


# DISREGARDING FEMALE DIGNITY IN VĀLMĪKĪ'S EPIC POEM 'RĀMĀYAᅇA' AND PREMCHAND'S STORY 'NĪRVĀSAN'\*

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## Abstract

This paper is an attempt to present the positions of women in Hindu civilization within the context of justifying the purity of women in Vālmīkī's celebrated epic poem 'Rāmāyaᅇa' and prominent contemporary Indian writer Premchand's story 'Nirvāsan'. Even though the date of composing the 'Rāmāyaᅇa' is not certain, it is estimated that it took place in literature between the 4th and 2nd centuries BC. On the other side, 'Nirvāsan' belongs to the date in more recent times as late 19th and early 20th centuries AD. This shows us clearly that the traditions and customs have never changed throughout the centuries. Literary intersections demonstrate how to transfer culture from generation to generation. Patriarchal social structure in India will be discussed with the method of radical feminist theory. Women can be seen as in the second plan compared to the men according to this feminist theory argument. Moreover, women are exposed to physical and psychological violence because of the patriarchal system. Patriarchal society is a structure in which men are superior to women in every sense and women are forced to live under the domination of the men. In this social structure, the authoritarian male has a more respectable position in the family and in social life than the woman. Women can be perceived as the object of men's power and authority. This study aims to provide an insight to the people about Indian culture through the texts by analyzing above mentioned literary works.

**Key Words:** Woman, Rāmāyaᅇa, Premchand, Nirvāsan, Female Dignity



## VĀLMĪKĪ'NİN DESTANI "RĀMĀYAᅇA" İLE PREMÇAND'IN ÖYKÜSÜ "NĪRVĀSAN"DA KADINLIK ONURUNUN SORGULANMASI

### Öz

Bu makalede, Vālmīkī'nin ünlü destanı 'Rāmāyaᅇa' ve önde gelen çağdaş Hintli yazarlardan Premchand'ın 'Nirvāsan' adlı öyküsü üzerinden kadınların sadakatleri sorgulanırken, Hindu medeniyetinde kadınların durumu da gözler önüne serilmektedir. Rāmāyaᅇa'nın yazıldığı tarih kesin olmamakla birlikte, MÖ. 4. ve 2. yüzyıllar arasında oluşturulduğu tahmin edilmektedir. Öte yandan, "Nirvāsan", MS. 19. yüzyılın sonları ve 20. yüzyılın başları gibi daha yakın zamanlardaki tarihe aittir. Bu bize, gelenek ve göreneklerin yüzyıllar boyunca hiç değişmediğini açıkça göstermektedir. Edebi kesişimler, kültürün nesilden nesile nasıl

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aktarıldığını gösterir. Hindistan'daki ataerkil toplumsal yapı, radikal feminist teori yöntemi ile tartışılacaktır. Bu feminist teori argümanına göre kadınların erkeklere kıyasla ikinci planda oldukları görülebilir. Dahası kadınlar ataerkil sistem nedeniyle fiziksel ve psikolojik şiddete maruz kalmaktadırlar. Ataerkil toplum, erkeklerin her anlamda kadından üstün olduğu ve kadınların erkek egemenliğinde yaşamaya zorlandığı bir yapıdır. Bu sosyal yapıda otoriter erkek kadına göre aile ve toplumsal yaşamda daha saygın bir konuma sahiptir. Kadınlar bir bakıma erkeklerin gücünün ve otoritesinin nesnesi olarak algılanabilir. Bu çalışma, söz konusu edebi eserleri analiz ederek Hint kültürü hakkında metinler üzerinden bir fikir vermeyi amaçlamaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kadın, Rāmāyaṇa, Premçand, Nirvāsan, Kadınlık Onuru



## Introduction

In this study, the reflections of from past to present traditional patriarchal Indian culture in the intertextual transition will be dwelled on through the Rāmāyaṇa<sup>1</sup> epic poem, which is known as the oldest poetic work of India, and the Nirvāsan<sup>2</sup>, one of the modern period stories. The effect of the patriarchy on women's lifestyles in Indian society during the author's lifetime was analyzed in the direction of these problematics: What is the place of women in terms of family and gender roles? Is the loyalty an only female-specific phenomenon? In this context, the patriarchal social structure in India and the culture of India, which is transferring from generation to generation for years, will be discussed with the radical feminist theory method. This paradigm, where women are in second place compared to men, defends the view that women are subjected to physical and psychological violence because of the patriarchal system.

Patriarchal society is a structure where men are superior to women in every sense and women are forced to live under the domination of men. The authoritative man in this social structure has a more respectable position than women in family life and social life. According to this theory, women can be perceived as an object which men practice their power and authority. Patriarchy accepts women as just fertility and sexuality centered, and perceive as the main object of power and authority of men. When examining the stories of Premchand, who was born in patriarchal social order, we see the texts in which women are subjected to physical and psychological violence, which is essentially caused by the patriarchal system. Also among the stories of Premchand, as a reaction to the see the women are of secondary importance compared to men we see the texts, which defend that women are worth alone. Nirvāsan is one of them. Similarly, in the work of Vālmīki, there is a male-dominant society centered expression too. The loyalty of women is questioned in the direction of the moral values of society.

Feminism and patriarchy have been one of the concepts that have been discussed for centuries no matter time or place. Emiroğlu and Aydın (2003) described feminism as a thinking system that queries the difference between women and men related the social, political, and economic dimensions. Even

<sup>1</sup> It means "The works that Rāma did", It is an epic poem written by Vālmīki in Sanskrit, which tells the story of the King Rāma and there are different variations of it in other modern Indian languages. Besides being a king, Rāma is the seventh avatār of the protector god Viṣṇu.

<sup>2</sup> This word has meanings like "expulsion, exile, expulsion and expulsion" (McGregor, 1992, p. 571).

though it is said that the bases of this thinking system go back to the 14th and 15th centuries when ideas about women's rights began to awaken, it is mentioned that the begin point was the political and social movements which showed up in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century to expand women's rights in the West.

In the work of him which names "Feminist Idea", Tong (2006), discusses the radical feminism with two sides when examining the types of feminism under the titles. The first one is "Radical Feminism About Reproduction and Maternity" and the second one is "Radical Feminism About Gender and Sexuality". Radical feminism defends that the patriarchal system domineers the women and a system like that cannot be reformed, but it is possible to get rid of it by ripping it out radically. Besides that, it says that it is not only the patriarchal law and political structure that has to be destroyed, but also cultural and social institutions.

It emphasized that the witch burning traditions of Westerners, "chastity belt" in 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries and honor killings in India are the most extreme form of patriarchal control (Ersöz transferred from Pope, 2016). A woman's virtue is directly associated with her sexuality. A virtuous woman is expected not to have sexual intercourse outside marriage, to protect her chastity, to be careful about her dressing and to act suited for traditions.

In his work, which names "Culture Commentaries", Eagleton (2016) said that the nature is meeker than culture when mentioning that the getting rid of weed is easier than crushing out the sexism, changing a whole culture needs more effort than settling a river or destroying a mountain.

The concept of patriarchy is first encountered in Weber's texts. Güneş, who said that Weber has been using the patriarchy in the sense of a special kind of authority relationship, mentions that patriarchy is mostly in a group connected by both economic and kinship ties, while authority passes from father to son in households. He says that the authority of the head of the family imposes solid obligations relative to obedience only within the boundaries of his household (Güneş, transferred from Weber, 2017). Patriarchy means "Domination of Father". "The term of patriarchy has used to describe the social systems which are built on the authority of men heads of the family in the beginning." (Marshall, 1999, p. 47). Patriarchy or Patriyarka refers to a social formation which men hold power in, or directly power of men. Thus, it is almost synonymous with "male domination" or crushing of women (Hirata, et al., 2015).

George Ritzer and Jeffrey Stepnisky (2018) say that the sources of economical, ideological, legal, and emotional power line up to maintain the patriarchy when the patriarchy started processing in Modern Sociology Theory, and they also say that men have much gain on controlling women. Women are expected to do house works, to give a birth and raise children, to satisfy pruriency of man and to show great respect to man instead of working and contributing the economy of home. The enslavement of women is controlled by social norms. Thus, the effort of men for controlling the women has got a result.

Uma Chakravarti uses the "Brahmanic Patriarchy (Patriyarka)" term in her work telling about the caste and gender hierarchy. She refers that the caste system, class discrimination and sexual stratification in India are the most important items which give a shape to brāhmanic patriarchy (Chakravarti, 1993). In

India, the sharing of the responsibilities, roles and works in the family things and social place, gender-based discrimination in the family works places heavy burdens on women. In the face of these traditional, social, and domestic roles, it is seen that women are as objects which often deprived of love and respect. In the Literary Theory of Terry Eagleton (2017), when Derida describes the woman and man, is saying that "Woman is anti and farther of man" and "Woman is the one that is not man, defective man". And he says that the existence of men is dependent on the act of excluding women and subordinating them to himself. From the describes of Derida, it is possible to derive that women are such passive, held in contempt, and they are pushed to the second plan in every sense and seen as an object.

According to Easthope (2019), the concept of patriarchy cannot be handled under the concept of class exploitation and he says that the analysis of the meaning determined by gender goes beyond the concept of ideology. For this reason, in the analyze of signification practices, he says that the concept of gender determines the wide-ranging social semantic fields related to masculinity, femininity and the reproduction of women's oppression within patriarchy.

Gail Omvedt, in her article that she wrote on Uma Chakravarti's "brāhmanic patriarchy" theory, states that this concept was first used in Indian literature by historian Uma Chakravarti and states that it belongs to the 19th century colonial period. In the formation of the brāhmanic ideology in the middle of the B.C. first millennium, while Vedic dharma<sup>3</sup> imposed heavy burdens on upper caste men in religious ceremonies, women were also made dependent on men. She tells that there is a path to salvation in the religious sense in remarriage of the widow woman, in lock themselves in the house and in devote themselves to their husbands, who are completely equal with God. In the words of Manu, women should never be set free. Omvedt emphasizes the role of Chakravarti's Manusmṛti<sup>4</sup> and pativrata ideology, like many feminists today. Defining this system imposed on women as a "caste-patriarchal bargain", while women from the upper caste accept an obedient lifestyle to the status and wealth of their husbands, Omvedt (2000) is questioning how women from the lower caste can accept this system. She questions what benefit this bargain has for women of the lower caste.

<sup>3</sup> It means religion, duty, morality, virtue, justice, law, and the right way (Kaya, 2003, p. 75).

<sup>4</sup> It means "The laws of Manu". This work thought that have been written by Manu, who is known as the ancestor of mankind, also known as Mānavāchārya, consists of twelve chapters. The first chapter describes the creation of the universe, and it is claimed that this chapter was added to the work later. In the second part, the control of the senses is mentioned. In the third part, the responsibilities of a head of the family who knows the Vedas well, eight different types of marriage, and the methods of protecting women and children are mentioned. In the fourth chapter, the duties of the brahmins, in the fifth chapter, pure and impure foods and purification methods as well as the duties and responsibilities of women are mentioned. In the sixth chapter, the things to be done by the hermits who have retired in the forest are explained, while in the seventh chapter the duties and responsibilities of the kings and the king's men are mentioned. In the eighth chapter, the concepts of law and justice, and the issues such as the decision of theft, border fight, and prostitution in the court of law are being discussed. In the ninth chapter, the duties of the king, man and woman are described. While telling about the caste system in the tenth chapter, what a man should do in the moment of anger is also explained. In the eleventh chapter, the practice of penance is mentioned, and the subjects of criminals serving their sentences such as murderers and prostitutes are mentioned. In the twelfth chapter, although rebirth is mentioned, it is mentioned that the good and bad things done in this world determine the next rebirth cycle. Manusmṛti underlies the modern-day Hindu Law, and it is thought to have been written in the 500s B.C. (Mani, 1996).

Manusmṛti is the basis text of traditional brāhmanism and warns to bring under control women. Omvedt (2000), who states that consuming of alcohol, having relationships with bad people, separating from her husband, walking around and living in someone else's house, sleeping and staying in someone else's home are defined as eight behaviors that damage women, says that brahman ideology is afraid of free women. The thought that a woman to go to heaven only if she bows down to her husband prevents her to be an independent person from her husband.

Only Brāhmaṇs, the men of god, are allowed to read the Divine Veda texts. In India, there was a reformist woman called Paṇḍitā Ramābāī, who was trying to flout these bans. She attempted to break taboo of women cannot read these texts. She was a pariah woman who got reaction from upper caste when she married with a shūdra<sup>5</sup>. She has created the first feminist organizational structuring called Ārya Mahilā Samāc in Pune. In the end, she has changed her religion too, became a Christian and fought to open churches in India. Paṇḍitā Ramābāī was seen as an important threat to brāhmanic Hinduism, so scholars have ignored her (Omvedt, 2000).

When taking a look at god and goddesses that mentioned in Vedas, it is seen that most of them are masculine gender. Kaya (2003) has listed the god and goddesses that mentioned in Vedas like that: Indra, Agni, Sūrya, Varuṇa, Ashvins, Aditi, Mitra, Vāyu, Ushas, Dyaushpitṛ, Soma, Pṛthvī, Maruts, Rudra, Yama, Bṛhaspati, Mātariṣvan etc. It is known that among them Indra Vedic is the god of warrior and lightning rainy storm, Agni is the god of fire, Sūrya is the god of sun, Varuṇa is the lord of river, organizer of seasons, manager of universe; Ashvins are the young and handsome twin sons of sun and sky, Aditi is the mother of gods, Mitra is the god of sun, Vāyu is the god of wind, Ushas is the goddess of dawn, Dyaushpitṛ is the sky father, Soma is the god of moon, Pṛthvī is earth mother, Maruts are the gods of storm, Rudra is the god of storm, Yama is the god of death, Bṛhaspati is the lord of pray, Mātariṣvan is the god who discovered the fire. It is seen that gods are mostly identified with sky and goddesses are mostly identified with earth.

As is seen, in Vedic religion known as Vedism, animist gods are at the forefront and most of them are masculine. However, some references were made to goddesses, in addition to gods, later transformed into a completely male-dominated divinity. As a natural result of this, it was unavoidable that society was shaped according to this masculine order.

It is crucial to state that after Hinduism was formed in later periods, the god trilogy which called Trimūrti was dominant. In the Vedic period this trilogy, consisting of Agni, Vayu and Surya, transformed into Brahmā, Vishṇu and Shiva got ahead of other gods and had more sacred values during the epic and puranic period. Brahmā is creator, Vishṇu<sup>6</sup> is protector and Shiva is destroyer god (Kaya, 2003). In fact, the Vedic period gods did not disappear completely, but only lost their importance in later

<sup>5</sup> Someone from the caste of the worker. A shūdra is in the lowest class according to Hindu caste system.

<sup>6</sup> Vishṇu is portrayed as equipped with gold and silk, adorned with necklaces of forest flowers, holding a shell of conch in four hands, which respectively proclaims its existence in the world, a disc representing the harmony of life, a mace to punish those who break the law, and a lotus to reward those who follow the law (Pattanaik, 2016).

period. For instance, in Rāmāyaṇa, “Agni, the Fire God” is also mentioned. There is a scene in the Rāmāyaṇa where the god of fire is seen as the one who saved Sītā from burning.

### Discourse Analysis from Rāmāyaṇa and Nirvāsan

The Rāmāyaṇa is considered to be the oldest epic poem of India and therefore they call it "ādi kāvya", meaning the first poem work. This is an epic poem which is describing former times. The author of it is Vālmīki and he is called "ādi kavi" which means "the first poet". Vālmīki and Rāma lived around the same time. When Rāma is exiled to the forest, he goes to visit Vālmīki's āshrama<sup>7</sup>. This āshrama is also the place where Sītā, who was abandoned by Rāma, lived for a while, and gave birth and raised her children. When Vālmīki was impressed by the happenings of Rāma, he took action to write the Rāmāyaṇa, which means "the story of Rāma". According to the other opinion, it is said that it was the creator god Brahmā that encouraged Vālmīki to do this. While Vālmīki was watching a pair of cranes about to copulate in the forest, suddenly a hunter killed the male crane; thereupon Vālmīki cursed the hunter in poetic form. Brahma heard this and encouraged him to write the story of Rāma in the same poetic form<sup>8</sup> (Mani, 1996).

The Rāmāyaṇa, which is an epic poem belongs to approximately B.C. 2nd century, consists of twenty-four thousand couplets (shloka) and seven chapters (kāṇḍa). This epic poem has spread to the island of Java, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Cambodia, Thailand, Laos, Burma, Japan, Nepal, Ceylon, and Mongolia (Kaya, 2002). Although the author of the epic poem is not known exactly, it is estimated that the author is Valmiki, who appeared as a saint character in the epic poem (Kaya, 2003).

King Dasaratha, who could not have children for many years, organized a horse sacrificial rite in Ayodhya. After this rite, Rāma was born from the king's wife named Kaushalyā. And Bharata from Kaikeyī, Lakshmaṇa and Satrugṇa from Sumitrā were born. The greatest and most favorite among the children was Rāma, who is also the avatār of Vishṇu. On the other hand, Canaka, king of Videha, had a daughter named Sītā. This girl was not a simple mortal neither. Because, it was said that she was born from the soil while the king ploughs, and therefore she was called Sītā, which means "furrow". The King Canaka accepted her as his own daughter (Kaya, 2002).

The aging king wants his son Rāma to enthrone in place of him. Thereupon, Queen Kaikeyī's hunchbacked maid, Mantharā, incites the queen against the king in order to Bharata takes the throne instead of Rāma. Since the king promised Kaikeyī to fulfill two requests of her, Kaikeyī wants to take advantage of this situation, caused Rāma to go into exile into the forest for fourteen years. Sītā and

<sup>7</sup> It is the name that given to the place known to be used by the saints in India as a center of religious teaching, located very far away in nature. Today, there are many āshramas in many places of India.

<sup>8</sup> Those lines in Sanskrit language praised by Brahmā and encouraging the writing of the Rāmāyaṇa are as follows: “Mā nishāda pratishṭhām tvamagamaḥ śāṣvatīḥ samāḥ /

Yat krauñcamithunādekamavadhiḥ

Kāmamohitam. //” (Mani, 1996, p. 640).

“Because that you killed one of these cranes that flaming with lust,  
Wish that you will walk around like enamour” (Kaya, 2002, p. 30).

Lakshmaṇa also gone into exile with Rāma into the forest. The king dies out of sorrow. Bharata, who is on the throne, pursues his brother and says that Rāma is the real owner of the throne and that he should take the throne. Rāma says that even if his father is dead, he cannot break his father's promise.

Rāma goes to the forest with his wife and brother. There are rākshasas<sup>9</sup>, who are disturbing the saints in the forest. Rāvaṇa is the king of the Rākshasa, and Shūrpaṇakhā is his sister. Once upon a time, Shūrpaṇakhā sees a handsome dervish in the forest. This dervish is the prince of Ayodhyā, Rāma. The intrigues of palace forced Rāma to live like a dervish in the forest for fourteen years. Rāma's brother Lakshmaṇa and his wife Sītā went to the forest together to join his ordeal. Shūrpaṇakhā approaches to Rāma and wants to be with him. Rāma said he was married and rejected her and said: "Go to my brother. He has no wife here". But Lakshmaṇa also rejected her because he had a wife in Ayodhyā. Shūrpaṇakhā got angry and attacked Sītā, thinking that if she killed Sītā and got her out of the way, Rāma could rethink her offer and make him her lover. When Sītā shouted for help, the two brothers immediately rushed to help for Sītā. Lakshmaṇa caught Shūrpaṇakhā and cut off her nose, ears, and nipples to teach her an unforgettable lesson. When the Shūrpaṇakhā yelled in pain and run to his brother, he decided to kidnap Sītā, who caused his sister's unhappiness, in order to punish the brothers in revenge. First, he sent a golden deer to enthrall Sītā, so Sītā begged Rāma to catch the deer. Sītā got restless and became nervous when Rāma did not return for a long time, so she begged Lakshmaṇa for looking up for him. Before leaving, Lakshmaṇa drew a line around Rāma's cottage, cautioned his brother's wife that "Never get out of here." While the brothers were away, Rāvaṇa disguised himself as a wise, came to Rāma's cottage and begged for food from Sītā. Sītā invited him in but Rāvaṇa rejected to enter. He said that because Sītā was married and was alone at home, he could not enter in because of etiquette. Thereupon, Sītā extended her hand from the cottage and offered food to Rāvaṇa. Rāvaṇa pretended to be hurt, saying that it was not an act that would suit the host. According to the Dharma hospitality, Sītā stepped out of the house to welcome the guest. Rāvaṇa threw his disguise and caught Sītā, took her to Lankā, the golden city on the island of Trikuṭā (Pattanaik, 2016).

Lakshmaṇa-rekhā, the line Lakshmaṇa draws outside of Rāma's cottage, separates nature and culture. Within the line, the laws of Rāma are valid. Outside is wild nature and the land of Rāvaṇa. Within the line, there is respect for marriage laws, but there is no outside. In it, Sītā is the wife of Rāma. But outside, she is a free woman who could be with anyone else. Rāvaṇa knows that if he tries to force Sītā by entering Rāma's cottage, he will be judged by the laws of society. But if he forces Sītā outside of Lakshmaṇa-rekhā, he will be judged by forest law. Within it, he will be a traitor who does not respect the marriage laws; but outside he will be a hero, a playful (Pattanaik, 2016).

In the Rāmāyaṇa III, 52: 34-39, it is mentioned that even the sun is fading, its rays are darkened during Sītā's abduction, he was crying at his sadness over Sītā's abduction. And also mentioned that if Rāvaṇa is going to kidnap Rāma's wife, Sītā, there is no more place for justice, truth, righteousness, and purity in this world (Kaya, 2002). Rāvaṇa kidnapped Sītā to his palace in Lankā. He asks him to be his

<sup>9</sup> Evil spirits.

wife by blurring the eye of her with his riches. Sītā rejects him. She says that she will never lose her commitment to Rāma, that she cannot touch him.

In the end, there was a big war. Rāma saves Sītā. After Rāma killed Rāvaṇa, the Rākshasas left Sītā. But Rāma did not accept Sītā as his wife until his wife proves her purity. Rāma rejected Sītā in front of all the monkeys and Rākshasa, and said that a woman who has been looked at with lustful eyes by another man cannot be accepted as a wife by Rāma. Sītā gone into fire; but she was so pure that the god of fire, Agni saves her from burning. When his wife's purity was proven publicly, Rāma returned to Ayodhyā with Sītā. But Rāma's people of Ayodhyā did not accept a dishonored woman as their queen. Respecting the wishes of his people, Rāma decided to reject Sītā and sent her to the forest with Lakshmaṇa<sup>10</sup>. Rāma did not remarry either. Rāma, who is forever loyal to Sītā, placed a gold statue of Sītā – because the gold is a metal that represents purity - in the place reserved for his wife. When the people of Ayodhyā realized their mistake over time, and they begged Sītā to return to the palace. Rāma also said her to come and let them see how pure she is. Sītā, who is constantly forced to prove her purity, said that if she thinks of anyone other than Rāma as her husband, the ground split and take her into it. The ground splinted and took Sītā into it. In Uttara Kāṇḍa, it is told that Sītā entered the Sarayū river and never exited (Pattanaik, 2016).

The Rāmāyaṇa consists of seven chapters: Bāla Kāṇḍa<sup>11</sup>, Ayodhyā Kāṇḍa<sup>12</sup>, Aranya Kāṇḍa<sup>13</sup>, Kishkindhā Kāṇḍa<sup>14</sup>, Sundara Kāṇḍa<sup>15</sup>, Yuddha Kāṇḍa<sup>16</sup> and Uttara Kāṇḍa<sup>17</sup>. Western experts claim that some parts of Bāla Kāṇḍa and the whole of Uttara Kāṇḍa were added to the epic poem later. The causes of this can be listed as follows: encountering the different text types in Bāla Kāṇḍa and many of the stories

<sup>10</sup> Sītā gives birth to twins named Kusha and Lava in Vālmīki's hermitage. Years pass. The children grow up and become Vālmīki's poets. Meanwhile, Rāma holds a great horse sacrificial rite. In this ceremony, Saint makes two young people read the Rāmāyaṇa which is written by him. Rāma understands that Lava and Kusha are the sons of his own. He immediately sends ambassadors to Vālmīki and asks them to bring Sītā to the ceremony, and wants her to swear on her purity. Next morning, Vālmīki brings Sītā and tells to Rāma that his wife is pure and innocent and that Kusha and Lava are his children. Despite being sure by the words of Vālmīki, King Rāma asks Sītā to come and purify herself by swearing. Then all the gods come out of heaven. But Sītā, with mournful looks, says these words: *"May Mother Earth embrace me in her bosom if I have not remained true to Rāma in my mind, speech and action. May Mother Earth embrace me in her bosom if I have ever known someone else but Rāma; I am saying the truth!"* When the swear of Sītā ends, a celestial throne with snake and demon figures shows up on the earth. The goddess of the earth is sitting on it, spreads her arms and embracing her and goes into the depths of the earth. Rāma begs to Mother Earth to give Sītā back but it is useless... The god Brahmā shows up and says that they can come together in only heaven. Thereon Rāma leaves his crown and throne to his children Kusha and Lava and goes to heaven. In heaven, he becomes Vishṇu again (Kaya, 2002, p. 31-33). Sītā is an innocent woman who always loyal to her husband until the end of her life. However, Sītā has deeply saddened by the fact that Rāma acted with the thought of what the world would say. It can be clearly seen here that Mother Earth could not bear Sītā's being offended any longer and embraces her. Rāma, who has already believed in his wife's purity from the beginning, leaves the throne to his children and goes after Sītā.

<sup>11</sup> The chapter of the youth of Rāma.

<sup>12</sup> The chapter that is passing in Ayodhyā city.

<sup>13</sup> Exiling to jungle and live in the jungle.

<sup>14</sup> In the Kishkindhā.

<sup>15</sup> Literal meaning is Beautiful Episode or Lovely Chapter.

<sup>16</sup> The war chapter.

<sup>17</sup> The final chapter.



either recapitulated or disappeared completely, the narration of Rāma as a hero rather than an embodiment of Vishṇu, there is no the first translations of Uttara Kāṇḍa into other languages, in Bāla Kāṇḍa the Rāmāyaṇa was created by Vālmīki and make his sons Lava and Kusha to recite. The repetition of the expressions mentioned in Bāla Kāṇḍa in Uttara Kāṇḍa, make the possibility that they were created in different periods, that is, they were written by others more powerful (Mani, 1996). Monier Williams (1986) also mentions that the first and seventh chapters were added to the work later. In the section Uttara Kāṇḍa, it is explained that the exile of Sītā to the forest due to the spread of the public rumors about Sītā's innocence. Sītā, when leaving the palace with Lakshmaṇa, who is preparing to leave her in the forest, expresses that she is a loyal and virtuous woman with this word:

*"...Tell the noble king that I am devoted to him and I am spotless. I respect that he left me because of the public's hate. The only purpose in life of mine is him. It is my duty to clear his name. Tell him to take care of his people, love his brothers, and treat his people justly. This is his noble duty. Tell him do not be sad, even if I lose my life. A woman should be able to sacrifice her life for the sake of her husband, Lakshmaṇa!"* (Özcan & Can, 2012, p. 138). Sītā was talking about dharma rules here.

One of the repeated topics in Hindu mythology is the war between Devas<sup>18</sup> and Asuras<sup>19</sup>. The Asuras are the incorrigible troublemakers of the Hindu world, constantly defeated by the Devas. Rākshasas are also described as demonic creatures like the Asuras. Rākshasas do not respect marriage laws. For them, violence is a tool to dominate the world. In the Rāmāyaṇa, Rāma and Sītā represent the dharma rules, while Rāvaṇa and Shūrpaṇakhā represent the laws of the forest (Pattanaik, 2016). In the Rāmāyaṇa, after Rāma was exiled to the forest, it is seen that there were saints who asked Rāma for help in order to get rid of the rākshasas that constantly dealt with the saints.

In his work which names God in the Indians, Kaya (1998) says that the Indian literature generally under the influence of the people who believes in Vishṇu and says that it can be explained by the fact that they are fonder of literature than the people who believes in Brahmā and Shiva. He also says that, actually, although all three gods appear on an important level in Indian literature, when Vishṇu embodied as the most important epic heroes Rāma, Kṛṣṇa and Baladeva, he was shown as more popular than the other two (Kaya, 1998). In the epic poem, the character of Rāma figures the perfect man who suffers and restrains his wishes and desires with superhuman patience. The author, Vālmīki, is probably a noble person from a Brāhmaṇ family living in Ayodhyā (Williams, 1986). While Rāma represents the ideal Indian man as a role model and king, it is noteworthy that the protectorate quality was given to a male god as an embodiment of God Vishṇu. In a male-dominated society, the man is the protector and the woman is the protected.

Regarding the situation of women in Rāmāyaṇa period, Soti Virendra Chandra (2009), who examines the Rāmāyaṇa as a single period says that women were in the same position as in the Vedic period. When he says that women were in various spheres of life during the Rāmāyaṇa period, he also says that there were women who even went to fight alongside their husbands. He gives the example that

<sup>18</sup> Gods.

<sup>19</sup> Evil spirits, demons.

Bharata's mother, Kaikeyī, who went to fight with King Dasharatha. He also tells about Sītā, who learns about Rāma's exile to the forest, and goes to the forest with her husband instead of leaving him alone. Even though Rāma says that Sītā should stay in Ayodhyā and serve her mother-in-law and father-in-law, Sītā says that she is decisive in going to the forest with him to show her loyalty to her husband as required the dharma rules in Indian culture. Rāma, Sītā and Lakshmaṇa are good examples of a loyal son, wife, and loyal brother with the devotion to father, the devotion to husband and the devotion to a brother.

Although Rāma believes the purity of Sītā, he could not accept her because of the social pressures and tried to justify her in public, with this act he humiliated her. When he returned to Ayodhyā with Sītā, he was not welcomed by public. Because the return of Rāma to the palace with his wife Sītā, who was lodge with Rāvaṇa in his residence for a while, is unacceptable since it is against the patriarchal order. It is fearful that this will have a detrimental effect on the moralities of women in the country. As an exemplary king, Rāma is very sorry for this. He feels responsible to his people. Rāma's renunciation of Sītā due to the doubts of public and Sītā's acceptance of her fate make her similar to the female character in Premchand's story Nirvāsan.

Nirvāsan is a story that takes place in the third volume of Premchand's eight-volume story compilation. In the story, there is a couple named Parashurāma<sup>20</sup> and Maryādā<sup>21</sup>. This couple also has a son. In the story, the purity of a woman who stay apart for a while from her husband is questioned just like in Rāmāyaṇa. In this story, which tells about the events that happened as a result of the husband and wife, who went to the river to bathe together, loss each other, while the man was returning home, the woman was hosted in āshrama for a while. Many lost women like Maryādā are hosted in the āshrama.

One day, a man who mentions the name of the great saint at the station says that he can take her as far as he will go by gaining the trust of Maryādā. However, this man is malicious. He wants to gain trust by using the name of the great saint. The man takes the woman to his home and locked her in. At a moment when the man is out, an old woman comes and advises her to forget her old married life, says that she could not return her old life after these happenings and advises to continue living here happily. The woman cries loudly because of what happened to her and is looking for ways to escape and return home at the first opportunity. During the time that she stays in āshrama, the women who disappeared like herself was not harmed. During the time that she stays in āshrama, the women who disappeared like herself were not harmed. She cannot accept what happened to her.

Maryādā escaped from the house where she was forcibly detained and returned to her own home and told her husband what happened to her. The man did not believe in the purity of his wife, who has not appeared for about a week, he thought that she dishonored. In the dialogue between the two, when Maryādā tried to defend herself, Parashurāma's response to her is actually questioning the situation in which patriarchy lowered women.

*“Maryādā: I swear on my son, nobody looked at me amorously.*

<sup>20</sup> The sixth one of the ten avatārs of the protector God Viṣṇu.

<sup>21</sup> It means like chastity, dignity, loyalty.

*Parashurāma: For a second alone with a foreign man is enough for me to question your loyalty to me.*" (Premchand, 2014, p. 39).

Parashurāma states that he does not act under social pressure, and the reason of he rejects her is that he cannot accept a woman who is desired by someone else as a wife again. He also says that he will support her as long as he lives. The woman resents this situation a lot, but takes a firm stand against her husband. She says that her husband died for her from now on, and that she will continue to live as a widow.

Maryādā thinks that all these happenings are her destiny. While women prefer to die when they faced with such situations, which are the subject of literary works in Indian society, in this story the woman killed her husband spiritually; it is so remarkable. The author's reflection of this story to the readers with a feminist approach is also not expected from a tradition-bound writer, it is proof that the author complies with the requirements of the age in terms of thought. In a similar way, in the famous Indian epic poem Rāmāyaṇa, Rāma, whose wife was kidnapped by a demon, publicly rejected his wife Sītā and Sītā became one with the land.

### Conclusion

Indian society was founded on protecting the land, protecting women and the realization of religious practices. These three are tightly interlocked and it is impossible to exist without a woman. Looking at the prehistoric findings in India, it is seen that women were more precious. It is seen that the woman was portrayed as a hunter and gatherer in cave paintings. In these cave paintings, pregnant women are also seen as the mother goddess, it is portrayed their birth moments and maternal roles. From here, it is concluded that in the prehistoric period, the hunting and gathering culture in India was carried out without gender privilege, that women were not only gathering but hunting, and that hunting was not specific to men. The sanctification of motherhood and divinizing of women also reveal the value given to women in those times.

In Ṛgvedic literature, it is seen that gods and goddesses are opposed to each other. In some cases, women are powerless and they obey men. On the other hand, women are mostly strong and protective as men. Caste and class distinction showed up in the period of agricultural economy and the second urbanization (800-600 BC). Women were required to come under the control of men as wives. The mentality that thinks women are sinners since they were born, unfortunately causes parents to worry about giving birth to a baby girl today. In Manu IX 17, the process that begins with the creator god's creation of the five elements<sup>22</sup>, the three worlds<sup>23</sup> and the woman and the man, the woman is described as a liar, jewelry fancier, despicable, betrayal, and someone who exhibiting bad behavior. In Shatapatha Brahmana XIV.1.1.3.1, woman, shūdra and dog are seen in the same sentence as the epitome of fraud, sinfulness and darkness. Again in "Strīpuṇḍhartha", which is written for women in the Tryambaka version of Manu in the 18th century, women are described as unreliable people from birth, having

<sup>22</sup> Air, water, fire, soil, and ether.

<sup>23</sup> 1. Bhūloka (World), 2. Svarloka or Svarga (Heaven), 3. Bhuvarloka (An area between the World and Heaven).

random sexual intercourse, unfaithful in love, even deprived of love, disloyal to their husbands despite being protected.

It is mentioned in IX.29, Manu that a woman, who can control her own thoughts and speeches and fulfill her duties to god, will become one with God when she is dead and will be called sādhvī and she is a virtuous, pure, and chaste woman. Kaliyuga<sup>24</sup> of the future was described as a bad age when women and men would not fulfill their duties.

Chakravarti (1993) is also telling about another variation that is alike to the Legend of Sītā in the Rāmāyaṇa. This the Sambula Story. She mentions that both women accompanied their husbands during the exiles of their husbands and became the center of interest for terrible monsters. Both women have to prove themselves because there is doubt about whether they are spoiling their honor. The common point of both stories is this: A woman who has been away from her husband for a while should be treated with suspicion!

Down the ages, the place of women in marriage rules and religious practices has always been tried to be limited. In marriage, women were seen as a person who is always protected, pressured, away from being a person alone and serving the purpose of her husband. In male-centered societies, especially in the patriarchal social structure, religious and social rules have also been factors that make the control mechanism more powerful.

In the Rāmāyaṇa, Aranya Kāṇḍa 17<sup>25</sup>, via Shūrpaṇakhā who acts according to jungle rules, in the conversation between Rāma, Sītā and Lakshmaṇa who are returned the exile place by getting out the Godāvarī River, it is seen that Shūrpaṇakhā is acting freely according to rules of the jungle where he lives in. So, the society in which people lives determines their behavior. If society is a male-dominated society, women are dependent on men, unable to act without men, and when they act without men or when they stay away from their men, they should be treated with suspicion and therefore their loyalty is questioned.

Similarly, in the story called Nirvāsan, when the woman, who disappeared, returned home there are social pressures and distrust towards women behind the psychological violence which she subjected to from her husband. While the male character says that he does not act under social pressure in this story, he mentions that he does not have any trust in her wife, who has been away from him for a while. The female character, who is rejected by her husband in this story, ignores her husband, this fact shows that the author wrote the story from a feminist perspective. Radical feminists criticize the patriarchal social order as the main reason why women experience all these negativities. When examining the characters in Rāmāyaṇa epic poem and Nirvāsan story, it is seen that the name of the male character in

<sup>24</sup> Yuga means the periods of the world. There are four yugas. These are Kṛta (Satya), Tretā, Dvāpara and Kali Yuga. Kṛta (Satya) Yuga consists of 4800 years, Tretā Yuga consists of 3600 years, Dvāpara Yuga consists of 2400 years and Kali Yuga consists of 1200 years. Since a god year is equal to 360 years for a person, it is equivalent to 1,728,000 years, 1,296,000 years, 864,000 years, and 432,000 years, respectively. The brightest period is Kṛta (Satya) Yuga. The period gets worse and worse, and after the darkest age of Kali, life on the earth is reset and everything starts all over again (Kaya, 2003, p. 218-219).

<sup>25</sup> "...Rāma, to be honest, I am a witch named Shūrpaṇakhā; I can take the shape I want, scatter fear and hunt in this forest. At first sight, I wanted you to be my husband. Your wife is very ugly and does not suit to you. Leave her, come with me. I eat her and your brother, then we will walk around through mountains and jungles." (Aranya Kāṇḍa-17) (Kaya, 2002, p. 113-114).

Nirvāsan is Parashurāma and the main character of Rāmāyaṇa is Rāma, both characters are the embodiment of the protector god Vishṇu. These facts also confirm that the man is the protector and the woman is protected in the patriarchal order. In the same way, Sītā, which means "furrow" and Maryādā, which means "loyalty and chaste" is seen to represent the ideal Indian woman with meanings such as motherhood and reproduction.

As is seen obviously, in all of the older texts, adjectives such as unreliability and unfaithful were attributed to women. Chakravarti (1993) also mentions in the Mahābhārata epic poem that it is difficult to control women. Manu is the most important ideology of brāhmanic system. Manu says that a woman should be protected and kept under observation day and night, regardless of her age. Strīdharmā<sup>26</sup> or pativrātādharmā<sup>27</sup> are the two ideologies that are imposed to women by the public. The Brāhmaṇs tried to create the patriarchal order in Hindu society according to the caste-class structure. One of the two important traditions which are serving patriarchy in India is "pardā-prathā" and the other is "dahez-prathā". "Pardā-prathā" is a tradition which has a religious and a social dimension, and separates women from men with a sexist approach. In Hindu society, this tradition expresses the avoiding of women from non-women by covering her face and trying to hide her eyes. "Dahez-prathā" means bride price. In India, a father pays the bride price to the groom while his daughter is marrying. This situation puts heavy financial burdens on the father of the bride. Therefore, it can be said that one of the reasons why a father who has a daughter does not want him strongly is this tradition and that there is discrimination for women in cultural and religious perceptions. These applications are still valid today. As Tong (2006) defends, it is obvious that it is necessary to reform all the cultural and social auxiliary factors of the system, instead of reforming the patriarchal system alone.



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<sup>26</sup> It states the duties and responsibilities of a woman (Mc.Gregor, 1992, p. 1045).

<sup>27</sup> It states the loyalty to husband (Mc.Gregor, 1992, p. 596).

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