

## DAUGHTER AND SONS, AND SOME ASPECTS OF MARRIAGE IN VĀLMĪKIRĀMĀYAṆA

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper focuses on the representation of marriage with a view to understanding the issues related to social organization. We will discuss here about marriage being an institution, its importance in society, and the issues related to the origins of marriage, by using examples from the Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki. We obtain certain ideas of social stratification, hierarchies and alternate social ordering from the Rāmāyaṇa. The objective is to see whether there was a gender bias in defining marriage, as represented in the Rāmāyaṇa.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki, Maintaining Community, Caste and Class Identities.*

### INTRODUCTION

The character of Rāma has been shown as a king who was just towards all - the elites and ordinary people of the society - including his wife.

Marriage was a social duty towards the family and the community, and there was little room for individual interest.<sup>1</sup> In the Rāmāyaṇa, the opinion of the bride and groom did not matter as everything was planned by the parents who were influenced by Brahmanical norms.

Marriage was undertaken for various reasons, among these being the establishment of a lineage through procreation, forging of political alliances and maintaining community, caste and class identities.

Here we will examine the procreation of daughters and sons, as well as marriages as a political alliance.

#### Procreation of Daughters

There are many instances which suggest that daughters were important to fulfill the desire to have sons. However, their importance is never appreciated.

#### The Story of Tātakā is Relevant Here

She has been mentioned as adulterous, and her transgression and its consequences are considered important enough for a long description. Her father was a great *yakṣa* named Suketu who was powerful and virtuous but was childless, and in order to get a child, he undertook great asceticism. On being pleased, Brahmā gave him a jewel of a daughter by the name of Tātakā who had the strength of a thousand elephants. Tātakā was married to Sunda, the son of Jambha. She had two sons – Mārīca and Subahu. Sunda was killed by the sage Agastya. Agastya's slaying of Sunda

appears to have led to Tāṭakā's desire for revenge. What is interesting is that there is no mention of the wife of the *yakṣa*, Tāṭakā's mother, and her birth is attributed to only her father's penance. Thus, marriage was not important in the context of her birth. Here, I would like to mention that the *yakṣa* was given a daughter instead of the son with all the strength which is assumed to be confined to a man.

- There is another story where the procreation of daughters was seen as important. There was a need for a male child that is why the *putraprāptiyajña* and *aśvamedha* sacrifice were performed by Daśaratha, which was to be performed by a sage named Ṛṣyaśṛṅga who alone could invoke the gods effectively. We are told that Daśaratha did have a daughter but in order to have a son to carry on his line, he was performing the sacrifice. The character of Śāntā, this daughter, is most obscure and she is not mentioned much. The marriage of Ṛṣyaśṛṅga and Śāntā was also fixed by elders and in order to do so, *apsarās* were sent first to destroy his chastity, as he was an ascetic. Hence, here one can see that the daughter of Daśaratha was used as a bait to complete the son producing act for him.
- There is another instance where the birth of the daughters of gods was seen as serving a divine purpose, by making the world better. Himālaya had two daughters Gaṅgā, the elder one and Umā the youngest. In their desire to affect a divine purpose, the gods asked the lord of mountains for his eldest daughter, Gaṅgā, to serve the interests of righteousness and welfare of the three worlds. Umā, on the other hand, was married to a fierce ascetic named Rūdra who was worshiped by the world.
- Here, one can see that one daughter was given away to the gods so that she could do all the divine things and another daughter was married to the ascetic.
- The above examples suggest that there was a need for daughters and hence they were sometimes appreciated in the texts. The marriage took place for the welfare of the world.
- A rare story of daughters bringing glory to the family, and the pride of the father over his daughters, is found in Kuśanābha's example. Here, the king, grandson of Brahmā, was blessed with a hundred beautiful daughters. The girls caught the eye of Vāyu, the wind god, who wanted to marry them. On being told that they needed their father's permission, the wind god is believed to have lost his temper and he twisted their bones. After this instance, the father praised all his daughters as they had shown extraordinary forbearance and respect for the family.

### Procreation of Sons

There are many instances where several practices have been recommended for procuring sons.

- The first *kāṇḍa* of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is only about producing sons and for that, there was a great political intrigue to persuade Ṛṣyaśṛṅga to marry Śāntā. In turn, Ṛṣyaśṛṅga would perform some sacrifices like the horse sacrifice, and son producing sacrifice.
- The promise of a birth of a son was given to Kuśanābha also who was mentioned earlier; and it was specifically mentioned that the son should be worthy and righteous, which would gain him enduring fame in the world.

Therefore, from the above analysis, one can see that producing a son is said to be the main reason behind marriage and any other reason is disapproved by society. And having a son was said to be the best act of a wife towards her husband because this leads to the removal of debts that a husband is obliged to repay in his life. This was regarded as an act of *dharma* and this was said to be done by every married man and woman. At the same time, the marriage did not automatically lead to the birth of children - this had to be ensured through other means as well.

- In another instance, we hear of the birth of a son to the monkey lord: who was a son of foremost among the *apsarā*, Añjanā, the wife of the monkey Kesarin.<sup>ii</sup>

Here, it is important to note that Añjanā's son was Hanūman, a devout follower of Rāma, and an important character in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. One can also see that a marriage took place between the *apsarā* and the monkey king which resulted in the birth of a miraculous child. The interesting point in this story is that the powers of the mother were transferred to the son, which contributed to his extraordinary power.

### **PutrāpraptīYajña**

As mentioned earlier, there is a mention of a *yajña* or *pūjā* being performed for having sons. According to this, a servant of lord Brahmā gave *pāyasa* to the king Daśaratha which was specially prepared for the three queens, which would automatically lead to the birth of sons. Here, we might surmise that the reason for three marriages might be due to the need for sons.

The procreation of the son was ostensibly required for a social cause according to the epic, which was to free the world of the demons. The sage Viśvāmitra appeared after sixteen years to remind the king of this purpose, and he asked that Rāma be sent with him for ten nights of the sacrifice. King Daśaratha did not want to give up his son, despite the fact that this was the stated purpose for which he was born. So he insisted on stationing his army for protecting the *yajña* from the *rākṣasas*.

After the birth, no evidence is given till Rāma was sixteen years old for this ordained purpose. The nurture of the child and the relationship of the son with the father and mother is also not given in detail. This suggests that the reason for wanting a son, although unstated in very obvious terms, was to ensure the inheritance of the kingdom.

Sons were born to continue the family line. Viśvāmitra said these words to Daśaratha, suggesting that the social norm of sending one's son for war is to be followed by all, and therefore is to be followed by Daśaratha as well. The examples cited are:

- The boon to King Sagara given by sage Bhṛgu was to have sons from his two wives so they would carry on his dynasty.
- There are some controversial points where sons were used for different purposes as well - they were used as a sacrificial object as can be seen in the story of Śunaḥśepa, son of Ṛcīka. When approached by the king Ambarīṣa, the sage is said to have parted with his second son so that the king could complete his sacrifice.
- In another instance, the promise of the birth of a son was given to Kuśanābha; and it was specifically mentioned that the son should be worthy and righteous, which will gain him enduring fame in the world.

### Obtaining Sons Outside Marriage

There are some instances where the procurement of a son took place without marriage as well.

- A Gandharva woman beseeched the sage Cūlin to beget a son on her. This suggests that the birth of a child and especially a son was important and could be encouraged even without marriage.
- Śiva's wife was unable to conceive, therefore the birth of son took place differently. When the semen of Śiva was dislodged from its place, the gods made that semen to get into the body of Umā from her husband; therefore, the son of Śiva was born. Here, one can see that the son was born after planning and deliberation, and while this was done against the wishes of Umā, Kārtikeya was thereby born.
- The wind god Pavana was infatuated with Anjanā, the wife of the monkey lord Kesarin. Pavana was overpowered by love and impregnated Anjanā. Hence, Hanumān was born.

### Political Alliance

An important reason for marriage appears to have been the forging of political alliances.

- This can be seen in the *Rāmāyaṇa* where the four sons of Daśaratha were married to the daughters and nieces of Janaka.<sup>iii</sup> Marriage was decided by the elders, and marriage in one family could be due to some political reason. As marriage in early India was also done to build up friendly relations, the marriage of the sons of Daśaratha to the daughters and nieces of Janaka might have been due to the matrimonial alliance which was decided by the elders.
- The marriage of Tārā and Sugrīva was in order to save the political life of Tārā. She was the erstwhile queen and she used to advise her first husband Vālin.<sup>iv</sup> Therefore, this suggests that the marriage was in order to retain the political power to herself. One can also see that she was powerful in warfare. Her second marriage and the vantage point she thereby secured was important, because her child Aṅgada who was supposed to be the inheritor of the kingdom, was replaced by his father's brother. Despite supporting her son, or because of it, Tārā was busy in asserting her political power. There is no mention of children after the marriage of Sugrīva and Tārā.

### CONCLUSIONS

This explains the significance of the story of Rāma and Sītā's marriage in the epic. It is also evident that marriage was important for the birth of sons. From all the examples cited in this paper, one can see that women were used as a reproductive machine whose main identity was as someone's wife or daughter. Once their sons were born, their primary identity is now as mothers. Their character changes along with their caretakers, who are the fathers/ husbands/ sons.

Marriage is an institution where everything was created to maintain the social class and caste. This is evident in the *Rāmāyaṇa* where the author shows some social constraints in relation to marriage. For instance, was the procreation of daughters important? The importance of daughters is known but it is not shown officially, as the daughter's birth is not celebrated. Hence, the need for daughters was stated as a means of having sons in the lineage. As one can see, Daśaratha was ready to do anything to have sons, and so he made a deal with his ministers to persuade Rśyaśrīṅga to perform a *yajña* for the procreation of sons. Daughters were considered important only to have sons from them. Marriage has been seen from the perspective of having a child. Sexual contact is required only for reproduction and

not for pleasure. It is also necessary to complete all the religious ceremonies related to marriage to achieve mokṣha.<sup>v</sup> In this context mokṣha is the main reason for marriage and for having sons. After marriage, one can perform all the rites and rituals which would ultimately lead to heaven. And if not this, then after the son's birth, the *kriyākarma* by the son's hand is considered to lead to the attainment of mokṣha. The importance of the daughter is not considered much. The main concern is to get them married and set them off to their new life, and if something beneficial happens from their marriage, this was always welcomed.

There is also an anxiety about their chastity which needed to be protected at all costs, as in the case of Kuśanābha's daughters.

There is no mention of women after the son is born. The acculturation of the son is done by the father and the role of the mother is not mentioned at all. This shows that the importance of the woman as mother is limited and was not seen as important. Daśaratha was ready to give up his army to Viśvāmitra, when the latter asked for his son (who would kill *rākṣasas* to enable Viśvāmitra and other sages to conduct their sacrifice). Here, one can see that Daśaratha was so keen on keeping his first born in his kingdom that he was ready to put the entire kingdom's safety at risk. That author has depicted the worldly nature of humans to make the epic more dramatic.

Marriage was not the only way of obtaining sons. There are some instances where social constraints were bent for some reasons. The reasons were mainly for the birth of a child. This was possible through a lot of penance. The birth of the child was acknowledged and accepted only when the gods planned something. The ability of women to question these possibilities seems less as we go down the social hierarchy.

A final point of note is that marriage was also undertaken for political alliances. As this epic relates to the exploits of kings, princes, and princesses, we see that many of the marriages were arranged in order to strengthen their kingdom. Hence, here one can see in marriage why women were the ones who used to leave their houses. This was done in order to ensure friendship, where both the kingdoms promised to help each other in bad times.

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