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RESURGENCE OF FAITH – NARRATIVES FROM MYTHOLOGICAL WORKS

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ABSTRACT

As societies and cultures undergo several transformations, several interpretations of myths emerge. Sometimes, the hidden meanings in the mythical stories are brought out in the open through these interpretations, and sometimes, new knowledge regarding a particular society or culture is highlighted. This process of reclaiming and recreating myths happens at the cost of demythification. Such demythification takes place especially when the mythical situations and characters are placed in a modern context to highlight the contemporary human experience. Though the myths are far displaced from the contemporary times, they are found to have a cultural relevance and a social significance. The main contention of this article is that myths are given a new role to suit the needs of the contemporary times. They are given a new life by the writers thus ensuring that they are not easily relegated to the position of a relic. At the same time, the myths are found to live precisely because they help each generation to understand itself better. It has been said that a real book reads us, and myths as books whether they repeat, adapt or transform the original myths, are seen to provide us greater clarity about our own situation. This article bases itself on the assumption that any creative writing, including those based on myths, is an examination and evaluation of ideas current at that time, e.g. the idea of liberty in a time of struggle for freedom, the idea of feminism or postcolonialism or globalization in the present times or the pursuit of one's own identity in the present chaos-ridden society.

Values are emotional rules by which a Nation governs itself. They summarise the accumulated time-tested wisdom by which society organizes and disciplines itself. Values are precious reminders and guidelines that individuals obey to bring order and meaning into personal lives, without values, individuals, societies and Nations would perish and disintegrate. Since units of society are individual human beings, the need for the cultivation and application of human values in life for the happiness

of human beings and harmony in society is Paramount. The practical core of scriptural teachings is the re- education of the intellect in human values and returning of the mind to live them in day to day life. Values are not relics of the past, but keys to the future.

Yet, repeated human failure to learn and live up to values, is due to the unintelligent exercise of the freedom of choice, resulting in utter selfishness causing human degradation. Hence, a continuous

self- education in values (Dharma) governing human behaviour, attitude and action is essential for human survival, progress and attaining perfection. Dharma (values) regulate human greed (lobha) and lust (kama) and brings moderation and reason in the life of the people. It sustains and upholds individuals and Society in harmony and bridges the gap between material progress and mental development.

(Ours is a spiritual culture, Sanatana Dharma (Eternal values) which is self- repairing in nature)

For many a time in our spiritual history, violations of human values (Dharma) became rampant and evil forces gained an upper hand bringing the people of that era to a state of helplessness.

At such critical occasions, the lord, the Law giver manifests himself as an Avatar (incarnation) amongst humans, according to the needs of the situation to restore human values by practice and precept. (Achara and Prachaar)

Ramayana - which depicts in a graphic manner, the bio-graphy of the great human Avatar, Sri Rama- is a treasure house of human values . This great Epic, the first poem (ADI Kavya) written by the first poet (adi Kavi), sage Valmiki , provides an exhaustive value -based education. It strikingly demonstrates that the Dharmic life of an ideal human being could be and should be lived by all in thought , word and deed, under all conditions and circumstances.

Sri Rama and Sita Devi are the ideal role models for humans as Dharmatma and Dharmapatni. Infact the specific purpose of this unique human Avatar is to teach lessons to humanity. It is the descent of the Lord for the ascent of man. In Shri Rama Avtaar- divinity is humanized , so that humanity maybe divinised. The multiple roles played by Sri Rama reflect the human values in the varied interactions in the human drama, as the ideal hero, dutiful son, ideal - brother,husband , friend and King - even as an ideal enemy.

The divine, yet human qualities of Sri Rama are liberally splashed all over the epic in the various facets of Sri Ramavatara to enable us to imbibe and profit by . Sri Rama as an embodiment of Dharma,

strictly practicing Dharma without any compromise under the most trying circumstances. Sri Rama effectively preached Dharma without fear or favour to one and all , irrespective of the intensity of relationship, whether it was father, mother , brother , wife, friend, Rishis and enemies! Even enemies of Sri Rama like, Mareecha , recognised him as an embodiment of Dharma.

Shrimad Ramayana portrays a study in contrast of two distinct cultures, very relevant even today - the Spiritual culture of Ayodhya , championed by Sri Rama and the material and sensuous culture of Lanka, spearheaded by Ravana. The two cultures depict two life styles based on positive and negative values - Yoga and Bhoga. Both were intelligent, educated , powerful and affluent, but the value system and the lifestyles pursued were opposite. While Sri Rama was an embodiment of all positive human values, such as truth, love kindness , forgiveness , self control , forbearance etc, Ravana represented the negative values like lust, anger, jealousy, greed, arrogance,delusion etc.

The emotional stability, balance and equanimity of the royal couple, Rama and Sita Devi and the ultimate coronation of Sri Rama despite the severe sufferings, trials and hardships in Ayodhya and in the forest are striking examples. So too Ravana's negative lifestyle of uncontrolled lust and indulgence resulted in frustration and unhappiness for himself and misery and destruction of the kingdom. Ravana was an Aviveki and a Bhogi. He possessed all the evil qualities which led to his downfall ! So was the case Vali in the epic.

Bhakta Hanuman and Vibhushana from cultural environment not very favourable for speedy evolution are ideal devotees of Sri Rama. They reached their destination in life by becoming endearing to Sri Rama through the pursuit of positive values.

The entire epic (through various Kandas) depicts the bio-graphy of an ideal- human and his personality unfoldment through strengths and weaknesses, trials and tribulations and success and failures in life. It demonstrates how human values play a vital role as a valuable guide in life's journey.

In the Bala Kanda, Sri Rama and brothers receive ideal training in the Gurukula and at home. It shows how to relate to parents, teachers, elders and others. It ends with the happy union of two noble families through the marriage of Sri Rama and Sita Devi. (Brahmacharya Ashram leading to Grihasthashram)

In the Aranya Kaanda again more cultivated qualities of the head and heart of Sri Rama are presented by Valmiki. They served as an armour when the royal couple were subjected to severe tests. (Valorous, soft-spoken , eloquent, quick-witted , humble , compassionate , ever forgiving, smiling etc) Sri Rama took a balanced interest in all branches of life and achieved success despite obstacles and adverse circumstances.

The Ayodhya Kaanda depicts that life's journey is not always smooth even in a palace. Everyone has to face problems and challenges over which there is no control- the instances of the coronation proposal and its overnight reversal (Manthara and Kaikeyi) and order of exile of Sri Rama upholding truth and dharma. Rama and Sita , though their inner strength calmly accepted the decision and exposing themselves to discomfort and dangers, poverty, bore, mental pain and agony with fortitude and forbearance.

Rama and Sita were concerned with moral and spiritual values of Satya , Thyaga and Vairagya. These are also echoed by the affectionate brothers Lakshmana and Bharata. Sri Rama, through learned discourses on the doctrine of Karma, educates one and all.

Through this we realise the fact that we cannot change situations and circumstances in the world, through our likes and dislikes. But we can change ourselves through a value - based lifestyle and meet the changing world with equanimity.

In The Aranya Kanda the crisis deepens with the separation of the couple and shows Moha (delusion) and Shoka (sorrow) are part of human life. Sita was tempted by the golden deer due to delusion. Humans facing tantalizing temptations in life. Self-reliance and consistent self- effort by Sri

Rama and Lakshmana helped them overcome depression and seek solutions to the problem.

In the Kiskindha Kanda , they revive hopes of a solution and help from the most unexpected quarters.- Vanaras, by following the path of Dharma.

In the Sundara Kanda, the solution to the crisis was by one of the greatest characters in the epic Bhakta Hanuman Ji who is a Bhakta Chakravarthy - an embodiment of rare loyalty.

Ever since he met his master, Hanuman shines as a Karmayogi, Bhakta and Gyani all rolled into one. Entrusted with the difficult and delicate task of finding Sita Devi, he flawlessly achieve it successfully, single handed, to the satisfaction of all. He crossed the ocean by his strength, valour, entered the formidable enemy territory, tactfully met and saved Sita, strengthened her with hope and confidence, by offering Sri Rama's ring, further creating terror in Lanka, he broke the morale of the Rakshasas by establishing the glory of his master Sri Rama! When arrested, he preached Dharma to Ravana with tact and diplomacy, freeing himself skillfully and setting fire to Lanka, he returned safely back to report and console Sri Rama. For this unparalleled achievement he earns the unbounded gratitude of Sri Rama through affectionate and his divine embrace.

In the war, Hanuman exhibits superhuman feats and saves many lives and earns tearful praise from the divine couple. With all his achievements through an ideal value based life of excellence and perfection, he is even humble (Vinaya) as a Dasa, a human quality worthy of emulation by all.

In the Yuddham Kaanda, the Rakshasas representing the negative evil forces are destroyed through the pursuit of positive human values and normalcy are restored by the Coronation of the divine couple ,Sri Rama and Sita Devi in Ayodhya.

Thus human values are liberally splashed all over the great Grand Epic Srimad Ramayana which has inspired and guided humanity for thousands of years and will continue to be a beacon of light for generations to come, as long as the mountains last

and rivers flow on the Earth; as assured in the Shloka in the epic," Yavatmal Sthasyanti Girayah Sarithascha Mahatale Tavat Ramayana Katha Lokeshu Percharishyati."

When we look around the world today, we are confronted with the sad paradox! The phenomenal progress of Science and Technology, the electronic Revolution and economic development of the world are designed to bring about prosperity, happiness, health, peace and harmony. However we see more of conflict, hatred, frustration, disease, hunger, poverty and environmental disaster. For any intelligent observer, the reason for this paradox is not far to seek. World development has taken place at the expense of Human Development, resulting in total neglect of human values.

True spiritual value- based education is the only answer. Thus the time tested Ramayana is the relevant answer for the development of human values, especially for the vulnerable younger generation, more exposed as they are put to intense body orientation and consumerism through the impact of the powerful media.

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