



THE PSYCHOLOGY OF BIGOTRY: A CASE OF MYTHOLOGY ENGULFING THE HISTORY

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Abstract:

The article discusses how mythology in its various forms when told as a story influences the psychology of the listener and when used by certain people with a hidden agenda influences the mass to believe in what is not original. The tales of Ramayana finds an important place in the Indian mythological literature and viewed differently by different faiths and its implications are not completely divine. The article proceeds by critiquing the veracity of the mythology as it has stretched beyond its natural boundaries and camouflaged the truth about its history and purpose in real world. The article traces that belief or mythology created and sustained in the mind does not require any evidences, but history needs scientific corroboration. It concludes by questioning what our culture is and what needs to be sustained and why?

Key Words: Mythology, Bigotry, Psychology & Ramayana Tales

The Beauty in the Stories of Ramayana:

While sitting on the throne, Rama's ring fell off his finger and made a hole in the earth and it disappeared. His henchman, Hanuman was sent to find the ring. As Hanuman by his power can become the smallest of the small and larger than the largest, becomes so tiny and goes down the hole in search of Rama's ring and reaches the netherworld. He finds the King of spirits (*Bhoothraja*) who rules netherworld (*Bhoologa*) and asks him about the ring. Listening to Hanuman's story, the king showed him a large plate full of rings and asked him to pick Rama's ring and leave. For Hanuman, who could not identify which one was Rama's ring as there were so many and all were similar. King of spirits said all these rings were Rama's ring and he did not know which one belonged to which of the Ramas. Astonished and puzzled, Hanuman left the netherworld without picking the ring. In another version, i.e., in the Jain Ramayana, Sita's father is Ravana and he is not a demon, nor a cannibal but a learned noble, who earned all his magical powers and weapons through "tapas" and is a devotee of Jain masters. This reflects the richness and multiplicity of dimensions to the roles of Rama and Ravana and the diversity in the versions of Ramayana penned across India (Ramunajan, 1999). There are two aspects which needs the consideration here. One is the story and the other is prose. More than the prose, it is through listening to the narration that people understood the contents. Hence, storytelling is not new.

Since the discovery of the first cave paintings some 27,000 years ago, humans relied on storytelling as a most critical method of communication (Widrich, 2012). Across time and culture, stories have been the agents of personal transformation – in part because they change our brains way of processing the information (Svoboda, 2013). Stories transform the way we think and perceive the world around us. Stories told over and over again gets deeply ingrained in the conscious mind and can influence the way we behave and judge ourselves and others.

The Psychology Behind Story Telling:

Stories provide a genuine human experience and Rutledge (2011) highlights the psychological rationale why stories are so influential. Stories connect us to our traditions, culture and mythological as well as real histories. An understanding of a particular story can connect us to a particular group which shares that tale. They provide a common ground to communicate our identity and help us to evolve a group, community or racial identities. The way we think is mostly influenced by the values, symbols, motifs, sequence and the dynamics contained in the stories. They provide mental model and metaphors to see ourselves and that of others. The decision we make, the justification we try to convince others are all through stories which we have been exposed to over the period of time. Human brain is wired for stories and without stories; it's hard to imagine a life in this world for men. That is the reason, children are always told stories before being exposed to higher order social and scientific concepts. Stories have the power to create a real world experience by creating real emotions and influencing our behaviour. Hence, they transcend generations by employing our emotions, passions, joys and sorrows from one generation to other. Psychologically, stories connect to our right hemisphere of the brain and create a world as conceived by the person and not as it is in real.

Since story telling influences and motivates people's emotions, thinking, perception and behaviour it is essential to understand how our customs and culture are woven around stories. The most significant aspect and purpose of education is to explore what is said and how it is said and by whom it is said. When critical enquiry is brought in to question the existing mythological stories, rather mending the differences, divide people based on race and lineage. Hence, it becomes all the more imperative to understand the history through those stories which have become a sort of identity of one race than of the other.

Mythology as a Parochial Genre:

It is important to understand who propagates and who listens. Tales can be enjoyed and relished when it is free of any prejudice or hatred towards a particular person or group or a race. The social and political climate prevailing in a country should not create any insecurity or conflict among the people and should not sow doubt in the citizens' minds based on which version of a particular mythological story they believe in or not. It seems, the country which celebrated the richness of multitude versions of a mythology is driven by a parochial group which does not tolerate the many dimensions. This becomes all the more problematic when this monotheism idea is painted on a mythology which is celebrated across the country for a variety of reasons. When the mythology is brought to life by rooting a particular place, time in history and a race, it creates more of an inconvenience to all those 'others' who does not share that view of that race. Narrow minded politicians who have ran out of ideas of how to win over the people through progressive means, stoke the regressive fire of identity politics through manipulation of mythological characters. There is a concerted effort on the part of some, to bring to life the mythology by tying a particular place of birth to the mythological character and create a make believe environment that is contrary to the truth. This very idea is extrapolated with various customs, rituals, and stories of the past. As it leads to a negative attitude towards the members of people who do not subscribe to the mainstream traditional mythology needs critical examination. As prejudice seems to evolve from the social thought, the component of mythological story telling needs to be questioned as it contributes to the social thought. The social thought runs from generations to generations and people who carry forward hardly think of reasoning it and those who try to reason it are always outnumbered by those who blindly believe in it. In this context, it becomes literally impossible to reverse the kind of psychological damage it creates in the minds of those who are the portrayed as negative characters. It is left for the educated minds to question the fundamentals of prejudice based on mythology or any other forms. In this article, a critical examination of Indian traditional mythology 'Ramayana' is subjected to rational scrutiny and tested alongside the ethnographical evidences. For an educated mind this needs to treat with skepticism and genuine facts needs to be established.

Inquiring the Mythology Through Mythology:

One way to test the authenticity of the claimed characteristics of a mythological figure is to know what are the other versions of Ramayana unravel. The questions raised by the Jain texts like how can monkeys vanquish the powerful Raksasa warrior like Ravana? How can noble men and Jain worthies like Ravana eat flesh and drink blood? How can Kumbhakarna sleep through six months of the year? And how can Ravana capture Indra and drag him to Lanka (?) handcuffed? and concludes that all these looks like wishful fantasy and extreme and illogical for reasoning. The Jains considering themselves as rationalists conclude that all that is said about Ravana are lies and contrary to reason.

Ethnographical Evidences:

Contrary to all the theoretical and historical evidences, even if the theory of Rama story is assumed to be true, it becomes critical to consider the life and belief of Gond tribals living in Paraswadi in Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra and other parts of central India in this time. According to the Gond tribals, Ravana is not a villain, he is an adored God and the Dharmaguru of the tribe. They are not Hindus, and hold the view that the so called adventures (misadventures) of Rama happened in "Amarkantak" mountain in Madhya Pradesh which is called as "Lanka". In Gondi, Lanka does not refer to modern day 'Sri Lanka', but a hilly place. They believe that Ravana was connected to Central India and in the clash of cultures, the Aryan culture distorted Gond History (Rashid, 2015). Gonds, a proto-Dravidian tribe are the victims of a historical injustice. Their history, their Gods, their Heroes and the role of their freedom fighters were also ignored in the mainstream discourse. This fact that there is a lineage for Ravana settles many a myths as myths and pulls the plug of making the majority monotheistic Rama as a pan Indian character. Time and space becomes an important factor in establishing the veracity of Ramayan. If it should be believed that it was written 2500 years ago, then the mentioned 'Lanka' is not other than the 'Amarkantak' which is 470 kms down from 'Ayodhya' found in Madhya Pradesh. If it has to be believed that Rama fought with Ravana of present day 'Sri Lanka' then the Ramayan itself is just 4 decades old which should have happened only after 1972 when erstwhile 'Ceylon' was named as 'Sri Lanka'. Either one should be considered as authentic. Even though the Hindu mythology propagates that the neighbouring country is the Sri Lanka as mentioned in the Ramayana, the Sri Lankan history says that Ceylon was rechristened in the year 1972. Neither the Ceylon's historical literature nor of any world historical literature including the Sangam Tamil literature has used the term 'Lanka' to mention the erstwhile Ceylon. Ancient Egyptians and Arab traders called it as 'Serendip', the south Indian Chera dynasty mentions it as 'Cheralam', Dravidian literature mentions that a 'Elam', Buddhist's literature mentions it as 'Tampobane'. The documental records of the officers of 'The Alexander, The Great' and the Portuguese travelers have mentioned the island as 'Ceilo' which later became Ceylon. Even the natural and authentic history of Sri Lanka never presents any evidence of Ramayana's 'Lanka'. In spite of these many mounting testified evidences, the story tellers continue their narration that the present day Lanka was the one which was mentioned in the Ramayana with ulterior motives.

This only confirms what Romila Thapar (2014) said i.e., ‘No amount of evidence is required to implant and sustain a belief in the mind, but for history we need scientific evidences’.

How the Mythological Story Ate Away the Tribal Truth?:

As it is believed that the purpose of education is to enable an individual to explore knowledge by critical enquiry, this story which was told and retold over thousands of years hardly stands the critical enquiry and only unmasks the cultural camouflage carried out by the parochial and religious politicians on the aboriginal tribes who belonged to the ‘other’. Knowledge does not consist of a body of information to be memorized and passed on. An educated mind demands questioning, fosters skepticism and nurtures an ability to think independently and connect to authentic information. As story telling is important for the development of the society, a wrong story or a lie in whatever mythological form as a story cannot sustain in reality. This proves that the surreptitious and imaginative mythology has engulfed the tribal truth with its rich culture and tradition. This has resulted in silencing the historical truth as the mythology has majoritarian maintenance while the native tribes are at the mercy of the majority.

Conclusion:

Next to real life experiences, stories are the best sources which could shape a person’s thinking, behaviour and even one’s personality. Stories give a virtual sense of how human lives unfold in its context and it has a profound impact on the psyche on the people who identify with it. Since, stories are mostly told for children, it has a lifelong influence on their psychological and moral development. Hence, it is required on the adults to scrutinize the content. There are real stories, imaginary ones, mythologies and history. Except for history, none of them require any scientific evidences and requires only intentions. It is the complacency of the majority which has led to spread of vested stories in the name of mythology that has reached far and wide and through generations creating barriers than bridges among the communities and races. Stories need to be valued for their human lessons and should never be intended to hurt or hit the self esteem of any caste, creed, religion or race. Since, stories have a major influence on the psychology of the individual, it is important to watch how and by whom and with what agenda it is portrayed in the media. Upholding one’s version as supreme and that of others as lesser significance leads to divisive consequences and will never help in the nation building. Now the question arises. Which is our culture and what needs to be sustained? It is left for each one of us to follow the footsteps of the Great Saint Poet Philosopher Thiruvalluvar “From whomsoever one hears about a thing, it is wisdom to understand the true import of it” to identify the truth and subscribe to it. This insight alone will bring a lasting peace, harmony and symbiotic growth among the communities, races and people of a country.

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