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Masculinity and Vulnerability: A Study of Ram's Emotional Journey in *Ram: Scion of Ikshvaku*

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Abstract

Amish Tripathi offered a new perspective on Lord Ram in the Ram Chandra Series. In Hindu mythology, Lord Ram is considered an avatar of Lord Vishnu and is typically portrayed as the personification of dharma and the ideal ruler, emphasising the importance of societal obligations over individual desires. Tripathi's narrative presents Ram as a more humanized figure, highlighting his emotional struggles, guilt, and vulnerability. This paper examines the reimagined portrayal of Lord Ram in Amish Tripathi's *Ram: Scion of Ikshvaku*. It highlights a shift from the traditional depiction of masculinity to a more nuanced character. This study analyses how Tripathi's portrayal reconceptualises masculinity as a blend of strength, empathy, and moral integrity, rather than emphasising emotional detachment. Furthermore, this reinterpretation aligns with contemporary gender discourse by proposing a model of masculinity grounded in emotional intelligence and ethical responsibility.

Keywords: Masculinity, Vulnerability, Ram, Gender Discourse

Introduction

In Hindu mythology, Lord Ram is an incarnation of Lord Vishnu, portrayed as the Ideal man (Maryada Purushottam). His figure is the symbol of unwavering virtue, stoicism, and ideal

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kingship in Indian mythology. He is the embodiment of dharma (righteousness); his emotional landscape has often been overshadowed by his divine responsibilities and unflinching moral compass. However, in Amish Tripathi's *Scion of Ikshvaku*, Ram's portrayal is different from the traditional one. Here, Ram is not only a prince burdened by duty but also a human being with his own flaws, guilt, emotional pain, and inner conflict.

In the contemporary retelling, Amish Tripathi presents Ram as a human, not as a God. The author reframes Ram's story by removing his divine qualities and focusing on his personal struggles, vulnerabilities, and emotional growth. This approach enables a deeper exploration of masculinity, extending beyond physical strength and stoic endurance to encompass emotional intelligence, moral complexity, and the capacity to process pain. In Tripathi's narrative, Ram is not portrayed as perfect; he experiences grief, hesitation, and self-doubt, and he bears the emotional burden of decisions that disrupt his personal world.

This study aims to explore how Ram: Scion of Ikshvaku redefines masculinity by allowing Ram to be emotionally expressive without compromising his strength or authority. Through an analysis of Ram's interactions with his family, his internal dilemmas, and his responses to injustice and exile, the study will demonstrate how vulnerability is not depicted as weakness, but as a crucial part of his journey toward becoming an ideal leader and human being.

Traditional Masculinity in Mythological Context:

In Classical Indian Literature, Ram is referred to as Maryada Purushottam, the Ideal Man. He embodies the principles of virtue, integrity, and heroism, motivating numerous people. His power is rooted in his moral and emotional self-control. Though this archetype is admirable, it has also contributed to a rigid definition of what it means to be a man- a person who does not weep, does not show emotions, does not falter and puts societal duties above the emotional ones. In traditional literature, Ram does not question his exile of 14years; he accepts that without any question, he remains silent during Sita's trial by fire and surpasses his inner turmoil to project calm and control. His emotional life is secondary in front of his public life, making him more divine than human, more symbol than person.

On one side, this represents Ram as a moral exemplar, but on the other side, it separates him from the emotional experiences faced by ordinary people. In a society where men have often been expected to hide their emotions, these portrayals support the idea that being strong means staying silent and enduring pain instead of showing feelings and compassion. By revisiting the character of Ram through a modern lens, Amish Tripathi challenges the traditional narrative. He presented a version of Ram that acknowledges pain, navigates emotional conflict and learn to balance public and private life.

Ram's Emotional Vulnerability in Scion of Ikshvaku

In *Ram: Scion of Ikshvaku*, Amish Tripathi presents a man who is shaped through trauma, insecurity, and an acute sense of justice. He peels back the layers of divinity customarily associated with Lord Ram. Amish describes Ram's birth very realistically. "When he was born, he was still and not breathing. Nilanjana, the doctor, was patting the baby to make him cry. She

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puts the baby next to Kaushlaya. The queen held her motionless son close to her bosom. Soon, the baby moved and gripped her long hair” (Tripathi 30). On the very day, Dashrath lost a battle to Ravan and therefore considered Ram’s birth as inauspicious. From the start, Ram carries the weight of his birth upon the day his father, King Dashrath, suffered a devastating military defeat. This casts Ram as a sign of failure for the king. His character arc is defined by the internalization of guilt, which serves as a primary emotional motivator. Although Ram is not responsible for the error, he believes atonement is necessary. This portrayal of a sympathetic character demonstrates the weight of this burden, which should not be construed as a character flaw.

Ram’s commitment to dharma is not simply about following rules. It often comes with personal sacrifice. He faces constant judgment, both from society and from himself, as he tries to live up to an almost impossible standard. By sticking to his principles, like refusing to break Lord Rudra’s laws even when it seems unfair, he often ends up feeling alone. When Roshini, the daughter of Manthara, was brutally gang raped and died, “Ram was devastated that Dhenuka, who was the main perpetrator of the heinous gang rape and murder, had been exempted from the maximum punishment because he was underage. But the law could not be broken, Ram, the law giver had to do what he had to do, but Ram, the rakhi-brother of Roshini, was drowning in guilt, as he was unable to avenge the horrifying death of his sister” (144). People sometimes see him as rigid or unfeeling, but inside, he is far from detached. These moments reveal a Ram who experiences deep emotions but chooses to set them aside for what he believes is the greater good. This kind of emotional strength is rarely recognized in traditional ideas of masculinity.

Ram’s affection for Sita is portrayed as gentle, respectful, and mutually emotionally fulfilling. Their relationship features profound discussions, common values, and emotional transparency. Ram is not afraid to be vulnerable with Sita; he confides his fears, guilt, and insecurities to her, illustrating a model of romantic masculinity rooted in honesty and emotional closeness. When Ram learned that Sita was the prime minister of Mithila, he said that women were just as smart as men. He respected women’s intelligence and believed that if women were given the same opportunities as men, they would demonstrate their ability to be effective leaders and managers. In the past, marriages among Kshatriyas were seen as a way to make political deals. Ram did not agree with this bad practice. He strongly believed that marriage was a special bond between a man and a woman. It should not be used for political reasons. He saw marriage as a true partnership between two people. That is why he supported having only one partner and was against having many wives, which he saw as disrespectful to women. Ram’s views about marriage were that husband and wife should respect each other’s individuality

Redefining Masculinity Through Vulnerability

Amish presents Ram’s emotional expressiveness; he is never afraid to weep, which marks one of the boldest departures from traditional portrayals. He is not afraid to weep for the death of his father. Ram shed tears quietly, mourning for the man who had always been both his ruler

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and his dad. However, he did not let his grief alter his sense of duty. His vow to Kaikeyi was his reality, his weight to bear, and his journey. Furthermore, he is not afraid to grieve for Sita and acknowledge his failures. “Nooo! Screamed Ram, wrenching his bow forward as he ran. Tears were streaming down his face” (6). Ram’s tears do not show fragility, but they affirm humanity. Amish Tripathi’s Ram is someone who feels deeply; his emotions are his strength, not weakness. His strength lies in his ability to feel deeply and still act with restraint. He demonstrates that true masculinity encompasses not only the ability to endure pain but also the capacity to channel it constructively.

Ram’s relationships with Sita, Lakshman, Bharat, and even his rivals like Raavan reflect a kind of masculinity based on respect, open communication, and compassion. He embodies a masculinity that is not authoritarian but rational. His connection with Lakshman highlights self-control and a strong sense of right and wrong. For example, when Lakshman becomes angry at Kaikeyi for sending Ram into exile, Ram responds with composure, “Control your anger, Lakshman. Kaikeyi has done no wrong. She has merely asked for what was promised” (188). His rational masculinity is also shown when he interacts with Bharat; despite Kaikeyi’s manipulation, Ram refuses to hold his brother responsible. “This is my destiny, Bharat. Do not blame yourself or your mother. I choose to honour my father’s word, for that is the dharma of a son” (210). Ram also acknowledges Raavan’s greatness, even though he was his enemy, “You are a great king, Ravan. You could have been among the greatest if only your arrogance had not blinded you” (398).

In an age where masculinity is defined by hostility, lack of emotional connection, and superiority, Ram’s character offers a refreshing template of healthy masculinity. Ram’s ideas about marriage, women, and monogamy are high-minded and noble. His vulnerability becomes a tool for connection, leadership and decision-making. Amish, in the novel, defines masculinity as a way of life “defined by truth, duty, and honour,” noting that at its best it is “efficient, just, and egalitarian,” but at its worst “fanatical, rigid, and harsh towards the weak” (85). This expresses the Amish’s belief that masculinity is linked to principles—not merely physical power, but also moral values such as truth, responsibility, and honour. *Ram: Scion of Ikshvaku* emphasizes that vulnerability is a form of strength, inspiring readers, especially men, to accept complexity, show their emotions, and act with empathy. This new perspective on masculinity is crucial for fostering healthier individuals and communities.

Conclusion:

In *Ram: Scion of Ikshvaku*, Amish Tripathi offers a bold and transformative retelling of Lord Ram. He portrays Ram as a character who is not rigid; instead, he experiences guilt, expresses grief, and grapples with inner conflict. Tripathi redefines the qualities of a strong man and a just leader. This interpretation of Ram showcases that embracing vulnerability does not equate to sacrificing strength; in fact, it is his emotional sincerity and internal struggles that add depth and inspiration to his character. His journey serves as a compelling reinterpretation of masculinity, characterized not by power or emotional distance, but by the bravery to feel, the insight to respond wisely, and the determination to act with compassion and self-control.

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In our current society, which is becoming more accepting of gender issues and emotional intelligence, Tripathi's portrayal of Ram feels timely and meaningful. By merging courage with kindness, the novel offers a view of masculinity that resonates with today's understanding of gender roles. Thus, Tripathi's Ram represents a power that stems from being vulnerable, forming rational connections, and adhering to reflective responsibilities.

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