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Karma v/s Women's Respect

There are two major Sanskrit epics of ancient India, The Mahabharata and The Ramayana. The author of the text “The Ramayana” is Valmiki. *Ramayan* is a 1987 Indian Hindi-language epic television series directed by Ramanand Sagar, based on the ancient Indian Sanskrit epic “The Ramayana”. It narrates the life of Sita, a kind soul and princess of the kingdom of Mithila. The epic follows her fourteen-year exile to the forest with her husband Ram and brother-in-law Laxman, urged by Ram’s father King Dashrat, on the request of his stepmother, Sita’s love for nature, her kidnapping by the demon Ravan which resulted in war between Ram & Ravan, their eventual return to Ayodhya followed by bunch of questions asked about her character and finally her emerging in the Earth. “The Mahabharata” in text form was written by Vyasa. *Mahabharat* is a 1988 Indian drama television series based on the Sanskrit epic “The Mahabharata”. It depicts how the disrobing of Draupadi led to the struggle between two teams of cousins in the Kurukshetra War. It also narrates how different kinds of parentings could be responsible for the karma of a person. According to google dictionary, the Sanskrit word karma means the sum of a person's actions in this and previous states of existence, viewed as

deciding their fate in future existences. Though the series *Mahabharat* and *Ramayan* were great in explaining the karma of human beings, they were unsuccessful in portraying female characters Sita and Draupadi in a respectful manner as they were considered objects and had to go through all the hardships.

Within the series *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat*, there are many different forms of love shown whether it be love between brothers, friends, between husband & wife or between mother & sons but the relationship between husband and wife doesn't have equality. In *Ramayan*, the character Sita respected and loved her husband Ram so much that she went exiled into the wilderness for fourteen years along with him and her brother-in-law Laxman, leaving the pleasures of the palace behind. This is shown when they all leave together after seeking Ram's father's permission (Ramanand Sagar Ep 16 7:52). If viewers connect it to today's world then today also the wife has to live with her husband in his house after marriage, which she could never consider as her own house. She has to move with him wherever he finds a job leaving her family and friends behind. In *Mahabharat*, the character of Gandhari is shown to be the dedicated wife of king Dhritarashtra of Hastinapur. When she found out that her would-be husband was born blind, she decided to blindfold herself to be like her husband (B. R. Chopra Ep 07 11:50). On one hand, the act of blindfolding herself was a sign of her dedication and love for the king. Though if viewers think from the other perspective then the act of blindfolding herself could also be considered as her protest against her father who asked her to marry a blind man without asking her choice. All these events show how the relationship of husband and wives worked during ancient times and even now, where husband is considered superior to wife, and she has to follow all of his commands.

In every phase of time, the life of women has been filled with hardships and discrimination. During both series, women were considered objects and properties first of their father then of their husbands. The emperors during Mahabharata didn't want daughters as a child. Daughters were not given importance as sons. Their marriages were conducted keeping the welfare of the kingdom in mind. It is noted that in both series, the marriage of the princesses was conducted in a manner where kings and princes from all over the country would participate in a contest where the winner would marry the princess. In *Ramayan*, king Janak declared that he would give his daughter Sita in marriage to anyone who could string the Great Bow of Shiva. Several kings, princes, and commoners had tried and failed. When Ram and Lakshman entered the assembly hall where the bow was displayed in all its glory, Rama walked over, picked up the bow, strung it, and plucked the bowstring and eventually got married to Sita (Ramanand Sagar Ep 10 20:54). This suggests that during the time of Ramayan, women were respected but they were not given the equal rights as men. In *Mahabharat*, it is shown that King Dhrupad had organized a contest for his daughter Draupadi so that he could get her married to the best archer and the most talented man on earth, whose perseverance and determination was matchless. The princes present at King Dhrupad's court were expected to lift a bow and then aim at a fish's eye fixed to a rotating plate on the roof, just by looking at its reflection in the water on the floor. Arjuna was among the many Princes who had participated in the Swayamwar. The Pandava Princes were in disguise of Brahmin along with his brothers Yudhishtir and Bhima. Arjuna was the only one besides Karna who was capable of winning Draupadi's hand and finally he married Draupadi. (B. R. Chopra Ep 34 20:41) This suggests that the princesses were not asked about whom they want to marry which means that their wish was not honored. Even their mothers were

not asked for the advice regarding their daughter's marriage as it is shown that their fathers were the one to decide everything. It also suggests that women were considered weaker and so they needed a strong man as their husband to protect them. This does symbolize princesses or rather say women as objects and their father as their trader where they would trade their daughter to the strongest person not regarding whether that person loves the princess or not. Despite all the hardships women of both the texts were faithful to the men of their lives.

Though the shows were unsuccessful in showing women in a respectful manner, the glimpse of life of two of the incarnations of Lord Vishnu: Lord Ram and Lord Krishna described karma by their actions in each of the series. *Ramayan* revolves around the life of Lord Ram. He is the seventh and one of the most popular incarnations of Lord Vishnu. Lord Ram was idealistic - Maryada Purushottam. He was ideal in every role played by him. Ram has many karma events that happen throughout the series, one being that he followed the golden deer into the woods even though his brother Lakshman told him not to and the result was that his wife Sita was kidnapped by the demon Ravana (Ramanand Sagar Ep 32 21:08). I think that this explains how karma works as it shows that when Ram wished to harm a deer by killing it, his own beloved wife got kidnapped. *Mahabharat* has some glimpse of the life of Lord Krishna. He is considered the eighth avatar of Lord Vishnu and as the supreme God in his own right. Karma was described in many ways by him in *Mahabharat* using many Sanskrit quotes which had approximately the following meaning in English, "The meaning of *Karma* is in the intention. The intention behind the action is what matters. Those who are motivated only by desire for the fruits of action are miserable, for they are constantly anxious about the results of what they do." He has also explained karma by his actions. Once when Krishna hurt his finger while fighting with

Shishupal, Draupadi immediately tore a piece from her sari and bandaged his finger and for its repayment, Krishna blessed her with endless fabric in the court of Hastinapur when her disrobement was happening (B.R. Chopra Ep 47, 31:48). This doesn't mean that a person should only help a woman if she had done anything for him. Rather, it explained that it is our karma to help a woman or other people in danger. Therefore, it could be said that both the characters Lord Ram and Lord Krishna were successful in explaining the principles of life or Karma by their lifestyle and by preaching them.

Despite being the source of depicting a perfect lifestyle, the shows do show lack of freedom for women after their marriage. In *Mahabharat*, the character of Draupadi first had to marry five Pandava brothers because of her mother-in-law's misunderstanding. As narrated in the show, when Arjun brought her home after marriage, he described her as a gift to his mother Kunti (when her back was facing them), to which she asked him to distribute Draupadi among his 5 brothers and to keep respect of his mother's orders, Draupadi had to marry all of them (B.R. Chopra Ep 35 21:22). Secondly, she had to go through disrobement in the assembly of Hastinapur by her own brother-in-law (B.R. Chopra Ep 47, 29:38). The story behind this was that while playing the game of Chaupar (Ludo) against Duryodhan (Draupadi's brother-in-law), Draupadi's husband Yudhishtir lost all his wealth, so eventually has to gamble Draupadi in the game and loses her as well. This suggests that even Yudhishtir, who is considered as the most truthful person of that time; also considers his wife as his property and trades her. In *Ramayan*, the character Goddess Sita had to go through many examinations of the society and was questioned many times for her character. When Ram saved her from the premises of Ravan, the people of Ayodhya demanded her to exile in the forest as she had come after living with a

strange man. When she comes back from the exile of the forest, her character is questioned again; getting frustrated with all these examinations and doubts she has to deal with, she requests the mother Earth to take her in its womb if her character was pure. As she was pure, the land divided in two parts and emerged her in it (Ramanand Sagar Ep.: Mata Sita Descends into Mother Earth, 28:46). All these events make us question why only women had to go through all the examinations and why the virginity of women is so necessary compared to men. Even in this modern era of 2021, women have to go through all such questions in different situations like when she comes home late from work or parties late at night. Therefore, it could be said that the role of women was not respected, and they were inferior to men during *Mahabharat* and *Ramayan*.

Conclusively, all the well minded characters of *Mahabharat* and *Ramayan* followed their karma of following the orders of their elders and remained quiet while the women were bothered, so they were unsuccessful in portraying women in a respectful manner. As women were objectified, dishonoring them was easy for the evil-minded people. Despite all the hardships, women of both the shows were faithful to the men of their lives. They respected their husbands and followed their orders at any cost even when they had to give away their self-respect. If viewers see this in terms of modern world then today also if a women is raped or is bothered by any other means then the people around would hesitate to help her because they don't want to get involved in legal matters. If a girl is teased then rather than complaining or punishing the teasers, the society questions the girl for why she was in a short dress? or why was she wearing lipstick? Thus, it could be concluded that while following our karma, believing in old traditions puts women's self respect at stake.

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