

Vernacular Ecofeminism: Analysing 'Sita' as the Embodiment of Nature

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Abstract

As Sita lived and behaved in the ancient past on her own terms and according to her own norms, this research aims to describe her eco-friendly personality. In the Ramayana, Sita is portrayed as the personification of nature since she is born from the earth and returns there at the end of her life (most naturally, exactly like a plant), and she spends a significant portion of her life leading a wild, natural life in the forest. In this article, I focus on the unexpected and unmatched energy (Shakti) of nature which is expressed through Sita (prakriti). It is crucial to comprehend Sita's role as representing a woman going through culturally civilizing tendencies while still remaining true to nature and helping humanity as a whole. The paper will examine the three significant incidents in Sita's life and speculate on how they affected her relationship with Prakriti/nature.

Introduction

In actuality, the Ramayana's principal plot revolves around the events in Sita's life. It is noteworthy that the Ramayana's main narrative, albeit not presented in that sequence, opens with Sita's dramatic birth and ends with her peculiar absorption into the soil. In contrast to the life of a typical woman, hers is extraordinary and unmatched. In classical Indian literature, particularly the Ramayana, Sita's impulsive temperament can be seen as the natural expression of prakriti/ nature, which is represented by the forest and female impulsivity. In this essay, I focus on the unexpected and unmatched energy (Shakti) of nature which is expressed through Sita (prakriti). The Ramayana thus symbolically conveys two themes: First, the cultural competition between men and women for dominance, and second, the affinity of women for nature (prakriti), particularly when it occurs in a natural forest environment. The plant symbolism in Sita's personality and her yearning for a life in the forest are symbolic of more than just the idyllic view of such a life; they also stand for the drive of the primal feminine force (Shakti) to live a life of unrestrained spirit. Women were purportedly in a privileged

position as food gatherers and keepers during the prehistorical Golden Age . Part of the reason for women's frustration in the Ramayana is the removal of women from their primary work—foraging for food in the forest—and connection to nature. Women had better rights and status in a society where hunting and gathering were based in the forest, so this move away from nature (in this case, plant nature or the forest) was a major factor. Observations of nature by men and women diverge: On the one hand, women saw nature and the forest as "all giving" and something to be maintained in light of their experiences as the "life givers" of sorts: they cultivated gardens for the family table before the arrival of large-scale farming dominated by males, and they conceive and rear children. Contrarily, men see nature and forests as "wild" and as something that needs to be tamed and controlled since they have lived as sort of "lifetamers/takers": they go hunting, fetch the meat, and they go to war. Rama and Sita's characters are powerful representations of both of these facets. In this essay, I will examine these two topics: the cultural conflicts between men and women; and the female connection and pining for nature, and life in natural surroundings, as opposed to their struggle to fit in with civilization, or, in other words, the longing for women's original status and life. The Sita of the Ramayana is portrayed in literature and film in a wide variety of ways, including orthodox, non-Hindu, feminist, according to different scholarly interpretations. Modern criticisms of Sita also exist in a wide variety of media, from print to broadcast. Sita gains a special place among her descendants, constantly igniting fresh thoughts. Sita's life can be loosely divided into three phases, including Sita prior Rama, Sita alongside Rama, and Sita without Rama, in order to explore her life in greater detail. My analysis of Sita in such three key areas of her life, which are shown here, reveals Sita to be a powerful, forgiving, and nurturing lady. Although she is intensely dedicated to Rama, she is never passive or meek, despite the fact that in some retellings of the Ramayana, those traits were attached to her. The beginning of a hero is frequently veiled in secrecy when a person's notion is mythologized. These heroic myths also frequently mention how a hero's relationship with his parents or family is strained and that he has greater envy, jealousy, and moral perplexity than other people. Even though Sita's function in the Ramayana is not immediately clear, all of these elements of the hero myth are present in her story and apply to her. The Krauncavadha story (Ramayana. 1. 2.14) defines the tone of the saga as that of the pain of the feminine owing to no fault of her or her companion, as indicated by Valmiki in his introduction to the Ramayana. Despite the limited screen time she receives in the Ramayana, Sita plays a crucial role in the plot's overall structure.

Sita's Early Life

Beginning with her birth, which the Ramayana describes as sprouting from the soil from a furrow of the field, the symbolism of environment (flora) is inherent and undeniably present in every significant event of the tale of the life of Sita. "As I was plowing the field, a girl sprang up behind my plow," recalls Janaka of an incident (Ramayana.1.65.15). Janaka's description of Sita's birth as "not born from a womb (ayonija)" conjures up an image of plants spontaneously growing from the earth in their most natural state, as in the wild. For plant life to appear in the wild, no plow or seed-sowing is required. It is the procedure that occurs in the wild the most naturally and frequently. Sita's birth therefore symbolizes two ideas: Sita's affinity for nature (prakriti), which overflows and nourishes life without any effort, and her proximity to spontaneous life. Raja Janaka asserts in the Ramayana (Ramayana. 1. 65.15-20) that Sita is:

“A treasure and a pride for eye.

Once, as it chanced, I ploughed the ground,

When sudden, ‘neath the share was found

An infant springing from the earth, Named Sita from her secret birth.”

Additionally, Sita tells the tale of her birth and union with Anasuya, Atria's wife, which retells the tale mentioned in this section (Ramayana. 2.110.30-110.50). Sita gave a more realistic account of her birth. She says, "I broke through the dirt while Janaka was ploughing the field. She continued, King Janaka was sowing grain by the fistful when he saw me, my body caked in dirt, and he was amazed. In contrast to Janaka's version, which significantly simplifies the narrative by stating that he was cultivating the field for a yagna, Sita's version makes clear that he was genuinely farming the area by stating that he had first tilled it and had then sown the seeds when he came across Sita. Sita mentions that her birth was natural and that she had "dirt caked on her body." The birth of Sita is unexpected and unplanned. She is a gem and a source of pride. In fact, this is a mysterious birth that has never been documented in the human world. This actually reflects two elements: the first is the spontaneous birth, and the second is the nurturing process, a civilizational endeavor. Sita may have been born as innately as nature gives birth to life, but she was discovered as a product of human civilisation (the act of ploughing is noteworthy in this context as a product of civilization), and her upbringing was not an unforeseen spontaneous wild growth as nature (or plant life) intended in its most natural conditions.

As a result, women and nature are tightly associated at the beginning of the Sita story, and the subtext of the narrative is the culture's efforts to civilize itself through cultivation. As the plot develops, the narrative continues to focus on Sita's (and women's in general) free-spirited nature and the challenges she encounters as a result of the oppressive forces of civilization and change. Sita is not a meek woman, despite the fact that this image has come to be associated with her. She is as strong and powerful as the man she married. The Ramayana portrays Sita's personality as spontaneous and a strong, independent lady at the beginning of the tale with her birth and marriage. As a result, Sita before she joined Rama represents nature's majesty and inherent qualities. The portrayal of her adopted mother, Sunayana, is another important consideration in this case. Despite being mentioned by name, she merely appears briefly. She plays the least significant part in Sita's life. As a result, the Ramayana frames this from the outset as Sita's heroic story, with Rama attempting to match her strength by breaking the bow.

“This heavenly bow, exceeding bright, these youths shall see, O Anchorit.

Then if young Rama's hand can string

The bow that baffled lord and king,

To him I give, as I have sworn, My Sita, not of woman born.”

(Ramayana.1.66.16-17).

It should be noted that this fortitude later enabled her to face many difficulties in life, including accompanying Rama into the wilderness under self-exile, surviving Ravana's imprisonment, enduring the ordeal of fire, and wishing for another exile to the forest, which allowed her to raise her kids independently and alone in the forest.

Sita with Rama

After their marriage, she spends fifteen years with Rama, of which fourteen are spent in exile in the forest. She also spends nearly a year at Ayodhya before being sent on her next exile by herself. Sita is being put to the test during these pivotal years in her life. As soon as Sita discovers that Rama has been exiled to Ayodhya, she makes the case that she should accompany him there as his legitimate wife. She emphasizes two things in her speech that will help her feel at home in the forest: her devotion for Rama and the forest's wealth and picturesque surroundings. Even if her affection for Rama is clear, she only views the forest from a positive perspective and with a feminine connection. Sita only sees the goodness and beauty of the forest; as she says in the statement that follows, the forest is all-giving, all-nourishing, and all-embracing.

Sita narrates that,

“the earth will yield me roots, these will I eat, and woodland fruits, And as
 with thee I wander there, I will not bring thee grief or care.
 I long, when thou, wise lord, art night, all fearless, with delighted eyes.
 To gaze upon the rocky hill, the lake, the fountain, and the hill;
 To sport with thee, my limbs to cool, in some pure lily-covered pool,
 While the white swan’s and mallard’s wings, are splashing in the water-springs.”

(Ramayana. 2.24.15)

Her connection to nature is obvious. Her insistence on going with Rama into the forest doesn't just come across as a desire to be a good wife; it also seems to be a desire for a life in a forest full of fruit-bearing trees, bodies of water, and waterfalls, where she can play with Rama while splashing in the water and admiring the flowers and birds. Despite the fact that she is unaware of the dangers in the forest, this simply demonstrates her feminine desire to be a part of nature. Sita has not yet grasped how living in the jungle necessitates a shift in lifestyle. Before Kaikeyi brings her the bark attire and Sita sees it, she is unaware of the difficult austere lifestyle and starts crying. Rama had to assist her in putting these clothes on because she was unfamiliar with them.

“Si-ta, in her silks arrayed,
 Threw glances, trembling and afraid,
 On the bark coat she had to wear,
 Like a shy doe that eyes the snare.
 Ashamed and weeping for distress
 From the queen’s hand she took the dress.
 The fair one, by her husband’s side
 Who matched heaven’s minstrel monarch, cried:
 ‘How bind they on their woodland dress,
 Those hermits of the wilderness?’
 There stood the pride of Janaka’s race
 Perplexed, with sad appealing face.
 One coat the lady’s fingers grasped,
 One round her neck she feebly clasped,

But failed again, again, confused
By the wild garb she ne'er had used.
Then quickly hastening Rama, pride
Of all who cherish virtue, tied
The rough bark mantle on her, o'er
The silken raiment that she wore."

(Ramayana.2.33.10-15).

Sita's willingness to go into exile, give up wealth, comforts, and even silk attire in order to go to the forest, although not being aware of the difficult existence there, is an example of her readiness and preference for the forest and its organic spontaneous life. She yearned to coexist with nature like Shakti.

Sita was only imprisoned by Ravana on her terms, and she kept to her vow while accompanying Rama into exile. Sita did not enter Ravana's castle or take advantage of Lanka's luxurious amenities; instead, she long grieved in the forest. She was not going to be coerced into doing anything. Even though her time in Lanka has been the most challenging portion of her life, she has never lost courage or complied with requests from anybody other than Rama. She undergoes the fire experience (agni pariksha) after the conflict at Rama's request to demonstrate her virginity and comes out a powerful and pure woman. Sita was not the type to back down from a confrontation, not even fire. Except for the few days she spent in Lanka, Sita's fourteen years spent in the forest with Rama are a testament to her tenacity and ability to persevere in the face of adversity. She once again demonstrated her connection for nature (prakriti), personifying Shakti, by expressing how at home she felt in the forest. It also proves that while living in the forest may have been difficult, the trials of civilization, such as the fire ordeal, were more difficult. She recalls her time spent in the forest as being unplanned and idyllic. Within a year of departing the forest while she was pregnant, she yearned for the life of the forest once more.

Sita without Rama

In the final chapter of Sita's life, after being deceived while pregnant, Sita is again split from Rama. Sita travels with Rama and Lakshmana and must contend with the difficulties of forest survival during the first

exile. But in this second exile, the last period of her existence, she is in charge of her own destiny. She makes her own decisions and bears the results of her choices. From her experiences during this second exile, Sita shows herself to be a resilient person. The fact that Sita was exiled a second time demonstrates her true self as a fearless and independent lady. This is the reason feminist scholars have given this section of the story a lot of different interpretations and changes. Both poets and academics have focused on this period of Sita's life. Rama in this final episode appears to be the timid individual, whilst Sita shines as the stronger character. Without notifying her, Rama sends Sita into the wilderness due to a report he heard from one of his spies. Rama gave Lakshmana the order to take her to the other side of the Ganga, close to the Valmiki ashrama, taking care to prevent his brother from challenging his choice. When Sita was abandoned on the other bank of the Ganga, Lakshmana did not tell her about Rama's choice. Rama used the excuse that Sita had indicated a longing to go to the wild during her pregnancy as justification for sending her on her way. This demonstrates two crucial points. First of all, Rama was unable and unwilling to confront Sita and debate the facts obtained from the spy with her or his ensuing choice. Second, it is unexpected that Rama chose to send her to the jungle rather than her own house in Mithila in order to deceive her into believing it was only a temporary visit. It is difficult to comprehend what led Rama to make this choice. Regarding Sita's pregnancy and the birth of his children, it appears that Rama acted with egregious neglect. Was it Rama's assumption that she liked the forest and would be successful raising her kids there? But this latter phase of her life, where she raised her children alone in the forest, further proves that women have a natural affinity for the outdoors. This concept was well-understood in Telugu women's stories.

End of Sita's Life

For Sita, death comes as naturally as birth. When asked the same question twice, Sita responded like a brave lady would. She had successfully raised her children on her own and had lived her life. Sita ultimately refused to obey Rama when he required her to go through another fire experience to demonstrate her virginity, and instead chose to demonstrate her chastity by entering the earth rather than the fire. She declined to respond or debate, instead choosing to vanish forever, hurting Rama's pride. She merely pleaded with Madhav to accept her if she was sincere and honest. She was absorbed by the Earth. Sita returned to the place where she was born. The Ramayana depicts women's struggle to keep their rightful place in the culture's development; in reality, this is their final battle, which marks the beginning of society's slow ascent. The final female witness to this fleeting conflict is Sita. The life of Sita has been incredibly eventful. She had made decisions that no

woman could ever make and, by her tenacity and bravery, dealt with unexpected repercussions. Also keep in mind that Sita simply sleeps, just like a seed waiting to be reborn in the warmth of spring.

Conclusion

Sita was born alone, lived her life on her terms, and was a highly independent person.

She was a joyful and vivacious child who lifted the Shiva's bow in play, demonstrating her power, independence, and fearlessness. Sita's desire to go into the wilderness with Rama after they get married is another example of her independent and obstinate temperament. Her time being imprisoned by Ravana in Ashoka jungle is another example of her uniqueness and independence. Sita cannot be forced to undertake anything that she does not wish to do. Even though she is pregnant and happy upon her homecoming to Ayodhya, she still longs for the freedom and carefree existence of the forest. At last, she still prefers to be absorbed into mother Earth again.

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