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The Unsung Tale Of Warrior Sita In Amish Tripathi's *Sita*

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ABSTRACT:

Mythology is not mere tales read and told as bed time stories for pleasure, they contain aspects of human truth and conduct. Each mythological story and the characters in it shed light upon various human values, morale and conduct. The mythological characters, victories, follies, decisions, and every single aspect of mythology that binds mythology into a whole symbolises the ethics, human conduct, life lessons and moral values to all the generations to come. There are umpteen versions of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* today. Majority of the narratives that are written are male-centered, but not to forget in recent times there are works of mythology focussing on women narratives. Broadly speaking Indian Mythology is in itself patriarchal in nature. What about the women characters then, do they exist? Aren't the women in Mythology important? What role do they play? The answer to all of these questions is Yes, women do exist and play a pivotal role in mythology. But women in mythology are seldom main stream characters and are mostly side-lined. Women in Indian mythology are mostly showcased as an epitome of beauty, devotion, kindness, chastity, sacrifice and so on. There are quite a few narratives of mythology from women's perspective but we barely come across or pay attention to such narratives, may be because we are so indulged and focussed on defending the central male characters that have been told to us since time immemorial and this is where we have neglected the female characters of the epic.

KEYWORDS: Mythology, Women, Re-defining, Warrior, Re-telling

INTRODUCTION:

When one talks about Indian epics or many of them hold the view that they know or remember the *Ramayana* or the *Mahabharata* characters, the very first character that comes to anybody's mind or say that is strongly embedded in their memory is Ram or Raavan(*Ramayana*) and Arjun or Bhima or Krishna or Duryodhana(*Mahabharata*). It is only after these male characters one remembers Sita, Shurpanaka, Kaikeyi, Draupadi, Kunti or say any other female characters. Women characters are largely neglected in the artistic interpretations of the epic.

In recent times there are quite a few writings that have come up with the women characters of the epic as the protagonists. When we read any epics or any retellings of the epics there is always a stereotypical sketch or portrayal of women characters. Two types of women are portrayed in mythology, one being the beautiful, virtuous, sacrificing women and the other being the ugly, demonic, villainous women. Be it a movie or daily soaps, novels, oral tales, drama or any visual or print media women characters of mythology are largely depicted to be dependent, virtuous, chaste, sacrificing, oppressed, duty bound etc. There is another instance wherein women of antagonist's side are always shown to be ugly, dark complexioned, demonically looking body features like pot-belly, hunch back, with horns and disturbed facial features, missing eye etc. Wherein on the other side women belonging to protagonist is shown to be the epitome of beauty. A range of difference is seen in the portrayal of women based on the clan or community they belong to which simply means that there is a difference created in the womanhood itself.

Untold Story of Sita:

The *Ramayana* is a multicultural and multilingual epic, there are 'n' number of Ramayanas across different regions, cultures, languages. All these 'n' number of Ramayanas have a different narration, plot, storyline and climax altogether a different story to tell yet, the portrayal of character Sita remains same no matter what. Sita remains to be a character known for her spell bound beauty, chastity, sacrifice, and a duty bound wife. The *Ramayana* is always told from the perspective of Ram, and the entire story centers around his valor and strength.

The present paper intends to re-represent or re-tell the traditional character sketch of Sita. Traditionally, Sita is always portrayed as a beautiful queen, known for her sacrifice, kindness, responsibility, and chastity. A dutiful wife bound to her husband and her womanly duties. Sita is much more than just being a dutiful wife. The present paper analyses the role of Sita, differentiating her from the typical dutiful wife of Ram to a powerful warrior.

Sita as a warrior is totally a new dimension or say other side of a coin to look at. She being a powerful warrior, skilled archer remains not so significant character. She is just reduced to being virtuous wife of Ram lacking an identity of her own, in spite of having a strong personality, skill and an aura. The present paper focuses on the untold story of Sita being a warrior and an archer.

The monolithic narrative always goes like Ram winning the hands of Sita in Swayamvara by breaking the bow, and him being a dutiful son going into exile for fourteen years, killing many demons in the forests, and eventually killing Ravan who abducted his wife Sita and finally saving her. Melodramatically in visual and print media the character of Sita is always depicted as a dependent wife, sobbing princess, waiting for her husband Ram in Ashokavana to save her from Ravan. We rarely read or come across the upbringing of Sita as a warrior princess of Mithila, we know very little about her and all these years we are always told about valorous Ram of Ayodhya and not about the warrior Sita of Mithila. This happens either because we only focus on the central male characters, their valour, strength, power, victory, or because we as a society or a system seldom accept and digest women as fighters or as warrior, and this is why female characters go unnoticed.

Sita, a learned scholar, studied at Rishi Shvetaketu's Gurukul. She was well versed in core subjects like Philosophy, Mathematics, Sanskrit, and Science and specialised subjects as Geography, History, Economics, Royal Administration. She was also well versed at warfare and martial arts. A lone princess who could lift the legendary bow, and who set the benchmark of strength among all the warriors from across the country. As a student Sita was extraordinarily intelligent, sharp and enthusiastic. She was one of those few great archers who could shoot relying on the sound. Sixteen year old Sita administered the kingdom after the death of her mother Sunaina. She was also known for her skill in stick fighting. Sita was one such archer who was admired by Vishwamitra for her remarkable skills at archery, spear-throwing and other weapon techniques.

"She flicked a spear up with her foot, catching it expertly in her hand. Vishwamitra noticed the stylish flick. But he was more impressed by something else. She had caught the spear exactly at the balance point on the shaft. Which had not been marked, unlike in a normal training spear. She judged it, instinctively perhaps. Even from a distance, he could see that her grip was flawless." (Tripathi, *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* 51)

Then she got married to Ram of Ayodhya, Sita was equally talented in military skills, martial arts as Ram. She was a shrewd administrator, a woman who is powerful, authoritative, knowledgeable, and above all fearless, surpassing the skills of many of her male counterparts. When Ram was sentenced to exile of fourteen years by his father, and Sita accompanies her husband to the exile. She could have chosen to stay back at the royal palace but, she refused to do so, she left back all the royal luxuries and she being a dutiful wife went to fourteen years of exile with her husband Ram. This depicts the mental strength and determination of Sita, as it was not a cake walk for a royal Princess to live in a forest for such long time with all the odds. She denied all the luxuries of royal household and went to exile for fourteen years with her husband.

Women in our society many a times are wrongly accused of the crimes that they have not committed. There are many instances wherein women are blamed for rape, divorce, marital disputes or any other crimes that are done against women. Sita was also affected by this blame game, her life becomes a whirlwind after her abduction by Ravan. Her chastity was questioned by society and her husband Ram and she had to undergo Agnipariksha to prove her innocence and chastity. Sita stayed in captivity withstanding the abduction by a ten headed demon Ravana.

“War is for demonstrating the valour of men. Rama has proved his heroism. He is awaiting the demonstration of his wife’s chastity. Isn’t this what Ahalya called distrust?” (Volga, *The Liberation of Sita* 32)

Even after proving her chastity she was sent to exile and was abandoned by the man she loved. Sita had to undergo a trial and had to bow down to authority. In the forest, she gives birth to twin boys Luv and Khush. She as a single parent raises her twin sons all by herself. She teaches them the kshatriya skills. She not only fulfills her motherly duties but also does everything that a father and teacher would do for the sake of her kids. Sita tells her sons:

“You want to master kshatriya skills. Is that all? I’ll teach you.
You?

Of course. I’m a kshatriya woman, am I not?

But women don’t fight wars, do they?

When necessary, they’ll do anything. I’m adept at all those skills. From tomorrow, I’m not only your mother but also your teacher.”(Volga, *The Liberation of Sita* 57)

She raises her kids in such a way that they would surpass their father Ram in valour and heroism. Eventually she sends her sons, Luv and Khush to their father Ram before going back to Mother Earth. She overcame many hurdles after her marriage right from going into exile, to her abduction, to Agnipariksha, to raising her kids in the forest all by herself. She is a true warrior who stood so strong during all the tough times and encountered them like no less than a man. Sita is a warrior not just because of her physical strength but also her mental strength is remarkable. She had the ability and woman power to withstand all the hurdles that came her way.

CONCLUSION:

In contemporary Indian society, women's status is still debatable. Even after much advancement, our society is largely patriarchal and so is Indian mythology. The mythological tales have been told and read majorly through a male perspective and female characters are kept at minor roles and are often marginalised. The re-telling of mythologies is a dire need since a new approach and re-casting the female characters allows the readers to know the untold stories and shed light on the voices unheard. The paper is an attempt to re-represent the character Sita of the great Indian epic *Ramayana*, entirely in different light shedding light on the new perspective of Sita as a skillful warrior, unbiased ruler, exemplary wife, a self-sufficient, and a powerful woman. Sita is a symbol of progress, women’s consciousness and spiritual awakening for women.

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