

Sexual Deviance and Sexual Violence in the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa

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The Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa, a popular epic of the brāhmaṇical tradition, delineates several behavioural patterns ingrained in different structures, formed to control the conscious and unconscious actions of humans. The recognized behaviour of humans was simplified and classified for the smooth functioning of a particular philosophy and morals. In this paper I will discuss how the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa set up norms for the regulation of sexual behaviour of the people. Forging the sexual behaviour was perhaps one of the primary motives of the narration. Sexuality had been visualized in a certain way that often contradicts the natural or untamed sexuality of the genders. Normative structures were more likely to guide the sexual behaviour of women and also to define the relationship of men and women. When we talk about gender and sexuality, relationships and norms of households become very important. In the narrative of the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa we find an account of royal households, where the king occupies the central position, whose authority was ‘unquestionable’ most of the time. It gives an account of the ways adopted by various societies for forging sexual attitudes and behaviour. Apart from kings, men in general secured the most influential place in the gender hierarchy of households. I will also discuss in this paper that how the patriarchal structures were acquiring ‘new’ shapes for attenuating the domestication of sex and how it was hidden beneath the idea of love, morality, dignity, glory and responsibility. To understand the nature of sexual loyalty and punishment I am considering the cases of four characters namely- Ahalyā, Urvaśī, Sītā and Rumā.

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