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+91 9940572462

+91 9940572462

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A Study of Women Characters with Reference to the Mahabharat and the Ramayana

Rishita Rastogi

Student, Amity School of Languages, Amity University, Lucknow Campus, India

ABSTRACT: This paper intends to dive into the epics such as Ramayana and Mahabharata and focuses on the comparative study of women characters in the epic and the major role they played throughout.

KEYWORDS: Ved Vyasa, Valmiki, Draupadi, Sita, Mythology.

I. INTRODUCTION

Ved Vyasa is an important figure in Indian mythology and is believed to be the author of the great epic Mahabharata. He is also considered to be one of the seven immortals in Hindu mythology. According to Hindu tradition, Ved Vyasa was the son of Satyawati and the sage Parashara. He was born on an island in the river Yamuna and was named Krishna Dvaipayana. As a young man, he was known for his great knowledge and wisdom and was often consulted by sages and scholars.

Ved Vyasa is best known for his role in compiling and editing the Mahabharata. The epic is said to have been composed over a period of several centuries. He is also believed to have written several portions of the epic himself. Apart from the Mahabharata, Ved Vyasa is also credited with composing the 18 Puranas, which are a collection of ancient Hindu texts that contain stories and teachings related to Hindu mythology. Ved Vyasa is revered as a great sage and his contributions to Indian literature and philosophy have had a lasting impact on Indian culture and spirituality.

Valmiki is a celebrated sage and poet who is best known for composing the epic poem Ramayana. He is believed to have lived in ancient India, around the 5th century BCE. According to Hindu tradition, Valmiki was originally a robber who used to rob people passing through the forest where he lived. One day, he came across the great sage Narada, who asked him if he was happy living a life of crime. Valmiki is known to have spent many years meditating and seeking knowledge, and he eventually became a revered sage and scholar. He is believed to have authored many other works, including the Yoga Vasistha, a philosophical text that expounds on the teachings of Vedanta.

However, Valmiki's greatest contribution to Indian literature is the Ramayana, an epic poem that tells the story of Rama, an avatar of the god Vishnu, and his quest to rescue his wife Sita from the demon king Ravana. The Ramayana is considered to be one of the greatest works of Indian literature and has been an important part of Hindu culture and tradition for thousands of years.

II. STUDY OF WOMEN CHARACTERS WITH REFERENCE TO THE MAHABHARATA AND THE RAMAYANA

Women play a vital role in both the Mahabharata and Ramayana, and their actions and decisions have a significant impact on the plot of both epics. These female characters are complex and multi-dimensional, and their portrayal provides valuable insight into the role of women in Indian society. A study of women characters in the Mahabharata and Ramayana can help us understand the role of women in ancient India and how this role has evolved over time. It can also help us understand how women were perceived by society and how their actions were viewed by those around them.

Some of the most notable women characters in the Mahabharata include Draupadi, Kunti, Gandhari, and Amba, while the Ramayana features characters such as Sita, Kaikeyi, and Mandodari. Each of these characters has a unique personality and is portrayed in a different way, highlighting the diversity of women's experiences in ancient India. By



examining the portrayal of women in the Mahabharata and Ramayana, we can gain a deeper understanding of the role of women in Indian society and how their experiences have shaped the culture and traditions of the country.

The epics Mahabharata and Ramayana are considered two of the greatest works of Indian literature. These epics not only contain powerful narratives of war and heroic deeds but also depict vividly the lives of several female characters. The roles and actions of these female characters have long been the subject of study and discussion in various fields, including literature, history, and gender studies.

The Mahabharata is one of the most significant works of Indian mythology and literature. It is an epic narrative that tells the story of the Kuru dynasty and the great war that ultimately led to the establishment of the Pandava dynasty. The Mahabharata is a vast work, consisting of 18 books or parvas, and contains over 100,000 couplets or shlokas. The story of the Mahabharata begins with the origins of the Kuru dynasty, tracing the lineage of the Kuru kings back to the sage Bharata. The central figures of the epic are the Pandavas and the Kauravas, two branches of the Kuru dynasty who are in conflict with each other.

The Pandavas are five brothers – Yudhishtira, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula, and Sahadeva – who are the sons of King Pandu. The Kauravas are the hundred sons of King Dhritarashtra, Pandu's elder brother. The conflict between the two families is driven by a complex web of political intrigue, personal ambition, and family rivalry. One of the key themes of the Mahabharata is dharma, or moral duty. The Pandavas and Kauravas are often at odds over what their respective moral duties are, and their disagreements ultimately lead to the war that is the centrepiece of the epic.

Overall, the Mahabharata is a vast and complex work that explores a wide range of themes and issues. It is a rich and enduring work that continues to be an important part of Indian culture and literature. The epic has inspired countless works of art, literature, and music, and its characters and stories continue to captivate and inspire people around the world.

The Ramayana is one of the most important and beloved epics in Indian mythology. It tells the story of Lord Rama, a prince of Ayodhya, who is exiled from his kingdom and embarks on a journey to rescue his wife Sita, who has been abducted by the demon king Ravana. In this essay, we will provide a detailed summary of the Ramayana and explore its themes and significance. The Ramayana is divided into seven books, or kandas, and follows the life of Lord Rama from his birth to his return to Ayodhya after defeating Ravana.

The story of the Ramayana begins with the birth of Rama to King Dasharatha and his wife Queen Kausalya. Rama is the eldest of four brothers, and he is loved and admired by all who know him. However, his father's second wife, Kaikeyi, schemes to have her own son, Bharata, crowned king instead of Rama. When Dasharatha is forced to exile Rama to the forest for fourteen years, Rama accepts his fate and leaves the kingdom with his wife Sita and his loyal brother Lakshmana.

At its core, the Ramayana is a story of the triumph of good over evil, of the power of devotion and righteousness, and of the importance of fulfilling one's duties and obligations in life. It is a timeless tale that has inspired generations of people in India and beyond, and continues to be an important part of Hindu mythology and culture. The Ramayana has had a profound impact on Indian society and culture, and has been interpreted and reinterpreted in countless ways over the centuries. It has been the subject of countless books, plays, films, and television shows, and its characters and themes continue to resonate with audiences around the world. In addition to its cultural and literary significance, the Ramayana is also an important religious text for Hindus. It is considered one of the most sacred scriptures of the Hindu faith, and is often recited during religious ceremonies and festivals.

In conclusion, the Ramayana is a rich and complex epic that has played a significant role in Indian culture and mythology. Its characters, themes, and teachings continue to inspire and resonate with people around the world, and its timeless message of love, devotion, and righteousness remains as relevant today as it was when it was first written thousands of years ago.

The two epics referred to in this question are likely the Indian epics of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, which are considered among the greatest literary works of India. The portrayal of women characters in these epics reflects the social and cultural norms prevalent in ancient India.



In the Ramayana, the main female character is Sita, the wife of Lord Rama. She is portrayed as the epitome of feminine virtue and is highly respected for her devotion to her husband. Sita is often seen as the ideal Indian woman who is submissive, patient, and obedient. Despite facing many hardships and betrayals, she remains steadfast in her loyalty to her husband and eventually returns to him after being kidnapped by the demon king Ravana.

In contrast, the Mahabharata features a more diverse range of female characters who are often portrayed as strong-willed and independent. Draupadi, the wife of the five Pandavas, is a notable example of such a character. She is highly intelligent, assertive, and outspoken, and she plays a key role in the events leading up to the war. She is also a victim of gender-based violence, as she is disrobed in public by the Kauravas, which triggers the war between the Pandavas and Kauravas.

One of the most famous incidents in the Mahabharata involving Draupadi is the episode of her disrobing. After the Pandavas lost a game of dice to their cousins, the Kauravas, Draupadi was dragged into the court by Duryodhana and Dushasana. They attempted to disrobe her in front of the entire court, but Draupadi prayed to Lord Krishna for help, and he came to her rescue. This incident is seen as a symbol of Draupadi's strength and courage, and her unwavering faith in God. Draupadi's role in the Mahabharata was not limited to her relationships with her husbands. She was also a key player in the war between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. Her beauty and charisma were instrumental in winning over allies for the Pandavas, and her strategic thinking and military prowess played a key role in their victory. Overall, Draupadi's character in the Mahabharata was defined by her strength, intelligence, and unwavering devotion to her husbands. She was a symbol of women's empowerment and challenged the traditional roles and expectations of women in ancient Indian society. Her story continues to inspire and influence people around the world, and she remains one of the most beloved and respected characters in Indian mythology.

Sita is one of the central characters of the Hindu epic, the Ramayana. She is known for her beauty, purity, loyalty, and devotion to her husband, Lord Rama. Her character is one of the most iconic and inspiring in Indian mythology, and her story continues to be celebrated and revered by people around the world. Sita was born to King Janaka and his wife, Queen Sunayana. According to the Ramayana, Sita was found in a furrow in a field by King Janaka while he was ploughing the land. He raised her as his own daughter, and she grew up to be a beautiful and virtuous woman. She was known for her intelligence, grace, and purity, and was admired by all who knew her.

Sita's life changed when she met Lord Rama, the prince of Ayodhya, and they fell in love. However, their path to happiness was not an easy one. Lord Rama was exiled to the forest for 14 years, and Sita chose to accompany him into exile, despite the dangers and hardships they would face. During their exile, Sita was abducted by the demon king, Ravana, and taken to his kingdom in Lanka.

Despite her virtues and strengths, Sita's character has also been criticized for perpetuating patriarchal values and gender roles in Indian culture. Some have argued that her willingness to sacrifice everything for Lord Rama, including her own safety and happiness, reinforces the idea that women should be subservient to their husbands and should prioritize their husband's needs above their own. Others have criticized the way she was treated by Lord Rama, who banished her from his kingdom after she was rescued from Ravana's captivity.

In conclusion, Sita is a complex and multifaceted character in the Ramayana. She is known for her beauty, purity, loyalty, and devotion to Lord Rama, as well as her strength, wisdom, and compassion. Her story continues to be celebrated and revered in Indian culture and society, and her character remains an important symbol of love, sacrifice, and the triumph of good over evil.

III. CONCLUSION

The Mahabharata and the Ramayana are two ancient Indian epics that have shaped Indian culture and society for thousands of years. These epics are replete with stories of women characters who display remarkable strength, intelligence, and courage. This study has examined the depiction of women characters in these two epics and their roles in shaping the narrative and the cultural norms of ancient India.

The portrayal of women characters in the Mahabharata and the Ramayana reflects the social, cultural, and religious values of ancient India. In the Ramayana, Sita is the epitome of womanhood, who embodies virtues such as loyalty, devotion, and self-sacrifice. She follows her husband Rama into exile, endures trials and tribulations, and eventually



returns to her rightful place as queen. Sita's character is a symbol of the ideal Indian woman, who is submissive, obedient, and faithful to her husband.

In contrast, the Mahabharata presents a more complex and nuanced depiction of women characters. Draupadi, for example, is a strong and intelligent woman who is not afraid to assert herself and demand justice. She is the wife of the five Pandava brothers and is fiercely loyal to them. Draupadi's character is a symbol of strength and resilience in the face of adversity. Similarly, Kunti, the mother of the Pandavas, is a wise and compassionate woman who guides her sons through the trials and tribulations of life.

The relationships between women characters and their husbands in these epics also reflect the cultural norms of ancient India. In the Ramayana, Sita is the obedient and loyal wife who follows her husband Rama into exile and endures numerous hardships to prove her fidelity. In the Mahabharata, Draupadi's relationship with the five Pandava brothers is complex and fraught with tension. Her marriage to the Pandavas is the result of a political alliance, and she is often caught in the middle of their conflicts.

However, despite the societal norms that dictate their roles, women characters in both the Mahabharata and the Ramayana display remarkable strength and agency. They are not mere objects of desire or passive recipients of male power, but active agents who shape the narrative and drive the story forward. Women characters such as Draupadi, Sita, and Kunti are portrayed as intelligent, courageous, and resourceful, challenging the patriarchal norms of their time.

In conclusion, the depiction of women characters in the Mahabharata and the Ramayana provides a fascinating insight into the social and cultural values of ancient India. While these epics are ancient texts, the themes and values they portray are still relevant today. The portrayal of women characters in these texts, as strong and capable, inspires us to challenge the patriarchal norms that still exist in our society and to strive for equality and justice for all. Draupadi and Sita are two of the most prominent and influential female characters in Indian mythology, and their roles in the Mahabharata and Ramayana, respectively, have had a significant impact on Indian culture and society. Both Draupadi and Sita played important roles in their respective stories, and their characters continue to inspire and influence people around the world. They were both strong, courageous, and resilient women who faced many challenges and hardships, but always managed to overcome them through their faith, love, and devotion. The stories of Draupadi and Sita continue to be celebrated and revered in Indian culture and society. They serve as powerful symbols of women's empowerment, strength, and resilience, and their characters continue to inspire and influence people around the world.

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