



SUBVERTING JOSEPH CAMPBELL'S HEROIC IDEOLOGY: LUCIFER EFFECT – THE GOOD / EVIL DIVIDE IN THE PORTRAYAL OF RAVANA IN RAMAYANA

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ABSTRACT

For centuries Ramayana has been the centre of contention for the critics with respect to deification of Rama, epitome of virtue and defamation of Ravana, the king of the darkest kind. Joseph Campbell's definition of a Hero resides with a person's heroic quest to achieve something that is beyond himself through his encounter with a challenging enemy and his victorious return. Ravana, the antagonist, underwent a challenging quest and was unconquerable until he was faced with his one tragic flaw – his lust for Sita. Upon looking through the lens of deconstruction, this abduction doesn't make Ravana the antagonist of the plot but actually a Tragic Hero of Aristotle. This Hamartia of Ravana was not implied by him but was imposed upon him by the circumstances which make him a fallen hero – the Lucifer of Genesis. This paper aims to apply Philip Zimbardo's Lucifer Effect theory to explore Campbell's ideology of heroism with reference to Ravana and also attempts to answer the question whether Ravana is the greatest villain or is he actually a situational victim, who is outshined as a villain by his tragic flaw intensified by circumstantial pressures.

KEYWORDS : deconstruction, hero, mythology, tragic hero, yin and yang

INTRODUCTION

Upon deconstructing the ideology of Rama as hero and Ravana as the antagonist it can be perceived that Rama is not completely virtuous and Ravana is not completely vicious. Joseph Campbell in his Hero with Thousand Faces identifies his Hero as the one who undergoes numerous perilous trials in his quest to conquer evils and returns to his native with the new knowledge or wisdom gained. Further exploring the character of Ravana, we can perceive that Ravana fits perfectly into the characteristics of a Hero described by Campbell.

Ironically, being an evil he sets out his journey to surmount the evil he and his people has manifested. According to Puranic scriptures and the classics there lived four races of people in the ancient Bharat – Deva, Asura or Rakshasa, Gandharva and the human beings. Deva and Asura are considered to be the polar binaries of good and evil. Thus it is natural for the Asura King Ravana to set out for the quest to conquer the evil of his realm, the terrestrial space beyond the wall of demonic reign.

Campbell's Heroic Ideology

Campbell describes the quest of a hero in twelve stages, broadly narrowing it down into three phases, Departure, Initiation and Return. Born to sage Visrava and demon princess Kaikesi, he acquired both the qualities of his parents. However, he is not confined with either the Brahmic scriptures or the demonic qualities but rather 'departs' for a daring adventure accompanied by his brothers.

Thus with his journey being 'initiated' he travels through various precarious 'Road of trials' and 'meet with the gods and goddesses'. Being an ardent devotee of Lord Shiva, through his persistent penance, he is bestowed with boon of immortality by both Shiva and Brahma that makes him eternally unconquerable by gods and demons. As there is no mention of human beings in the boon, he takes it for granted as he considered it the meekest and is thus ultimately defeated by Rama, the divine incarnate in human form. When Ravana's 'Road of Trial' successfully ended with the 'Ultimate Boons' he returns to his home space and establishes his power with the boons acquired. Now being invulnerable and invincible against almost all the races, he usurps his half brother Kubera, the treasure keeper, acquires his wealth and construct the Kingdom of gold, the invulnerable city Lanka. As Campbell mentions, Ravana not only conquers and become 'Master of Two worlds' but he mastered the three worlds

prevailed then. From then on he starts to dominate the whole terrain, being the great demon king with his loyal subjects as his asset. So is Rama, the protagonist of Ramayana undergoes an arduous exile where he faces and fights with the evil forces and finally triumphs in his ordeal and successfully returns home fulfilling his purpose of quest and was elevated to the status of god by his subjects.

Thus with Campbell both the protagonist and the antagonist, Rama and Ravana can be considered as the greatest heroes of their race and they own the same attributes from time to time. Rama's birth is divine as he is born out of the yagna performed by Dashratha and Ravana too is of divine origin being the son of Maharishi Visrava, cousin of Kubera and the great grandson of Lord Brahma. Both the heroes are portrayed as the great scholars, mighty warriors, possessors of numerous mystical weapons bequeathed as boons by Lord Shiva and Brahma, great kings, gifted with devoted brothers, loyal subjects and is deemed invincible by their enemies.

Ravana and the Lucifer effect:

Apart from all the similarities found between Rama and Ravana, these heroes are identified only by the extreme polarities they share, Rama – the Divine incarnate and Ravana – the evil incarnate. Ravana, the hero of Lanka, indeed turns vicious at one juncture of his life. Philip Zimbardo, postulates his theory of Lucifer effect as, the normal and virtuous persons engage themselves in the evil action at a specific vulnerable moment thereby turning vicious chiefly due to the circumstances they encounter with.

Till the arrival of Soorpanaka, Ravana is only portrayed as the embodiment of goodness. In Amish Tripathi's Raavan, the qualities of Ravana are described by Kumba as "You can play music, you sing, you write poetry, you are a warrior, you are wealthy, you are well-read, you are super – intelligent. There's no one like you in the whole wide world!" (93). He is a great mathematician, master of Vedas, ardent devotee of Lord Shiva, gifted poet and possesses ten heads which represents his multifaceted persona. But all this went in vain with his one tragic flaw – his lust for Sita. After the encounter of Soorpanaka with the brothers of Ragu vamsa, the fierce battle begins between Rama and Kara, one of the brothers and the chief army generals of Ravana, in which Rama fatally assailed Kara and his armies single handedly. The only survivor of war, Ahampana counseled the agitated Ravana to abduct Sita than imposing a fair battle. After long

deliberation, unable to resist the beauty of Sita he approached his uncle, Mareecha to seek his counsel in his evil scheme. But Mareecha through his words of caution suppresses the demonic qualities aroused in Ravana and returns to his capital, still as a hero. "What plan is this?...To hanker after Raama's wife is the highway to disgrace and destruction and the annihilation of the Rakshasa race." (Rajagopalachari, 2019, p. 214)

Furthermore the demon king's lurking lust is kindled by his sister, Soorpanaka. She knows her brother very well and starts to trigger the anger or desire or whatever she can for Ravana to harm the three mortals in exile. "Have you no thoughts of vengeance – you, a hero, brother, king?" (Rajagopalachari, 2019, p.216). And this time Ravana cannot resist the temptation stirred by Soorpanaka and falls not only for her words and the beauty of Sita but also falls from the state of a hero. "I have no words to describe her perfections. I have never seen such sublime beauty in any creative thing...you do not know your strength. You can easily secure Seeta and make her your own (Rajagopalachari, 2019, p.216-217)

Ravana – The Tragic Hero

Ravana became the arch rival of the divine human Rama, solely for the reason that he is the husband of Sita. He falls prey for the circumstances created by his sister and abducts Sita, thereby marking not only his destruction but the annihilation of the entire race. No matter how great Ravana is in his feats and deeds, the very thought of possessing another man's wife makes him sinister and his abduction makes him all the more sinful and diabolic. Thus the hero of his darkest kind is now fallen into the abyss of unredeemable depth of damnation with this one tragic flaw – the untoward lewd and lascivious longing for Sita. When this hero becomes a Lucifer, he is dragged down from the status of hero to the tragic hero of Aristotle. Ravana perfectly fits into the framework of a tragic hero as he successfully evokes both pity and terror in the audience. Abraham and Harpham, in their book "Glossary of Literary Terms" narrates Aristotle's tragic hero as "He is neither thoroughly good nor thoroughly bad but a mixture of both and also that this tragic effect will be stronger if the hero is 'better than we are', in the sense that he is of higher than ordinary mortal worth." – 405. This clearly proves that Ravana is definitely not the antagonist but the tragic hero of Ramayana, with the hero Rama.

Be it the tragic hero or the antagonist, the presence of Ravana is crucially essential for the existence of Rama. Without Rama, Ravana still exists but in the absence of Ravana, Rama's existence and his triumph are matters to be interrogated. For Rama to shine as a perfect hero, the presence of Ravana is inevitable. Though the same trial is imposed on Rama and is equally tempted by the same Soorpanaka, the moral uprightness of Rama doesn't allow him to yield himself to the lustful words of Soorpanaka despite her splendid beauty.

The binaries of good and evil, light and dark, conscious and unconscious, and so on exist in every creation which represent the physical and spiritual realm of the universe. Both Rama and Ravana are the essential heroes of the epic and they coexist. They are the Yin and Yang, found within one self, symbolically manifested as two different entities in Ramayana. Rama's victory over Ravana, represents the victory of dharma over adharma. However in the spiritual context, it is the victory of the murkier lurking aspects of the unconscious over the conscious. Rama is symbolized as purely divine, whereas Ravana is represented with both the divine and demonic qualities. Though initially he maintains a perfect balance between the binaries, he cannot withhold the balance and suppresses his Rakshasha side in front of the divine Rama. His abduction of Sita doesn't make him the antagonist of the epic as it is natural for a powerful Asura to desire the possession of Sita, when he already has everything

in his possession. But in the process he has lost the balance which he hitherto has held so far between his Rakshasha and Deva manifestations and is fatally defeated by his self.

CONCLUSION

Succinctly put Ramayana narrates the journey of two heroes who underwent the quest of conquering the self. Rama, in spite of all the arduous trials, conquers the self which elevated him to the status of God. Ravana, who is almost successful in his quest, at last fails and falls to his tragic flaw, thereby becoming the Tragic Hero. At the symbolic level, Rama's conquering of Ravana represents the conquering of the self defeating the malignant elements to show to the world that the benign prevails. We cannot expect demonic features in Rama, as he is purely divine and at the same time we also must not expect Ravana to be a perfect hero as he is the embodiment of the both. On the grounds of deconstruction rather than perceiving Ravana as an antagonist, he deserves to be empathized for being the darkness which illuminates the valor and virtues of Rama in more vibrant hues. And this Tragic Hero must be honored for the great spiritual counsel, he has given through his life and his fall that, if one is able to conquer his self like Rama, then everybody can become a hero.

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