

How to handle your feelings: anger as an antagonist in the ramayana



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Negative emotions such as despair, disappointment, fury, bitterness are very impactful on one's life and actions; at times, such sentiments can drive one away from the right path. The complexity of feelings is accountable for the depth and dimension of a being. One of the reasons why the Indian epic the Ramayana has such profound layers is the emotional development of its characters. The flow of the story paints the perspectives of each character, good or bad, through multiple lenses. The demons, Rakshasas, may appear to be the main antagonists of Rama in the Ramayana, but negative emotions are the true fatal enemies within each characters, no matter whether men or animals.

In this epic, anger is a negative emotion that can destroy a person's life with its immediate, horrifying consequences. When the evil Manthara fuels the Ayodhya queen Kaikeyi with hatred, and when she shows her rage; " Kaikeyi ran to the palace anger-room, slammed the door and locked it behind her. She broke off her strands of pearls. [...] I want to die!" (Buck, 68). This moment of fury leads her to the inescapable hole of misery and misfortune. Shortly after, her beloved husband Dasaratha passes away due to tremendous grief, caused directly by her decision to exile Rama. However, the most painful results that Kaikeyi has to suffer is the denial of her son Bharata and the death of her husband Dasaratha. The queen does everything in her power to make Bharata king, but he does not accept the throne. Contrary to her imagination, Bharata disagrees with his mother's actions, calling them " hateful" and telling her that she is " like a deer lured into a snare by a sweet song" (114, 115). He does not appreciate what Kaikeyi considers " efforts" and " good intentions" to him. One who causes

destruction to another must receive the same result. She is deeply wounded by her son's words, just as how Dasaratha suffers immense depression because of hers. Similar to Kaikeyi, Surpanakha's rage leads to a terrible result. When Ravana's sister fails to seduce Rama, her anger leads to an outburst, in which " she rushed at Sita, and held out before her her claws curved like elephant hooks" (157). Her intentions to harm Sita ultimately result in Lakshmana's anger and cause him to cut off her ears. Her will to hurt Sita, in a moment of burning fury, causes her own wounds. Her brother, the demon king Ravana, also makes the same mistake. When Ravana and Time hold a conversation, the Rakshasa lord lets fury take over him and insults Time: " You little liar! [...] And whatever you give you steal back, by fraud, from hiding, when you're not watched" (337). Time and Death are the most powerful entities known, but Ravana, in his moment of anger, dares to humiliate Time. When Kala goes on, Ravana loses his patience and " made ready to seize Time and crush him with his steely strength" (339). Similar to Kaikeyi and Surpanakha, his anger catches him and his insult backfires. Not long after, he faces his doom, in his own ignorance and isolation. Thus, fury is a catastrophic negative emotion that has the ability to cause devastation within a very short amount of time.

Anger is not the only negative feeling that exists in Ramayana. Lust plays an important role in the epic as well. Its consequences are shown most clearly through Ravana's actions and his life. Ravana is a role model for a lecherous lifestyle. He is so lustful that he steals women who are happily married, ultimately leading to Nalakubara's curse after he rapes his wife: " Ravana, when you next attack a woman who won't have you, your ten heads will

burst!" (180). This curse stops the king from conducting wrongdoings towards women and preventing him from stepping into his own doom. But lust is a lethal foe of all beings and even the mighty Ravana cannot escape his fate. The feeling that Ravana has towards Sita, which he calls "love", is in fact another appearance of lust. It covers his eyes, lures him from his path to Dharma and ultimate happiness and pushes him to the edge of doom. Because of lust, the Rakshasa king abducts Sita and indirectly causes his loved ones, even his brother and his own son, to die. Lust is the basis of the stubbornness in Ravana's actions when he neglects the truthful advice from others. Regardless of Kumbhakarna's warning "A King is the roof his people's happiness, and if he is wrong their lives are in danger and their nation will die" (301) or Indrajit's wisdom "You took Death on your lap the day you stole Sita, and Death have you courted all this time" (318), he insists on killing Rama and seizing Sita. He ignores the well-being of his people and even himself, just because lust deceives him. He has to undergo the sorrow of loss, exactly as Rama feels when he took Sita away. Even though the consequences that desire brings are not as swift as rage, their impact is much worse. In the end, the demon king dies at the hand of Rama, the man whose wife he steals. While the appearance of lust seems to be beautiful, as what Ravana calls "love", it is a deadly enemy that slowly crushes one to death.

While anger and lust lead to actions that are controllable, grief — another destructive negative emotion, is a reaction and the greatest suffering that is unstoppable and inevitable. Dasaratha, once the mighty king of Ayodhya, suffers an agonizing depression due to his son's departure. When Rama goes

to visit his father before his great journey of fourteen years, he finds Dasaratha who “ shut the wine-vault doors and locked them closed and barred them; [...] he sat not in a palace but in a death-waiting house; he was a pilgrim come to die at some holy place in one of the little stone-built rooms” (77). His actions show how destructive grief can be. He abandons his status and hope, just waiting for death to claim him. Grief transforms him from a wise king to a hopeless man and takes away all his hopes and joy. The heartbreak ends Dasaratha’s time on Earth and death approaches him, shortly after Rama is exiled. However, grief is not identical to anger or lust. While rage and lust are the roots of sin and often expressed by an action of one on another, grief is a reaction that usually only has impact on oneself rather than others. This difference makes the emotion unique and reveals a hidden aspect: if one can get over the agony of grief and let go of vengeance and bitterness, they can achieve happiness and peacefulness, according to their definitions.

Sita is one character who is a victim of grief, but later successfully overcomes it. When Indrajit, the master of illusions, creates a false death of Rama, it causes Sita such sorrow that she decides to die: “ She quietly opened her hand, and let life slip and fall away through her fingers” (286). Grief is so devastating that it can take away her life if Rama no longer exists. Her patience and willingness to continue is barely clinging onto her hope in her reunion with Rama. However, at the end of the epic, Sita finally lets go of her sorrow and becomes independent from grief. Even though Rama is still alive, she decides to return to her mother’s arms, indicating that she no longer relies on her husband. Rama is also a role model in his ability to

prevent himself from falling into the hands of grief. Sita's departure from his life at the end of the Ramayana certainly affects him, but he does not let it take over him: "[...] I will never meet Sita again as a man." Rama sighed, and still he was smiling" (417). His smile shows his acceptance of the event. Indeed, he cannot eliminate grief completely, but he does not fight it either. He makes peace with grief and stays calm. In the end, Rama receives his long, deserving rest from life and reunites with Lakshmi in Heaven, after transforming back into Narayana. Therefore, even though grief is devastating, if one can overcome sorrow without harming others, he or she will be able to find joy and wishes fulfilled. Negative feelings are the main factors that lead to the ruin of Ramayana characters.

While anger and lust cause the immediate destruction of one when they do harm to others, grief acts as a challenge that test if one has the ability to seize happiness. Emotions are the biggest obstacles to stop a person from obtaining their goal, thus it is important to stay aware and conscious of our own actions. If one survive the impact of feelings, he or she can achieve the " everlasting Dharma wheel and truly set it turning", an achievement tantamount to ultimate joy and happiness, as well as freedom from desires and needs.

Works Cited

Buck, William, translator. Ramayana. University of California Press, 1976.