

# **The Invisibilization of Women In Society Portrayed Through Select Cantos of Ramayana**

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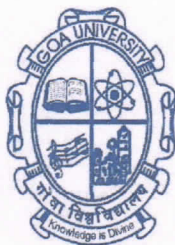
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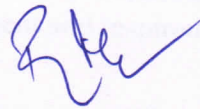
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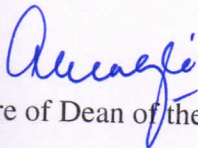
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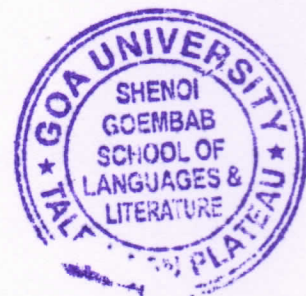
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## **Abstract**

The invisibilization of women characters in Ramayana is a significant aspect that reflects underlying societal attitudes towards gender roles and power dynamics in ancient Indian literature. This study explores how female characters such as Sita, Mandodari, Urmila, Kaikeyi and Surpanakha are portrayed and marginalized within the narrative.

In the Ramayana, women are often depicted in relation with male protagonists, serving as catalysts for the advancement of the male-centric plot. Women characters, despite their pivotal role, are subjected to doubts that challenge their virtue, and their agency is restricted by societal expectations. This study critically examines the invisibilization of women in the Ramayana, analyzing the implications of their portrayals on gender hierarchies and societal norms. It delves into the consequences of sidelining female perspectives and agency, contributing to broader discussions on gender representation and power dynamics in ancient literature.

Through this exploration, the abstract aims to provoke discourse on the depiction of women in epic narratives and its relevance to contemporary gender studies, emphasizing the need to reevaluate historical texts from feminist perspectives to uncover hidden narratives and empower marginalized voices.

Keywords: Ramayana, patriarchy, invisibilization, femininity, Subjugation, Resistance, Identity

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

The Invisibilization of women is an issue that has been constant throughout the ages in Indian society. Hence this research is entirely directed towards analyzing and questioning the perpetual Invisibilization that women have been facing despite being faithful, and an ideal figure according to the conventional norms of Indian society. The research attempted here focuses on understanding the vital issue of Invisibilization of women, portrayed in Indian literature that continues till date, as the sidelining of women in contemporary times continues. The study presented here, explains the normative approach with which the Invisibilization of women characters has been tackled in Indian literature. The protagonists of the selected texts for this research, represent some of the most crucial female figures of Indian literature. Women have always held a lesser position than men in patriarchal societies. The root cause of Invisibilization is being tackled in this study by exploring selected cantos of Valmiki Ramayana. The study of Ramayana with these events poses important and challenging questions about the structure of Indian society in a post-enlightenment world that is overflowing with concepts of gender equality, reason, and justice.

Through *Ramayana* we are briefed about the female protagonist *Sita*, as well as other female characters such as Kaikeyi, Kausalya Tataka, *Shurpanakha*, *Ahalya*, *Urmila*, Kausalya, Sumitra and *Mandodari*, who were equally subjugated by the patriarchal society.

These are a few examples of female characters from the Ramayana, who underwent sorrow, misfortune or difficulties in the course of the epic's narrative. There are several episodes in the



Ramayana that provide examples of the sufferings and Invisibilization faced by the aforementioned characters, which puts the patriarchal temperament under scrutiny. This research tries to focus on the root cause related to the degradation of women, and its continuation in contemporary times, through selected female characters from the text. The hypocritical principles of the society that are responsible for the underrepresentation of contemporary women is being tackled in this study, in association with the ancient Indian literature. This study is directed towards examining the perceptual categorisation of women as emotional beings. Such stereotypical associations often affect the position of women in the society. There is a familiar pattern between the predicament of all the female characters portrayed in the primary texts. Right from the time of Sita, women have been single handedly partaking in the parenting of their children. The epic Ramayana is reflective of the root cause of invisibilizing women, it also explains the double standards prevailing in our society, which makes unnecessary divisions between men and women. Women have to pass through manifold trials and tribulations in the course of their lives all by themselves. This study looks at the predicament of women that has been constant and identical, in the epic. The study seeks to problematize the widely acknowledged subversion of gender roles by examining the moral dilemma of women's invisibilization in Indian literature. The findings of this study are hence directed towards the deeply rooted connection between the underrepresentation of women in Indian literature, and their predicament in contemporary society.

### **Scope**

- The study examines the underlying gender inequality, through Simone de Beauvoir feminism theory.

- It explores the socio-cultural factors contributing to this invisibilization, by an in depth analysis of the underrepresentation of women in society.
- It explores ancient Indian literature, with the purpose of finding parallels between the position of women in Indian society, in the past as compared to the present.
- With necessary examples from the texts, the study examines how the women characters from the primary texts are portrayed as marginalized, or depicted as invisible.

### **Limitations**

- This study is restricted to the analysis of the incidents from the texts, that prove the phenomenon of invisibilization of the female characters, and not based on any kind of critical analysis.
- The study is restricted to selected cantos of Ramayana.
- This study is not inclusive of any recent information in this field, since Indian feminist literature has evolved significantly throughout the years, and is in the constant process of growth
- This research is entirely based on a balanced analysis based on critical inputs from scholars and writers of the study, with the help of primary texts. And as literature is open to interpretations, this study does not allow any room for a different interpretation over the one being followed here, in case of interpretation variability with other similar scholarly interpretations in this field of study.

## **Research Problem/ Question**

- What are the socio-cultural factors that contribute to the phenomenon of invisibilization of women, portrayed in Indian literature.

## **Relevance & Necessity of the Proposed Research**

- Gender Equality: The need for equality of gender in both literature and broader societal contexts can be highlighted by understanding how women are invisibilized in literature.

- Representation: Literature is often said to reflect values and societal norms. Analyzing the ways in which women are depicted in Indian literature, will allow us to gain valuable insights into the cultural and historical perceptions of women in India.

- Social Commentary: Since literature has always served as a great platform for social commentary. Exploring the topic of invisibilization of women in Indian literature can help in shedding light on issues such as sexism, gender discrimination and patriarchy.

- Impact on Society: Portrayals of women in literature can influence societal attitudes and behaviors. Examining invisibilization can help identify harmful stereotypes and encourage more diverse and accurate representations of women in literature.

- Academic Study: Understanding the invisibilization of women in Indian literature is crucial since it will help in challenging stereotypes, promoting gender equality, and fostering more representative and inclusive narratives. The topic offers rich material for academic research and analysis, contributing to fields such as cultural studies, gender studies and literary criticism.

- The study holds relevance in today's society, since female characters portrayed in the primary texts represent the problems of contemporary women in the society. This study provides an

understanding of how most societal and cultural norms have their roots in historical representations of women. Understanding this can help in enduring gender differences. Examining depictions of women in ancient literature, highlights the prejudices and stereotypes that are persistent in the modern society. The historical underrepresentation of women has the potential to shape women's self-perception and positions within society.

- To inform advocacy and policy-making efforts aimed at promoting diversity in literature and gender equality, to improve the representation of women in literature through initiatives such as publishing practices and inclusive curriculum development.

- Overall, the study presented here is of utmost importance, since the underrepresentation of women in ancient Indian literature continues to Influence gender relations, culture, in the modern society. Through acknowledging and rectifying past prejudices, we can strive towards a future that is more just and comprehensive.

### **Objectives of research proposal**

- To study and analyze the pattern in which women are represented in Indian literature that impacts societal perceptions.

- To explore the societal, historical and cultural factors contributing to the invisibility of women in literature, including gender biases, social structures and patriarchal norms. In order to understand and analyze the social issues, revolving around the female characters portrayed in the primary texts.

- To understand how literary representation and visibility can empower women to challenge existing gender stereotypes and norms. By conducting an analysis to uncover instances of invisibilization of women in Indian literature.
- Overall, the objective of such a research would be to raise awareness about the invisibilization of women in Indian literature, highlight its significance in shaping societal attitudes towards gender, and advocate for greater representation and inclusivity in literary narratives.aspects that lead to the Invisibilization or sidelining of women in Indian society.

## **Literature review**

As Indian feminist literature has evolved, over the years it has undergone significant changes, and has become inclusive of different types of texts from epics, to poems, short stories, to lengthy novels, dramas and autobiographies. After a thorough exploration of the existing information in this field, these are the few studies that have been shortlisted for this research.

- ”Escaping from Rama: Portraits of Indian women” is a study by Valentina Gamberi, published in the year 2014. This study examines visual, post-colonial portraits of the Indian women of the Sanskrit epics, in order to show the sociocultural, historical-ideological roots of this aesthetic. After independence, Hindu movements found in the epics a female archetype, who stands for the Hindu community. Post-colonial visual representations maintained this idealistic characterisation within a binary system, according to which women can be angelic guarantors of the social order or devilish, sexually uncontrolled creatures. This ambiguity derives from the double nature of the female principle of the world, shakti, and the visual storytelling tradition or chitrakatha. Using the same Indian storytelling tradition, female points of view have begun to criticise this

nationalistic, 'male gaze'. In the graphic novel Sita's Ramayana, Rama and male activities, particularly war, are secularised and criticised as selfish by female characters, foremost of whom is Sita, a model of the devoted and pure bride or pativrata.

- The research paper titled as “ Important Female Characters in the Ramayana: Their Relevance in Modern Society” is a study by Dr. Sreekala P. S, published in the year 2022. This article attempts to put forth the characteristics of a few major female characters from Valmiki Ramayana and provides an explanation of their actions. It justifies the characters actions in the epic. It claims that Sita is a supreme character and no other character can be compared to her. Lastly, part of the article is dedicated to King Dasharatha, and explains his character.

- ”Feminist Analysis of Adaptations of the Ramayana” Is a study by Debarati Pal, published in the year 2022. This paper attempts to discuss the topic mentioned above with reference to feminist critics like Wollstonecraft and Butler while also referring to other reinterpretations of the epic. It discusses the short stories of Volga through a feminist lens and focuses on the questioning of the caste system in Tripathi. It uses Western texts as well as Indian texts like the Manusmriti to give a theoretical grounding to some of the basic understandings obtained. To get a better understanding of the woman writing about another woman. It will come up through these discussions that the love for Ramayana is not only based on an unequivocal worship of Ram, but an equal questioning of his acts and a sympathetic identification with Sita.

- Chakraborti Shruti, published an article “Subverting Patriarchal Interpretation of the Ramayan through a Feminist Lens: A Critical Study of Sita's Ramayana” in the year 2022. The study presented here analyzes Ramayana from a feminist perspective or from the point of view of Sita. This article gives Sita the central role and tries to look at the events of the epic. The study seeks

to understand the elements of revisionism in Sita's Ramayana in the context of a sixteenth century.

- "Feminist Discussion of the Ramayana" Is an article published by Meenu Aryaa, Kusum Kundu and Simpi in the year 2023. It focuses on the characters Kaikeyi, Sita, Tara, Surpanakha, and Mandodari. And it discusses how these names have reportedly come forth after the 19th century. The study discusses the grandeur associated with these great women who remained as unsung heroes for centuries together. It discusses how inspiring these women are as reclaimed icons for contemporary feminism.

- The research paper titled as "The Forest of Enchantments": A Feminist Interpretation of the "Ramayana" from Sita's Perspective" Is a study by Suchitra Rani Mahato in the year 2022. This paper will attempt to examine how Divakaruni's retelling portrays the character of Sita as contrary to the traditional beliefs. This paper tries to show the power of patriarchy to subjugate women in the name of dharma (duty). It also discusses the resistance of Sita whose voice gives vent to the unheard voices of all women subjected to many inhuman injustices in the name of culture and tradition.

**Hypothesis:** Indian literature, as depicted in the epic Ramayana is reflective of the tendencies towards invisibilization of women in Indian society.

### **Research Methodology for proposed research.**

The collection of primary data has been done through the analysis of the selected texts. And the secondary data has been collected through a few articles, and the information is based on a balanced analysis of critical inputs from scholars and writers of this study. The approach to



studying involves analyzing the depiction of reality in literature through qualitative methods. A comparative analysis is also taken into consideration. The study focuses on Indian literature that portrays the Invisibilization of women, and helps in understanding its impact on the contemporary status of women in Indian society. The study progresses through a contemporary viewpoint, and it is restricted to ancient Indian literature.

## **Chapterisation**

**Chapter one:** Content, preface and declaration, Introduction

1.1 Scope and limitations

1.2 Research problem/ question

1.3 Relevance and necessity

1.4 Objectives

1.5 Literature review

1.6 Hypothesis

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**Chapter two:** Introduction to Valmiki Ramayana

2.1 The author

2.2 Theory used (Feminist theoretical framework)

2.3 Simone de Beauvoirs feminist theory

2.4 Femininity in 5th century BCE

**Chapter three:** Ayodhya

3.1 Sacrifice and Acceptance

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4.1 Women society and Righteousness

**Chapter five:**

Conclusion

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# Chapter 2

## Valmiki Ramayan

Valmiki is credited with writing and composing one of the best pieces of literature in ancient Indian history, the Ramayana. It is still regarded as one of the greatest critically lauded works of all time since it has withstood the test of time. It seems that the characters of the Ramayana are role models for us all. The characters Rama, Sita, Lakshmana, and Hanuman represent all the characteristics that every person on the earth should possess in order to establish a perpetual state of peace.

Rāma and ayaṇa are the two words that make up the name Rāmāyaṇa. The name of the epic's main character, Rāma, has two connotations. It is associated with the word rātri, which signifies 'darkness or stillness of night' and has the meaning 'dark, dark-coloured, black' in the Atharvaveda. The Mahabharata has another meaning that is "pleasant, pleasant, charming, lovely, beautiful." The definition of ayana is "journey" or travel. The Sanskrit grammatical rule of internal sandhi causes ayana to change to ayaṇa, meaning "Rama's journey" in this case.

The Ramayana is a highly influential ancient Indian epic that is credited to the sage Valmiki. It is divided into seven kandas, or volumes, each of which tells a distinct story about an event or facet of Lord Rama's life. Below is an in-depth analysis of every kanda:

### 1. The Childhood Book Balakanda:

- The birth of Rama and his siblings, Shatrughna, Lakshmana, and Bharata, to King Dasharatha and Queen Kaushalya in Ayodhya is described in this kanda.
- It tells the tale of Rama's divine beginnings, childhood, schooling, and marriage to Sita, the daughter of King Janaka.
- Balakanda also tells the story of what happened before Rama was banished, including Kaikeyi's plotting and Dasharatha's keeping of her vows.

### 2. The Ayodhya Book, or Ayodhya Kanda:

- The central theme of this kanda is Rama's exile from Ayodhya brought on by Kaikeyi's blessings.

- It shows how Rama complied with his father's desires, how sad the people of Ayodhya were, and how Lakshmana and Sita insisted on going with Rama into exile.
- Ayodhyakanda also recounts Rama's unwavering adherence to his father's pledge and Bharata's attempt to persuade him to return to Ayodhya and establish dominion. Rāma in the forest. He requests Rāma to return and rule. But Rāma, determined to carry out his father's orders to the letter, refuses to return before the period of exile.

### 3. Aranyakanda: The Book of Forests

- Along with Sita and Lakshmana, this kanda narrates the tale of Rama's life during his banishment in the jungles.
- It features meetings with a variety of sages and demons, including the golden deer (Maricha) and Ravana's kidnapping of Sita.
- Aranyakanda recounts the assassination of Shurpanakha and the development of Hanuman and Rama's relationship.

### 4. The Kishkindha Book, or KishkindhaKanda:

- The story of Rama's coalition with Hanuman and Sugriva to vanquish Vali and restore Sugriva to the throne of Kishkindha is told in this kanda.
- It also involves the hunt for Sita, which ends with Hanuman jumping from Lanka across the ocean.
- Kishkindhakanda emphasises the friendship and loyalty between Rama and Hanuman, as well as the formation of the Rama-Sugriva alliance.

### 5. The Beautiful Book Sundarakanda:

- The main subject of this kanda is Hanuman's expedition to Lanka in pursuit of Sita.
- It describes how Hanuman met several obstacles and people in Lanka, how he found Sita, and how he comforts her on behalf of Rama. Sundarakanda emphasises Hanuman's amazing talents, bravery, and devotion.

### 6. The book of war, Yuddhakanda:

- The battle between Ravana's army and Rama's army is described in this kanda.
- It covers the building of the Rama Setu bridge to Lanka, the conflicts between the several warriors, and Rama's last meeting with Ravana.
- Yuddhakanda also depicts Rama's anguish at losing his cherished spouse and his eventual triumph over Ravana.

## 7. Uttarakanda (Book of Epilogue):

- The story of Rama's return to Ayodhya following his triumph in Lanka is found in Uttarakanda.
- It features the meeting of Rama and Sita again, Rama's inauguration as Ayodhya's ruler, and Sita's exile because of widespread mistrust.
- Sita's return to Earth and Rama's resolve to live as an ascetic in the jungle in preparation for his ultimate departure from this life mark the end of the Kanda.

Collectively, the seven kandas offer a thorough account of the life, tribulations, and victories of Lord Rama, and they function as a cornerstone of Hindu philosophy and culture. The underlying concepts of responsibility, honour, dedication, and righteousness are enhanced by the distinct contributions of each kanda.

Most people consider the Bala Kanda, if not the entire work, to be an interpolation into the epic. The epic commences with the wise Vālmīki inquiring of Narada whether a virtuous man remains in the earth. Nārada responds that Rāma is one such man. Vālmīki witnesses two birds being shot, so he invents śloka, a new kind of metre, and is given the capacity to write an epic poem about Rāma. The primary narrative commences at the court of King Rāma, where the youths Lava and Kuśa, whom he teaches his poetry to, recite it throughout the nation.

Ayodhyā's king was Daśaratha. Sumitrā, Kaikeyī, and Kausalyā were his three wives. Because he was without a son, he offered a fire sacrifice known as Putrīyā Iṣṭi in an attempt to have a legitimate heir. Concurrently, the gods are pleading with Brahmā and Vishnu regarding Rāvana, the rākṣasa monarch who is ravaging the cosmos. Therefore, in order to battle the monster Rāvaṇa, Viṣṇu had chosen to be born into mortality. Consequently, Kausalyā gave birth to Rāma first, Kaikeyī to Bharata, and Sumitrā to Lakṣmaṇa and Śatrughna. The 16-year-old Rishi Viśvāmitra, approaches the Daśaratha court seeking assistance against demons interfering with sacrificial ceremonies.

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He selects Rāma, who is trailed by Lakṣmaṇa, who stays by his side the entire time. After receiving guidance and otherworldly weaponry from Viśvāmitra, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa vanquish

Tāṭakā and numerous other demons. In addition, Viśvāmitra tells many stories about the history of the region, his own ancestors, and the princes' forebears. The group then decides to travel to the kingdom of Mithila to see King Janaka's sacrifice. King Janaka is the owner of a bow that no one has been able to string. After telling them about the famous bow's history, Janaka tells them that the person who strings the bow will win the hand of his daughter Sītā, whom he discovered while plowing a field. Then Rāma goes on to shatter the bow in addition to stringing it. Rāma marries Sītā; the marriage celebration returns to Ayodhyā after being celebrated with tremendous fervor in Mithila.

Following their marriage, an aged Daśaratha declares his intention to crown Rāma, a desire that is supported by the Kosala assembly and his countrymen. Kaikeyī was delighted about this on the eve of the major occasion, but later on the evil maidservant Mantharā pushed her to claim two boons that Daśaratha had bestowed upon her ages ago. In order to give her son Bharata the succession, Kaikeyī orders that Rāma be sent into the desert for a period of fourteen years. Obligated by his vow, the heartbroken king gives in to Kaikeyī's demands. Rāma exhibits the same serene composure and total obedience that define him throughout the narrative as he accepts his father's reluctant pronouncement. Sītā persuades him to take her with him into exile despite his request for her to stay in Ayodhyā. Lakṣmaṇa also decides to go into the forest after his brother. King Daśaratha dies after Rāma leaves, unable to handle the sadness. While visiting his maternal uncle, Bharata discovers the happenings in Ayodhyā. Bharata goes to the jungle to see Rāma and declines to take advantage of his mother's evil schemes. He asks Rāma to come back and take control. Rāma, however, is adamant about following his father's instructions to the letter and won't go back before the exile period ends.

Following a fourteen-year banishment, Rāma, Sītā, and Lakṣmaṇa go southward along the Godavari River, constructing huts and subsisting on the land. They receive a visit from Śurpanakhā, the sister of Ravana, a rākṣasī, at the Pāñcavati forest. After failing in her attempt to woo the brothers, she makes an attempt to murder Sītā. She is stopped by Lakṣmaṇa, who amputates her ears and nose. When her brothers Khara and Dushan learn of this, they plan an assault against the princes. Rakshasas led by Khara are vanquished by Rama. As Rāvaṇa learns of these happenings, he decides to use the raksasa Mārīca to help him capture Sītā in order to destroy Rāma. Assuming the shape of a golden deer, Mārīca captures Sītā's interest. Sītā begs Rāma to catch the deer, mesmerized by its beauty. Knowing that this is a demon's ruse, Rāma is powerless to stop Sītā from pursuing her passion and drives the deer into the forest, leaving Sītā under Lakṣmana's watchful eye.

A while later, Sītā hears Rāma screaming for her. Fearful for his life, she demands that Lakṣmana head straight to his assistance. Trying to reassure her that Rāma not be wounded so quickly and that it would be ideal if he carries out Rāma's instructions to keep her safe. Sītā, on the edge of hysterics, insists it's not She is Rāma, who requires Lakṣmana's assistance. He complies with her request but specifies that she must not Get out of the cottage and don't host outside guests. Next,

he leaves after drawing a line that no demon could cross. to support Rāma. Finally, with the coast clear, Rāvaṇa shows up pretending to be an ascetic who asks for Sītā's courtesy.

Rāvana tricks Sītā into believing she is her guest, and then she forcibly drags her away. The vulture Jatāyu attempts to save Sītā but is fatally injured. The rakṣasīs of Lankā keep watch over Sītā. Sītā declines Ravaṇa's proposal of marriage since she is utterly committed to Rāma. Concurrently, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa discover that Sītā has been kidnapped by Jatayu and promptly embark on a mission to rescue her. They come upon the ascetic Ābarī and Kabandha during their hunt, who point them in the direction of Sugriva and Hanuman.

The human forest dwellers known as Vānaras (Vana-nara) are the setting for Citadel Kishkindha Kanda. Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa encounter Hanuman, the greatest ape hero, the ardent follower of Sugriva, the exiled aspirant to the throne of Kiṣkindhā, and the largest devotee of Rama. In return for helping Rāma restore Sītā, Sugriva befriends Rāma and aids him in slaying his elder brother Vāli, regaining the kingdom of Kiṣkindhā. Sugriva, though, quickly forgets his pledge and luxuriates in his newfound might. Vāli's wife, the astute former ape queen Tārā, coolly steps in to stop an irate Lakṣmaṇa from demolishing the ape castle. She then skillfully persuades Sugriva to keep his word. Subsequently, Sugriva sent search teams to all four corners of the planet, but they return from the north, east, and west empty-handed. A vulture named Sampātī, the elder brother of Jatayu, informs the search team in the south led by Angada and Hanuman that Sītā was carried to Lankā.

The core of Valmiki's Ramayana is Sundara Kanda, which is a comprehensive, colorful story of Hanuman's valor. Hanuman takes on an enormous shape and performs a titanic jump across the sea to reach Lanka after learning about Sītā. He encounters numerous obstacles along the road, such as a Gandharva Kanyā who appears as a demon to test his mettle. Hanuman comes onto Maināka, a mountain, who grants him rest and support. With hardly much time left to finish the quest for Sītā, Hanuman declines. He discovers that Lankini, a demon, guards the entirety of Lanka after arriving there. To enter Lanka, Hanuman engages her in combat and subdues her.

During this procedure, Lankini, having previously received a vision or warning from the gods, realizes that defeating him will bring an end to Lanka. Here, Hanuman spies on Rāvaṇa while investigating the devils' realm. He finds Sītā in Ashoka Grove, where Rāvana and his rakshasis are courting and threatening to marry her. By presenting Rāma her signet ring as proof that she is still alive, Hanuman comforts Sītā. He offers to return Sītā to Rāma, but she declines, claiming that it is not the dharma and that the Ramayana will mean nothing if Hanuman brings her there. She claims that Rāvana carried Sītā forcibly when Rāma was absent. Sītā was taken back to Raema by Hanuman. She demands that Rāma himself show up to exact revenge for the humiliation caused by her kidnapping. To demonstrate to Hanuman that she is still alive, she gives him her comb. Hanuman departs from the Tattvas. He chooses to cause devastation in Lankā by demolishing buildings and trees in the Naulakha Bagh, as well as killing Rāvana's troops, before returning to Rāma to inform him of Sītā's whereabouts and express his need for solely his rescue. He consents to being apprehended and brought to Rāvaṇa. To let Sītā free, he

boldly lectures Rāvaṇa. Despite being sentenced and having his tail lit on fire, he manages to break free from his shackles, vaults from one rooftop to another, lights up Rāvaṇa's citadel, and makes the enormous leap back off the island. The happy search team brings the news back to Kiṣkindhā.

This book, also called Lankā Kāṇḍa, recounts the battle between Rama's and Rāvaṇa's armies. After receiving Hanuman's report about Sītā, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa move towards the southern seashore alongside their supporters. Vibhiṣaṇa, Rāvaṇa's rebellious brother, joins them there. The Rama Setu is built by the vāṇaras Nala and Nīla. The princes cross over to Lanka with their army. A protracted conflict breaks out. Lakṣmaṇa is gravely injured when Ravana's son Meghanāda throws a strong weapon at him during a battle. Hanuman, therefore, takes on his enormous form and soars from Lankā to the Himalayas.

After reaching Mount Sanjeevani, Hanuman chooses to return the entire mountain to Lanka because he cannot figure out which herb will cure Lakṣmaṇa. When Rāma kills Rāvaṇa, the conflict finally comes to a conclusion. Vibhishana is then crowned king of Lanka by Rāma. On encountering Sītā, Rāma states; "The dishonour meted out to him and the wrong done to her by Rāvaṇa have been wiped off, by his victory over the enemy with the assistance of Hanuman, Sugrīva and Vibhishana". But Rāma becomes very discouraged when people in his country criticize Sītā for her chastity. Thus, to disprove the citizens and erase the unjustified accusation against her, Sītā asks Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa to set up a bonfire for her to step into. Sītā enters the pyre after praying to Agni to demonstrate her marital fidelity, while Lakṣmaṇa is preparing it. From the blazing pyre, Agni himself emerges, embracing Sītā and bringing her back to Rāma, proving her chastity. [34] Later, Rama accepts her with joy. The Ramayana stories narrated by Valmiki and Tulsidas differ in the Agni Pariksha scene. In Tulsidas's Ramcharitmanas, Sītā had to be brought out before Rama could be reunited with her since Agni (see Māyā Sītā) was protecting her. Arriving, the Gods under the leadership of Brahma exalt Rama as the embodiment of the Almighty God Narayana. The dead Vanaras are brought back to life by Indra. When Rāma returns to Ayodhya after the exile, the people rejoice so much that it's like a festival. On Deepavali, it is believed that Rama, Sītā, Lakṣmaṇa, and Hanuman arrived in Ayodhyā following their 14-year exile, following their victory over the evil army of demon king Rāvaṇa. Rāma's coronation marked the celebration of his homecoming to Ayodhyā. We refer to it as Rāma pattābhisheka. The Ramayana relates that Rama offered gifts to Sugriva, Jambavan, and other Vanaras on multiple occasions. He also gave Sita a pearl necklace and instructed her to donate it to a deserving person. When the gods, led by Brahma, show up, Goddess Gī She hands it to Hanuman. Rāma wanted to offer Vibhishana a wonderful gift because she was so grateful to him. Vibhishana received his Aradhana Devata (Sri Ranganathaswamy) as a gift from Rāma. The Rāma rājya, or rule of Rama, was considered to be a righteous and equitable law. Many people think that people used diyas to celebrate their gladness when Rama returned, and this is how the festival of Deepavali is associated with Rama's return.

In particular, in tales like Sita's banishment and Shambuka's death, scholars observe "linguistic and rhetorical differences" between the Uttara Kanda and books 2 through 6 of the Ramayana.



Along with Bala Kanda, this poem is thought by some to be an interpolation, and the 'original' version of it concluded with the Yuddhakanda. [39] [40] This kanda describes the Ashvamedha yajna, the birth of Lava and Kusha, Rama's final days, and his reign over Ayodhya. Rama returns to Ayodhya with Sita, Lakshmana, and Hanuman when his exile ends, and the coronation takes place there. To the surprise of everyone, Hanuman rips apart his chest to reveal an image of Rama and Sita when he is challenged to demonstrate his devotion to Rama.

One of the two major Hindu epics the Ramayana or (Sanskrit: Rāmayaṇam), commonly referred to as the Valmiki Ramayana and historically assigned to Valmiki, is an ancient Indian smṛiti work, also defined as a Sanskrit epic. The epic tells the story of Rama, an Ayodhya prince who lived in the Kosala kingdom. The epic recounts Rama's fourteen-year exile in the forest, which his father King Dasharatha ordered at the request of his stepmother Kaikeyi. The epic recounts Rama's fourteen-year exile in the forest, which his father King Dasharatha ordered at the request of his stepmother Kaikeyi. It also describes his travels through Indian forests with his brother Lakshmana and wife Sita, the war that ensued after Sita was abducted by Ravana, the king of Lanka, and Rama's eventual return to Ayodhya where he and Sita were crowned kings amid joy and celebration.

Although the text's original production date is unknown, researchers have estimated that its oldest stages date from the 7th to 4th centuries BCE and that its latter stages date from the 3rd century CE . One of the biggest ancient epics in the canon of literature, it is composed of seven kanda/chapters and around 24,000 verses, most of which are in the Shloka/Anustubh metre. It is under the Itihasa genre, which consists of purāvr̥tta accounts of historical events laced with lessons on the meaning of life. Aside from Buddhist and Jain adaptations, the Ramayana is available in numerous Indian languages. The Ramayana is also available in translations into Cambodian (Reamker), Indonesian, Filipino, Thai (Ramakien), Lao, Burmese, Nepali, Maldivian, Vietnamese, Tibeto-Chinese, and Malay.

The major characters of the Ramayana were essential to the cultural consciousness of many countries, both Buddhist and Hindu. The Ramayana had a significant influence on later Sanskrit poetry as well as Hindu life and culture. The value of virtue in a citizen's life and in the goals of forming a state from Sanskrit: Rāmarājya, a utopian state ruled by Rama or a functional society was its most significant moral effect. With the exception of Vietnam, the art and culture of the Indian subcontinent and southeast Asia have been greatly influenced by the Ramayana, one of the most significant literary masterpieces of ancient India. The tale established the precedent for the ensuing millennia of expansive compositions in the opulent language of Hindu temples and royal palaces. It has also served as an inspiration for a great deal of secondary literature written in a variety of languages. Notable examples include the 12th-century Tamil poet Kambar's Kambaramayanam, the 14th-century Kannada poet Narahari's Torave Ramayana, the 15th-century Bengali poet Krittibas Ojha's Krittivasi Ramayan, and the 16th-century Awadhi version of Ramcharitmanas, penned by Tulsidas.

There are additional depictions of Ramayanic scenes in paintings, terracotta, bronzes, and stone sculptures. Among these is the stone panel located in Nagarjunakonda, Andhra Pradesh, which portrays the meeting between Bharata and Rama at Chitrakuta in the third century CE.

From the eighth century onward, the Ramayana gained popularity in Southeast Asia and was portrayed in theater, dance, literature, and temple architecture. Dramatic renditions of the Ramayana tale, referred to as Ramlila, are performed today throughout India and in many other countries where Indians live abroad. The Ramayana has gained popularity as a medium for artistic expression in Indonesia, particularly in Java and Bali, where it is used in dance drama and shadow puppet shows. The Javanese traditional ballet, Sendratari Ramayana, is performed regularly in Yogyakarta's cultural center in the wayang orang style. For many years, the Prambanan Trimurti temple featured large casts in both indoor and outdoor performances. Ramayana dance dramas were also regularly presented in Balinese Hindu temples in Ubud and Uluwatu, where kecak dance performances incorporate scenes from the Ramayana. Wayang Kulit of Purwa and Wayang Wong, two Javanese Wayang, also take inspiration from the Ramayana.

The Puranas and the epics Mahabharata and Ramayana are examples of the Itihasa genre, which consists of stories about historical occurrences (purāṇvṛtta). The Ramayana is one of these stories. Teachings about the purposes of human life are also found in this genre. It shows the responsibilities of relationships by showcasing idealized sons, servants, brothers, husbands, wives, and kings. Similar to the Mahabharata, the Ramayana weaves philosophical and ethical ideas throughout the story allegorically to convey the wisdom of the ancient Hindu sages. Organization Approximately 24,000 couplet verses make up Valmiki's extant Ramayana, an epic poem that is split into seven kāndas (Bālakānda, Ayodhyakānda, Aranyakānda, Kiṣkindakānda, Sundarākānda, Yuddhakānda, Uttarakānda) and roughly 500 sargas. It is thought to be among the longest epic poems ever composed.

Academic estimates place the earliest stage of the text that is currently available between the seventh and fourth centuries BCE, with later phases reaching as late as the third century CE. [Bush 7] The oldest portions of the Ramayana are said to have originated in the early 7th century BCE, according to Robert P. Goldman (1984). [22] The story does not mention Buddhism, which was formed in the fifth century BC, or the importance of Magadha, which became well-known in the seventh century BC, hence the later sections cannot have been written any later than the sixth or fifth century BCE.

Additionally, Ayodhya is mentioned in the book as the capital of Kosala rather than Saketa, the city's later name, or Shravasti, the city's successor. [23] The Ramayana's action takes place before the Mahabharata's in terms of narrative time. According to Goldman and Sutherland Goldman (2022), the earliest known version of the Ramayana was written in 500 BCE. The oldest parts of the epic are found in books two through six, although the first and last books, Uttara Kanda and Balakanda, respectively, appear to have been added later.

## **2.1 The Author**

Based on the attribution in the text itself, Valmiki was a renowned poet who is hailed as the traditional author of the epic Ramayana. He is considered the first poet, Ādi Kavi, and the creator of the first epic poem, the Ramayana.

The Ramayana was composed of seven cantos (kandas) and 24,000 shlokas when it was first penned by Valmiki. With a word count of roughly 480,002, the Ramayana is roughly four times longer than the Iliad and one-quarter the length of the entire Mahabharata. The Ramayana narrates the tale of Prince Rama from Ayodhya in the Kingdom of Kosala, whose wife Sita is taken captive by Ravana, the Lankan demon king, also known as Rakshasa. Although the text's original production date is unknown, researchers have estimated that its oldest phases date from the eighth to fourth centuries BCE and that its final stages date from the third century CE. It has undergone a process, just like many classic epics. Valmiki was "recognized as a literary genius," according to British humorist Aubrey Menen, and as a result was viewed as "an outlaw," possibly due to his "philosophic scepticism," during the "Indian Enlightenment" era. Another source cites Valmiki as Rama's contemporary. Valmiki is referred to by Menen as "the first author in all history to bring himself into his own composition."

Pracheta, also called Sumali, was a Brahmin from Bhṛigu gotra who gave birth to Valmiki as Agni Sharma. His birthplace was close to the Gangetic plains in what is now Western Bihar. He is honored by having Valmiki Nagar named after him. Legend has it that he once conversed with the great sage Narada about his responsibilities. Agni Sharma was moved by Narada's comments and started chanting the word "Mara," which means "die," as a penance. The word eventually became "Rama," the name of the god Vishnu, as he carried out his penance for several years. Agni Sharma got the nickname Valmiki because of the enormous anthills that grew up around him. After being renamed Valmiki, Agni Sharma studied the scriptures under Narada and rose to become the most renowned ascetic, highly respected by all. There are additional legends that claim Valmiki was a thief before he became a rishi. According to the Nagara Khanda of the Skanda Purana, Valmiki was a loving son to his parents and was born as Lohajangha, a Brahmin, according to the part on the establishment of Mukhara Tirtha. He was faithful to his lovely wife, and the two of them were lovely. For the sake of providing for his family during the twelve long years that the Anarta region experienced a drought, Lohajangha began robbing persons he came across in the jungle. He encountered the Saptarishi, or the seven sages, during this incarnation and attempted to plunder them as well.

However, the wise elders felt sorry for him and exposed his foolishness. During his meditation, the Brahmin turned criminal became immersed in reciting a mantra given to him by Pulaha, to the point where anthills appeared all around his body. "You will become well-known in the world as Valmiki since you achieved great Siddhi seated within a Valmika (an anthill)," declared the sages after they heard the sound of the mantra emanating from the ant-hill and congratulated him. Valmiki would make his daily ablutions at the Ganges river. Bharadwaja, one of his disciples, was carrying his garments. They encountered the Tamasa Stream while traveling.

"Look, how clear is this water, like the mind of a good man!" Valmiki said to his disciple as he turned to face the stream. Today, I'll take a bath here." He noticed a crane couple coupling as he searched for a good spot to cross into the stream. Valmiki was ecstatic to see the contented birds. The male bird instantly perished after being struck by an arrow. Its mate, overcome with grief, cried out in pain and passed away from shock. This pathetic scene melted Valmiki's heart. He glanced around to see who had fired, to discover out who had shot the bird, he turned to look around. Nearby, he noticed a hunter brandishing a bow and arrows. Valmiki grew enraged. His mouth parted and he let out a cry.

•mā niṣāda pratiṣṭhā tvamagamaḥ śāśvatīḥ samāh yat krauñcamithunādekam avadhih  
kāmamohitam

•You will find no rest for the long years of Eternity For you killed a bird in love and unsuspecting

This couplet, which appeared out of nowhere out of Valmiki's anguish and wrath, is regarded as the first shloka in Sanskrit literature. Later, Valmiki used the same meter to write the complete Ramayana. The Ramayana is regarded as the first kavya (poem), and Valmiki is honored as Adi Kavi (the first poet). This couplet, which appeared out of nowhere out of Valmiki's anguish and wrath, is regarded as the first shloka in Sanskrit literature. Later, Valmiki used the same meter to write the complete Ramayana. The Ramayana is regarded as the first kavya (poem), and Valmiki is honored as Adi Kavi (the first poet).

The final chapter of the epic Ramayana, Uttarakānda, features a significant role for Valmiki. Valmiki may not have been the author of the Uttarakānda at first. Scholars Robert and Sally Goldman, for instance, have noted that: "Vālmīki narrates the narrative only indirectly, placing it in the mouths of other figures such as Agastya. Much of the narrative focuses on figures other than Rama." [19] Sesha Ramayana is thought to have been the source of it [citation needed]. Rama sent Sita into the jungle, so the tradition goes. After seeking safety in the ashram of Sage Valmiki, Sita gives birth to twin boys, Lava and Kusha. The first two people Valmiki taught the Ramayana to were Lava and Kusha. The epic's Bala Kanda also relates the tale of Valmiki telling Lava and Kusha—who later become his disciples—the story of the Ramayana.

## **2.2 Feminist theoretical framework**

Feminism is becoming recognized as a philosophy of social construct in modern society. Finding female characters in literature who defy society standards and reject the constraints of marginalised female stereotypes and roles is frequently difficult. Women are depicted in the epic

as objects of subordination, in keeping with the patriarchal nature that rules it. As the text presents a false empowerment of women, who ultimately succumb to common archetypes accustomed to women in literature, women are portrayed in The Ramayana as helpless objects that fall prey to men's manipulation. This hierarchy of gender institutionalised male dominance amid female inferiority. The women in The Ramayana fight against the patriarchal society and seek a means to become dynamic figures of authority.

In The Ramayana, the women fight against the institutionalised patriarchy and seek to achieve dynamic forms of power that will allow them to represent independent authority. Although women seem powerful in Valmiki's The Ramayana, in the end they are only tools used to satisfy men's needs. It cannot be reliably dated because, like many classic epics, it has undergone a process of interpolations and redactions.

## **2.3 Simone de Beauvoir's feminist theory**

The feminist theory used here is by Simone de Beauvoir who was a prominent French existentialist philosopher, writer, and feminist theorist whose work significantly contributed to feminist theory. One of her most influential works is "The Second Sex" (Le Deuxième Sexe), published in 1949. This groundbreaking book is considered a foundational text of modern feminism and offers a comprehensive analysis of women's oppression and their struggle for liberation. De Beauvoir's feminist theory revolves around the concept of "woman as other." She argues that women have historically been defined and treated as the "other" in relation to men, thereby being subjected to social, economic, and political inequality. De Beauvoir contends that the cultural construction of woman as the "second sex" has led to women being viewed as inferior and marginalized in society.

Some of the key aspects of Simone de Beauvoir's feminist theory are the following

1. **The Myth of Womanhood:** De Beauvoir critiques essentialist notions of femininity and challenges the idea of a universal "feminine essence." She argues that gender roles and stereotypes are socially constructed and perpetuated through cultural norms and institutions.
2. **Existential Freedom:** Building upon existentialist philosophy, De Beauvoir emphasizes the importance of individual agency and freedom. She asserts that women must assert their existential freedom by challenging oppressive structures and defining themselves on their own terms.

3. **The Problem of Patriarchy:** De Beauvoir analyzes how patriarchy operates as a system of domination and control, relegating women to subordinate roles. She explores how patriarchal norms perpetuate inequality and limit women's opportunities for self-realization.
4. **Sexuality and Reproduction:** De Beauvoir discusses how women's sexuality and reproductive capacity have been historically exploited and controlled by patriarchal society. She advocates for women's autonomy over their bodies and reproductive choices.
5. **Ethics of Liberation:** De Beauvoir's feminism is characterized by an ethics of liberation, advocating for collective action and solidarity among women to challenge systemic oppression and achieve gender equality.

Simone de Beauvoir's feminist theory has had a profound impact on subsequent generations of feminist thinkers and activists. Her critique of patriarchy and emphasis on women's autonomy continue to inform contemporary feminist discourse and efforts to dismantle gender-based oppression.

Simone de Beauvoir's feminist theory, as articulated primarily in her landmark work "The Second Sex" (*Le Deuxième Sexe*), is a complex and comprehensive analysis of women's oppression and the existential and social conditions that shape women's experiences. Here are key elements of Beauvoir's feminist theory in detail:

1. **The Problem of Otherness:** Central to Beauvoir's analysis is the concept of "woman as other." She argues that throughout history, women have been defined and treated as the "second sex," positioned in relation to men as the "other." This status of otherness leads to women being viewed as secondary, inferior, and subordinate in society. Beauvoir critiques the myth of femininity and challenges essentialist notions of gender that reduce women to stereotypes.
2. **Historical and Cultural Analysis:** Beauvoir examines the historical and cultural construction of gender roles, showing how women's identities and opportunities have been shaped by societal norms, traditions, and institutions. She traces the evolution of patriarchy and its impact on women's lives, highlighting how women's autonomy and agency have been systematically restricted.
3. **Existentialism and Freedom:** Beauvoir's feminist theory is deeply influenced by existentialist philosophy, particularly the idea of existential freedom. She argues that women, like men, possess the capacity for freedom and self-determination. However, women have been denied genuine freedom due to societal constraints and gender-based expectations. Beauvoir calls for women to assert their existential freedom by rejecting imposed roles and defining themselves autonomously.

4. Sexuality and Objectification: Beauvoir analyzes how women's sexuality has been objectified and commodified within patriarchal societies. She critiques the male gaze and the ways in which women's bodies have been used for the pleasure and domination of men. Beauvoir emphasizes the importance of women reclaiming their bodies and sexual agency as a means of liberation.

5. Ethics of Ambiguity: Beauvoir's ethics are grounded in ambiguity, reflecting the complexities of human existence. She acknowledges the contradictions and ambiguities inherent in women's experiences, rejecting simplistic solutions or essentialist views. Beauvoir advocates for a nuanced understanding of gender that recognizes diversity and individuality among women.

6. Call to Action: Beauvoir's feminist theory is not merely a philosophical critique but also a call to action. She urges women to unite in solidarity to challenge patriarchal structures and demand social, political, and economic equality. Beauvoir emphasizes the importance of collective struggle and resistance against oppression.

7. Legacy and Impact: Simone de Beauvoir's feminist theory has had a profound impact on the development of feminist thought and activism. Her emphasis on women's agency, the critique of patriarchal systems, and the exploration of gender as a social construct continue to inform contemporary feminist scholarship. Beauvoir's work remains relevant for understanding the complexities of gender inequality and the ongoing struggle for women's liberation.

In a nutshell, Simone de Beauvoir's feminist theory provides a rich and nuanced analysis of women's oppression within patriarchal societies. Her work challenges essentialist views of gender, emphasizes women's existential freedom, and calls for collective action to dismantle systemic inequalities.

## **2.4 Femininity in 5th Century BCE**

The portrayal of the female characters in the epic is startling as they are displayed as submissive and obedient wives, mothers and daughters, who aren't supposed to have a mind of their own, thus dictated by the male members. Worshipping husbands as god epitomises unequal relationships that are glorified and set as a precedent instead of questioning the inequality.

These ideas tacitly construct the foundation of our society. If the foundation is so unequal, how can the pyramid be equal? These events mirror to us the reality of the society that breathes patriarchy. Notwithstanding the fact that the Ramayana is an eternal epic that has been engraved in the hearts of thousands, however, it is daft to still see reflections of relevance in a postmodern



society. The prescription of an ideal woman reiterated and reinforced throughout is irrelevant. It is more of an imposition than prescription.

The underlying concern with the display of Ramayana in contemporary times is its impact. The society is inherently patriarchal. The depiction of such submissive character in a time where women are challenging and smashing the shackles of patriarchy is not just regressive but it also defeats the purpose. Families and the patriarchs impose their problematic and unjust notions on a woman who they want to mirror Sita or preach the Naari dharm. A woman who already has to fight even for her breath is now put in a conflicting situation where her views are at odds with the family values.

Instead of healing the wounds etched in the hearts of Sita, she is asked to prove her chastity in front of everyone. A victim who strongly resists her perpetrator is brought under surveillance. Ram is never questioned. This again reinforces that it is the woman only who is questioned, regulated and restrained while a man can do anything they want.

Her miseries are aggravated. Her fight is exasperated. The problem confronting us is the portrayal of Sita as the only ideal woman who is an idol of all the virtues. Idealism is subjective, objectifying and appareling it with unequal patriarchal notions is a victory for the society, where a woman is again treated as a puppet. What is ideal is to be decided by an individual woman. Why are there no definitions for an ideal man? A woman can't wear ire, she has to be docile and poignant. This is preached as normal in society and makes any woman deviant of the normal worthy of backlash. This is unjust.

# **Chapter 3**

## **Ayodhya**

This chapter analyses the cantos (chapters) that tell the tale of invisibility of women characters, belonging to Ayodhya in Valmiki Ramayana. Ramayana the epic brings to light different kinds of women and their sufferings. Beginning with Sita who is married to the hero of the epic. She's the worst sufferer in the epic, as most of the important events revolve around her. She is shown as a wife who is constantly conforming to the norms of the society that guarantee a woman's position as an ideal wife figure. Sita's sister Urmila on the other hand is a character whose sufferings and sacrifices went completely unnoticed, unlike Sita. Urmila was kept forever under the shadows, and had to live the life of a prisoner, caged in the palace. Then we have Kaikeyi, a character who is villainized throughout the epic, for the mere reason of not being selfless. ( a quality that is not generally associated with stereotypical women). Modern women can strongly relate with Kaikeyi's situation (a woman belonging to the 5th century BCE), as, till date an opinionated woman who likes to control her own life and desires happiness, is questioned by the patriarchal society. A woman wanting to be incharge of her own happiness is straightaway categorised as selfish or even wicked. Her character puts the male desire of wanting a stereotypically selfless woman under scrutiny. Apart from these women characters, there is Kausalya who is depicted as a woman of great wisdom, virtue and compassion. She embodies the qualities of a devoted mother and wife.

### **3.1 Sacrifice and Acceptance**

#### **Sita**

Sita is the epitome of womanhood. She is an emotional pillar to her father in childhood and her husband after marriage. She is an ambassador of the values of Ayodhya during her captivity and is rewarded with rejection by her husband for all her struggles. This is the story of her emotional development from a love-struck teenager to an empty-nested single mother.

She is known for her self-sacrifice, courage, dedication and purity. Sita is raised as the adopted daughter of King Janaka of Videha while being described as the daughter of Bhūmi (the earth). In a swayamvara, Sita chooses Rama, the prince of Ayodhya, as her spouse while she is young. She follows her husband to his kingdom after the swayamvara, but she ultimately decides to go with him and her brother-in-law Lakshmana when he is exiled. The Rakshasa king of Lanka, Ravana, kidnaps her from the Dandaka jungle where the three has settled after their banishment. She is held captive in Ashoka Vatika's garden in Lanka until Rama, who kills her kidnapper, comes to her aid. In some versions of the epic, after the conflict, Rama requires Sita to prove her chastity by undergoing Agni Pariksha, an ordeal of fire, before accepting her. This causes Lakshmana, Rama's brother, to get enraged with him for the first time. In some versions of the

story, while the actual Sita hides in the fire, Agni creates an illusion known as Maya Sita, who takes Sita's place and is captured by Ravana. Scriptures also state that Vedavati, a woman Ravana attempts to molest, was her former birth.

Prior to Valmiki's Ramayana, a female fertility goddess known as Sita existed, although she was eclipsed by more well-known fertility goddesses. The Ramayana states that Sita was found while Janaka was plowing in a ditch. Given that Janaka was a monarch, plowing was probably done as part of a ceremonial to maintain the land's fertility. Sita is regarded as the offspring of Mother Earth, born out of the marriage of the king and the land. Sita is the embodiment of all that is good, abundant, and fertile on Earth.

•Canto XXVII “And lead me, O my hero, hence- I know not sin-with confidence. Whate'er his lot, 'tis far more sweet To follow still a husband's feet Than in rich palaces to lie, Or roam at pleasure through the sky. My mother and my sire have taught What duty bids, and trained each thought, Nor have I now mine ear to turn The duties of a wife to learn. I'll seek with thee the woodland dell And pathless wild where no men dwell”

Sita in her first speech in Ramayana, addresses her husband and tells him that she can leave all the luxuries of the palace and live in the woods with him during the fourteen years of exile. She explains that, as a wife it is her duty to accompany her husband in good as well as bad times, and she says that it is also what her parents have taught her. It makes a clear indication towards the social norms that existed during the 5th century BCE, (which is approximately 2500 years ago) . These norms still exist, so that women can be tamed by the patriarchal society. There are some unspoken rules that are laid down by the society, following which make a woman ideal in the eyes of men in the society, who want to control the women folk forever. Hence there has always been a part of women in society who want to prove themselves as “good women” by conforming to the norms that never allow them to free themselves from the shackles of male dominance .

•Canto IX.“And there shall blissful hours be spent

In woods with honey redolent. In forest shades thy mighty arm Would keep a stranger's life from harm, And how shall Sítá think of fear When thou, O glorious lord, art near?”

In this canto Sita is encouraging her husband Rama , by showing her selfless dedication and trust in him. These lines make it clear that Sita is trying to conform to the gender stereotype, by adapting a typically feminine trait of being submissive or dependent upon her husband, laying all her trust on Rama to become her saviour in the woods, at which he failed later.

•Canto XLIX. Sitas abduction

“O all ye Gods who love this ground

Where trees of every leaf abound, Tell Ráma I am stolen hence, I pray you all with reverence. On all the living things beside That these dark boughs and converts hide, Ye flocks of birds, ye troops of deer, I call on you my prayer to hear. All ye to Ráma's ear proclaim That Rávan tears away his dame With forceful arms, his darling wife, Dearer to Ráma than his life. O, if he knew I dwelt in hell, My mighty lord, I know full well, Would bring me, conqueror, back to-day, Though Yáma's self reclaimed his prey.”

This canto is reflective of the helplessness of Sita, who had come to reside in the woods counting on her husband.

Then as Sita is taken to Lanka in the flying chariot of Ravana, she says:

Canto LIII “Ah, glorious strength indeed is thine, Thou meanest of thy giant line, Whose courage dared to tell thy name

And conquer in the fight a dame. Does the vile deed that thou hast done Cause thee no shame, thou wicked one- A woman from her home to rend When none was near his aid to lend? Through all the worlds, O giant King, The tidings of this deed will ring, This deed in law and honour's spite By one who claims a hero's might. Shame on thy boasted valour, shame! Thy prowess is an empty name”

This canto is reflective of the weapon that women have been using throughout, which is questioning a man's morale, for having his ways with a woman in the absence of her husband. Women throughout history have been kept confined in the households and very little attention has been paid to teach them how to protect themselves/ self defence.

•Canto XV. Sítá. Sita Fair as Kailása white with snow He saw a palace flash and glow, A crystal pavement gem-inlaid, And coral steps and colonnade, And glittering towers that kissed the skies, Whose dazzling splendour charmed his eyes. There pallid, with neglected dress,

Watched close by fiend and giantess, Her sweet face thin with constant flow Of tears, with fasting and with woe;

The above canto is reflective of Sita's beauty as well as the trouble it came along with. The amount of suppression that she had to endure, despite being a queen, puts a big question mark on the visibility of other lay women of the society.

•Canto XIX. Then o'er the lady's soul and frame A sudden fear and trembling came, When, glowing in his youthful pride, She saw the monarch by her side. Silent she sat, her eyes depressed, Her soft arms folded o'er her breast, And, all she could, her beauties screened From the bold gazes of the fiend.

There where the wild she-demons kept Their watch around, she sighed and wept. Then, like a severed bough, she lay Prone on the bare earth in dismay. The while her thoughts on love's fleet wings Flew to her lord the best of kings. She fell upon the ground, and there Lay struggling with her wild despair, Sad as a lady born again To misery and woe and pain, Now doomed to grief and low estate, Once noble fair and delicate.

•Canto XXI. She thought upon her lord and sighed, And thus in gentle tones replied:

"Beseems thee not, O King, to woo A matron, to her husband true. Thus vainly one might hope by sin And evil deeds success to win. Shall I, so highly born, disgrace

My husband's house, my royal race?

•Canto XXIV. Still with reproaches rough and rude Those fiends the gentle queen pursued:

"What! can so fair a life displease, To dwell with him in joyous ease? Dwell in his bowers a happy queen In silk and gold and jewels' sheen? Still must thy woman fancy cling To Ráma and reject our king? Die in thy folly, or forget That wretched wandering anchoret. Come, Sítá, in luxurious bowers Spend with our lord thy happy hours; The mighty lord who makes his own The treasures of the worlds o'erthrown."

Then, as a tear bedewed her eye,

The hapless lady made reply: "I loathe, with heart and soul detest The shameful life your words suggest. Eat, if you will, this mortal frame: My soul rejects the sin and shame. A homeless wanderer though he be, In him my lord, my life I see, And, till my earthly days be done, Will cling to great Ikshváku's son."

•Canto XXV. On the bare earth the lady sank, And trembling from their presence shrank Like a strayed fawn, when night is dark, And hungry wolves around her bark.

Then to a shady tree she crept,

And thought upon her lord and wept. By fear and bitter woe oppressed She bathed the beauties of her breast With her hot tears' incessant flow, And found no respite from her woe.

•Canto XXVI. "I Ráma's wife, on that sad day, By Rávan's arm was borne away, Seized, while I sat and feared no ill, By him who wears each form at will. A helpless captive, left forlorn To demons' threats and taunts and scorn, Here for my lord I weep and sigh, And worn with woe would gladly die. For what is life to me afar From Ráma of the mighty car? The robber in his

fruitless sin Would hope his captive's love to win. My meaner foot shall never touch The demon whom I loathe so much.

•Canto XXXII. Her eyes the Maithil lady raised And on the monkey speaker gazed. She looked, and trembling at the sight Wept bitter tears in wild affright. She shrank a while with fear distraught, Then, nerved again, the lady thought: "Is this a dream mine eyes have seen, This creature, by our laws unclean? O, may the Gods keep Ráma, still, And Lakshman, and my sire, from ill!

•Canto XXXVII. "Thou bringest me," she cried again, "A mingled draught of bliss and pain: Bliss, that he wears me in his heart, Pain, that he wakes and weeps apart, O, see how Fate is king of all, Now lifts us high, now bids us fall, And leads a captive bound with cord The meanest slave, the proudest lord, Thus even now Fate's stern decree Has struck with grief my lord and me. Say, how shall Ráma reach the shore Of sorrow's waves that rise and roar.

•Canto XXXVII. Swift rose before her startled eyes The Vánar in his native size, Like Mandar's hill or Meru's height, Encircled with a blaze of light. "O come," he cried, "thy fears dispel, Nor doubt that I will bear thee well. Come, in my strength and care confide, And sit in joy by Ráma's side."

•Canto XXXII. Again her eyes with tears o'erflowed: She gazed upon the head he showed, Gazed on the bow so famed of yore. The glorious bow which Ráma bore. She gazed upon his cheek and brows, The eyes of her beloved spouse; His lips, the lustre of his hair, The priceless gem that glittered there. The features of her lord she knew. And, pierced with anguish at the view, She lifted up her voice and cried: "Kaikeyí, art thou satisfied? Now all thy longings are fulfilled; The joy of Raghu's race is killed.

Great trembling seized her frame, and she

Fell like a stricken plantain tree.

As lie the dead she lay; at length Slowly regaining sense and strength, On the dear head she fixed her eye And cried with very bitter cry: "Ah, when thy cold dead cheek I view, My hero, I am murdered too. Then first a faithful woman's eyes See sorrow, when her husband dies. When thou, my lord, wast nigh to save, Some stealthy hand thy death wound gave. Thou art not dead: rise, hero, rise; Long life was thine, as spake the wise

•Canto XLVIII. Sítá's Lament.

"False are they all, proved false to-day, The prophets of my fortune, they Who in the tranquil time of old A blessed life for me foretold, Predicting I should never know A childless dame's, a widow's woe, False are they all, their words are vain, For thou, my lord and life, art slain. False was the priest and vain his lore Who blessed me in those days of yore By Ráma's side in bliss to reign: For thou, my lord and life, art slain. They hailed me happy from my birth, Proud empress of the lord of earth.

•Canto CXVII. Sítá's Disgrace.

He saw her trembling by his side, And looked upon her face and cried: "Lady, at length my task is done, And thou, the prize of war, art won, This arm my glory has retrieved, And all that man might do achieved; The insulting foe in battle slain And cleared mine honour from its stain. This day has made my name renowned

And with success my labour crowned.

•Canto CXVIII. Struck down with overwhelming shame She shrank within her trembling frame. Each word of Ráma's like a dart Had pierced the lady to the heart; And from her sweet eyes unrestrained The torrent of her sorrows, rained. Her weeping eyes at length she dried, And thus mid choking sobs replied: "Canst thou, a high-born prince, dismiss A high-born dame with speech like this? Such words befit the meanest hind, Not princely birth and generous mind, By all my virtuous life I swear I am not what thy words declare.

The above cantos explain the life of difficulties that Sita had to endure and her journey of Invisibility. These cantos reflect how women have been subjugated throughout history despite being selfless. Rama and Sita return to Ayodhya after Sita demonstrates her purity, and they are anointed as king and queen there. When a man starts doubting Sita's loyalty, Rama sends her into the forest close to the sage Valmiki's ashram to establish Sita's innocence and preserve both his and the kingdom's honour. Years later, after being freed from a harsh environment and as proof of her innocence, Sita returns to the womb of her mother, the Earth, for release from a cruel world and as a testimony of her purity, after she reunites her two sons Kusha and Lava with their father Rama.

## Kaikeyi

Kaikeyi's story in the Ramayana portrays complex themes of familial relationships, political intrigue, and the consequences of personal desires. Kaikeyi was born to King Ashvapati of Kekeya shortly before her mother was exiled. She was raised by her only mother figure being her hunchbacked nursemaid, Manthara. She is raised with seven brothers, including her twin, Yudhājit. Her character undergoes significant suffering and experiences a form of invisibilization within the royal court, leading to profound consequences for herself and others. Here's a closer look at Kaikeyi's sufferings and invisibilization in the Ramayana:



- Desire for Boons:** Kaikeyi's troubles begin when she reminds King Dasharatha of two boons he had promised her earlier in their marriage. Due to her devotion and service to him during a battle, Dasharatha had promised to grant her two boons at a later time. However, when the time comes for Kaikeyi to claim these boons, her desires lead to a series of events that impact the entire kingdom.

- Political Manipulation:** Kaikeyi's maid, Manthara, plays a crucial role in Kaikeyi's suffering by stoking Kaikeyi's fears and ambitions. Manthara manipulates Kaikeyi into believing that her position and her son Bharata's future are threatened by Rama's imminent coronation. This manipulation ultimately leads Kaikeyi to demand that Dasharatha banish Rama and crown Bharata instead.

- Isolation and Regret:** After Kaikeyi's demands result in Rama's exile and Dasharatha's subsequent death from heartbreak, Kaikeyi faces isolation and deep regret. She becomes ostracized by the royal court and society, as her actions are seen as selfish and detrimental to the kingdom. Kaikeyi's suffering intensifies as she grapples with the consequences of her decisions.

- Redemption and Reconciliation:**

Despite being initially portrayed as a negative character due to her role in Rama's exile, Kaikeyi undergoes a transformation towards the end of the Ramayana. When Bharata confronts her upon learning the truth about Rama's exile, Kaikeyi feels immense remorse and begs Bharata for forgiveness. Bharata, in turn, forgives his mother and seeks to fulfill Rama's wishes during his exile.

Kaikeyi's sufferings and invisibilization highlight the complexities of human desires, familial responsibilities, and the consequences of rash decisions. Her story serves as a cautionary tale about the impact of unchecked ambitions and the importance of introspection and redemption. Ultimately, Kaikeyi's character arc in the Ramayana demonstrates the potential for growth and transformation even amidst profound suffering and societal ostracism.

- Canto IX.**As fury lit Kaikeyf's eyes She spoke with long and burning sighs: "This day my son enthroned shall see, And Ráma to the woods shall flee. But tell me, damsel, if thou can, A certain way, a skilful plan That Bharat may the empire gain, And Ráma's hopes be nursed in vain."

- Well pleased the grateful monarch sware To grant thy first and second prayer. Thou for no favour then wouldst sue, The gifts reserved for season due; And he, thy high-souled lord, agreed To give the boons when thou shouldst need.

•No hump-back maid in all the earth, For wise resolve, can match thy worth. Thou art alone with constant zeal Devoted to thy lady's weal.

Dear girl, without thy faithful aid I had not marked the plot he laid.

The cantos above describe kaikeyi's plot for sending Rama to the woods, with Manthara by her side. Both the women supported each other. Manthara gave Kaikeyi the plan that would fulfill her dream of seeing her son become the next ruler of Ayodhya. And in return Kaikeyi financially supported her and gave her a lavish lifestyle.

In the canto mentioned below Kaikeyi is being questioned about her decision. Since anything that a woman did for her own happiness was considered selfish and wrong. (Valmiki 472)

Canto XXXV. Wild with the rage he could not calm, Sumantra, grinding palm on palm, His head in quick impatience shook, And sighed with woe he could not brook. He gnashed his teeth, his eyes were red, From his changed face the colour fled. In rage and grief that knew no law, The temper of the king he saw. With his word-arrows swift and keen He shook the bosom of the queen. With scorn, as though its lightning stroke Would blast her body, thus he spoke: "Thou, who, of no dread sin afraid, Hast Daśaratha's self betrayed, Lord of the world, whose might sustains Each thing that moves or fixed remains, What direr crime is left thee now? Death to thy lord and house art thou, Whose cruel deeds the king distress, Mahendra's peer in mightiness, Firm as the mountain's rooted steep, Enduring as the Ocean's deep.

•Canto LXXIII. But when he heard the queen relate His brothers' doom, his father's fate, Thus Bharat to his mother said With burning grief disquieted: "Alas, what boots it now to reign, Struck down by grief and well-nigh slain? Ah, both are gone, my sire, and he Who was a second sire to me. Grief upon grief thy hand has made, And salt upon gashes laid: For my dear sire has died through thee, And Rāma roams a devotee. Thou camest like the night of Fate

This royal house to devastate. Unwitting ill, my hapless sire Placed in his bosom coals of fire,(Valmiki 636)

Kaikeyi was repeatedly being put to shame and being asked why she took such a decision. However according to a legend it is stated that Narada the messenger between the three worlds, sent Kaikeyi a message that she has to do the deed of sending Rama to the woods for the great deed that awaits him, even if it costs it reputation as a queen/ mother. Kaikeyi had been cursed by a sage, when she was a child. His curse comes true, for when Kaikeyi insists that Rama be banished, the people of Ayodhya and, even her own son, begin to hate her and revile her.

Urmila

The character that has been most ignored or kept under the shadows is that of Urmila. She was caged in the palace throughout her life. She never received her parents' love as much as Sita, nor did she experience marital bliss. Although she was the biological daughter unlike Sita who was found in the soil, her father Janaka the king of Mithila arranged for a bow breaking ceremony for the marriage of his beloved daughter Sita. Whereas Urmila was given away in the form of (dana) just as one would donate a maid servant. Sita took the central stage and suffered in a way that the world remembers till date, whereas Urmila's sufferings went completely unnoticed. She was forever kept under the shadows, and remained as an invisibilized being throughout her life. Lastly her identity comes from the relationship that she shares with others and does not have an identity of her own. The fact that there is no chapter specially dedicated to Urmila in the entire Valmiki Ramayana proves it. Urmila's name is mentioned only in Lakshmana's speeches in Ramayana.

In the Ramayana, there is a touching and emotional scene where Lakshmana speaks to his wife Urmila before leaving for the fourteen-year exile with his brother Rama and sister-in-law Sita. This conversation is found in the Uttara Kanda of the Ramayana.

**Lakshmana's Promise and Concern:** Lakshmana expresses his deep love and concern for Urmila. He promises to fulfill his duties to Rama and Sita during their exile and assures Urmila that he will always protect them. Lakshmana understands the pain of leaving Urmila behind and assures her that he will return safely after fulfilling his responsibilities.

**Lakshmana's Request to Urmila:** Lakshmana requests Urmila to take care of their parents and uphold her duties as a daughter-in-law in his absence. He entrusts Urmila with the responsibility of looking after their household and assures her that he will constantly think of her during his exile.

**Urmila's Selfless Response:** Urmila, demonstrating her immense love and sacrifice, selflessly supports Lakshmana's decision to accompany Rama and Sita into exile. Despite her own desire to be with Lakshmana, Urmila understands the importance of duty and willingly accepts her role as a supportive wife.

**Urmila's Sleep:** As a remarkable display of devotion, Urmila requests a unique boon from Lakshmana. She asks him to transfer the sleep that he would have otherwise experienced during the exile to her. By doing so, Urmila ensures that Lakshmana can remain vigilant and focused on protecting Rama and Sita without the need for rest.

**Lakshmana's Gratitude:** Lakshmana is deeply moved by Urmila's request and grants her boon. He expresses his gratitude for having such a virtuous and understanding wife like Urmila. Despite the emotional challenges, Lakshmana departs with a heavy heart, knowing that Urmila will patiently await his return.

This conversation between Lakshmana and Urmila highlights the themes of duty, sacrifice, and unconditional love portrayed throughout the Ramayana. It showcases the profound bond between husband and wife, as well as the strength of character and selflessness exemplified by Urmila's extraordinary gesture.

Lakshmana, the third son of King Dasharatha, was married to Urmila. Chandraketu and Angada were their two sons. It is said of her that she has the same devotion to Sita as Lakshmana had to Rama. Urmila was prepared to go with Lakshmana when he joined Rama and Sita in exile, but he hesitated and asked her to remain in Ayodhya to look after his elderly parents. A tradition states that Urmila slept nonstop for fourteen years. Her spouse is said to have never slept during these fourteen years of banishment in order to keep his brother and sister-in-law safe. As Lakshmana saw the goddess Nidra as Rama and Sita were sleeping on the first night of their banishment, he asked her to grant him the blessing of not needing sleep.

The goddess inquired if she could fulfil his request, but if she did, someone else would have to fall asleep in his stead. Is it possible for Lakshmana's wife to sleep instead of him? Nidra asked Urmila about it after she heard this, and she gladly took on the assignment. This unique offering, known as Urmila Nidra, is what makes Urmila famous. Another version claims that Urmila was clothed like a queen when Lakshmana arrived to tell her of his choice to accompany Rama in his exile. She infuriated Lakshmana, who likened her to Kaikeyi. It is said that Lakshmana purposefully provoked her in order to absolve himself of the guilt of abandoning her in order to care for her brother and sister-in-law.

Sita said that hundreds of her would not be able to equal Urmila's sacrifice after learning of this.

# **Chapter 4**

## **Lanka**

The cantos selected in this chapter describe the story of Lanka's invisible women characters, from Valmiki Ramayana.

The Lanka mentioned in the Ramayana (also known as Ravana's Lanka) and the Hindu Texts, which are still in existence, is said to represent a sizable island nation in the Indian Ocean. According to studies, the Kashyapa I of Anuradhapura erected the Palace of Ravana at Sigiriya. The tale states that the kingdom's capital was situated between plateaus and woodlands. According to certain academics, the Sri Lankan literature Mahavamsa, written in the fifth century, explicitly states that it was Sri Lanka. That being said, the Ramayana makes it abundantly apparent that mainland India was located 100 Yojanas (or around 1213 kilometers or 753.72 miles) distant from Ravana's Lanka.

Based on these interpretations, some academics have concluded that Lanka was situated at the intersection of the Indian Prime Meridian and the Equator. As a result, this island would be located more than 160 km (100 mi) southwest of Sri Lanka as it is today. The most authentic version of Valmiki's Ramayana that now exists also proposes that the western Indian Ocean is where Ravana's Lanka is located. It suggests that, in the western Indian Ocean, Lanka was situated amid a conglomeration of sizable island states, buried mountains, and drowned plateaus. Since the 19th century, many academics have conjectured that, prior to being buried in the Indian Ocean, Ravana's Lanka may have been in the region where the Maldives originally stood as a tall mountain. Madagascar and Sumatra have also been proposed as potential locations.

Even by today's standards, the description of Lanka, the capital of Ravana, Lankapuri, looks superhuman. The main fortress of Ravana, or the central palace complex, was a vast cluster of structures measuring more than one yojana (13 km or 8 mi) in height, one yojana in length, and half a yojana in breadth. On top of a huge mountain range on the island known as the Trikuta Mountain (Trikonamalai in Tamil and Trikomale in English, where Ravan constructed a Shiva temple), lay Ravan's capital city of Lanka, which was centered around his fortress.

### **4.1 Women, society and Righteousness**

## Ahalya

The story of Ahalya in the Ramayana is a famous episode that illustrates themes of virtue, deception, and redemption. Ahalya is the wife of the sage Gautama, known for his great asceticism and spiritual practices. Here is a summary of Ahalya's story as depicted in the Ramayana:

**Ahalya's Birth:** Ahalya is said to have been created by the creator god Brahma himself. She is described as extraordinarily beautiful and virtuous.

**Deception by Indra:** Indra, the king of the gods, becomes infatuated with Ahalya due to her beauty. Desiring her, Indra deceives Gautama by assuming the form of the sage when Gautama is away. Disguised as Gautama, Indra approaches Ahalya and seduces her.

**Curse by Gautama:** When Gautama returns and realizes what has transpired, he curses both Indra and Ahalya. Indra is cursed with a thousand genital organs (symbolic of impurity and lust), while Ahalya is cursed to become invisible to all beings and remain in a stone-like state until she is liberated by Rama's touch.

**Redemption by Rama:** Years later, during Rama's exile in the forest, he and his brother Lakshmana come across Gautama's hermitage. Gautama informs Rama about the incident involving Ahalya and explains that only Rama's touch can restore Ahalya to her original form. Rama then arrives at the stone where Ahalya is residing and touches it with his foot. Instantly, Ahalya is freed from her curse and restored to her true self. Overjoyed and grateful, Ahalya pays homage to Rama and Gautama.

The story of Ahalya in the Ramayana is often interpreted as a cautionary tale against lust, deception, and the consequences of straying from the path of virtue. Ahalya's redemption through Rama's touch highlights the belief in the power of divine grace and the possibility of spiritual renewal after repentance. Ahalya's story serves as a base to explain how important it was for a woman to maintain her chastity. Women wouldn't be spared even if it was a man's fault. Which is true in Ahalya's story as she mistook disguised Indra as her husband.

Canto XLVIII. The Gods who dwell above the sky. Here with Ahalyá at his side His fervid task the ascetic plied. Years fled in thousands. On a day It chanced the saint had gone away, When Town-destroying Indra came, And saw the beauty of the dame. The sage's form the God endued, And thus the fair Ahalyá wooed: "Love, sweet! should brook no dull delay But snatch the moments when he may." She knew him in the saint's disguise, Lord Indra of the Thousand Eyes, But touched by love's unholy fire, She yielded to the God's desire.

"Now, Lord of Gods!" she whispered, "flee, From Gautam save thyself and me." Trembling with doubt and wild with dread Lord Indra from the cottage fled; But fleeing in the grove he met The home-returning anchorite, Whose wrath the Gods and fiends would shun, Such power his fervent rites had won. Fresh from the lustral flood he came, In splendour like the burning flame, With fuel for his sacred rites, And grass, the best of eremites. The Lord of Gods was sad of cheer To see the mighty saint so near, And when the holy hermit spied In hermit's garb the Thousand-eyed, He knew the whole, his fury broke Forth on the sinner as he spoke: "Because my form thou hast assumed, And wrought this folly, thou art doomed, For this my curse to thee shall cling, Henceforth a sad and sexless thing."

### Surpanakha

She was the daughter of the rakshasi Kaikeshi and the sage Vishrava, and the sister of Lanka's ruler, Ravana. Although minor in the original epic, Surpanakha plays a vital part. As Surpanakha herself is the driving force behind the events that took place in the epic, that led to Ravana's defeat. The fight between Rama and Ravana was initiated by Surpanakha, although due to no fault of hers. The cantos listed below describe her predicament in the epic.

•Canto XVIII. On her ensnared in Káma's net His eyes the royal Ráma set, And thus, her passion to beguile, Addressed her with a gentle smile:

"I have a wife: behold her here, My Sítá ever true and dear: And one like thee will never brook Upon a rival spouse to look. But there my brother Lakshman stands: Unchained is he by nuptial bands: A youth heroic, loved of all, Gracious and gallant, fair and tall. With winning looks, most nobly bred, Unmatched till now, he longs to wed. Meet to enjoy thy youthful charms, O take him to thy loving arms. Enamoured on his bosom lie. Fair damsel of the radiant eye, As the warm sunlight loves to rest

Upon her darling Meru's breast."

The hero spoke, the monster heard, While passion still her bosom stirred. Away from Ráma's side she broke, And thus in turn to Lakshman spoke: "Come, for thy bride take me who shine In fairest grace that suits with thine. Thou by my side from grove to grove Of Dandak's wild in bliss shalt rove."

Then Lakshman, skilled in soft address, Wooed by the amorous giantess, With art to turn her love aside, To Súrpaṇakhá thus replied:

"And can so high a dame agree The slave-wife of a slave to be? I, lotus-hued! in good and ill Am bondsman to my brother's will. Be thou, fair creature radiant-eyed, My honoured brother's younger bride: With faultless tint and dainty limb, A happy wife, bring joy to him. He from his spouse grown old and grey, Deformed, untrue, will turn away, Her withered charms will gladly leave, And to his fair young darling cleave. For who could be so fond and blind, O loveliest of all female kind, To love another dame and slight Thy beauties rich in all delight?"

Thus Lakshman praised in scornful jest The long-toothed fiend with loathly breast, Who fondly heard his speech, nor knew His mocking words were aught but true. Again inflamed with love she fled To Ráma, in his leafy shed Where Sítá rested by his side, And to the mighty victor cried:

"What, Ráma, canst thou blindly cling To this old false misshapen thing? Wilt thou refuse the charms of youth For withered breast and grinning tooth! Canst thou this wretched creature prize And look on me with scornful eyes? This aged crone this very hour Before thy face will I devour: Then joyous, from all rivals free. Through Dandak will I stray with thee."

She spoke, and with a glance of flame Rushed on the fawn-eyed Maithil dame: So would a horrid meteor mar Fair Rohini's soft beaming star. But as the furious fiend drew near. Like Death's dire noose which chills with fear, The mighty chief her purpose stayed, And spoke, his brother to upbraid: "Ne'er should we jest with creatures rude, Of savage race and wrathful mood. Think, Lakshman, think how nearly slain My dear Videhan breathes again. Let not the hideous wretch escape Without a mark to mar her shape.

Strike, lord of men, the monstrous fiend, Deformed, and foul, and evil-miened."

He spoke: then Lakshman's wrath rose high, And there before his brother's eye, He drew that sword which none could stay, And cleft her nose and ears away. Noseless and earless, torn and maimed, With fearful shrieks the fiend exclaimed, And frantic in her wild distress Resought the distant wilderness. Deformed, terrific, huge, and dread, As on she moved, her gashes bled, And groan succeeded groan as loud As roars, ere rain, the thunder cloud. Still on the fearful monster passed, While streams of blood kept falling fast, And with a roar, and arms outspread Within the boundless wood she fled. To Janasthán the monster flew: Fierce Khara there she found.

With chieftains of the giant crew In thousands ranged around. Before his awful feet she bent And fell with piercing cries, As when a bolt in swift descent Comes flashing from the skies. There for a while with senses dazed Silent she lay and scared: At length her drooping head she raised, And all the tale declared, How Ráma, Lakshman, and the dame Had reached that lonely place: Then told her injuries and shame, And showed her bleeding face.



•Canto XXXIV. Then forth the giant's fury broke As Śúrpaṇakhá harshly spoke. Girt by his lords the demon king Looked on her, fiercely questioning:

"Who is this Ráma, whence, and where? His form, his might, his deeds declare. His wandering steps what purpose led To Dandak forest, hard to tread? What arms are his that he could smite In fray the rovers of the night, And Triśirás and Dúshan lay Low on the earth, and Khara slay? Tell all, my sister, and declare Who maimed thee thus, of form most fair."

Thus by the giant king addressed, While burnt her fury unrepressed, The giantess declared at length The hero's form and deeds and strength:

"Long are his arms and large his eyes: A black deer's skin his dress supplies. King Daśaratha's son is he, Fair as Kandarpa's self to see. Adorned with many a golden band, A bow, like Indra's, arms his hand, And shoots a flood of arrows fierce As venomed snakes to burn and pierce. I looked, I looked, but never saw His mighty hand the bowstring draw That sent the deadly arrows out, While rang through air his battle-shout. I looked, I looked, and saw too well How with that hail the giants fell, As falls to earth the golden grain, Struck by the blows of Indra's rain. He fought, and twice seven thousand, all Terrific giants, strong and tall, Fell by the pointed shafts o'erthrown Which Ráma shot on foot, alone. Three little hours had scarcely fled,- Khara and Dúshan both were dead, And he had freed the saints and made Asylum sure in Dandak's shade. Me of his grace the victor spared, Or I the giants' fate had shared. The high-souled Ráma would not deign His hand with woman's blood to stain. The glorious Lakshman, justly dear, In gifts and warrior might his peer, Serves his great brother with the whole Devotion of his faithful soul: Impetuous victor, bold and wise,

First in each hardy enterprise.

As Shurpanakha grew older, she wed Vidyutjihva, a Danava prince from the Kalkeya Danava dynasty, in secret. Shurpanakha's marriage to a Danava infuriated Ravana. Rakshasas's deadliest adversaries were the Danavas. Ravana chose to murder them both out of hatred. so went to war against the army of Vidyutjihva and defeated him in combat. Mandodari, Ravana's wife, intervened to save Surpanakha just as he was ready to kill her as well. Ravana was also urged to spare Surpanakha's life by his brother Kumbhakarna. [5] Mandodari instructed Surpanakha to wander around looking for a new husband. Then, on Ravana's orders, Shurpanakha divided her time between Lanka and the forests of Southern India, occasionally residing with her Asura kin, Khara and Dushana.

Description of Surpanakha by Valmiki

The ways that Shurpanakha appears in the many epic texts vary greatly. The majority of renditions, such as the Valmiki Ramayana, describe her as an ugly woman. Valmiki describes Shurpanakha as having an ugly face, being pot-bellied, wry-eyed, having coppery hair, having ugly features, having a brassy voice, being deplorably old, being a crooked talker, being ill-mannered, impolite, and abhorrent when she first encounters Rama in the jungle.

This shows the amount of disregard any male writer had for women who did not look pleasing. The sufferings of women who did not meet the conventions of the society looks wise, was never ending. Ravana her brother who was twice uglier than her did not get criticized by the author. Instead the author focused on his qualities, addressing him as a clever king.

## Mandodari

Mandodari was the daughter of Hema, an apsara (celestial nymph), and Mayasura, the King of the Asuras (demons). Three boys, Meghanada (Indrajit), Atikaya, and Akshayakumara, are born to her and Ravana. Some interpretations of the Ramayana claim that Mandodari is also the mother of Sita, the wife of Rama, who is famously abducted by Ravana. Mandodari loves her husband in spite of his flaws and counsels him to walk the straight and narrow. She tells Ravana to give Sita back to Rama on several occasions, but he ignores her counsel. The Ramayana extols her devotion to her love for Ravana. In one Ramayana adaptation, Hanuman deceives her into telling where a magical arrow is that Rama uses to kill Ravana. According to several Ramayana stories, Vibhishana, Ravana's younger brother, allying with Rama following his death does so at Mandodari's suggestion.

Mandodari, the wife of Ravana in the Ramayana, is portrayed as a complex and tragic character who endures significant suffering due to her husband's actions and the tumultuous events surrounding the epic. Here's a closer look at Mandodari's life of sufferings:

- **Marriage to Ravana:** Mandodari's life of suffering begins with her marriage to Ravana, the powerful and ambitious king of Lanka. While Mandodari is described as virtuous and wise, Ravana's character flaws and unbridled desires lead to a tumultuous and often unhappy marriage for Mandodari.

When Ravana visits Mayasura's home, he falls in love with Mandodari. With Vedic ceremonies, Mandodari and Ravana get married shortly after. Three of Ravana's sons, Meghanada (Indrajit),

Atikaya, and Akshayakumara, are born to Mandodari. Mandodari's native place is thought to be Mandore, a town 9 km north of Jodhpur. Some of the local Brahmins see Ravana as their son-in-law, and he is honoured with a temple here. Mandodari admires Ravana's strength and loves him in spite of his flaws. She knows that Ravana is weak when it comes to women. Mandodari, a devout woman, tries to guide Ravana toward righteousness, but Ravana constantly disobeys her counsel. She counsels him against subduing the Navagraha, the nine celestial entities that control one's fate.

- **Ravana's Actions and Decisions:** Throughout the Ramayana, Ravana's actions and decisions cause immense suffering to those around him, including Mandodari. Ravana's obsession with Sita, his abduction of her, and his refusal to heed Mandodari's counsel ultimately lead to his downfall and the destruction of their kingdom.
- **Mandodari's Helplessness:** Mandodari, despite her wisdom and righteousness, is often portrayed as helpless in the face of Ravana's arrogance and defiance of dharma. She witnesses the escalating conflict between Ravana and Rama, knowing that her husband's actions will bring disastrous consequences upon their family and kingdom.
- **Loss and Grief:** Mandodari experiences profound loss and grief as the war between Rama and Ravana unfolds. She mourns the deaths of her husband and her sons, including Indrajit (Meghnath), who fought valiantly but ultimately perished in battle.
- **Aftermath of the War:** After Ravana's death and the fall of Lanka, Mandodari is left to grapple with the ruins of her once-great kingdom and the loss of her loved ones. Her suffering is compounded by the devastation wrought by the war and the realization of the consequences of Ravana's actions.
- **Legacy of Tragedy:** Mandodari's story is a poignant reminder of the human cost of greed, hubris, and the pursuit of power. Despite her moral strength and intelligence, she is ultimately overshadowed by Ravana's destructive ambitions.

Mandodari's character serves as a reflection of the collateral damage caused by the epic's central conflict. Her story highlights themes of loyalty, resignation, and the inevitability of fate in the face of overwhelming circumstances. While Mandodari's sufferings are profound, her resilience and dignity in the face of adversity also offer glimpses of her inner strength and integrity amidst the chaos of war and tragedy.

Canto CXIII While thus they wept, supreme in place,

The loveliest for form and face, Mandodari drew near alone, Looked on her lord and made her moan: "Ah Monarch, Indra feared to stand In fight before thy conquering hand. From thy dread spear the Immortals ran; And art thou murdered by a man? Ah, 'twas no child of earth, I know, That smote thee with that mortal blow. 'Twas Death himself in Ráma's shape, That slew thee: Death whom none escape. Or was it he who rules the skies Who met thee, clothed in man's disguise? Ah no, my lord, not Indra: he In battle ne'er could look on thee. One only God thy match I deem: 'Twas Vishnu's self, the Lord Supreme, Whose days through ceaseless time extend And ne'er began and ne'er shall end: He with the discus, shell, and mace, Brought ruin on the giant race. Girt by the Gods of heaven arrayed Like Vánar hosts his strength to aid, He Ráma's shape and arms assumed And slew the king whom Fate had doomed. In Janasthán when Khara died With giant legions by his side, No mortal was the unconquered foe In Ráma's form who struck the blow. When Hanumán the Vanár came And burnt thy town with hostile flame, I counselled peace in anxious fear: I counselled, but thou wouldst not hear. Thy fancy for the foreign dame Has brought thee death and endless shame. Why should thy foolish fancy roam? Hadst thou not wives as fair at home? In beauty, form and grace could she, Dear lord, surpass or rival me? Now will the days of Sítá glide In tranquil joy by Ráma's side: And I-ah me, around me raves A sea of woe with whelming waves. With thee in days of old I trod Each spot beloved by nymph and God; I stood with thee in proud delight On Mandar's side and Meru's height; With thee, my lord, enchanted strayed In Chaitraratha's 1013 lovely shade, And viewed each fairest scene afar Transported in thy radiant car. But source of every joy wast thou, And all my bliss is ended now.

Then Ráma to Vibhishan cried: "Whate'er the ritual bids, provide. Obsequial honours duly pay, And these sad mourners' grief allay." Vibhishan answered, wise and true, For duty's changeless law he knew: "Nay one who scorned all sacred vows And dared to touch another's spouse, Fell tyrant of the human race, With funeral rites I may not grace."

The garden of Kuvera, the God of Riches. Him Raghu's royal son, the best

Of those who love the law, addressed: "False was the rover of the night, He loved the wrong and scorned the right. Yet for the fallen warrior plead The dauntless heart, the valorous deed.

Let him who ne'er had brooked defeat, The chief whom Indra feared to meet, The ever-conquering lord, obtain The honours that should grace the slain."

Vibhishan bade his friends prepare

The funeral rites with thoughtful care. Himself the royal palace sought Whence sacred fire was quickly brought, With sandal wood and precious scents And pearl and coral ornaments.

Wise Bráhmans, while the tears that flowed Down their wan cheeks their sorrow sowed, Upon a golden litter laid The corpse in finest ropes arrayed.

Thereon were flowers and pennons hung, And loud the monarch's praise was sung. Then was the golden litter raised, While holy fire in order blazed. And first in place Vibhishan led The slow procession of the dead, Behind, their cheeks with tears bedewed, Came sad the widowed multitude. Where, raised as Bráhmans ordered, stood Piled sandal logs, and scented wood, The body of the king was set High on a deerskin coverlet. Then duly to the monarch's shade

The offerings for the dead they paid,

And southward on the eastern side An altar formed and fire supplied. Then on the shoulder of the dead The oil and clotted milk were shed. All rites were done as rules ordain: The sacrificial goat was slain. Next on the corpse were perfumes thrown And many a flowery wreath was strown; And with Vibhishan's ready aid Rich vesture o'er the king was laid. Then while the tears their cheeks bedewed Parched grain upon the dead they strewed; Last, to the wood, as rules require, Vibhishan set the kindling fire.

Then having bathed, as texts ordain, To Lanká went the mourning train. Vibhishan, when his task was done, Stood by the side of Raghu's son. And Ráma, freed from every foe, Unstrung at last his deadly bow, And laid the glittering shafts aside, And mail by Indra's love supplied.

Mandodari is characterized as a stunning lady in The Ramayana by Valmiki. When the monkey Hanuman Rama's emissary travels to Lanka seeking Sita, he is in awe of Mandodari's beauty as soon as he enters Ravana's sleeping quarters and makes a mistake Mandodari in honor of Sita. [5] When Hanuman eventually discovers Sita discovers Ravana threatening to murder him if She weds him. Raising his weapon, Ravana When Sita refuses, decapitate her. Mandodari intervenes to save By taking Ravana's hand, Sita. According to Mandodari, Since killing a lady is a terrible offense, Ravana ought not to murder Sita. She requests that Ravana give up and amuse himself with his other spouses. the notion of being married to Sita. Despite her belief that Sita is less than her in ancestry and beauty, Mandodari recognizes Sita's adoration for Rama and likens her to the deities Rohini and Sachi. And tries to help her not fall prey to her husband the demon king Ravana.

Mandodari, the wife of Ravana in the Ramayana, is depicted as a character of great righteousness, wisdom, and moral integrity amidst the turbulent events of the epic. Despite being married to Ravana, a demon king known for his arrogance and wrongdoing, Mandodari stands out for her virtuous qualities and adherence to dharma (righteousness). Here are aspects of Mandodari's righteousness in the Ramayana:

- Resilience and Fortitude:** Despite the trials and tribulations brought upon her by Ravana's actions and the war, Mandodari maintains her composure and resilience. She faces adversity with strength and determination, embodying the ideals of inner fortitude and endurance.

- Ethical Conduct:** Mandodari is portrayed as a woman of high moral character and ethical conduct. Despite being the queen of Lanka, she remains steadfast in her principles and does not compromise her values even in the face of her husband's misdeeds.

- Wisdom and Counsel:** Mandodari is known for her wisdom and intelligence. She often advises Ravana against his impulsive actions and attempts to dissuade him from pursuing his reckless ambitions, knowing the consequences that await their kingdom.

- Empathy and Compassion:** Mandodari demonstrates empathy and compassion towards others, even those who are considered enemies. She feels sorrow for the suffering caused by the war and mourns the loss of lives on both sides.

- Devotion to Dharma:** Throughout the Ramayana, Mandodari upholds the principles of dharma (righteousness) despite the challenging circumstances she faces. She remains faithful to her duties as a wife and queen, honoring her role with dignity and grace.

Quest for Justice: Mandodari's righteousness is further highlighted by her desire for justice and accountability. She questions Ravana's decisions and confronts him about the consequences of his actions, seeking to uphold moral principles even in the midst of chaos.

Mandodari's portrayal in the Ramayana underscores the complexity of her character and the depth of her moral fiber. While she is often overshadowed by the larger-than-life personalities of Ravana and other central figures, Mandodari's commitment to righteousness and her unwavering adherence to dharma serve as a beacon of moral clarity amidst the turmoil of the epic's narrative. Her character exemplifies the enduring strength of character and resilience in the face of adversity, making her a compelling and memorable figure in the Ramayana tradition.

# **Chapter 5**

## **Conclusion**

This is a gynocentric analysis of Ramayana, through which we come to a conclusion that the women characters have been invisibilized in the epic. Ramayana the epic brings to light different kinds of women and their sufferings.

There is a woman character that each of us can relate with, in modern times too. There are countless Sitas, Kaikeyis and Urmila's living among us. In a post-enlightenment world flooded with the ideas of gender equality, rationality and justice, the study of Ramayana with these events raises significant and harsh question on the design of Indian society. Before delving in the domain of questioning and challenging, it is important to traverse through the trajectory of irrelevant acts seamlessly portrayed in the epic. The most prominent ones were the preaching of Naari Dharm, the reflection of ideal woman in Sita, and the Agnee Pareeksha. Throughout the epic, 'Naari Dharma' is taught, preached, glorified, evaluated and practised by all the female characters. Naari dharm entails endless loyalty and servitude towards her husband, who is an epitome of god in her eyes, abiding to all the rules designed by the patriarchs, devotion to household work, sacrificing herself for the larger good etc. Women, who are docile and execute the dharm assigned to them, by virtue of their gender, with pure dedication are pedestalize, celebrated and idealised like Sita.

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Sita is an exemplary of the 'ideal woman', an inspiration to all. This elevated position was attributed to her for fulfilling and subscribing to naari dharm effortlessly. Sita was undoubtedly an epitome of grace, beauty and chastity. However, it is wise not to ignore the fact that her grace was concealed and shrugged aside owing to the aura and dominance of Lord Ram. In Indian households, the act of Sita is told and retold to remind wives, daughters and mothers how they should behave and act in order to win over a plagued society which otherwise treats a woman like a dirt stuck in a shoe.

It is sad that a woman is glorified and treated respectfully only when she surrenders her dignity and mind. The historical epochs echo with the chants of holy Sita, who is worshipped for her subjugated, obedient and submissive role and not because of her willed, strong personality. The episode where Sita is asked to prove her chastity and loyalty by Ram, through a trail by fire i.e. Agnee Pareeksha is particularly significant in contemplating the relevance of Ramayana. A woman who shows resilience and courage against an enemy, and upholds her duty in crisis, is asked to prove her purity not once but twice. The lack of apathy towards Sita who had undergone countless ordeals and hardships is appalling.

In a world of #MeToo, where we allow victims to live with dignity and emerge as survivors and call out the perpetrators, the depiction of a woman succumbing to the societal perception and patriarchal values is a slap on all the efforts of the survivors. Instead of healing the wounds etched in the hearts of Sita, she is asked to prove her chastity in front of everyone. A victim who strongly resists her perpetrator is brought under surveillance. Ram is never questioned. This again reinforces that it is the woman only who is questioned, regulated and restrained while a man can do anything they want.

The invisibilization of women in society is a complex and multifaceted issue that has deep historical, cultural, and societal roots. It refers to the phenomenon where women's voices, experiences, contributions, and rights are marginalized, ignored, or rendered invisible within various social, political, economic, and cultural contexts. This invisibilization manifests in different forms and has significant consequences on women's empowerment, representation, and overall well-being. To draw a conclusion on this topic, we can consider several key points:

- Historical Context:** Throughout history, women have often been relegated to subordinate roles, with their achievements and perspectives omitted from mainstream narratives. This historical precedent has perpetuated the invisibility of women in society.
- Structural Inequality:** Structural inequalities embedded in social systems contribute to the invisibilization of women. Gender biases and stereotypes influence decision-making processes, media representation, and societal norms, further marginalizing women's voices.
- Economic Disempowerment:** Women are disproportionately affected by economic disparities, including unequal pay and limited access to resources and opportunities. These economic challenges can contribute to their social and political invisibility.
- Cultural and Social Norms:** Traditional gender roles and cultural expectations often confine women to domestic spheres, limiting their visibility and participation in public life. Stereotypical portrayals of women in media and popular culture reinforce these norms.
- Political Underrepresentation:** Women continue to be underrepresented in political leadership and decision-making positions globally. This lack of representation hinders efforts to address gender-specific issues and perpetuates women's invisibility in policy and governance.



- Intersectionality: Women's experiences of invisibilization intersect with other aspects of their identity, such as race, ethnicity, sexuality, and disability, resulting in compounded marginalization and exclusion.

Addressing the invisibilization of women requires concerted efforts at multiple levels:

- Policy Interventions: Governments and institutions must implement policies that promote gender equality, including affirmative action measures to increase women's representation in leadership roles.
- Empowerment and Education: Investing in women's education and empowerment initiatives can challenge stereotypes and empower women to assert their visibility and agency.
- Media Representation: Media and cultural industries should actively promote diverse and inclusive representations of women, showcasing their achievements and perspectives.
- Advocacy and Activism: Civil society organizations and activists play a crucial role in advocating for women's rights and challenging discriminatory practices that perpetuate invisibility.

In conclusion, combating the invisibilization of women requires a comprehensive and intersectional approach that addresses systemic inequalities and promotes meaningful social change. By amplifying women's voices, dismantling discriminatory structures, and fostering inclusive societies, we can work towards a more equitable and just world for all genders.

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