art and literature," who accompanied their father "to all the conferences and religious seminars across the country, experiencing a world no princess had been allowed to visit" (Kane 9). Kane has sketched Urmila very differently from the other princesses of her age. Her propensity and intellect makes her "more the freethinker-who doesn't believe in rituals and rites" and also for whom "marriage did not hold much interest. . . . She would rather seek knowledge instead of a suitor" (17, 9). Sita being adopted was always more loved and slavishly fawned upon but Urmila was never resentful or bore any ill-will towards her sister; on the contrary she was always in awe by the veneration her parents' held for her elder sister. While Sita felt indebted to them since she was a foundling, it was only Urmila who treated her normally, never jealous or angry on Sita for being considered special and extraordinary. Even though older, for Kane's Sita "Urmila had always been the veritable older sister all though their growing years-strong, fiercely protective like a tigress shielding her from everything, guiding her, helping her, consoling her" (23-24) and also "was her anchor who secured her to a veracity of her own existence. Urmila was her lifeline, she was her soulmate" (22). Mandavi was very perceptive of Urmila's emotions and feelings. She knew that Urmila "rarely revealed her intimate sentiments" concealing her feelings, lest anyone infringed her "realm of hidden thoughts" (44). Urmila knew of Mandavi that under all her aloof mask, she was not just the fiercest but also the most possessive and protective of her sisters. When Urmila revealed why Lakshman was unwilling to marry and

where she stood in his life, for Lakshman had already made it stark clear that when time would come to choose between her and his brother Ram, he would unhesitatingly choose his brother each time over her, Urmila unable to let him go, give him up was ready to even subjugate herself. But Mandavi was not ready to let Urmila give up her self-respect. She was indignant and angry on Urmila's behalf asking "In this prioritization of his emotions, you are always going to be second place, is that it?" (72), even deriding her by saying, "How will you be able to accept this secondary status in his life?" (75). Even Shrutakirti was sceptic about Urmila's decision and knew that her sister was a proud woman and asks Urmila outright "Will your love not affect your sense of pride, your self-preservation? Will you be able to live with yourself? How can you accept a man who has sacrificed himself for another? Where does it leave you?" (72). Shrutakirti though youngest was smart, understanding and the mature one. She rightly perceived why Urmila was willing to accept Lakshman as well as the fact that the younger brothers were devoted and dedicated to Ram and that there was an "infrangible thread of allegiance" which bound the brothers and if and when "such a situation were to merge, where any of them would have to choose between his wife and the brother, it will be the brother they will opt for" (75).

After the marriage, during the welcome ceremony at Ayodhya, Urmila was offended seeing Sita being treated dismissively by Queen Kaikeyi and defiantly corrected her empathically saying that it was Sita who was called Janaki and Maithili and not she. When Urmila came to know that Queen Kaikeyi wanted Ram to remarry and King Dashrath had also apparently agreed, she was flabbergasted. Seeing her sister all alone and still and silent she furiously stated "You shall not take it silently anymore, Sita! They have the audacity to think of remarriage dismissing you as if you were some trophy to be replaced! I won't have it, Sita..." (100). Taking a stand for Sita, unable to stand the injustice meted out to her dear sister, she further said:

Do they seriously take us to be such tame girls who will scurry to obey? . . .
They are so used to being obeyed without any questions that this palace seems to revel in some kind of benign autocracy. The King said marry the four princesses, and the sons obediently did, without a murmur of protest. Now the King decrees Ram to marry again! This is tyranny! (100-101)

Manthara, the virulent maidservant of Queen Kaikeyi with her sweet talk ingratiated herself upon Mandavi and Sita, playing them against each other. She put the notion in

Mandavi's head that Bharat would be king and she his queen since King Dashrath of Raghu dynasty had given his word to Queen Kaikeyi's father and on the other hand, she certainly never let Sita forget how unfortunate an orphan she was. It was Urmila who made them realize that it was Manthara who with her sweet venom brought out the worst in all of them, "our insecurity, our latent fears, our petty jealousies. She is deliberately harmful, sowing distrust and ill will" (111). And she definitely succeeded in her plans. Mandavi confessed that only when she was convinced that Bharat too had a fair possibility to be a king, did she agree to marry him, since she didn't want to be a princess all her life but be a queen. Urmila knew how Mandavi was always "the most ambitious amongst them, sharp and politically astute, but she would not have believed her to be so excessively materialistic or so deceptively manipulative" (112). Among the four of them, Manthara had been most successful in turning Mandavi against her own sisters. She, who loved her sisters so much, even went as far as to say to Urmila with deceptive sweetness "you would rather have your dear elder sister be queen than your own cousin...and what they say is so wrong, blood is certainly not thicker than water!" (110). After the showdown the relation between the sisters became strained. Mandavi began to act stiffly with them, remaining aloof and just maintained cordiality with her sisters. Urmila knowing that once misunderstandings crept, it would seep, corrode one's mind and emotions, was restless, and could not help but compare the relation of the four sisters with the four brothers realising that it was mutual trust and respect among them that held them together through all thick and thins. Lakshman astutely deciphered Mandavi's aloofness from her sisters correctly- that she was either angry or hurt or ashamed at her behaviour, and realizing it, could not bring herself to face them.

Destiny took its own course. King Dashrath subjected Ram to fourteen years of exile and Lakshman and Sita decided to accompany him, both wanting to follow their own dharma. Reality struck Urmila. Both her husband and sister were abandoning her, without even a pinch of hesitation, "Urmila's first instinctive reaction had been a flood of hurt for being rejected by both her husband and sister, followed by a deep bitter anger. . . . She felt betrayed, left out and let down" (142). Lakshman refused to take Urmila with him, so as not to be distracted from his duties and placed the burden of whole of Ayodhya on her young shoulders. Before leaving he said to Urmila, "You are so strong-the strongest woman I have ever known. . . . It is you who binds all the sisters together with your patience and wisdom. Please do it for me now. Look after my broken family" (144-145). Urmila, to make the fourteen years of exile and separation

easier on her husband forbade Sita from ever bringing her up, or doing something which would remind him of her. A flummoxed Sita acknowledges her sister's sacrifice and says to her:

You make my exile a simple task compared to what you are doing. Not only are you going to be separated from your husband for the next fourteen years, but you don't want your husband to even think of you lest he digress from his goal to serve his brother. I bow to you sister, for your vanvaas, your exile here in the palace shall be way harder than mine in the forest. Give me your strength and I know I shall succeed too. (153)

Urmila did not have the time to ponder over her grief. Realizing that it was she, on whom the burden of politics and affairs of palace fell till Bharat came, she took over the reins of Ayodhya on the request of the ministers and the learned men. Mandavi who had always been very perceptive of Urmila's inner turmoil wondered how Urmila remained so calm and stoic, after going through the strain, the trauma and the horror and awfulness of it all. Even though Urmila did not want to talk about the unpleasant happenings Mandavi could very well see her heartache but could not bring herself to look at it. Even she was steeped in her own inner pain. She wanted a let out. The guilt of saying horrible things to Sita and not being able to see her before she left kept gnawing at her. At Chitrakoot, when Ram refused to come back, Bharat swore he would not sit on the throne of Ayodhya but would administer the kingdom from Nandigram as a hermit, while doing penance on the banks of river Sarayu. Urmila was struck. And when Ram acquiesced Bharat's decision it was a scream for Urmila and she felt wrath as never before; "Mandavi was going to face the same fate as she. Sita had agreed silently and so had she, now it was Mandavi's turn, her spell of doom" (219). Urmila refused to let Mandavi undergo the same pain and rejection she was going through. Kane's Urmila, questions, the dharma of all the people present there

Who cares whatever happens to your wife and family? Today, in this room, we have talked about all sorts of dharma-of the father and the sons, of the king and the princess, of the Brahmin and the Kshatriya, even of the wife for her husband. But is there no dharma of the husband for his wife? No dharma of the son for his mother? Is it always about the father, sons and brothers? (219)

She questions the dharma of a husband to his wife. She cites Sita and herself of how they each have followed their own dharma- Sita, by following Ram to the forest, and she, by staying back, so as to not distract her husband from his duties and services to his brother. And

now Mandavi was being forced to follow the dharma of a wife by staying alone in the palace while Bharat fulfils his duties as an ideal brother, supporting their brother, Ram, in his endeavour. Urmila was mad with grief not able to come to terms with the fate that her sister was being doomed to. She questions Bharat and the brothers:

Is that what your penance means, Bharat, Not to forgive your mother? But why are you punishing your wife? What is her sin? That she is your wife and has to follow the dharma likewise of obeying her husband's decision irrespective of what it entails? . . .

If you could not keep the vows you made to your wives, why did you brothers marry? You may be the best of princes, the perfect sons, the ideal brothers, probably the ideal king too, but never the good husband! (222-223)

Bharat's decision of leaving Ayodhya had disheartened Mandavi to the extent that she had "simply kept disconcertingly silent, sealing her lips and herself from the world outside" and "had caged herself in her own private, corrugated hell, alternating between wistful wordlessness and long bouts of fitful sleep" (227). The three sisters were suffering the same fate- being away from their husbands, abandoned. But each dealt with it in a different way. While Mandavi cooped herself up, Urmila turned to painting and studying the Vedas, the Upanishads under Guru Vashishta. Even after a year from the fated day of Bharat leaving Ayodhya for Nandigram, Mandavi could not bring herself to forgive Kaikeyi. She blamed the queen for her state, for her separation from her husband and this decision lay entirely on her. Both Mandavi and Bharat had the same resoluteness in their nature, although their reasons were different- "For Bharat, it was an act of retribution, remorse and repentance; for Mandavi, it was fury" (233). The difference between Urmila and Mandavi was stark. While Mandavi hated Kaikeyi for separating Bharat from her, for it was she, for whom Bharat took the decision that he took, because he wanted to punish his mother and in his retribution she was also subjected to suffer the punishment. Urmila, did not hate Kaikeyi, but even forgave her, even though she was the reason both Lakshman and she were separated. She could not carry on being embittered, and strongly believed that a person who was once so nice and kind could not become so heartless. Mandavi always considered herself close to Urmila, and seeing her, braving all the misfortunes with a brave smile on her lovely face made her furious. She asks

her sister whether she never feels anger against the people who had abandoned her in her time of need due to their own selfishness

You say I am being selfish but what have these people done for us? What have they done to us, Urmi? Don't you ever feel anger against them? Don't you ever resent them for depriving you of your freedom, your joy; to have bound you by societal and family rules as the royal daughter-in-law, the wife, the princess? (234)

Urmila was always a free speaking woman, never shy to assert herself. She points out that by carrying herself silently and gracefully, she "never let them forget what they have done; all of them have been guilty for some reason or the other. They know it each time they look at me in the eye. I make them realize it" (234). Mandavi was always the most protective as well as the most unforgiving of all. Being trapped in a situation she never wanted for herself made her claustrophobic with sorrow, and what hurt the most, is, the family she had thought of as her own, had let her down without a moment's doubt, lamenting at her circumstances she grieves

And that is what riles me the most...our family let us down. I have never felt so unwanted, so disgraced-I feel like running away from all of them, from this damned palace so hideous in its beauty. It seems all the walls are trapping me in endless pain. What have I got myself into? (235)

Urmila was brave enough to bear this sorrow and separation because of her love for Lakshman and the promise she had given him. But Mandavi's "growing grief and desolation" made her helpless and scared, and both, she and Shrutakirti didn't know how to comfort their sister who "looked crazed; the raging emotions were eating into her, destroying her slowly" (235). Urmila, seeing her dear sister so dejected tries to make her see life, a life different from which she found herself trapped. Even Euripedes's Medea says- "Of all the creatures that have life and reason we women are the sorriest lot" (230). Urmila here beatifically points out to the patriarchal rules imposed on the women, rules which govern them, having no say in it:

We are women, we are wives, we are creatures of circumstances. We make choices we have no control over. You cannot change anything, Mandavi, just try to accept it. We do not have the power to change anything but ourselves. (235)

Unlike the others, Mandavi hadn't married for love. She had always been clever, calculative, and ambitious. She had married Bharat because she had thought that he had a fair chance to be a king. She had always wanted to be a queen. And now when societal rules had forced her into a deep corner from where she had no escape, she couldn't help but regret her marriage. She even tells Urmila about it:

If I had been so clever, I would not have married Bharat at all! Ma was right- we sisters should have never married into this family! They have given us just grief, pain and humiliation. Sita is suffering in the forest, you and me here and Kirti, lucky girl, relatively better off than the three of us! And I am in this situation all because of my dumb ambition to be a queen! I could have got some other king for all my wit and charm! Oh, why did I not marry someone else? (235)

Mandavi's lamentation about why she married Bharat and her self-hatred scared Urmila. For she felt abandoned. She did not want to be the last on his priority list. Mandavi's feeling of abandonment, of being forced to accept the rules of society is a representation of those women who are forced to accept things that the society dictates them to, without their considerations. Not everyone can be great and selfless. And Mandavi, sure, admits she is not:

I do not have the patience and perseverance to wait for so long. I want love. I want him and not some noble ideals thrown at me to seek solace as a dutiful, devoted wife! . . . I am tired of society's definition of me. How long can I conform to its rules? (236-237)

As Chaitanya Charan Das opines that "Emotions are the ornaments of life. But we need to choose the emotions that bring out our higher side, not our lower side" (61). Mandavi was crazed with grief, despair and felt like a caged animal unable to escape from her trapped situation. And this is where the difference between the three sisters comes forth. Urmila and Shrutakirti accepted their situation gracefully, with Urmila having Lakshman's memories and love to keep her going, Shrutakirti being lucky enough to see and talk to Shatrughna. He made sure to give her sometime from his busy schedule. Mandavi whereas was broken and disillusioned. She knew that it was Lakshman's love, from which her sister derived the strength to get through. As she tells Urmila, "It has always been about him- your self-abnegation, self-denial and unflinching will not to give him up. His love gives you strength and hope. That is the power of love...which I don't have..." (237). Mandavi was filled with darkness, so deep

was her despair and self-hatred that she could only loathe everyone and herself. She wanted hope; she wanted to be saved from the darkness engulfing her. Urmila advised her to find the light within herself, her own inner strength. For “one has to survive on will, on the convictions that life has to go on irrespective of everything, and not just on hope, love and memories” (238). Mandavi was grateful for the fact that Urmila was there with her and not with Sita in the forest. For Urmila was the backbone of all the sisters. It was Urmila who held them together, “You are our glue! And that is what you have always been for us-an adhesive binding us together, holding us up. You are our binding spirit!” (238).

Amidst the power struggle, jealousy, love, the four princess of Mithila had not only become a victim but also a part of the injustice. Along with the brothers the wives also led a unique kind of marital life. According to Urmila they all had “suffering in common-love and loss, separation and abstinence. Our Fate, besides having a twisted sense of humour, is quite egalitarian” (261). The past years had shaped Sita, Urmila, Mandavi and Shrutakirti differently- “Four sisters, married the same day, living in similar wretchedness but each accepting and acknowledging life differently- Mandavi bitter, Kirti wiser and she catatonic. But yes she did live-exist-in a certain stupor, enduring on her sheer will to survive” (263). Sita extremely happy in the forest with Ram, true to her name, while Urmila had made peace with her fate, optimistic, enduring, by her love for her husband. Mandavi who always had been cold, witty and hard, having her wit aid her through situations, had now become caustic, rancorous, lonely and deep ill-willed. Urmila knew Mandavi well enough that although she was cold on the exterior, once love and attention was showered on her, she would bask it. Unlike Mandavi, Shrutakirti was content and happy requitedly with Shatrughna. With years, Shatrughna's wit had rubbed on her adding to her humour.

Urmila under the tutelage of the Gurus of royal court of Ayodhya- Guru Vaamdeva, Markandeya, Katyayan, Kashyap and Vashishta- expanded her curious and scholarly mind. From an inquisitive student, she had grown into an exemplary scholar, an acknowledged pandit, who by her perseverance had gained expertise over the *Vedas* and *Upanishads* and had become quite skilful a debater, who could debate on philosophy and religion with the most learned of sages. Urmila had always longed for recognition from her father. As Shrutakirti correctly points out that, albeit, at the hindsight, but she had always striven to gain her parent's love, affection and respect, which the other three sisters had easily- Sita, for she was privileged oldest child, an ideal perfect daughter, and Mandavi and Shrutakirti since they were motherless. Although Urmila was entitled to everything she got nothing. But even then in spite of resenting, reeling

in self-pity, she braved it all. Urmila hated being pitied and praised too. So when her father King Seeradhvaj Janak had invited her to partake in the prestigious *brahmayagna*, Urmila felt proud of the fact that at last her father had acknowledged her as a peer though always not agreeing with her theology. And that this acknowledgement and respect meant the world to her both her cousins knew that. In Mithila, while debating with Guru Jaabali, seeing her father's eyes holding tenderness and pride for her, Urmila, finally felt that she was her father's daughter at last, "she was Urmila, not just the woman of passion as her name so defined her but one whose heart and mind had come together in intellectual and spiritual enrichment" (269). Janak rightly puts forth that staying away from Lakshman has made their love transgress boundaries; their love has reached "the highest form of love-the *parakiya-rasa*-where the two of you share thoughts even through separation" (270). Just as Ram sought his opportunity in exile, Ram's exile was Lakshman's exile too and in his exile, Urmila was also exiled and it was due to that exile that Urmila today had reached the heights she had. It was "an exile from attachment, because only with detachment one learns the value of love versus the range of emotions" (271). And this detachment had made Urmila understand what tapasya is; thus making her a tapasvi. Janak, fondly and respectfully says:

And as this great tapasvi who has gained great spiritual understanding and intellectual attainment, I greet you today as a scholar. Your scholarship came not just from reciting verses and detailed study but primarily from your pain, your separation, your detachment. Your separation was your meditation, your spiritual rebirth and your love for your husband became your salvation. (271)

But Mandavi, on the other hand never realized the importance of her exile, the greater truth of why and what she was subjected to. Everyone leads life according to their own comprehensibility and own ability. Janak points out the difference between Mandavi and Urmila, on how their exile had shaped them:

Did she see the penance of Bharat? Did she see his sacrifice? And more importantly, did she learn from that pain of separation? She is filled too much anger and hurt, corroding into her very soul. How will she ever get her peace, her wisdom, her deliverance? Agreed, both of you suffered the same destiny, but each eked out a different fate for herself. Destiny is given but it depends on how you take it. (272)

Mandavi in all these trying fourteen years had observed her sister closely. Urmila had endured all that Mandavi could not. Both the sisters had been subjected to the same tribulations, but where “she had wilted and withered”, preferring to live surrounded by bitter pain and disillusionment, “Urmila’s unshakeable self-belief had made her bloom and blossom, weathering the worst of times” (288, 289). In those fourteen years of exile, each and every one fought a battle of their own. Urmila’s perseverance throughout the year, standing tall like a pillar, caring, loving, forgiving all; had held the broken family together. Even Sumitra, acknowledges and empathises with her:

Did we deserve you? None in the family ever considered your feelings, did they? None of us. . . . And yet you did not take anything lying down, a woman free to speak for herself, bending the rules but not breaking them, turning the shackles of your feet into anklets, tinkling with serene joy and bringing music to our deaf, saddened ears. . . . (291)

The news of Sita’s agnipariksha had the three sisters reacting differently from each other. They could not fathom that their loving sister Sita had to face humiliation for exoneration in the eyes of society. Mandavi, with virility voiced her opinion that even if as a king, Ram was expected to place moral principles and duty above Sita’s chastity and to set the standards of king to prove her chastity before society

How can one compel someone to undergo torture and public humiliation for exoneration in the eyes of society? Sita was kidnapped, she did not stay at Ravan’s palace willingly! Then why this doubt in people’s mind? And in his mind? (293-294)

Shrutakirti defends Ram’s action saying that whatever he did was a calculative move on his part. He put Sita through trial so that people don’t question Sita’s fidelity. Urmila too questioned Ram’s actions. She put forth that if Ayodhya’s subjects thought and opinions were of such importance to him then why did he leave Ayodhya even when his subjects begged him to stay back

They wanted him to be king, but he went to the forest to keep his father’s word. So, again, in this dilemma of dharma between king and son, he preferred to follow the dharma of a son. Not the king’s. So, why now at the cost of hurt and humiliating his wife? (295)

When Ram, Sita and Lakshman returned from their fourteen years of exile, Sita was full of guilt and self-remorse for whatever she did and said. She wanted to seek her dear sister, Urmila's, forgiveness. But Urmila calms her down and says to Sita that "We made mistakes...let's just learn from them and not keep searching for justifications. Life is too short to have regrets. And too long to endure the tribulations", and finally lets her tears flow, "washing away the bleakness, the agony and anguish, the despair and desolation of those last so many years" (304). At last, Urmila hopes for a new life, a life that would bring their suffering and yearning some sense of fulfilment in the coming years.

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