



UNDERSTANDING ELEMENTS OF HINDUISM IN AMISH TRIPATHI'S RAVAN: ENEMY OF ARYAVARTA

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Abstract: *Ravan: Enemy of Aryavarta* is Amish's third installment in the Ram Chand series that explores and redefines the legendary antagonist from the popular Hindu epic Ramayana in a much more modernistic, realistic and humanist fashion to the contemporary readers in the landscape of fictitious genre of mythology. He exercises his creative license to articulate Ravan's tormented metaphorical representation of being a Naga, widely ostracised due to the I will conceived notion of evil karmic interpretation manifesting in his present life. Amish opens the door to multifaceted conceptualisation, misconception and understanding of karma and its nature as a belief and applied theory in the larger philosophical framework of the Hindu way of life. Ravan's disillusionment about Dharma and its neurosis manifest and reverberate at the objectively universal and individual level in the form of adharma and Swadharma, the ongoing negotiation of an individual with an established belief and his perception of it. Precisely explored, contemplated and heavily debated between him and Vedavati. In Amish's caricature, Ravan symbolises the modern man caught in worldly Maya, the materialistic slew of human existence that corrupts the soul. It acts as the fulcrum in his book, balancing both karma and Dharma in the most complex and proficient manner that makes Ravan's character dynamic diabolical and engaging to answer some of the most difficult questions that are very fundamental to human nature and its conception and application in the society. This paper intertwines the concepts of Karma, Dharma and Maya, which are the tenants of the Hindu philosophical school of thought to navigate Ravan's journey in the grand landscape of the popular epic to the readers.

Index Terms - Karma, Dharma, Maya, Vedas, Hindu, Swadharma.

I. INTRODUCTION

Karma:

Upanishads, Mahabharata, and Ramayana for ages have echoed the postulates of karma: "Intent and action have consequences; karma persists and does not disappear; and all positive or negative experiences in life require effort and intent. The infallible law of karma holds an individual accountable and facilitates his life course, taking his past and present actions into consideration of a total sum" (Long 1980). Born a Naga, Ravan was Karmically cursed by the actions of his past life that shaped the course of his present, marked by an abusive father, familial ostracization, and societal betrayal right from an early age. Bruce R. Reichenbach opines that "all actions for which we can be held morally accountable and which are done out of the desire for their fruits have consequences. Moral actions, as actions, have consequences according to the character of the actions performed. Right actions have good consequences. Wrong actions have bad consequences. Some consequences are manifested immediately or in this life, some in the next life and some remotely. the effects of the karmic actions can be accumulated" (The Law of Karma). Thus, lying and killing came naturally to him both out of curiosity and jealousy, firstly for Kanyakumari in the context of Dagar "I was better than that idiot whom you like to favour" (Tripathi 22) and secondly as a necessity for Kumbhakaran against the midwife

“Just give me my baby brother and ill let you go” (Tripathi 31) which became a large part of his personality. From nine at Chilika to looting Krakachabahu and commanding two hundred ships for illegal trade with a palace at fifteen, finally meeting Vedati, Ravan lived true to his words, “Karma defines the individual,” and all this was a result of his actions. Dr Rajendra Prasad states that “The law of karma is a retributive law or one which presupposes a retributive theory of morality because according to it whatever one deserves for having done an action, he deserves it simply because he has done it and not because of its utility and disutility its is thus opposed to consequentialism or utilitarianism” (Prasad, Rajendra Karma, Causation and Retributive Morality).

He was always capable of better but did the worst. He made Samichi bathe in the pool of her own father's blood, he wanted to tear apart Dadimikali (courtesan) from limb to pieces, and when Vedavati was brutally killed, he finally roared to conjure the very soul of Sukarman out of his body through torture and followed it by the massacre of entire Todee village, not even giving them a proper burial. For the first time, tears made their way following Vedavati's death and with them did the words “I hate this cursed land” (Tripathi 191). Pure madness and rage manifested. As a result of obliterating Aryavarta, Dashrath was the first victim who was mercilessly annihilated at the battle of Karachapa. Kubaer (Lankan trader king) and Meghadoot (his treasurer) were removed similarly, and Ravan became the supreme authority, the mighty Lankan warrior unparalleled in strength and wealth. It soon gave way to carnal pleasures and substance abuse. The void was never filled, rather detracted him from his Dharma. He did not hesitate to strike his mother dead, cursing her in the most uncouth manner imaginable. Unconsciously his karma decided his fate in Ram. His actions resonated in the small boy compelling him to rise until it culminated at the battle of Mithila and Sita's Swayamvar. Destroying Aryavarta was not enough for Ravan. He wanted to humiliate them by marrying their daughters against their will, first with Mandodari and secondly in an attempt with Sita. Defeated at Mithila, Ravan used his own half-siblings to get back at Ram. The dishonour of Shurpanakha provided an opportunity for him to kidnap Sita sealing his fate in the tryst of his actions with Ram, an unavoidable conflict that would completely change the landscape of the world, its existence and its understanding of its being. Ivanhoe propounds that “Character consequentialism recognises that the possession of certain virtues usually leads to the realisation of certain good consequences above and beyond the possession of virtue itself. However, these good consequences are not guaranteed to one who pursues or possesses the virtue” (Ivanhoe, Philip J. Character Consequentialism: An Early Confucian Contribution Contemporary Ethical Theory 1991,56). Vishwamitra, only played as a catalyst, ensuring that he became the enemy that would be the harbinger of change for the whole of Aryavarta, which would now be brought about in his battle with Ram.

Dharma:

The Hindu way of life functions and sustains its foundations on the principle of four Purusharthas, i.e., Artha, Karma, Moksha and the most important of them all, Dharma, which encapsulates duty, laws, virtues, morality, character, religion transcending both space, time and life itself. Humans are distinguished from other animals by their Dharma. Dharamanand Sharma states, “All aspects of human life are enveloped within its character. The correct interpretation of the concept of Dharma in its various implications is the key to an adequate understanding and appreciation of the entire Indian tradition in Philosophy.” The conceptualisation of Dharma is enigmatic and far more complex owing to its fluid interpretations and concrete effects. Thus, Ravan formulated his own worldview perception of it. His father betrayed his own Dharma when he ordered to kill him and his brother, and so did the people of Ashram, believing that Nagas were descendent of evil karmic incarnations upon the earth and were meant to be exterminated. He understood that it was his Dharma to protect his own mother and his brother, provide for and look after them at the mere age of nine. The world's cruelty knocked out his innocence, and realities of resentment towards his father formulated his judgements on kindness and honesty, ascribing them as virtues of weakness and victimhood, only strength as the absolute necessity for survival and prosperity. He chose to be a hunter and a lion. Thus, he threatened, killed and bullied people into getting what he wanted, a palace, a ship and a flourishing illegal shipping g trade. However, his rendezvous with Kanyakumari Vedavati sparked in him the flames of Dharma, the lightness and goodness to do better than he was always capable of doing but ignored. Tulsi Das propounds “That the Dharma which was universally observed by the people in the reign of Ram rested on four pillars: truth, gentleness, compassion and charity. Dharma is the spirit of devotion to the welfare of others. It is not static, rather dynamic for all things and persons at all times, but is subject to growth and varies from person to person, group to group and age to age (Chaupai following Doha number 20 in Uttarkaand).” The Panchatantra tale of deer and lion compelled him to introspect his own fundamental understanding of Dharma and his acquaintance with

'Swatatva' (your being) and 'Swadharma' conjured his honesty "I... I have done some terrible things to build my empire. I am a monster." (Tripathi 174)

For the first time, he understood the goodness in himself "Tears pooled in Ravan's eyes" (Tripathi 175). He was a transformed man with a purpose, a man on the path of Dharma to restore Aryavarta to its former glory. Mrs Annie Besant opines similar notions in her statements "My Dharma is the stage of evolution which my nature has reached in unfolding the seed of divine life which is myself, plus the law of life according to which the next stage is to be performed by me. I must know the stage of my growth, and I must know the law which will enable me to grow further. I know my Dharma, and by following that Dharma, I am growing towards perfection" (Dharma, Madras: Theosophical publishing house, 1964, Pg 22). It lasted briefly as Sukarman stole Vedavati and with it the zeal of Dharma from Ravan in an instant and what was left behind became the precursor to adharma, Ravan again was robbed of goodness, a cyclic evil ailing his entire life that finally propelled him into pitch darkness of a tunnel forever being lost. What emerged from the tunnel was the pure incarnation of absolute hatred and rage that burned every notion of Dharma. Ravan adopted adharma as his warpath. Blinded in rage, he killed Sukarman, burned the entire village and massacred them ruthlessly. It was just the beginning that later culminated in the annihilation of Dashrath at Karachapa, the murder of Meghadoot and the forced exile of Kubaer to the mountains. The darkness stole him from light, from his mother and finally from Kumbhakarna, the final frontier stopping him from crossing the gates of hell. The very Sapt Sindhu empire was his nemesis, and he became the 'Enemy of Aryavarta' on a war path of adharma that led to an attack on Mithila, the abduction of Sita and his direct confrontation with Ram. Vishwamitra played a catalyst in his journey, but Ravan himself chose his path via his karma. He faltered from Vedavati's teachings and gave into what he inherently had fostered and acquired from his own troubled childhood, a selfish interpretation of Dharma, serving himself indulging in maya of carnal pleasures of body and substance, imagining himself above Lord Vishnu and above Lord Rudra himself compelling people to worship him as a living god and bow before him for mercy and salvation.

Maya:

The Vedanta philosophical thought of Hinduism prominently in Rig and Atharva Veda conceptualises the embodiment of the world into "The doctrine of Maya, or the unreality of the duality of subject and object and the unreality of the plurality of souls and their environment as the very life of the primitive Indian philosophy" (Gough, "Philosophy of the Upanishads," p.237). The word Maya could be etymologically broken down into 'ma' – to measure or to give form and 'ya' means which proceeds or goes. Thus, Maya is not real or unreal. It is undefinable correctly due to its multifaceted interpretations and fluid meanings. However, a much more agreed understanding of it formulates the notion of Brahman as the supreme consciousness. The classical understanding of it could be attempted as Fred Alan Wolf archly explained it "Quantum physics requires the existence of that which is not in order to explain that which is" (Fred Allan Wolf, Parallel Universes New York 1988). The conceptual duality of this idea perpetuates the existence in its entirety into the binary of 'Purusha' and 'Prakriti'. The former is the soul, while the latter is considered to be matter or materialistic existence. Sudhir Kakar opines, "The unity is obvious; the duality is nearly palpable but incomplete: two parts are not each whole, and we are left with the voracious hunger of the urge to merge. To this, we shall return" (Sudhir Kakar, Intimate Relations: Exploring Indian Sexuality, University of Chicago 1989). Thus, Maya has the power to create a bondage to the materialistic world reality that entangles Atman or Purusha from attaining the ultimate truth and reality, i.e., Brahman or Parmatma. Edward C. Di Mock Jr opines that "the subtlety of matter reminds me of Krishna's instructions to Arjuna in the Bhagawad Gītā to the effect that Arjuna should do his duty as a warrior even though he has relatives and gurus in the enemy's ranks (On Māyā*)."

Materialism is one of the root evils at play in Amish's Ram Chand series in general, and in *Ravan Enemy of Aryavarta* particularly, that propels the façade of the complexity of selfish human interests that entangles the individual and pits them against one another in an endless cyclic compulsion of bloodshed and war. The illegal trade of cutter ships looting by Krakachabahu and deployment of heavy taxations on the trader Vaishya class by Dashrath are symbolic of this materialistic slew that corrupts them for hoarding wealth and later itself finds manifestation and echo in Ravan's own character "There is a lion and deer within each of us, and we should always aim to be the hunter" (Tripathi 155). He wishes not to be the victim but rather the master of his own actions and fate, and he is willing to cut down anyone who will come into his path. Krakachabahu, the Malayaputras and Kubaer of them are a hindrance in his path to achieve what he wants the most, Vedavati. He bullies Kalpana into a deal and loots Krakachabahu of his wealth in order to strike his deal with Malayaputras to launch two hundred ships onto the sea to do his bidding of making illegal shipping trade. Killing becomes an essential practice on his road to realising his dream. He brutally murders Sukarman and

burns the entire Todee village people without even a speck of remorse in anger. He kills Meghdoot and exiles Kubaer from his own kingdom. He launches an attack on Sapt Sindhu and annihilates Dashrath forcing them into a treatise of paying an exorbitant amount of money as taxes reserving and controlling all the shipping of trades to themselves, reducing the entire kingdom into a husk of poverty and destitution. Ravan will fully and readily be indulged in carnal bodily pleasures of flesh and alcohol that greatly alienate his soul from the larger consciousness of Brahman. He viewed women as materialistic objects of possession, claiming to possess hell in their mouths and heaven below. His marriage to Mandodri was purely out of revenge on Sapt Sindhu's empire, and he similarly wanted to possess Sita as an object for his pleasure and satisfaction for harming Mithila and, with it, the entire empire. In his moral destitution, Maya and Ravan became synonymous with each other.

2. Discussion:

The philosophical concepts of Karma and Dharma are intricately webbed together in the larger understanding of human existence, purpose, soul and reality. Ravan, right from his birth, is punished for the sins of his past. Being a Naga with deformity, he and his brother suffer ostracisation and an attempt to their life by their own father's karmic actions, which breaks his 'Swadharma' that requires him to love his own children. The people of the Ashram and the Kanyakumari abandon their Dharma, and their karmic actions are questionable from the eyes of a nine-year-old child who has the least understanding of himself, leaving alone the evils he is being held accountable for. Kaikesi, Ravan's mother, is disowned by her own husband and family that gives into the maya of this world formulated by what the society deems to be fit rather than their own parental Dharma and appropriate karmic actions ought towards their daughter. The disparity of belief and the blatant hypocrisy of people breaks Ravan's mind in an attempt to understand his immediate realities, and he gives into what comes primarily as an instinct to human nature, 'survival'. Ravan's understanding of Dharma, karma and Maya largely stems from his rationality and practicality in the attempts to survive and support his family, which primarily become the bedrock of his consciousness. The 'Swadharma' becomes selfishness, and 'Swakarma' becomes selfish deeds. Maya culminates into what first establishes itself as a necessity and later gets fully blown into carnal pleasures of the body, substance abuse and greed for materialistic wealth and fame. The series of consequential actions in self-interest ultimately leads Ravana to his own reality that he would face in Ram, and the precursor to their destined fate symbolically is captured in the war of Mithila and the abduction of Sita by Amish.

3. Conclusion:

Amish projects the godly figures from the epic of Ramayana and brings them to the base level marked by absolute reality and simplicity in plot and structure for an understanding by the common man. But the philosophical issues that he problematizes in his novel are by no means easily comprehensible; at most, they are distilled into clarity for the audience to draw substantive meanings. Amish navigates the readers into the complexity of the Hindu view of life in the context of Dharma, Karma and Maya, which becomes an eye opener for the modern man, a mirrored image of Ravan leading a sedentary and fractured lifestyle of overindulgence moral and ethical corruption. Vedavati's words inspire the youth who find themselves lost in the materialistic slew of Maya, which corrupts Atman and prolongs its submersion into Brahman, the universal consciousness. Karma behaves in a transactional manner, yet one should not perform actions in hopes of reciprocity. Rather, actions should be borne out of pure 'Swatava' and 'Swadharma.' One not necessarily has to become a deer or a lion. One only has to introspect the consciousness that connects him with 'Parmatma' and paves forward the most appropriate course of karmic actions. Dharma might be enigmatic in nature, but that should not discourage one from opting for the path of righteousness and goodness for others. 'Swadharma' should never become selfish like Ravan. People are endowed with the capacity and ability to do good and just by the people only if they are willing to listen to their consciousness and open their hearts to others rather than make others the means of their salvation. Ravan's childhood was marked by tragedy, he was abandoned by people close to him, but he always had the opportunity to do better. Just like Kanyakumari Vedavati said, Ravan was always blinded by his range and temptations to his ego that blurred his understanding of his truer karma and Dharma and at last, he became the prisoner of Maya, his soul forever trapped and corrupted, never having a chance to repent and leave the spatial cyclic continuum of life birth and death, never acting moksha the ultimate truth and absolute truth of this world in accordance to the Hindu view of life and religion.

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