



SITA: AN EPITOME OF STRENGTH: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SITA: WARRIOR OF MITHILA AND RAMAYANA 3392AD

Meenu Sharma

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, ISMAIL NATIONAL MAHILA PG COLLEGE,
CH. CHARAN SINGH UNIVERSITY, MEERUT U.P. INDIA.

Abstract

Myth has been projected with fresh life in contemporary narratives. This freshness is also evident in the delineation of most revered and idolized women characters like Sita, Draupadi, Sati, Gandhari, etc. Sita, firstly introduced by Maharishi Valmiki in his archaic saga Ramayana and has been refabricated distinctly over the ages. As modern literature gives a new stride to mythology, the character of Sita has been recapitulated with new dimensions. The present study would comparatively examine the character of Sita specifically in terms of her strength in two contemporary rehashings named *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* by Amish Tripathi and *Ramayana 3392 Ad*, a graphic novel by Virgin comics. Both these tales are set in assorted periods and demonstrate Sita in a completely new arena. In modern narratives, Sita has developed a persona based on her solidarity and frailties.

Key words

Myth, Narrative, Comparison, Sita, Strength, Ramayana, Women, Modern

Introduction

The Literature consistently tends to reconfigure its composition. Modern Indian English writing reconnoiters their underlying foundation to foster their artistic designs. Mythology gave wing to the insightful intellect of young authors and assumed an indispensable role in conferring Indian Mythology to the global arena as well. Narratives and trends from Vedic scrolls, Puranas, Upanishads, classics like Ramayana and Mahabharata, strengthen Indian Art history. Even though, Indian Mythology is an ocean that is yet to be

churned more and more to produce a pile of fascinating and engaging fiction. These scriptures are being reshuffled and re-imagined countless times over the course of the hundreds of years in words, songs, gestures, pictures and sculptures. Myth has given Indian fiction a new face in English. These retellings showcase the hidden aspects of illustrious epics and gave a new dimension to the eminent characters. Moreover Karna's wife: the Outcast Queen', Sita's Sister and Lanka's Princess, Ahalya's Awakening by Kavita Kane Karna's wife, Sita's sister Urmila, Surupnakha in Volga's Liberation of Sita The Queen's Play by Aashish Kaul which focuses on Ravana's wife Mandodari, "The Curse of Gandhari" by Aditi Banerjee are few examples that detailed the unrecognized characters of the incredible saga. The contemporary tales bestowed new identity to the conventional signoras of Indian mythos like Sita, Draupadi, Sati, and so forth.

Sita is the epitome of virtue and strength in Indian mythology and has been portrayed countless times in pictures, words, gestures, and sculptures. Contemporary narratives both written and visual are jammed with these concealed demeanors of Sita. Sita: Daughter of the Earth by Saraswati Nagpal Sita's Ramayana by Samhita Arni & Moyna Chitrakar, Sita's Ascent by Vayu Naidu, Sita: An illustrated Ramayana by Devdutt Pattanaik and Ramayana 3392 AD are some exceptional renderings of Sita in the new age. "Although there are countless versions of the Ramayana, Valmiki's is considered to be the oldest, and therefore the most authoritative." (Richman 2001, p. 3) Whereas these narratives ruminate on diverse sides of Sita Yet, all of them substantially restrict her persona inside the layout of a victimized and choice-less woman who constantly battles for her existence. All the works focus on Sita's perspective yet are necessarily a regretful legitimization of the anticipated wrongs exposed on her. Srinivasa Sastri in his Lectures on the Ramayana remarks that the Ramayana has been told to us an endless number of times. "Every line of it has been scanned and commented upon minutely, not hundreds, not thousands but millions of times over...nevertheless, somehow or the other...there is a tendency which we nourish to come again and yet again to the story..."(Sastri 2013 p. 7).

Sita: Warrior of Mithila by Amish Tripathi delineates an unfamiliar one. Amish Says," The portrayal of Lady Sita in my narrative is closely aligned with her description in the ancient texts of Valmiki's *Adbhuta Ramayana*.' (Firstpost, 2017.) She is firm and capable like Rama and has broken the stereotype image of past renderings. She has been portrayed in a fair and magnanimous way, along with restating the whole story of Ramayana in a multilinear narrative. On the other side, Seeta in Ramayana 3392 Ad has been bestowed with Earthly magic and presented as the only key to the salvation of the nuclear devastated world. The present paper focuses on the comparative study of Sita in both narratives in terms of her strength. It also seeks the new Sita paradigm that scrumptiously resembles the paradigm of contemporary Indian women.

Sita in Amish Tripathi's Sita: Warrior of Mithila

Amish Tripathi, widely acknowledged as a literary pop star is a banker from profession and author from enthusiasm. He started his literary excursion with Shiva Trilogy which comprises three novels denominated "The Immortals of Meluha", "The Secret of the Nagas", and "The Oath of the Vayuputras". These all are bestsellers. He has now ventured into the "Ramchandra series" based upon Ramayana, the great archaic saga. Amish tried his hands on an avant-garde "multi-linear narrative". In this regard, while the first book Ram: Scion of Ikshvaku traces the life of Rama, prince of Ayodhya, the subsequent book recounts the story by keeping Sita in the center and projected her as a great warrior and strong contender of Vishnuhood. The third book in this arrangement manages the existence of Ravana, an enemy of Aryavrata, and addressed the new aspects of his character. All these three tales start with the birth of the pivotal characters and end at the abduction of Sita by Ravana.

On applying multi-linear narrative in his tale, Amish the best-selling author explains, "Do we know well enough the backstory of all the characters of Ramayana? So I thought it would be interesting to have the backstories of the main characters, which converges into a common narrative," The birth of Sita is a mystery and conferred in all adaptations in their specific manner, so as in Amish's tale She is found by a devout and spiritual King Janak of Mithila, and his pragmatic and brave queen Sunaina in the forest encompassed by a pack of wolves. "...She's probably just a few months old. She must be strong to have survived this ordeal," said Sunaina. (Tripathi, 2017 p.19) She is being adopted by the royal couple. They named her Sita and raised her in an environment that combines Queen Sunaina's practical side with King Janak's profound philosophy. "She turned to Janak, We found her in a furrow in Mother Earth. It was like a Mother's womb for her. We will call her Sita." (Tripathi, 2017 p.20)

In her childhood, she is so impulsive and her temper is called upon to regulate when she grievously wounds a young boy in the slums. She was adequately brave to go to the slum on her own and fight for her life. She swung her stick ferociously at the boy's head that snatches her gold ring from her finger. Her sense of distance was spot on. She also stood firm in her opposition to his uncle's injustice and smashed off his new seal, even though she was accused of causing Mithila problems as a result of her actions. She began attending Rishi Shvetaketu's gurukul at the age of ten, where she received lessons in core subjects like Philosophy, Mathematics, Science, and Sanskrit. She learned Geography, History, and Royal Administration as well. She also studied combat and martial arts. She is a master stick fighter and a skilled archer. Maharishi Vishwamitra, Chief of the Malayaputras, a clan left by Lord Parshuram, picked her as the seventh Vishnu because of her skills and knowledge. "She has the wisdom of King Janak, great Malayaputra. But she also has the pragmatism and fighting spirit of queen Sunaina." (Tripathi. 2017 p.51)Rishi Shvetaketu remarked. She possesses all of the attributes of a challenger to Rama, another contender groomed for the Vishnuhood by Maharishi Vashishta.

Sita, played by Amish Tripathi, appears to be both physically and mentally strong. It can be said by quoting the following paragraph. “She was almost as tall as Ram. Lean, Muscular, Wheat-complexioned. Her round face a shade lighter than the rest of her body. She had high cheekbones and a sharp, small nose. Her lips were neither thin nor full. Her wide-set eyes were neither small nor large; strong brows were arched in a perfect curve above creaseless eyelids. Her straight, jet-black hair was braided and tied in a neat bun. As always.” (Tripathi.2017 p.211). Previous iterations centered on Sita's life as a dedicated spouse of Rama, King of Ayodhya, or a solitary dejected mother of Luv-Kush, which closely mirrored the phenomena of contemporary single mothers. But Sita: Warrior of Mithila focuses on the concealed life of Sita before getting married to Rama. It bridged the gap and focused on her birth, roots, and relationship with her adoptive parents, friendships, her policies, and community. In one interview, Amish Tripathi told; “Sita was not just an obedient and humble wife; she was a warrior. I was surprised to know that many people do not even know that she was the adopted daughter of King Janak. The feeling that I have got after interacting with so many people is that although people seem aware of the Ramayana, there is very little knowledge about the story of Sita,” (Hindustan Times,2017)

From the outset, Sita seemed obstinate, however, she eventually flourished towards her obligation. Her journey was not easy so far. She confronts the trauma bravely as her empire accuses her of the fall when she affronts her uncle Kushadwaj. The story also focuses on the fact that being an adopted child, it is difficult to make a place in the core of the individuals of Mithila. She faces a lot of criticism as an adopted child but after the sudden demise of her mother Sunaina, She demonstrated her solidarity as a guardian of Mithila. At a very early age, she is assigned responsibility for her realm, her delicate sister, and her father, who relies entirely on her. She not only takes care of her father and sister but the kingdom of Mithila with the assistance of Samichi, the central cop of Mithila. When Sita tells her sister Urmila her philosophy of life, "Life is not about what we desire, but what we have to do. We really don't have privileges. So, we have roles "(Tripathi.2017 p.295). She did a ton of attempts to improve the financial status of Mithila and the welfare of people. To gain a financially and secured stable state, she took the help of Malayaputras. At that point, she went to Agastyakootam for educating herself on the principles of Governance, Philosophies, Warfare, and other advanced training required in her journey of turning out to be the next Vishnu.

She is a mentally strong woman who does not believe anyone blindly as when she came to know about Rama through Radhika, she started to doubt the reasoning of Vishwamitra to pick her over Rama for the title of Vishnu. At this point, she chooses Rama as her companion for the title of Vishnuhood. She persuaded her father to arrange a swayamvar to fulfill her plan to work with Rama in an association as the next Vishnu. “She saw him as a worthy partner in the destiny of the Vishnu: someone she could work with for the good of her motherland, the country she loved, this beautiful, matchless India.” (Tripathi. 2017 P.204)

Amish generate this concept of marriage as companionship and equality between two partners through the mythic tale. As his Ram doesn't want an average woman, he wants a lady who can cause him to admire her. Ram wanted to marry a woman in front of whom he would be compelled to bow his head in admiration." (Tripathi. 2017 P.210) Rama here resembles the phenomena of men of contemporary culture dream of a powerful, successful, and hardworking woman who stands on her own feet as a conventional spouse. Sita is the true embodiment of such a life partner, Rama dream of. She grew up to be a brave woman without femininity and less mindful of her looks and appearance. The first moment she gets humiliated about her appearance was when she is enamored with Ram. "She touched and twisted a war mark on her forearm. Her scars became a source of pride." "A guy like Ram's going to value my scars. It is "the body of a warrior." (Tripathi. 2017 P.211)

Sita plans a marriage alliance with Ram through a Swayamvar. Although she likes Rama but it's not a blind love. She wedded with Rama with a perspective of a companion not only for his personal life but also for the title of Vishnuhood, assigned to the welfare of society. Love among them was not a sensual body alone, but they dreamt of battling together for their country. Ram wins the Swayamvar and marries her, while his brother Lakshman marries Urmila. The following day, Ravana besieges Mithila with 10,000 troopers, and Ram is compelled to use the biological weapon Asurastra by Viswamitra. As Ram is constrained to sin by his passion for her and his sense of duty to defend Mithila's innocent people by the Asurarstra, a biological weapon which was forbidden according to Lord Rudra's Law.

Rama is projected as an emotional person yet Sita is an inwardly strong woman who did not get manipulated by Vishwamitra. Sita holds resentment against Vishwamitra for constraining Ram to use the weapon and never addresses him. Moreover, she acknowledges the predetermination fearlessly and joins Rama for exile. "You share my destiny and I share your destiny. This is a real marriage." (Tripathi.2017 P 261) She completed 13 years of exile with Rama and Lakshmana among numerous events that took place by overcoming the hurdles they came across. When she was attacked by Surupnakha, she faced her strongly. The combat between them left Surupnakha with a deep cut on her nose which brings then angst of Ravana towards them. Ravana's troopers attacked them to abduct Sita. She had fought bravely and killed several soldiers of the Lankan army in hiding. She did a failed try to save Jatayu but he sacrificed his life to save his admired Vishnu. She was ultimately captured and rendered unconscious with some blue substance and bundled into Pushpak vimana by Ravana.

Seeta in Ramayana 3392 AD

On the other side, Ramayana:3392 AD is a graphic novel that re-imagines the story of exemplary Ramayana in a post-apocalyptic future. It was written by Shamik Dasgupta and drawn by Abhishek Singh and Jeevan Kang. It was published by Virgin Comics in three volumes. In this rendition of Ramayana, She additionally projected as a resilient lady and in fact the strongest one who has the supernatural power of creation. Graphic novel, one of the youngest genres of literature has been quite successful in visualization of prominent mythic tales. The excursion began with the comic book adaptations of Indian epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata in Amar Chitra Katha and took a long path of transformation till present day re-creation. Campfire's "Ravana: Roar of the Demon King", "Draupadi: the fire born princess", "Ramayana 3392AD", "Krishna: Defender of Dharma", "Vimanika's Shiva", "Sita's Ramayana" are a portion of the notable models which acquired solid readership. Deepak Chopra claims Ramayan 3392 AD is a text with "mythical symbols that are meant to be understood in the contextual framework of a cross-cultural post-modern, multi-ethnic, global society" (Dasgupta et al, 2007 np)

Seeta in Ramayana: 3392 AD is not the prime character unlike Amish's Sita: Warrior of Mithila. She came into the story in the second half of the first volume. It has been observed by Ramanujan in his "Three Hundred Ramayanas: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translation" that though influenced by beliefs, cultures, and traditions there has been several refashioning of the Ramayana narrative, the posterior Ramayanas in some facet or the other derive from the knowledge of the earlier tellings. These modified versions according to him are the Meta Ramayanas. (Ramanujan 1992 p.24) The story essentially manages the last realm of people who are battling demons Asuras to endure. The prime protagonist of the series is the human prince Rama who, alongside his brothers, aims to bring down the demon-lord Ravan. At Mithila, they subdue the last remnants of the dispatched Asura force thus saving the princess of the region, a woman by the name of Seeta who is gifted with magical powers of nature.

Unlike Amish's version, Sita is first shown as an adolescent girl in the graphic narrative. She is the adopted daughter of King Janak of Mithila. The daughter of the Earth, Seeta is endowed with magical properties that enable her to control and manipulate nature. King Janak told her birth story to Vishwamitra in short. "The fruit born of this life tree would come to define my life and may yet go on to define all of ours stillSeeta is the daughter of Mother Earth gifted unto me. I was charged her protector until now, And I have done this best I can." (Dasgupta et al. 2013 n.p.)



Figure: 1 Seeta introduced as nurturer of Environment in the graphic novel

(Source: Dasgupta et al. 2013 n.p.)

They are then attacked by three Asura warriors who are three of Ravana's children. In the fight, the three champions are executed along these lines acquiring humans the anger of Ravan himself who at that point shows up to annihilate Mithila. Sage Vishwamitra anticipates the situation and chooses Rama as the protector of Seeta, the magical girl. "She is the key to the salvation of this wretched world and your brother is supposed to be her Protector" (Dasgupta et al., 2013n.p.) Even King Janak counsel Mother earth and she told him that Rama, the blue stranger will protect her in the future. Sita is endowed with great power. As a literal daughter of the Earth, Seeta possesses "earth magic" or Maya Vidya which allows her to heal people and control plant life. Seeta utilizes this ability to advance harmony by developing flowers, stopping a striking gathering of Asura champions, taking care of a ravenous clan of rodents -like animals, and recuperating Rama. "She turned the junkyard of pampa into an oasis amid the deserts of Thar". (Dasgupta et al., 2013n.p.)



Fig. 2 She turned the junkyard of pampa into an oasis amid the deserts of Thar”.

(Source: Dasgupta et al., 2013 n.p.)

Her Shakti status is important to help ensure her associates and go about as the salvation of her reality, reestablishing life to a planet that Ravanna has for, the most part obliterated. On the other hand, Ravanna wishes to capture her and utilize her mystic power to comprehend the distinct feelings felt by living creatures, especially humans. Instead of desiring Sita for her magnificence, Ravanna needs to use Sita’s earth sorcery to make him all the more impressive. “Only the girl from Mithila can fill that void. She has the power of earth, the secret of life.” “In that aspect, she is more powerful than I. but if I can control the energy she wields, then I will know the truth of life.” (Dasgupta et al. 2013 n.p.) As trio of Sita, Rama, and Lakshman reached the city of Panchvati in Ramayan 3392 AD Reloaded, they are split and abducted. Rama and Lakshman are brought to the Cathedral structure where they must participate in the single combat for the city’s entertainment. Sita is put up for auction as a courtesan. She manages to flee and is spared by a man who claims to be a seer named Vishwamitra but is actually Ravanna. He tries to convince Seeta to come with him “You are the most powerful being in Aryavrata Seeta too long you have been kept in ignorance of your true potential. You need proper guidance and the elders will provide that you must come with me”. (Dasgupta et al., 2013 n.p.) The books contain several references to Sita’s inability to control her powers and the need for a male guardian first her father, then Rama, and after that Ravanna in disguise of Vishwamitra to protect her and guide the use of her powers. It is when Sita flaunts this protection, running away from Rama and then trying to save him and herself, that she is kidnapped. Ravanna convinces Sita that she must use her powers to rescue Rama. Though Rama is fated to be Sita’s protector, she consents to destroy Panchvati and save Rama. Sita causes large Venus flytraps to emerge from the earth and swallow the city. After the city is destroyed Ravanna reveals himself to Sita and kidnaps her saying, “you have served your purpose . . . I now claim you, Seeta, as my own. . . We shall become gods! And you Seeta shall become the bride of Ravan” (Dasgupta & Kang, 2013 n.p.). Sita is the most powerful being in the novel yet she has not reasoned control over her magical power. She abuses her power to rescue Rama, and trap herself in the hands of disguised Ravanna.



Fig.3 Seeta is kidnapped by Ravana

(Source: Dasgupta et al., 2013 n.p.)

Conclusion

The character of Sita has been delineated distinctly in both narratives. Writers take the freedom of innovation and modify the existing Ramayana theme to suit their conception of the tale, Yardi notes in his Epilogue of Ramayana (Yardi 164). The comparison between Sita in both given texts is that although Amish's Sita doesn't have any magical power yet she is more powerful physically and mentally. Initially, she was an impulsive girl but gradually overpower her impulses. She controls not only her life but creates the destinies of Mithila as a good prime minister and the whole nation as the next Vishnu. She is an intelligent and knowledgeable woman on one side and a good practioner of stick and knife on the other. She is not a born Vishnu but achieved all the qualities with expertise to be called India's great leader as the next Vishnu. Tripathi says in an interview with Akhila Damodaran for Express News Service, "Sita-Mithila's Warrior is not a Sita Devi's Ramayan. It's Lady Sita's own story. She's the lead character, the hero. And Lord Ram comes as a character in the last one- third of the novel. I depicted Sita as a warrior, a powerful woman," he continues. Amish's Sita, has defied stereotypes and strongly parallels the phenomenon of modern Indian women. She is an intelligent and courageous daughter of King Janak and queen Sunaina, an abled disciple of Rishi Shwetaketu a competent administrator of Mithila, and a worthy claimant for the title of Vishnuhood to blot out the demon's power like Ravana. Amish's story has projected Sita's life before getting married to Rama and redesigned it to show the hidden aspects of her life like her birth, her roots, and her relationship with her adoptive parents, her friendships, her policies, and her culture.

On the other side, Seeta in Ramayana 3392 AD Graphic novel is although placed in the future settings yet projects a stereotype image of the daughter of Mother Earth. She possessed the Maya- Vidya which can control nature and recovers from the devastating state of the world. She has been presented as a precious object which needs to be protected. She is an innocent girl who does not understand how to use her influence wisely. Ravana, posing as Vishwamitra, manipulates her strength to save Rama, trapping herself in the jaws of the demon lord. She needs a male guardian, such as King Janak or Rama, or she may fall into the wrong. She is a powerful character, but she is built to blend into the tropes of Indian mythic heroines that depend on the male protagonist for defense and direction.

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