

# Unveiling the characters of Ramachandra series and ancient Ramayana

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## ARTICLE INFO ABSTRACT

The ancient Ramayana is written by Valmiki some thousand years ago in Treta yuga and Amish Tripathi has written the Ramachandra series in 2015. So we see that there is a big gap between the time period of these two Epics. While going through all these retellings a reader can definitely find many differences like the narrative techniques, character representation, Socio-political instances everything was presented differently by different authors. Our present research is mainly focused on the characters of both these epics Valmiki's "Ramayana" Amish Tripathi's "Ramachandra series". The art of characterization of both these men of letters is quite different and minute, Both Valmiki and Amish Tripathi has used their talents fully and they have given us characters that were very similar to us. Due to the different time periods the interpretation of the epic tale is unique and the characters sometimes carries us with them

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Rewriting and retelling of stories makes so many changes that can be read in Valmiki's Ramayana and Amish Tripathi's Ramchandra series. In Valmiki's Ramayana we met dharma; all the characters were presented with a lot of perfection. Its characters were spiritual and idealized models. The journey of Lord Rama as presented in the ancient Ramayana gives a perfect picture of a dutiful son, a devoted husband and a perfect and fair king. In the Valmiki Ramayana, Ravana is depicted as a powerful and highly intelligent demon king who rules over Lanka. He is also shown as a learned scholar and a great musician who used to worship Lord Shiva. Only due to his lust of power and wealth he abducted Sita the wife of Lord Rama. He faced his downfall due to this. In Ramchandra series Ravana's character is also portrayed as an intelligent and powerful ruler but the Amish has added some additional traits in his personality. He has showed him as a man who was troubled by his past memories and was not in good relations with his family. On the other hand Amish has shown him as a great person or a great king who is always ready to sacrifice his life for his kingdom. During the time of external threats he faces the situation with bravery. Like the character of Rama we have also noticed that Amish Tripathi has portrayed the other characters like Rama, Sita, Hanumana, Laxmana in a different way. These characters were not the same as they were presented in the original Ramayana of sage Valmiki. Valmiki has written Ramayana between 500 BC. There are many differences between the approach of Valmiki and Amish Tripathi, both of them interpreted the story of Rama differently. Ramayana is an ancient epic written in Sanskrit as its poetic language on the other hand Amish Tripathi's Ramachandra series is just like the modern fiction. He has employed many new elements like fantasy, folklore and mythology and therefore he has captured the audience engagement. Amish has introduced many new characters, basically who were not present in the ancient Ramayana of Valmiki. Amish has also modified some characters so that they will suit his narrative style. Both story displays the male protagonist Lord Rama and takes into a journey of Rama's life but Amish has added some twists and turns in Rama's journey. His story telling technique is quite a different one. In "Scion of Ikshvaku" Amish has added many new characters and those characters were not at all present in Valmiki's Ramayana. A few of them are:

**Roshni-** Amish has created this character as a skilled warrior and she is presented as a military member of Rama's army. She has played a very important role and she has been shown with Rama throughout the book. She is shown as a powerful and independent woman. She got unique combat skills. She was shown fearless in the battlefield. Her role is very different from the traditional woman. She participates equally with the male

warriors. Amish Tripathi has shown a deep bond between Rama and Roshni and a sense of devotion and respect is shown between them. By creating this character in his retelling of Ramayana Amish has broadened the role of women in society. Her character displays the strength and caliber of women. She inspires every woman character and her presence makes her male partners feel proud of her. There are many instances shown in the "Scion of Ikshvaku" where she has shown various extraordinary skills. In the battle against the Lankan soldiers Roshni has also displayed war strategies, her decision making skills. When the capital of Mithila Janakpur was attacked by raiders she helped the fellow soldiers in rescue safely. While going through the whole story we have also seen the confrontation of Rama's army with Ravana's army and in this final battle also Roshni has showcased her strength, and combat skills. She has fearlessly faced the enemies. She has been presented as a great leader with the abilities like:

- Strategic Planning
- Mentorship and Guidance
- Commanding Presence
- Organizational skills
- Decision making

In the "scion of ikshvaku" we met Roshni when she came to tie a rakhi to Bharata. Amish has described Roshni's character in an incident when she was performing a ceremony at Ayodhya.

"Roshni applied the ceremonial sandalwood paste to Bharat's forehead. Manthara's daughter had inherited her mother's fair complexion, but in all other ways the dissimilarity could not be more obvious. Dainty and small boned, she was soft-spoken, gentle and childlike. The simplicity of her attire was a subtle rejection of the opulence afforded by her family's wealth: a white upper garment coupled with a cream- coloured dhoti. Tiny studs and a bracelet made from Rudraaksh beads gave a hint of festive gaiety to a solemn face framed by long, wavy hair that was tied, as usual, in a neat ponytail. Her most magical attribute, though, was her eyes: overflowing with innocent tenderness and the unconditional, compassionate love of a true yogini; one who had discovered union with God. [chapter-10]"

The above lines speak about Roshni that she was humble, good, innocent, dutiful and a humble sister also. Usually it is a trend in India from ancient times that after tying Rakhi or the suraksha thread, the brothers use to give gifts or money to their sister's, but Roshni did not approve this trend. She was always ready to support her brothers. In an incident when Lakshman got injured while saving Ram from a falling tree branch, Roshni was that doctor who recovered Lakshman.

**Kumbhakarana-** In the Original ancient Ramayana of Valmiki this character is present but again Amish has added a few new traits in his character portrayal. Amish has presented him as noble and wise and shown him a loyal man of Rama. In the retelling of Ramayana while giving the description of Kumbhakaran various authors have dealt according to his bodily size and appearance. In the traditional depiction Kumbhakaran is described as a giant figure very huge and tall than other fellows of his time. He was also described as a loyal brother of Ravana and a good warrior from the demons side. The traditional battles of Ramayana portray him as a powerful person. We have noticed that various versions or retelling of Ramayana presents Kumbhakarana's character differently. These differences may be due to cultural, regional or artistic needs. Let us go through a verse from Ramayana of sage Valmiki:

"Also Kumbhakarana be fully roused. His understanding vitiated by lust, he is slumbering at ease, free from all cares."

"The ogre sleeps for nine, ten or eight months. Having deliberated with me, he for his part fell fast asleep nine months ago from now". [11-17]

The above lines from Valmiki's Ramayana tell us that Kumbhakarana had an extraordinary birth and he was born with immense strength. Ramayana tells us a background story before Lord Brahma's curse. It says once Kumbhakarna performed a major Sacrificial ritual or Yajna to please Brahma so that he can grant him a boon of getting the asana of Indra (Indrasana) but his tongue was tied by goddess Saraswati and in place of the word "Indrasana" he asked for 'Nidrasana'. It has been told in Ramayana that the king of God's Indra and The God of death, Yama was subdued by him as a result Brahma the creator cursed Kumbhakarana to "sleep like he is dead" but on Ravana's request Brahma modified his curse and he let Kumbhakarana sleep for six months and eat something. His six to eight months of long sleep and his gluttony proved to be an obstacle that keeps him away from the battle field during the time of war. Lord Rama's army during the war of Lanka got the privilege of his sleep. Lack of self control is also shown in his character. Kumbhakarana's death in the battle against Ram proved him as a dutiful warrior, and also presents him as a symbol of strength and destruction. In Amish Tripathi's book from the "Ram Chandra series" Kumbhakarana is presented as a Naga or a human born with many deformities. The book says that he is a loyal brother of Ravana and he used to stand with Ravana in all the odd times. Amish Tripathi's version also presents his ability to consume large quantity of food and he used to sleep for long periods. In the ancient Ramayana's traditional depiction of Kumbhakaran, he was shown engaged in intense battles with the heroes of Ramayana specially Hanuman.

**Parshuram-** Parshuram is a Hindu mythological character. Regarding his birth it was told by Valmiki in the ancient Ramayana that his birth is a gift by the gods. He was a child blessed with extraordinary strength and

mastery of weapons. To take the revenge of his father's death Parsuram cleared the name Khastriya clan from the whole land. Hindu mythology presents him as the incarnation of Lord Vishnu. The ancient Ramayana says that he was the protector of Vedic traditions. In the ancient Ramayana Valmiki says that during Sita's Swayamvara when Lord Rama broke Shiva's bow Parsurama appeared and questioned Rama that from where did he get the right to do so. He was seen as a warrior who always stood in front to save the dharma. He is also seen in Valmiki's Ramayana but in the "Scion of Ikshvaku" Amish has expanded his role.

**Ravana's sister-** In the ancient Ramayana of Valmiki the portrayal of Ravana's sister Shurpanakha is very different from that of Amish Tripathi. Valmiki presented her as a powerful demoness who tried to seduce Lord Rama during the time of his exile, Rama rejected her and Lakshmana cut her nose to protect his brother Ram. All these deeds of Lakshmana annoyed Shurpanakha and she went to Ravana and she requested Ravana to kidnap Sita to take revenge. She was the only reason of the conflict that aroused between Ravana and Ram. After her triggering Ravana went to the forest and he abducted Sita. Her uncontrolled desire and unrighteous conduct led the Lanka war. The mistreatment by Lakshman also shows the position of women in the patriarchal society. Her immoral actions also show the importance of moral values in the ancient society. On the other hand Amish Tripathi has presented Ravana's sister in his retelling of Ramayana but actually she is not the same character in Valmiki's Ramayana. He has shown her as a powerful and influential self-motivated lady. According to Amish she is the person who challenges the patriarchal rules of the society. Amish has also presented the injustice and double standards faced even by the powerful princess. Shurpanakha's name is clearly described by Amish in "The Ramachandra Series" Book 2 'Sita : Warrior of Mithila'. The book says; "Ram smiled politely. Meanwhile, Shurpanakha pulled out a small violet kerchief and covered her nose delicately, Lakshman noticed her fashionable and manicured finger nails, each one shaped like a winnowing basket.

That was perhaps the root of her name, Shurpa was Old Sanskrit for a winnowing basket, And nakha means nails." [PP-340]

The above lines speak about Shurpanakha's beauty and elegance. But at the same time the other verses say that she also got uncontrolled desire.

"Sita watched Shurpanakha, hawk-eyed, as the lady continued to stare at her husband. Unabashedly. Up close, it was that the magic of Shurpanakha's eyes lay in their startling color : bright blue. She almost certainly had some Hiranyaloman Mlechha blood. Practically nobody east of Egypt had blue eyes. She was bathed in fragrant perfume that overpowered the rustic, animal smell of the Panchavati camp; at least for those in her vicinity. Not overpowering enough for her, evidently, She continued to hold the stench of her surroundings at bay, with the kerchief pressed against her nose." [PP-340]

These lines clearly show that Amish Tripathi's portrayal of Shurpanakha is very different from the original ancient Ramayana of Valmiki. Amish has tried to give a humanizing trait to this villain character. He has also tried to cover the back-story of this lady and presented her as a more complex one. Amish's presentation also questions the actions of Lord Rama and Lakshmana. Lakshman's treatment of Shurpanakha shows the injustice and double standards of ancient Indian society. The story also portrays the submissiveness of woman characters in the ancient times. By presenting the villain character of Shurpanakha Amish Tripathi has given us a multidimensional presentation of the older events and records of ancient Rama's story. The familial bond between Ravana and Shurpanakha is not shown in the ancient Ramayana but Amish has tried to present this beautiful bond of brother and sister in his Rama Chandra Series. Ravana loved his sister so much that he decided to take revenge by abducting Sita. Amish has involved his readers to question about this action of Lakshman that whether his cutting the nose of his sister is right or it is just like an insult to an unmarried young girl. It is clearly seen that both these authors have presented their characters differently. In fact Amish has added some new traits in Ramachandra series characters.

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