

Treatment Of Selflessness In Devdutt Pattanaik's The Book Of Ram

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<p>Keywords: Ramayana, Mythology, Myth, Indian Ethos, Ram, Dharma, Selflessness and Righteousness.</p>	<p>Abstract Mythology refers to the myths that are associated with the sacred stories of a particular culture. Indian mythology is a vast collection of tales which are predominantly featured in religious texts like the Vedic literature and the Puranas. Mythological narratives play a crucial role in effectively imparting the essential message to people and guide them towards a fruitful life. Every religion and philosophical system in India is imbued with ethical elements. Indian ethos refers to the guiding beliefs and noble notions of Indian culture. One can adhere to the ethos of the culture to enhance his or her life. Devdutt Pattanaik is an Indian mythologist, speaker, illustrator, columnist and an author of more than fifty books. Some of his important works are Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of the Mahabharata, Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana, Shyam: An Illustrated Retelling of the Bhagavata, The Book of Ram and Shiva to Shankara: Giving Form to the Formless. His works deal with the areas of religion, mythology and management. The present study aims at an analysis of The Book of Ram of Devdutt Pattanaik so as to highlight the importance of selflessness in one's life. The author provides a new perspective to the Ramayana in his novel by focusing on the selfless life led by Ram. The present study analyses the selfless deeds of a few characters such as Lakshman, Bharata, and Vibhishana. They act selflessly in order to uphold dharma.</p>
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Introduction

The word myth is originated from the Greek word "mythos" which refers to the stories that are passed down orally. Mythology refers to the myths that are associated with the sacred stories of a particular culture. According to M.H. Abrams and Harpham, mythology refers to:

A system of hereditary stories of ancient origin which were once believed to be true by a particular cultural group, and which served to explain why the world is as it is and things happen as they do, to provide a rationale for social customs and observances, and to establish the sanctions for the rules by which people conduct their lives. (A Glossary of Literary Terms, 230)

Academicians and Historians view these topics as debatable and seek to prove their factual aspects. However, myths are the effective medium for teaching the moral values to humanity. Indian mythology is a vast collection of tales which are predominantly featured in religious texts like the Vedic literature and the Puranas. Every religion and philosophical system in India is imbued with ethical elements. Indian ethos refers to the guiding beliefs and noble notions of Indian culture. One can adhere to the ethos of the culture to enhance his or her life. According to the followers of Hinduism, the Vedas, the Puranas and the sacred books emphasize the moral principles and duties that one has to uphold in order to lead a prosperous life. Devdutt Pattanaik is an Indian mythologist, speaker, illustrator, columnist and an author of more than fifty books. Some of his important works are Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of the Mahabharata, Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana, Shyam: An Illustrated Retelling of the Bhagavata, The Book of Ram and Shiva to Shankara: Giving Form to the Formless. The present study aims at an analysis of The Book of Ram of Devdutt Pattanaik so as to highlight the importance of selflessness in one's life. It examines the

selfless deeds of a few characters such as Ram, Lakshman, Bharata, and Vibhishana. They act selflessly in order to uphold dharma.

For instance, when Sita, Ram and Lakshman are in exile, Lakshman always serves his brother and his sister-in-law selflessly. Devdutt Pattanaik writes:

On the first night in the forest, Lakshman kept watch while Ram and Sita went to sleep. That is when Nidra, the goddess of sleep, approached him. He begged the goddess to leave him alone for fourteen years so that he could guard his brother and sister-in-law night and day. The goddess, impressed by his act of filial devotion, agreed. (78)

At night, Lakshman stays awake to protect the sleeping Ram and Sita from the wild animals and evil doers. When Lakshman is confronted by Nidra, goddess of sleep, he pleads her to stay away from him for fourteen years so that he can always safeguard Ram and Sita. Seeing his selfless deed, the goddess has agreed to his request. This act of Lakshman shows his selfless devotion towards his brother and his sister-in-law. He sacrifices his sleep which is one of the basic human requirements for fourteen years in order to protect them. He does this because he believes that it is his duty to protect his elder brother and his sister-in-law.

Once, Kala, god of time, approaches Ram and insists to have a private conversation. Ram orders Lakshman not to allow anyone to interrupt their conversation. He has warned him that if anyone disturbs them, then he will be killed. When Lakshman was guarding them, Rishi Durvasa arrives and demands to meet Ram. Lakshman says that he cannot meet Ram. Durvasa, who is known for his short temper, threatens to curse Ram and his kingdom. In order to protect Ram and his kingdom from Durvasa's curse, Lakshman interrupts the conversation between Ram and Kala. Devdutt Pattanaik depicts Lakshman's selfless act skilfully:

'I want to see Ram immediately,' he demanded. Lakshman tried to explain that Ram did not want to be disturbed but Durvasa refused to take no for an answer. 'If you don't let me see Ram right now I shall curse him and his kingdom,' shouted the sage who was infamous for his temper. Not wanting any harm to befall Ram or Ayodhya, and not wanting to hurt Durvasa, Lakshman decided it was in everyone's best interest that he himself disturb Ram and inform him of Durvasa's presence. Later when Durvasa and Kala had left, Lakshman informed Ram that it was time for him to die for Ram had said anyone who disturbed his meeting with Kala had to be killed. Ram could not take back his word and Lakshman could not disobey his brother. So the two parted ways and Lakshman walked into the Sarayu river and gave up his mortal body. (93)

Since Lakshman has interrupted the meeting between Ram and Kala, he has to be killed. To fulfil his brother's promise, he drowns himself in the Sarayu river. Lakshman selflessly sacrifices his own life to protect Ram and Ayodhya. He does not care about losing his life. His main concern is to protect his brother and his kingdom from any harm. His selfless action reflects his commitment to upholding the principle of dharma for which he has sacrificed himself for the welfare of his brother and his people.

Bharata, Ram's another brother, has refused to rule the kingdom of Ayodhya even when he had the chance of doing so. When he comes to know that his mother Kaikeyi has manipulatively secured the throne for him, he rejects it. Rather, he has gone to the forest to bring back Ram. Devdutt Pattanaik writes:

'Come back. His kingdom needs you,' said Bharata. But Ram refused. His father's order that he stay as a hermit in the forest for fourteen years had to be fulfilled. Bharata then said, He did not order me to be king. The crown was simply secured for me by my mother's complicity. I reject it. Only Ram shall be king of Ayodhya. Until you return, I shall administer the kingdom as your regent. And during that time I shall not enjoy the comforts of royal life. I shall live as a hermit outside the city and suffer as you do. (79)

However, Ram denies Bharata's request to return to Ayodhya. Unable to convince his brother, Bharata takes Ram's sandals with him to Ayodhya and he places them on the throne. He decides to administer the kingdom as his regent and lives the life of a hermit like him until he returns. Though Bharata has the opportunity to become the King, he stoutly refuses the position which has been obtained by wrong means by his mother Kaikeyi. Instead, he upholds dharma by trying to bring back Ram, the rightful person to become King. Even when Ram refuses to come back, Bharata does not change his mind and follows the righteous path to rule as his regent. He does not want to live a luxurious life while his brother suffers in exile, so, he decides to live the life of hermit like his brother by renouncing all the comforts. His willingness to renounce all the luxuries has displayed his act of selflessness.

Vibhishana, Ravana's brother has disapproved his immoral act of abducting Sita. He says, "I tried to make Ravana see sense. I told him it is adharm to hold captive another man's wife against her wishes. But he kicked me out of his court. Though he is my brother, I will not support this action of his. Therefore I have left Lanka and have decided to join you. Call me a traitor, but dharma is more important" (87). He has advised his brother that imprisoning another man's wife against her consent is unethical. However, Ravana has not listened to his advice and he has expelled him from his court. Vibhishana has not supported the injustice and he decides to join Ram's camp. During the war between Ram and Ravana, Vibhishana reveals the secret of killing Ravana to Ram. When Ravana dies, Vibhishana could not bear the grief of losing him. He goes near to Ravana and weeps for him. Though Vibhishana and Ravana are brothers, Vibhishana selflessly sacrifices his brother to uphold nobility. On the other hand, Kumbhakarna, Ravana's another brother stands by his side. Though he disagrees with what Ravana has done, he chooses to fight for him in the war and sacrifices his life for his brother. While, Vibhishana chooses nobility over his family, Kumbhakarna prefers familial bond and devotion to his brother. Both of them act in selfless manner in their own ways and stand for examples for noble traits.

These instances reveal the greatness of the noble aspect of selflessness in human's life. Selflessness makes an individual to prioritize the welfare of others over one's own. From the analysis, the readers could understand that when people become selfless and act beyond their personal interests, the world will turn to be harmonious and peaceful. Devdutt Pattanaik has adeptly presented the significance of upholding the principle of selflessness in one's life. The selfless people are always glorified and immortalized in the minds of masses.

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