

Psychoanalysis Of The Character Of Ravan In “Valmiki’s Ramayan”

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Abstract: *Valmiki’s Ramayan, along with being one of the most revered religious texts for the Hindus, is also one of the best literary works produced in India. The antagonist of the epic, Ravan, is an extremely interesting character and even Valmiki, himself, has gone to great lengths to portray the flamboyance of the Demon-king. In order to understand a character, it is extremely important to first understand the psyche of the aforementioned character. So, the paper, in order to have a better understanding of the character of Ravan, tries to view him from a psychological perspective. This psychoanalysis of Ravan has incorporated the study of Narcissistic Personality Disorder and how it can be linked to the enigmatic antagonist of Valmiki.*

Keywords: *Ravan; psychoanalysis; Valmiki’s “Ramayan”; Narcissistic Personality Disorder*

The epic of *Ramayan* does not act merely as a great literary work but also as a religious text for the Hindus providing with the ways one should govern one’s life. It is not only a story of a king fighting a battle to win back his queen from the villain who had abducted her. But in the pages, there are ways and teachings that show how one should lead one’s life following the path of *dharma* (Senu Singh 9). Valmiki’s epic just does not talk about the Kshatriya prince and his battle against the Demon-king, Ravan.

Ravan, the king of Lanka, was the Emperor of the whole world. He was a magnificent warrior and a great ruler. He had defeated the great Indra, God of the rains and was paid tribute by them. His kingdom was designed by the great Vishwakarma. He was the great grandson of Brahma, the creator, himself and had received a boon from him that no rakshasa, kinnara or God could kill him but in his pride he asked for no safety against humans because he considered them too puny to harm him anyway. He was a great devotee of Lord Shiva and a favorite of him because of his *tapasya* to him which had made Shiva grant him with boons as well. He was the darkness himself and was supposed to be invincible. He had ten heads all of which were of varying features and sizes but what they all had in common was the savagery in them. He was a great warrior. Even Rama appreciated his skills on the battle ground and seeing his greatness, there were

moments when Hanuman himself had doubted Rama’s victory over Ravan. He had immense knowledge the likes of no one else and he constantly strived to gain more and more. He had a kingdom full of subjects who feared but adored him and revered him and his harem was filled with women with beauty of all kinds.

Despite having everything, the Demon-king was defeated and that too by a human, a Kshatriya prince. One wonders the reasons behind the undoing of such a great king and a *tapasvin*. There ought to be more to Ravan and not merely pride or love behind the reason for his downfall. The psyche of such an enigmatic character as him is bound to have multiple folds to it. These questions have spurred the discourse for the research. The king of Lanka was a character of epic proportions and had multiple facets to him. Valmiki depicts Ravan as someone who follows the path of *adharma* but goes at great length to describe the opulence and attractiveness of the Demon-king. Throughout the epic, his flamboyance has been awed upon and his conquests, knowledge, wealth, dexterity at the battle field and his sexual prowess have been greatly admired. He had ruled for more years than the denizens of the *devlok* even bothered to keep count of. So, it seems extremely odd to digest the fact that he would be willing to give it all up for merely a woman who was unwilling and adamant not to return back his feelings. There

are various characteristics in Valmiki's Ravan that are magnified as compared to a supposedly normal human being which is very prominently depicted in Valmiki's Ramayan.

Valmiki's *Ramayan*, itself, is an extremely interesting read and along with the religious aspects attached to it, it is also an extremely well written literary work. As someone belonging to a Hindu family, it is impossible to ignore the teachings of *Ramayan* and with the advent of visual media, the *Ramayan* and its teachings have become a very popular source of entertainment as well. Initially, in one's childhood days, the understanding of the epic is extremely limited. The whole *Ramayan* is put into black and white. But with maturity, comes a better understanding of everything and one starts viewing the grey zone that is mostly where everything happens. For, us Rama has always been the epitome of all that is good or *dharma* and Ravan has been the exact opposite, that is *adharma*. It is very easy to categorize everything under the heading of good or bad. Seldom do we try to explore the reason behind why something or someone is the way it, he or she is. The reasons can be good or they can be bad as well but everything has an origin point and the formation of Ravan as the kind of character that he was is sure to have a reason behind it. The curiosity to find that reason had led to the discourse of this paper.

There are more things at work that led to the falling of Ravan that eludes the neglecting eye which the research will try to explore into. . The research focuses of the character of Ravan as has been dealt with in Valmiki's *Ramayan* and tries to understand why Ravan was what he was. This has led to psychoanalysis of the character of Ravan and hence, the paper will look into the psychological aspects that went into the making of the Demon-king.

The various peculiarities present in Ravan are something very odd and something that one would not expect to find in a man who was as learned and knowledgeable as Ravan. This leads to a more in-depth analysis into the nature of the character which brought in Freud's theory that explains narcissism and people suffering from Narcissistic Personality Disorder. People suffering from NPD (Narcissistic Personality Disorder) regard themselves to be unique and greater than and superior to anyone and everyone; they always chase after success, power and excellence; they have a constant need for being admired and approved by others; they consider themselves to be unique and demand unquestioned obedience from everyone; they have no regards for others and can exploit them to great extents in order to gain benefits for themselves; they have no empathy towards other feeling, all that matters to them is they themselves; they are arrogant and believe is shameless show-off of all that they have and achieved; and lastly, they are extremely jealous of other and think that others feel the same for them. These characteristic and extremely evident when one starts throwing light on Ravan.

While the reading of Valmiki's *Ramayan*, the character of Ravan stood out completely segregated and more larger than life than any other character. The research, being completely theory-based, the methods included only reading and more reading of topics related to Valmiki's *Ramayan* and the methodology included selectively incorporating various instances from the primary text and other information from articles related to the primary text and jotting down the

inconsistencies found in the character of Ravan. Then, in order to understand these inconsistencies, more reading had to be done which led to the study of Personality Disorders. Under Personality Disorders was Narcissistic Personality Disorder that included in it the characteristics of people suffering from it and they had stark similarities to the inconsistencies found in the character of Ravan and this led to the comparison of the two.

Ravan's Lanka was supposed to be made of gold. The very street encrusted with precious jewels. The houses of the people of Lanka were so beautifully designed that even Hanuman was awed seeing them for the first time. The houses of many were painted by gold and also had jewels embedded in the walls. People were wealthy and whiled away their time in satisfying bodily pleasures. The whole of the city was designed by the great Vishwakarma and was a vista to behold. Although the city and its houses had an ethereal beauty to them, Ravan's palace took it to a completely different level altogether. It was one-fourth of the whole of Lanka and completely made of gold and all sorts of precious jewels. It had ferocious *rakshasas* standing guard all around it around the clock and a moat protecting it as well. The high walls surrounding the palace were made of some unearthly metal that was extremely smooth and impossible to scale it. Ravan had hundreds of *harems* each having hundreds of women living in them who satisfied Ravan's fancies whenever he pleased. His corridors, halls, doors and even his bed was made of gold encrusted with jewels the kind of which none had ever seen. His throne was even greater than all the above combined together. It was made of black crystal embedded with precious jewels which were tributes paid to him by the royal vassals of all the three realms. He lived a life of opulence and grandiosity and never shied away from showing off his wealth which made sure that he was revered and treated as a superior by his subjects. Studies have concluded that people with Narcissistic Personality disorder are exhibitionists, grandiose and attention-seeking (Eric Russ). This is very much evident from the kind of lifestyle preferred by the Demon-king. His excessive show of his wealth and the way he decorated his throne with precious stones from the denizens of *devlok* prove that he believed in showing off his power and the power that he commanded over everyone. Rather than being humble, he preferred an extremely grand way of life which would demand attention from others and make sure that everyone noticed him. This clearly tallies with the characteristic of a person suffering from Narcissistic Personality Disorder on the basis that he loved to show off his wealth and lived a life of excess and demanded attention from all.

Ravan was goaded on by Soorpanakha, his sister, to capture Sita and avenge the insult metted out to her by Rama and Lakshman. Ravan was seduced by the description of Sita given to him by Soorpanakha. He wanted to capture her more for himself and less to avenge his sister. He shared his plan with his uncle, Maricha, who was a hermit and lived near to where Rama, Sita and Lakshman were staying at the woods. Maricha was aware of Rama's powers, having been defeated by him previously, and tried to persuade Ravan to not go ahead with his plan. But he was scared to push Ravan more and he knew that he would die if he followed Ravan's orders

and he chose death to disobeying Ravan. Such was Ravan's fear that none in his court dared defy him. Even his brothers were cautious while trying to make him see reason when he did not wish to give Sita up and wanted to battle against Rama instead. Vibheeshan tried to show him reason but he was threatened and asked to never show himself to Ravan ever again. All the women in the harem were expected to give in to Ravan's desires and fancies whenever he wanted without any objections from them. There was a constant strive in Ravan to excel himself. He gained more knowledge, more power which helped him to keep people more in fear and awe of him. He demanded unquestionable agreement on everything from his people and did not tolerate disobedience. People with NPD are exploitative in nature and demand obedience from others which is also one of the characteristics of Ravan (Sheenie Ambardar). Ravan was so feared that the fear of him incited obedience from everyone around him and he would want nothing else even. His want of obedience from all his subjects was so high that he would kill them if they dared to put a toe out of line. This is completely in sync with the characteristic of a person with NPD which shows that Ravan wanted complete obedience at any cost.

There is mention of Ravan's wealth and power throughout the length of Valmiki's *Ramayan* and most of the times it is he who does the boasting himself. When he first meets with Sita, he tries to persuade her to come with him for he can give her whatever she wants and treat her like a queen as she was entitled to be treated. He scoffs and laughs at Sita that she can even think about that Rama, a mere human, will be able to defeat and kill Ravan who had defeated Indra himself and to him all the three worlds paid tribute. He indulged in *tapasyas* and gained as much knowledge that he could. But he was vain along with that as well. He boasted of his sexual prowess to Sita and said that no woman, except her had resisted his charms and attraction for so long. He was extremely proud of the fact that women were charmed by his attractiveness and could never get enough of him. He had an enormous harem filled with dotting women who were ready to give in to him in a moment's notice to prove that. People with NPD are very sexually seductive and provocative (Eric Russ) and they always have this constant need of admiration (Sheenie Ambardar). And Ravan was nothing different. Ravan was proud of the fact that women could not resist him for long and he took any woman who fancied him. His voracious sexual appetite was not even fulfilled by his already filled *harems* and he kept on adding more and more women to it, who were so seduced by him that they willingly gave themselves to him, even if they resisted him initially. This giving up of women to his seduction fulfilled Ravan's need for constant admiration as well.

Ravan considered himself to be the greatest of all. He had proclaimed himself to be superior to all in all of the three worlds and was proud of the fact that even Indra could not defeat him. So, he was completely baffled by the fact that Sita chose Rama over him, who was just a human compared to his splendid *rakshasa* self. He constantly compared himself to Rama trying to show Sita that he was greater than Rama, or in fact greater than anyone, and that he was the best that Sita could ever get and someone as beautiful as her should be with him who was the greatest of all. He thought that there was

none like him that was ever sired and Sita's resistance to him enraged him to a great extent. The feeling one considering the self as unique (Sheenie Ambardar) is something that makes up the character of a person with Narcissistic Personality disorder and it is the "self" who is the center of everything (Giancarlo Dimaggio) which very clearly comes across in the character of Ravan. Ravan's consideration of the self as unique very much tallies with the characteristic of a person with NPD who considered himself to be unique and different and greater than everyone and anyone else.

Ravan had a harem full of beautiful women from all parts of the three realms. They were filled with *rakshasis*, *gandharva* women, *kinnara* women, serpentine *naga* women and many more. All these women doted on him and lusted for him. He was infamous for his sexual prowess. He had an array of sycophants in his court to fan his ego and praised him whenever they could. Ravan basked in all the admiration and praises and what came to him as a shock was Sita's complete disregard for him and all that he had to offer her. He constantly pined for her admiration that drove him to his frenzy that made him forget everything, his queen, his kingdom, his subjects and that made him drive his subjects to the war which was doomed for him from the very beginning. His want of admiration and acceptance from Sita was so huge that it made him ignore all omens and blindly go ahead and seal his fate that was to die from the hands of Rama. There is an excessive need for admiration present in people with NPD (Sheenie Ambardar) and Ravan was no different from that. His want of admiration was so much in excess that it was almost like a validation that he required out of his *harem* full of lovers. Normally, one would give up trying to win over someone so in love with someone else like Sita was with Rama. But such was Ravan's plethoric need of admiration was such that he refused to accept the fact that Sita would never love him and threatened to kill her if she did not voluntarily give herself to him.

Nobody could blame Ravan that he did not know how to get his ways. He would get his way mostly by the fear that he incited in people and in the case of Gods by his devotion and *tapasyas*. He exploited others so as to gain personal gains of which the vivid example would be the way he threatened Maricha, to become a golden deer so that Sita would want it and to capture it Rama and Lakshman would have to chase after it which would give him the opportunity to abduct Sita for himself. Moreover, the mindless war that he pushed his people into and the way he chose to ignore the voice of reason, which was of Vibheeshan, just so that he could have his way with Sita and exploiting his command over his subjects completely prove the fact that he very well knew how to get his work done otherwise he would not have been such a feared emperor. The interpersonal exploitative nature of a person with Narcissistic Personality Disorder (Sheenie Ambardar) is very much evident in Ravan. He exploited his subject, his family members and all the women in his life to gain personal benefits, a different from each of them. What mattered to him was his gain to which he could go to any extent, even kill the person who was of no use to him. He was thinking about himself only when Maricha was killed (which he considered to be a sacrifice for the greater good) and also when he exploited

all of his subjects to go into a mindless war against Rama when the odds were clearly against him.

Ravan had complete disregard for the feelings of other which are evident from many incidents from the epic. Firstly, he captured the wife of another man and abducted her whereas he kept the women of his harem away from other men's eyes. He had no consideration for Sita's pining for her Rama and in fact wanted Rama's death by grieving for his lost wife. He claimed to love Sita more than anything but did not care for her feelings at all and did not wish to see the longing for her husband in her eyes. He did not force himself on Sita not because he had any regards for her feelings but because he was cursed by Brahma, after he had defiled a *devloki*, that if he ever took another woman again by force then his head would explode into a thousand pieces and that would be the end of him. He had thousands of beautiful women in his harem who wished for him to come to them but he did not have any regard for their wishes when he should be thinking about them as well because he had taken responsibility for them. And most importantly, the king should always take responsibility for his subjects and do what is right for them. That is his *dharma*. But Ravan kept his whims of acquiring Sita before that of doing what is right for his kingdom and plunged his people into an already doomed war which resulted in all the households of Lanka losing someone or the other to the war. He had lack of empathy and lack of empathy is very common amongst people with NPD (Sheenie Ambardar). This lack of empathy is very clear from Ravan's complete disregard for other's feelings, be it that of Sita, whom he claimed to love, his family, his women in the *harem* or his subjects. The only person about whom Ravan thought of was he himself and no one else. So, the characteristic of lack of empathy that is found in people with Narcissistic Personality Disorder is also found in Ravan.

Ravan, with all his wisdom and knowledge, was a vain and jealous man. His constantly comparing himself to Rama and trying to prove to Sita that how much more greater he was than him showed his jealousy towards Rama that he had what Ravan coveted and that was Sita's heart. He did not pay any heed to the voice of reason, Vibheeshan, when he tried to persuade Ravan to give up Sita back to Rama and ask for his forgiveness because he had committed and act of *adharma* by abducting her. Ravan accused him of being jealous of him instead and blamed him that he could not tolerate Ravan's glory and waited for the right moment to strike him down. Ravan was envious of others and had the mindset that others are envious of him and such a trait is found in someone who suffers from Narcissistic Personality Disorder (Sheenie Ambardar). One of the characteristics of people with Narcissistic Personality Disorder is that they think that everyone is jealous of them whereas, they are the ones who are actually the jealous one. Ravan's pride blinded him to see that he was the one who was actually jealous of Rama for Rama had a dotting wife whose love for him never decreased and Ravan lacked this selfless love in his life which probably made him console himself by considering that others were the ones who were actually jealous of him.

Despite of Ravan being the Emperor of the World and having defeated Indra and gaining so much knowledge there was a major flaw within himself and that was, if described

using the help of modern discoveries, that he suffered from Narcissistic Personality Disorder which molded him into what he was and which sealed his fate even. Because his blind reverence for himself and considering himself to be the center of the universe and because of him considering himself to be the Law and his selfishness and jealousy made him come to such a pitiful end. Had he not considered himself to be above and beyond everything and not underestimated his enemy, the story might have had a different ending. But to understand all that went into the events that unfold in the epic, an extensive study into the Indian mythology has to be undertaken. Even to understand the growth of Ravan into the king of all the three realms, the help of texts other than that of Valmiki's *Ramayan* should be taken.

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