

Projection of Complex Human Relationships in Two Great Indian Epics

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to project the complex human relationships projected in literature. Extracting examples from the two great Indian Epics, *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*, this paper analyses the characters and the bonds they shared with other characters in the story. Basic human relationships like friendship, love, parental and marital relationship, are discussed with examples taken from the two great epics. This paper also manages to present the behaviour of characters in protecting their bonds with the fellow characters in the stories. Thus, this paper is a brief analysis of complexities in human relationships.

Keywords: human relationships, conflicts, sacrifices, moral values, friendship, strong bonds, literature.

Literature is generally defined as the combined imagination of human minds expressed in the form of fiction, drama, poetry and prose etc... Literary imaginations rely mainly on the behaviour of human species. Interestingly, the themes may be different, but every action depends on human behaviour and responses to the happenings. Starting from the minor poems to the great epics in any language, the plot goes around the human relationships. It may be the human relationship with other individual of the same species or with the environment or with the individual belonging to other species. Whatever the bond may be, the emotions that those bonds share are alike. There are many conflicts portrayed in literature. However, the conflicts among human relationships is highly focused. there are numerous works published in literatures of all the languages which could be undoubtedly compared with the Graham's number in Physics. But the point to be noted is, every work of art introduces a conflict and tries to offer solution to any problems that arises and is related to the modern situation. Northrop Frye comments thus,

“Nearly every work of art in the past had social function in its own time, a function which was often not primarily an aesthetic function at all. The whole compositions is a relatively modern one” (344-345)

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Literature is most commonly called as the mirror of human life as it reflects the real-life instances in it. Literature in that way teaches the readers to handle real life situations using the instances learnt from literature. Indian literature consists of works written in many languages including Tamil, Sanskrit, Malayalam, Telegu, Kannada etc... Even though these are the local native languages in India, the literature in English gained greater reader audience in India. The reason behind it was that English was learnt by many a number of people in India than their neighbouring languages. Literatures created in English was also translated into other languages by many writers. Literatures in every language speaks about the human conflicts in building up their relationships. The bonds they share with their neighbours and the importance they give to them causes great changes in their lives. This process is now and always stays as the main reason for the creation of literatures.

Taking the great epics in Indian literature *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* for example, one could find number of instances that speaks about the importance of human relationships. There are many good relationship bonds in these epics and there are many pessimistic type bonds. Every human being are capable of creating and destroying their relationship with fellow human beings. Whereas, the parental relationships could not be made but destined by God himself. No one has the ability to chose their parents before birth. But parents are the only responsibility to shape the characters of their children and thus they teach them the characters that they expect from their children. So, children in a way could be considered as the artificial traits. Parents creating a bond with their children is easier than any other relationships. But there are some instances in the great epics where the parental bonds end up in failure. Though the period when the great epics taken place is known for elderly respect and high tradition, there are some characters who acts against the words of their parents.

Both these epics depicts characters that could be quoted as examples for ideal father, ideal so, ideal mother, ideal husband and wife and also ideal siblings. *The Mahabharata* exclusively speaks about the character Karna, who could be quoted as the best example for an ideal friend. The friendship between Karna and Duryodhana was spoken by many scholars. Though the reason for their friendship was justified in the plot, many researches were made on their friendship. The kind of friendship they shared was unbreakable throughout the end of the story. Though Karna's friendship was praised he failed to make his friend to walk in right direction. His companion made Duryodhana to commit further more sins because he believed Karna's strength. Karna did not fail to respect every of his relationships. He knowingly or unknowingly advices his brothers, that is, the Pandavas, as he was the elder brother to them all. Though he had respect towards his legitimate mother Kunti, he expresses out his frustrations to her, that in turn created a break in their relationship. Karna says thus'

“Kshatriya lady, I do not agree with you that to do what you say is the door to dharma. The way you behaved with me was highly objectionable. Because of it, I suffered, my dignity suffered. Born as a Kshatriya, I was deprived of

Kshatriya rites because you treated me as you did. What enemy could have done worse? When I needed help you gave me none. You deprived me of my samskaras, now you need me, and so you come to me. You never cared for me as a mother. Now you come to me, because you need me,” (Lal 205).

In *The Ramayana* there were only unequal friendship, that is, they shared friendship only as the matter of beneficiary. Sometimes friendship also deceives and creates a clear break in relationship. Jaques Derrida says thus:

“If you want a friend, you must wage war on him, and capable of it, capable of having a ‘best enemy.’ To be capable of this friendship, to be able to honour in the friend the enemy he can become, is a sign of freedom. Freedom itself. Now, this is a freedom that neither tyrants nor slaves know.” (1997: 282).

The only relationship that could be highly praised in this epic is the sibling bond. Rama’s brothers Lakshmana and Bharata stand as the perfect examples for good sibling relationship. The sibling relationship in *Mahabharata* was also highly praised by researchers. The five brothers born for Kunti and Pandu, commonly called as the Pandavas stood unique and united till the end of the story. They were considered as the incarnation of virtue as they were born out of mantras chanted by Kunti. Their brotherly relationship lasted even after their marriage with a woman named Draupadi. The bond they shared with each other was really a best example for sibling relationship.

There was also a sibling rivalry that took place in *Mahabharata*. It was between Dhirudhirastra and Pandu. Both were the son of a same father but different mothers. Though Dhirudhirastra was the elder brother, he could not come to throne as he was a blind by birth. This created a strong hatred towards Pandu. But when Pandu was sent to forest as he commits a crime by killing two deer which are in a relationship. As he goes into the forest, the kingdom is automatically handed over to Dhirudhirastra. There was a complete sibling rivalry in their relationship. Whereas in *The Ramayana*, when Rama was sent into the forest, his brother Bharata rules the country with Rama’s slippers on the throne. This shows his love towards Rama. Though Bharata ruled the nation with Rama’s slippers, it was Lakshmana who was praised for the good brotherly relationship as he went along with Rama to the forest. When Lakshmana faints at the battle field, Rama confesses that, “In this world I might find another mother like Kausalya, a wife like Sita, but definitely not a brother like Lakshmana”.

The husband and wife relationship between Rama and Sita were still praised but Rama forced Sita to prove her chastity to the world. This act created a strong break in their relationship. But Draupadi married five men, brothers from a same family, but no one had suspicion over her character. They respected her very much and gave ears to her decision. The patient brothers became furious when the Gauravas illtreated her. That made their bond

stronger. Though Dhirudhirastra was a blind man, he ruled the kingdom beautifully. Gandhari after marrying him, tied her eyes with cloth and lived blind folded throughout her life. This is due to the respect and love she had for her husband. Love of Krishna and Rukmani, Karna and his wife, relationship between Dasaratha and his wives could be quoted as some good marital bonds in these epics.

Draupadi and Krishna's relationship was spoken by many researchers. They had such a friendly and brotherly bond with each other. Krishna tolerated all the evils in the story except the court act where Draupadi was illtreated by the Gauravas. Krishna's anger was immeasurable. Even though she had five husbands no one could save her from the disgrace. It was Krishna who saved her from the evil hands.

There are many complex relationships in both these epics. Every character could be related to present situation of mankind. Morality and humanity were taught with good examples by the great epic makers like Valmiki and Vyasa. Exposing an ocean of characters these epics presents the life lesson for every individual being. Good human bonds like friendship, love, matrimony, parenthood etc... are very much important to achieve great in society and family as well. Relationship bonds are very much necessary to built up good future generations. But due to technology and materialism, these bonds are becoming weaker and thus travels to voids. Thus, reading this kind of epics and good literary works by great writers would help to restore healthy human relationships.

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