

Concealed Countenances: A Re-Conceptualization of Sita in Amish Tripathi's Sita: Warrior of Mithila and Volga's Liberation of Sita

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Abstract Indian Mythology depicts diverse varieties of woman characters mostly revered and idolized. Among them Sita is an influential female character known for her courage, wisdom and chastity. Sita has retained the image of a perfect woman known both for her physical and mental perfection from the context of Valmiki Ramayana. Also, she is commonly accepted as a weak and mute sufferer of her pain and agony. The paper seeks to juxtapose the character of Sita from a delicate woman to a powerful fighter through the works of Amish Tripathi's Sita: Warrior of Mithila and The Liberation of Sita by Volga. Sita the stereotype is broken through the portrayal of these characters.

Keywords Sita, Feminism, Ramayana, Interpretation, Retelling

I.INTRODUCTION

Myths are the traditional stories passed on from generations which have remained alluring mysterious and influential. The fluidity of the myths helps the writers to reshape and modify them so as to make it realistic gaining more transparency to the characters and incidents. Mythology concerns more with our own humanity and the values people should inculcate providing a greater vision to an emerging future. Mythical stories are widely accepted, as one could easily connect them with our familial realities of the world. They reflect our own origin and the long lost culture and tradition which once prevailed in our society. Ramayana is the bygone epic which is a part of every Hindu household and is familiar to everybody as the story of Ram. Sita is an iconic figure in Ramayana and has traditionally been seen as the chaste and noble consort of Lord Rama and it is her qualities of wifely submissiveness and dedication that has been extolled that of many female characters including Draupadi (the major character in Mahabharata after Pandavas). Many women characters in Ramayana and Mahabharata are delicate, sensitive and chaste. This paper focuses on the role of Sita in two celebrated works by Amish Tripathi and Volga. While, Ramayana's tale is not an unfamiliar one, these two books portray Sita in a different light.

II.OBJECTIVE

The main objective is to re conceptualize the stereotypical vision of Sita through the works of Amish Tripathi's Sita: Warrior of Mithila and Liberation of Sita by Volga.

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III.RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Feminism is concerned with the rights for women in political, social, economic, medical and personal struggles for women's equality. Though there are many heroines in the real world, these ventures hadn't made as big impression in the intellectual spheres. Feminist literary criticism is the literary criticism where feminist principles are used to critique the literary language. They try to reflect on how literature portrays the women from a different lens than from the narrative of male domination. It gives a new perception of varying texts to revive the female tradition of writing and rediscovery of old texts giving prevalence to symbolism of women's writing. This culture of analyzing women's writings -increases sexual and political awareness as developed by Lisa Tuttle in 1980s which was later adopted by major feminist critics. Feminist literary criticism extends from the 19th century works of authors such as George Eliot and Margret Fuller. They are also concerned about the exclusion of women from literary canon, as the theorists like Lois Tyson have argued that considered women's opinion to be non universal ones. Modern feminist criticism also intertwines women's literary representation with the birth and origin of the queer community. Feminist scholarship or feminine critique grounded pieces of literature to recognize the implicit misogyny in the structure of story itself. According to Elaine Showalter feminist critique is an "ideological, righteous, angry, and admonitory search for the sins and errors of the past" and says, gynocriticism enlists "the grace of imagination in a disinterested search for the essential difference of women's writing" (Susan, 3). Many contemporary scholars' try to understand femininity by interpreting it with assumptions regarding gender politics. The main aim of this tool is to reflect the patriarchal tensions in the novels contingent on female subordination. Feminist criticism in literature also tries to seek how feminist literary and critical critique with scholars like Susan Lanser try to improve literary analysis and analyses non practices to be more diverse.

IV.ANALYSIS

Amish Tripathi the Indian author is known for his novels *The Immortals of Meluha*, *The Secret of Nagas*, *The Oath of Vayuputras*, *Scion of Ikshvaku* and *Sita: Warrior of Mithila*. His first three collections collectively comprise the Shiva Trilogy and the latter two are the first two books of the Ram Chandra Series which is a collection of five books. The Shiva Trilogy was one of the fastest selling series in Indian publishing history while Ram Chandra Series is the second largest selling book series in the Indian



publishing history. He recently launched his first nonfiction book called *Immortals of India*. According to Chikermane of Swarajya Magazine “Amish’s influence goes beyond his books, his books go beyond literature, his literature is steeped in philosophy, which is anchored in bhakti, which powers his love for India.” Volga is the name by which Popuri Lalitha Kumari writes. ‘Volga’ was in fact the name of her elder sister who died an untimely death when Lalitha Kumari was sixteen. In her college days, Volga was active member of the Students Federation of India (SFI) and later joined the Revolutionary Writer’s Association which was an offshoot of CPI. Then in 1980, frustrated by the party’s patriarchal attitude towards women, she quit left politics and devoted herself to propagate feminism among Telgu to propagate feminism among Telgu readers through her activism and writing. Among Volga’s nearly fifty publications are seven novels, six short story collections, nine edited volumes, twelve translations from English, six books of literary criticism and the three feminist theoretical works. *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* by Amish Tripathi is the second part of his Ram Chandra series. We know that there are unnumbered versions of Ramayana from the oldest version Valmiki Ramayana, Adhyatma Ramayana, Vasistha Ramayana and the regional versions such as *Ram Charitamanasa* in North India, *Kamba ramayana* in Tamil Nadu, *Adyatma Ramayanam Kilipattu* etc. Unlike all these, Amish gives drastic alterations to the original versions. Here, the book is female centric which begins from the life of Sita who is a chivalric warrior, masculine and undaunted. Ram appears as a character only in the middle of the book and is younger than Sita. The whole book is topsyturvey when juxtaposed with the epic. King Janak and his consort Sunaina found Sita in a furrow protected by a vulture. As a childless couple they adopted her as their elder daughter and made her the queen of Mithila. She was brought up to be a strong and brave women and was sent to rishi Swenthakethu’s ashram to learn martial arts. Mahamuni Viswamitra planned her to be the seventh Vishnu, who is responsible for the protection of goodness in the society. When Sita heard of Ram, the other candidate for the same seat she thought of marrying him, as they could work together for the betterment of the nation. Marriage for her was not only the responsibility she had towards her husband but also for the whole society. Sita finds Ram as a copartner in her establishment of duty towards the nation, thereby distributing their responsibilities equally. On the day of Sita’s Swayamvar, Ravan, the mighty Lankan was also invited but was made to get departed in humiliation. As retaliation Ravan started a war where Ram involuntarily used the biological weapon ‘Asurastra’ which was forbidden according to Lord Rudra’s Law. Followed by this action Ram, Sita, and Lakshman choose fourteen years of exile in the forest. They led their life in forest overcoming the hurdles they came across. Woefully, on the thirteenth year of vanavasa Sita was abducted by Ravan. She fought hard before she lay unconscious and got abducted by Ravan in his Pushpaka Viman. Once she regained consciousness she attempts to murder Ravan, but was seized by a lady who was her childhood friend, Samichi. Janak at the beginning of the novel after having a glimpse of baby Sita surrounded by a pack of wolves says to Sunaina, “Yes. Strong and beautiful. Just like you” (Tripathi-, 19). As a father, Janak was proud to adopt and raise a girl child like Sita. She was

brought up to be a courageous women who lacked femininity and was less concerned about her beauty and appearance. The first time when she gets bothered about her looks was when she falls in love with Ram. “She touched a battle scar on her forearm and winced. Her scars had been a source of pride. Once. Do they make me look ugly?” (Tripathi-, 211). After the death of Sunaina, though Sita became mentally weak she never tries to show it to others. Instead she became the support system for both her sister and father. Thus from younger age itself Sita was capable enough to handle courtly matters and to look after her little sister. Sita was a guiding light to her sister when she advises, “Life is not only about what we want, but also about what we must do. We don’t just have rights. We also have duties” (Tripathi-, 295). She was also open in her philosophy regarding marriage when she says to Ram- “You share my fate and I share yours. That is what a true marriage is” (Tripathi-, 261). In Volga’s rendition, Sita is a single mother who raises her sons herself in saint Valmiki’s abode. She has been disowned by Ram, Ayodhya’s ruler even after he freed Sita from Ravan, the demon king of Lanka. Volga has carried on with the thriving introspective tradition of Telgu literature, demonstrating Sita and other neglected female characters from Ramayana in a different light exhibiting their perceptions about the men in their lives. Ramayana does not tell us about the desolation of the ladies Ahalya, Surpanakha, Renuka Devi, Urmila etc. But Volga does it through this novel. We find a different Sita here, as a helpless and neglected mother who seeks inspiration and gets liberated from the advice given by equally desolate women characters. Sita meets each of these characters whom once she encountered in her life’s journey. When she meets Surpanakha after years her rage towards Sita and her family came to an end. From her she learns the value of self-discovery and fulfillment which not only lies in bringing up her children but also in finding herself. Thus both of them strike a bond of sisterhood as mature women in pursuit of self-realization. Ahalya-, teaches her about the complexities in the popular notion of female fidelity. Sita was once warned by Ahalya regarding female fate, but she received greater evidence of it when Sita herself was asked to prove her chastity by Ram. She uplifts her by asking to cheer herself up as everything is for good which will help in the process of self-realization. Meeting with Renuka Devi also made an indelible experience for Sita. Renuka Devi was a victim of her son’s brutal attack as his own father ordered to kill her because of suspicion regarding her chastity. Sita finds the advice useful as the time comes up when she needs to handover her sons to Ram. Sarcasm was evident in Renuka’s voice when she said, “-If they understand that their paativartyam and fidelity is like these sand pots, They will be able to live in peace-” (Volga-, 50). The final meeting with Sita’s own younger sister Urmila made her realize that wisdom of life is not destined to a particular age group. Though Urmila is younger than Sita, she is more enlightened and erudite than Sita. She advises Sita: “Each of these trials is meant to liberate you from Ram. To secure you for yourself. Fight, Meditate, look within until you find the truth that is you” (Volga-, 81). Mythologies often deal with the theme of good versus evil, where good wins over evil. In order to satisfy this strategy, a male centered character is employed with many sub characters. But a



strong female character is mostly absent or has a minimal presence in these epics. We find female characters who are mostly revered and idolized. But they are not strong enough to outdo a male counterpart. Male characters often outshine female characters who are mostly calm and delicate. This creates an image of women as weak and diffident. From ancient times onwards in Indian context we find women subservient to men though they exhibit great emotional perseverance and natural adaptability to their circumstances.

V.CONCLUSION

Our epics have least bothered about the fate of women heroines. Sita is no exception, who is considered an epitome of 'ideal womanhood'. Sita's origin is dubious as she was found from earth and disappears back to her mother earth. She was a child abandoned by her biological parents and was raised by King Janak of Mithila. We don't know what would have happened to her if she was not found by him. Thus the episodes in Sita's life were out of sheer luck or bad luck. From pre modern times women are subjects of conquests as in the representation of Ramayana where Sita surrenders to the choices made by her life. While Ram is known under the title "the ruler of Kosala" Sita is not addressed as Queen or Princess. She is often belittled as the wife of Ram. Thus, women lacked identity but at the same time they were happy and privileged to be named after their husbands Sita's identity remained an enigma till she was married to Ram. She gained more individuality when she chooses to go with Ram in exile to the forest, and gives up a privileged life for her husband. Her perceptions and views towards life evolve from the circumstances she encountered through her life's journey. Even when Sita was abducted by Ravan she was representative of a weak woman who weeps helplessly for her husband. But none tries to view a strong and willful woman who also questions some of the choices that are made for her towards her end. The paper is thus- a feminist reading of two different narratives on SitaDevi, one from the novel *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* by Amish Tripathi and the other one, a collection of different stories by Volga, *The Liberation of Sita*. The former is written in a multi linear narrative, a story telling technique called 'hyperlinks' while the latter is narrated through the perspectives of distinct woman characters in different stories. Both the works are noteworthy for the fact that there are still some of the writers who give a worthy and satisfactory space for women like Sita. All such retellings open up new spaces for reconceptualizing these women characters.

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