

Selection And Deviation as a Constructive Tool for The Retelling: A Study of Ashok K Banker's *Ramayana* Series's Novel *Prince of Ayodhya*

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Abstract: India as a land of ancient civilisation produced voluminous literature related to all aspects of life. Indian literature starts from *Vedas* and diverse himself through the gradual development of time. Indian literary tradition produced epic *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* which are considered masterpiece of ancient civilisation. These epics are full of heroic deeds of great people of ancient time. These epics also provides cultural codes and insights to future generations after their creation. Cultural and epistemological status of these epics are still relevant because collective Indian psyche take refuge on them during difficult time. Characters and incidents of Indian epics are considerably more layered and complicated. One finds solace after reading them as they are away from any judgement about life. They are filled with tales which clearly shows the unpredictability of life through the events and actions of its characters. Contemporary creative writers retold the events and incidents of these epics because these epics provides them ample material for their inquisitiveness. Contemporary creative writers either retell the selective part of the tale or deviated completely from the ur-text of the epic. Selection and deviation from main narration of the epic construct a new tale which soothes the modern soul and sensibility. Thus, selection and deviation became constructive tool for the retelling of any tale related to varied human subjects. In the present paper researcher analysed the Ashok K Banker's novel *Prince of Ayodhya* as a constructive tool for the retelling.

Keywords: Selection and Deviation, *Ramayana*, epic, retelling etc.

Telling the tale is an ancient tradition that extends back to immemorial times. When it comes to construct civilizations, cultures or even individual identities, humans employ tales and other sorts of narratives for their purposes. Humans are heavily relied on tale-telling techniques that would help them to connect with each other and give them a better understanding of a complex surroundings. Every culture sustains through vicissitudes of time because of the tales that are told and retold to their upcoming generations as these tales are repository of cultural traditions and values. Whenever a generation want to their day-to-day experiences or values to upcoming generation, they tell a story related to their cultural consciousness. These tales are very frequently told selectively or deviated from original tale as every reteller of the tale retold the tale according to ideologies of the time. Contemporary writers in their retellings provides a better explanation and understanding of selective ancient incidents. Thus, selection and deviation became constructive tool for the retelling of any tale related to varied human subjects.

As regards the epic *Ramayana* which have several retellings, but it continues to fascinate people and serve as the constructive basis for new works of literature and art. The creative imagination of every type of genre writers in english always seeks refuge in the varied content and perspective of the *Ramayana*. Raja Rao famous novelist, states about the *Ramayana*-

What could be more glorious, more sacred, more fantastic, a book of books- showing every beauty and treachery of this our tragic-comic existence, absurd, inhuman, gentle, devout, noble, cruel, yet not altogether felt as of this world, described for our terror and our joy, and final wisdom than *The Ramayana*. The book that has filled my imagination and come to me for years at every crucial point of my life, to interpret and to help, is *The Ramayana*. (46)

Contemporary authors want to narrate their experience in the framework of the *Ramayana*. Ashok K Banker is one of them as he also retells his *Ramayana* in the form of novels by applying all tactics of retelling. He has selected some episodes and deviated from the main story to construct his *Ramayana* series. Each novel is based on the theme and plot of the epic *Ramayana*. Researcher chooses one novel *Prince of Ayodhya* from his *Ramayana* series to show how the selection and deviation works as constructive tool for the retelling.

Every retelling follows selection and deviation as these norms helps a reteller to tell a story related to his understandings. In each retelling a creative reteller selected some events from a known text or history and through deviation he constructs a different tale. Here one thing is noted that new tale often addressed contemporary issues which are sometimes rooted in past or their solution is possible through new renderings of text and traditions. Creative writers of every era used selection and deviation as a constructive tool for their renderings of text and traditions. Contemporary writer Ashok K Banker also used selection and deviation as a constructive tool for his *Ramayana* retellings. His novel *Prince of Ayodhya* chronicles the incidents of Ayodhya. In this novel, he selects the events of Ayodhya from parent *Ramayana* and deviated completely in treatment of characters and dialogues. He manipulates every character and re-creates incidents this leads to conspicuous differences. In *Ramayana*'s first book *Balkanda* story started with the birth of Rama but in *Prince of Ayodhya* story begins with the dream sequence of Rama. Rama is presented here as an adolescent boy who has a horrific vision of the misfortune of Ayodhya, ravaging it to nothingness. Later in the narration author selected the arrival of sage Vishwamitra at Ayodhya. It is completely deviated from original tale of the epic. Sage Vishwamitra comes Ayodhya and warns King Dasaratha about the impending doom of Ayodhya and the eventual rise of Ravana. But the incident is narrated in twisted mode as in Ayodhya he faces the imposter Vishwamitra who in reality is a demon named Kalnemi. Everyone

is astonished to see two Vishwamitra and King Dasaratha also does not believe at the impossible sight. After seeing much confusion Guru Vasishta steps forward and utters a *Mantra*, in a moment the first Vishwamitra reveals himself as a demon from the netherworld. Soon Sage Vashishta and Sage Vishwamitra send the demon into dungeons of Ayodhya with the help of *Brahman* power. Every person exalts both seer mages and King Dasaratha also shows his veneration for both seer mages. Vishwamitra blessed the king and demanded Rama for his mission and further told the king that his mission would also save Ayodhya. King Dasaratha after hearing this odd demand, denied instantly. Then sage Vishwamitra told king Dasaratha-

All these years while the *Arya* nations have enjoyed peace and prosperity, while your armies have grown soft and gentle with inactivity, while the pursuits of culture and civilisation have occupied you rather than the bloody arts of warfare and mayhem, your enemies have been marshalling their forces. Today, the Lord of Lanka has an army twenty times greater than the combined forces of all the *Arya* nations.

(*Prince of Ayodhya* 161 hereafter POA)

Vishwamitra further told king Dasaratha that he made an ancient mistake by judging an *asura* in human standards. Whether twenty days or twenty years from now, the *asuras* will invade as it is the only goal of their existence and every breath they take is dedicated to this purpose and this purpose alone. They wanted to ravage the *Arya* nations and their goal is total and uncompromising genocide. Sage Vishwamitra also told king Dasaratha that though *asuras* or mortals will remain to walk on the earth, but both species will no longer co-exist. King Dasaratha, became worried but still showed his obduration to sage's demand. At that moment Rama reached the assembly hall and asked the whole matter then king told him the whole story and this made him perplexed so he reminded his father the *Kshatriya* code. Then king Dasaratha told Rama that he was not away from his *Kshatriya* code as he already offered him the services of his best warriors, *Purana wafadar* battalion and entire army. Yet the *Brahmarishi* rejected all his offers and insisted on his own choice of protector. Though, he knows all about the demons as they had the capability to demolish a whole army. King Dasaratha further told Rama that sage demanded him for his cause. Hearing this, Rama said firmly that he would be happy to go with sage Vishwamitra, but Dasaratha denied again. *Brahmarishi* Vasishta intervened and reminded about the first king of Kosala, lawmaker Manu who founded this mighty kingdom and made some laws at that time by which he governed the state. Hearing this Rama spoke the laws -

The first law is to obey *dharma* at all costs. 'For *dharma* is the moral code by which the pillar of *Arya* character stands upright.' He paused, seeing the destination of the guru's argument even before he spoke the words. 'The second law is that the *maharaja* rules not for himself, his dynasty, clan, varna or family. He rules for the people. If he takes a decision that affects the people, then it must meet with the people's consent.

(POA 228)

After hearing the laws, there was complete silence as everyone knew the implication of the second rule. However, king Dasaratha was still adamant to sage's demand, so he told him that *Maharajas* of Ayodhya always ruled for the sake of the people and their behest. Therefore, he must ask his people about the demand of sage Vishwamitra. Let the people of Ayodhya decide what they should do. In the evening king Dasaratha asked this question in front of the people of Ayodhya in *Mela* ground as people of Ayodhya were celebrating the Holi festival. King told them whole story and the demand of the sage Vishwamitra as he wanted his eldest son, Rama. After this sage Vishwamitra faced the citizens of Ayodhya and presented a picture of possible threat in near future. Vishwamitra with the help of *Mantras* showed them a dreadful picture of *asura* invasion. Seeing the brutality of *asura* forces, the whole Ayodhyan people's faces became frightened. After giving his audience time to recover, Vishwamitra assured Ayodhyan people that it was an illusion but in future it would be a harsh reality. He told the Ayodhyans that destruction was near and one person was destined to stop it. Hearing this Ayodhyan asked a question to sage Vishwamitra, how one person could deal with such mighty forces. Then sage told them that he would accompany Rama in every situation, and he would infuse him with the power of the most potent *Mantras*, which were created for martial combat a millennia ago. With this statement, sage Vishwamitra waited for the answer, but there was none. A dhobi was sitting there with his wife, suddenly his wife said that 'God forbid that the prince should come to any harm. But even if he were to die fighting the demons, it would be a noble sacrifice for a good cause.' (256) Dhobi turned his face towards his wife and, dissatisfied with her words, threatened to slap her. However, he soon realised the truth and raised his hand, expressing what others were unable to say "If a son of Ayodhya must go, better it should be our proudest son. If *Maharaja* Dasaratha agrees to send his own scion, then no father in the *Arya* nations will hesitate to send his own heirs into battle against the *asuras*." (POA 256) Dhobi's logic was unassailable, if the king refused now, then every parent of the kingdom would not send his sons to the battle against rakshas. The whole citizen of Ayodhya shouted, '*yatha raja tatha praja*' as does the king, so shall the people. Rama must go. After this, Lakshman insisted that he also wanted to go with Rama. The king and sage Vishwamitra permitted him and they left the palace and reached the lip of *Bhayanak van* or woods. Here they came across with the soldiers of Ayodhya who were sent by the king for the assistance of Rama. Sage needed no assistance as he had different plan to counter the demons, so he denied them. After travelling across the forest, they reached their destination, the *Kama's* grove. Here sage Vishwamitra gives them two powers known as Bala and Atibala. Both boys received the *vidya* with grace, and transformed themselves into something more than human or lethal in almost every aspect. After this, they reached a place called Anang *ashram*. Here all young rishis welcomed sage Vishwamitra and his acolytes. Sage Vishwamitra introduced Rama and Lakshmana to everyone. When Rama saw the ambiance of *Anang ashram*, he thought how a place in the centre of *Bhayanak van* might be so calm and beautiful. Then *Rishi* Adhrang reminds Rama that he might hear in brief from his Guru Vashishta about the *Kama ashrama* and a tale of *Kama's* folly. Hearing this, Lakshmana said he heard the story but it is a myth, then *Rishi* Adhrang said-

Indeed, Rajkumar Lakshman. Over time, truth becomes fact, fact is rewritten as history, history fades to legend, and eventually, legend remains as myth. Yet you are blessed. For you live in the *Treta-Yuga*, the Age of Reason. Not as blessed as the *Satya-Yuga* or Age of Truth, but close enough that you may still tread the same sites where *Devas* once lived and loved and fought, and those tales you call myths were once living events as real as your own actions. Over time even these tales will fade from memory, and by the coming of the *Kali-Yuga* or Age of Darkness, they will be

mere race-memories, dismissed as mythology or fantasy by those who believe themselves rational and scientific. Yet to us who live here and now, these are scientific and rational tales. For they obey the scientific rules of our world without exception. All you need is a proper knowledge of our science. Or, as we *Aryas* name it, *vidya*.

(POA 356)

Rishi Adhrang further says that he is the follower of lord Shiva and *Katha-vidya*, or the science of tale-telling, is an important and precious part of their tradition. *Rishi* Adhrang then talks about the *Anang ashram* and tells a story which goes back millennia ago. He tells about the *satyuga* which soon came after the creation of lord Brahma had been completed. On the earth, *Devas* lived their lives unburdened by the responsibilities of governing creation. Only a few mortals had been created, and not all *asuras* had yet declared their hostility against the gods. In this period Rudra, whom we now know as lord Shiva, a simple mendicant who took pleasure in meditating in cremation grounds and in passing his time in the company of spirits, ghouls, goblins, and the like, took into his heart a desire to wed the beautiful Sati, daughter of lord Daksha, Seed Spreader. Sati also desired to mate with Rudra but Daksha was against this relation as he saw Rudra unruly, dishevelled, homeless young mendicant who rode the black buffalo of the lord of Death, Yamaraj, and wore a serpent as a necklace entwined around his neck, drank poison as an intoxicant and went around clad in a chain of human skulls and a barely modest swatch of uncured leopard's skin. Daksha wanted that his daughter should marry a much better stock than this strange one. However, Sati's love for Rudra was too strong, so she defied her father and was married with Rudra. Once Rudra became his son-in-law, Daksha was compelled by *Deva* tradition to include him in all family rituals and affairs. But Daksha had a great proud and uncompromising attitude. He knew that despite his wild appearance and peculiar habits, Rudra had a great sense of dignity. Daksha thought that if he insulted his new son-in-law publicly, he would leave Sati alone and return to his wild bachelor ways. So, Daksha organised a great *yagna* and consciously neglected to invite Rudra while making sure that Sati herself was present. Sati soon realised her father's coarse action against her husband and became Devastated. She blamed her father for dishonouring her husband and threw herself bodily into the same *yagna havan*. Her name became a synonym for self-sacrifice and Shiva, went into deep meditation after this incident. As everybody knows, when Shiva meditates, the world may end without his knowledge, because in his grief, he loses all awareness of his surroundings. "Aeons passed. The morning of the first day of Brahma grew closer to noon. Civilisations rose and fell. Great empires were raised and collapsed. The eternal battle between *Devas* and *asuras* began in earnest. Millennia passed like the water of sacred Ganges." (POA 361) After this, sage related the Shiva story to Tatka. This story is wholly contrary to parent epic. The story that was told by *Rishi* Adhrang in this novel is an amalgam or pastiche work of known stories. The story goes in this way-

Tataka's atrocities soon grew too terrible for the *Devas* to ignore. A day came when the extent of her Devastation compelled an outcry on Prithvi and mortals began to appeal to the *Devas* to intervene and put an end to her reign of terror. The *Devas* sent the oldest and greatest of the Seven Seers, the great sage Narada himself, to investigate Tataka's misdeeds. He returned quickly with a terrifying report. When the *Devas* heard it, they unanimously decided that Tataka must be stopped. 'But before anyone could take action, the *Devas* were besieged by hordes of *asura* armies led by the Lord of Lanka, Ravana himself. After many wars and battles in which the *asuras* lost as much ground as they gained, their disparate races finally united under the banner of Ravana. And his ambition was as great as the *asura* host he led. He sought to invade the very cities of the gods. The shining cities of *Amravati* and *Vaikunta* were both besieged, and mighty Indra, leader of the *Devas*, as well as Kartikeya and Ganesha, *senapatis* of the armies of the *Devas*, were hard-pressed to defend those mighty domains. Not a single *Deva* could be spared to go down to the realm of *Prithvi* and deal with the intolerable menace of Tataka.

(POA 371)

Shiva was the only person in the universe who could stop the Tataka by opening his third eye and Tataka would cease to exist in her present form. But there was a problem that Shiva was deeply engrossed in his meditation, so it was decided by the *Devas* that an emissary should be sent to awaken him from his meditation. When sage Narada refused to do proposed action then *Devas* sent the beautiful Parvati, an incarnation of Sati herself, Shiva's lost wife. Sati had chosen to be reborn once again to re-consummate her relationship with her beloved mate. So, she tried to awaken Shiva with her presence but failed. Then *Devas* sent the god of desire, *Kama*, to help Parvati and awaken Shiva. *Kama*'s act angered Shiva and he opened his third eye and blasted Lord *Kama* into ashes. '*Bhasamkardiya Kamadev ko.*' (POA 374) *Kama* was left bodiless. *An-anga*. He who has no physical body. Due to this reason this hermitage is called *Anang ashrama*. Hearing the news of her husband's death Rati, wife of *Kama*, ran to Brahma moaning inconsolably over the loss of her husband. Then lord Brahma, promised Rati that *Kama* would be restored to his body when Shiva and Parvati were married. Time passed on and Parvati did strict penance following Shiva's austerity laws. When, Parvati was nearly nothing, Shiva appeared and accepted her as his wife. Together they danced the *tandav* a great and terrible dance of procreation and awakened the entire universe with their tantric sexuality. At the moment of their joining, by using the formidable energies unleashed by their union, Lord Brahma was able to restore the *Kama* to his body. After some time, Parvati gave birth a son named Kartikeya who went forth to put an end to the scourge of Tataka. Here it is seen that though author shows Tataka killed earlier with the hand of Kartikeya, but she was still alive. For this, he gave us a reason that though Tataka was killed by Kartikeya. "But as you know, matter can never truly be destroyed, only transformed. So, when she died, she only left this mortal plane and was sent to the next plane, where she now belonged." (POA 425) After this Rama and Lakshman with sage moved to *Bhayanak van* which was haunted by the deeds of Tatka and her fellow miscreants. They reached that place where Tataka lived. Rama and Lakshman got a bloody welcome by the Tataka's morphed creatures. Rama and Lakshman killed the scores in a minute as their bows behaved like rain from the sky. After some time, Tataka came in front of Rama, but her description is given by the novelist in a different manner as Rama's assistant *Vajra* captain Bejoo remarks. -

The Yakshi was neither ugly nor malformed. On the contrary, she was . . . 'Ateesundar,' he whispered aloud, as if speaking the words could help him believe the fact. Beautiful beyond comparison. So beautiful that it took an effort to wrench his eyes away and glance around the clearing. His men were as baffled as he was. Their weapons were raised and ready for battle, every last one of them willing to fight the *asura* to the death, however impossible or futile. But what they were not prepared for was this unexpected reversal. How could an evil demoness be as stunningly beautiful as one of Indra's *apsaras*?

(POA 470)

Rama also became surprised after seeing the feminine appearance of Tataka and became confused as he was unable to decide what to do. Seeing the confusion of Rama Sage Vishwamitra warned him against the beauty and femininity of demoness as she assumed this *bhes-bhav* only to confuse him. He must remember her atrocities which were seen by him earlier. Rama looked at the giantess, then said that he did not want to violate *dharma* by killing a woman. Then Vishwamitra told Rama that *dharma* is a duty performed for the greater good. This duty he must perform for the welfare of all the four castes, for the sake of all mortal kind. Even if it seems unrighteous and distasteful, a king must do what serves his subjects best, for such is his *dharma*. So, he must suppress his pity, and take up his bow and kill Tataka while the sun approaches its zenith. Rama was still motionless, then sage showed him an object on the ground. There was a body of his brother reduced to a heap of shattered bones and tattered flesh. Rama rushed and tried to collect the heap of gristle and bones that was all that remained of his brother in arms. He raised his brother's body and walked, carrying his brother's mangled body in his arms, knelt before the sage and lowered the remains. Rama bent and touched his forehead to the ground and said to sage that he was supreme in knowledge, so he must resurrect his brother. Vishwamitra told Rama that lord of death Yama keeps accurate accounts. His scales are perfect and every spell that alters the balance of life and death, has a cost without any exceptions. So, Rama must pay the price if he wants the restoration of his brother Lakshman. Hearing this, Rama said he would sacrifice himself for the life of his brother. Vishwamitra said that other souls are unable to satisfy lord Yama. The god of death will only accept one life in exchange of his brother's. Then Vishwamitra raised his hand and said, "kill Tataka, and he will bring his brother's life back from Death." Rama followed the command of the sage and lost the arrow, but it made no impact on the Yakshi. After this Rama scratched his own skin, tiny drops of blood emerge. Rama dipped the point of arrows with his blood and shot directly at the belly of Yakshi Tataka. She screamed and her wounds started burning. Soon Tataka died and Rama succeeded in restoring the peace in the woods. Sage Vishwamitra started his *yagna*. The first six days and night were spent peacefully however on the seventh day *yagna* was attacked by Mareech and Subhau. Rama killed Subhau and expelled Mareech from the land. After completing the *yagna* sage Vishwamitra gifted both princes some divine astras of *Devas*.

Retelling's constructive tool selection and deviation again found in the novel when Banker introduces Manthara as vile and an enemy of Ayodhya. She works as a spy in the palace of Ayodhya for Ravana. Here she is not presented as an ordinary servant of Queen Kaikeyi but depicted by the Banker as a much powerful sorceress. She manipulates Kaikeyi and worships the dark-lord demon king Ravana. Manthara is so shrewd in her activities that her secret pooja chamber is still not captured by the watchful eyes of Ayodhyan soldiers. To appease the dark god Ravana, she often offers him the sacrifice of a *Brahmin* child.

She turned to the man. 'Do you have what I need?' 'And yet you made sure he was a born *Brahmin*, with his naming ceremony and thread ceremony performed correctly, as well as his coming-of-age ceremony performed in the past week, just like the other boys before him.

(POA 32)

Here Ravana was introduced early as an innate enemy of Rama who with the help of his sorcerous power desired to control everything in the realm of all three worlds. In every bad incident of Ayodhya, Ravana is the only man behind that incident. Everything happens either according to his plan or the consequences of his plans. He threatened Rama in his sleep with the use of *asura* sorcery. He sent Kalnemi as a disguise of Vishwamitra to kill Rama, but real Vishwamitra reached in time and saved everyone. Another deviation from the main story is the episode of king Dasaratha's palace. Here he shows the rival relationship contrary to parent epic where queens are lived in a lovely and docile manner. In this novel Banker narrates the events of the chamber of the first queen Kausalya when king Dasaratha visits queen after so much long time. When queen Kaikeyi heard that Dasaratha was in the chamber of Kausalya, she became outraged and talked with Kausalya in a mean and impudent manner-

You hussy! I know what you're up to. You won't succeed. You temptress. Seductress. Like a cheap *devdasi* you lured my husband away from my chamber and into your clutches. Did you think I wouldn't know, witch? Did you think I'd give him up without a fight?

(POA 97)

Thus, in the novel *Prince of Ayodhya* Banker, chronicles the incidents of Ayodhya, selectively. He takes all liberty to narrate the deviated story by manipulating every character. It is noteworthy that the differences in this novel are not subtle but conspicuous. After analysing the novel *Prince of Ayodhya*, it is seen that author brilliantly used selection and deviation as a constructive tool for a new retelling of a known tale.

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