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A Contemporary Manifestation of Sita in Amish Tripathi's *Sita: Warrior of Mithila*

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Abstract:

Indian mythology has a distinctive role in illuminating the voluminous tradition, cultural legacy, and social background of India. The narrative of Rama, is the subject of India's greatest epic, the Ramayana. There are multiple renditions of Ramayana, where Rama is presented as the perfect son, brother, and husband, whereas Sita is portrayed as the ideal meek, docile, and obedient wife who is completely dedicated to her husband in all areas of life. She has always been praised as an idol and a quiet suffer, but has never been acknowledged as a woman of great power. The contemporary writers have recapitulated the character of Sita with different dynamics. One of the most prominent writers is Amish Tripathi who is famous for his depiction of deities as human beings. With a contemporary sense, Tripathi in his novel *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* has presented Sita as a youthful, skilled fighter with the courage, fearlessness, and intelligence to lead her kingdom. Sita is portrayed in the novel as more than simply a character; she is also a strong example of liberation and a woman who imparts the virtue of resilience. This paper will examine Sita's unique personality and will investigate at Sita's endurance as a whole.

Keywords: Myth, Sita, Strength, Warrior, Women.

Introduction:

Myth is an encompassing tool that investigates social, cultural, and historical situations. It is recognized as a fundamental component of human culture and is thought to have existed at some point in the history of traditions. The origin of the word 'myth' is from the Greek word 'mythos' which means 'story'. Myths serve as a symbol for the ideas and aspirations of people. These mythical stories have existed since the dawn of human civilization. A society's cultural base is reflected in its myths, which also represent human experiences. *The Routledge*

Dictionary of Literary Terms defines 'myth' as "stories of unascertainable origins or authorship accompanying or helping to explain religious beliefs". (Childs 46)

Myths concerning human life have been passed down across all cultures from the beginning of time. It is a collection of fantastic tales about the origin, cultural and religious beliefs of a particular group of people. The study of these traditional tales, the myths, is known as mythology. The underlying issue with human life is clarified by mythology. Conventional narratives that connect the society fervently promote mythology as a method of living. It "focuses on how we see the world: what is seen and unseen and why some things are seen and others unseen" (Pattanaik 30). To put alternatively, if myth is a concept, mythology is the means through which that idea is represented. In his work *Myth=Mithya*, Devdutt Pattanaik focuses on myth and expertly distinguishes it from mythology.

From myth comes belief, from mythology customs. Myth conditions thoughts and feelings. Mythology influences behaviours and communications. Myth and mythology thus have a profound influence on culture. Likewise, culture has a profound influence on myth and mythology. People outgrow myth and mythology when myth and mythology fail to respond to cultural needs. (Pattanaik XVII)

The genre of mythology has gained popularity as a means of preserving stories for ages. Indian mythology has a distinctive role in illuminating the voluminous tradition, cultural legacy, and social background of India. Nowadays, writers are focusing more on myths. To appeal the modern sensibilities, they have reimagined the mythology. These writers are known as 'Revisionist- Mythmakers'. These writers are the ones who reinvent, rethink, and reinterpret the myths. Some of the famous revisionist mythmakers in India are Ashok Banker, Devdutt Pattanaik, Amish Tripathi, Kavita Kane, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. The topics of the two major epics, the Ramayana and Mahabharata, are primarily interpreted by these authors. The narrative of Rama, is the subject of India's greatest epics, the Ramayana. There are multiple renditions of Ramayana, where Rama is regarded as the ideal son, brother, and husband, while Sita is portrayed as an ideal, gentle, docile, and submissive wife who is totally devoted to her husband in all facets of life.

Sita holds a particular place in the minds of most of the Hindus and is a symbol of power and dominance of the traditional feminine paradigm. In reality, each and every Indian woman is familiar with the stories surrounding Sita's purity, compassion, and undying loyalty

to her husband. She has never received recognition as a powerful woman; instead, she has consistently been regarded as an icon and a silent sufferer. The figure of Sita has been reimagined by contemporary authors using diverse dynamics. One of the most well-known authors of mythology is Amish Tripathi. He is known as “India's First Literary Pop”. In order to reframe the history, he has rewritten the stories of Shiva and Rama as well as other Indian myths. Deepak Chopra, one of the well-renowned mystical experts, says that “Amish’s mythical imagination mines the past and taps into the possibilities of the future. His book series, archetypal and stirring, unfolds the deepest recesses of the soul as well as our collective consciousness” (Tripathi 4). He has accomplished this by giving conventional Indian characters a modern edge and a relatable personality, as well as by incorporating a topical idea into his stories. When interviewed by *Deccan Chronicles*, Tripathi claims that, “mythology has always existed. It is a method for learning ideologies. And philosophy is ultimately the art of discovering how to survive. Mythology is timeless. It’s a route to learn philosophies. And philosophy is essentially the art of learning how to live.”

Amish Tripathi is recognised for the *Shiva Trilogy*, in which he depicts Lord Shiva as a human being. In the subsequent series, the *Ram Chandra*, he intends to retell the same story from Ramayana. The story of Rama is told in the opening book titled *Ram: Scion of Ikshvaku* (2015). The second book, *Sita: Warrior of Mithila*, which was released in 2017, chronicles the story of Sita from the time of her salvation as a new born through her captivity by the villain Ravana. The novel describes Sita as being remarkably different from the Sita who is deeply embedded in Indian psyche yet still remains entirely genuine. She is not described as a timid, placid, or submissive lady; instead, she is a warrior. In her description, Tripathi asserts;

O keeper of righteous vows, remember this,

Whenever dharma is in decline,

Or there is an upsurge of adharma;

The Sacred Feminine will incarnate.

She will defend dharma.

She will protect us. (Tripathi 10)

Sita is portrayed as a ferocious warrior, who is proficient in martial arts, Vedas, and Upanishads. In the book, she is shown as a fighter who is proficient at combat and she does not

act like a meek, obedient princess. Amish Tripathi claims that the use of the Adbhut Ramayana helps him to produce a more rounded, strong, and passionate character. In one of his interviews, Tripathi asserts that, "In modern India we know Sita Ma from the 1980s television serials which depicted her character in a particular way. But in the original Valmiki Ramayana she is way far stronger character. In Adbhut Ramayana and Gond Ramayana she is a warrior. That truly inspired me."

By depicting a strong woman who is ready to rule the enormous realm, Amish Tripathi through his novel, broke the preconception of a docile Sita. He asserts that the narrative is constructed from Sita's perspective and details her journey, which has mostly gone unnoticed. He argues that in a way, this is a "Sitayana" since it traces the course of Sita's life events prior to Ravana kidnapping her. Apparently, he claims that, "This is the story of a crusader who wins against all odds. The story traces the beginnings of the adopted offspring of King Janaka of Mithila and the ups and downs she goes through as she transforms from an orphan girl to a sword-wielding warrior, breaking barriers to become a supreme force in the land" (Tripathi).

Sita, in the novel, is a brave princess who is both intelligent and attractive. Each story from Sita's formative days is correctly retold in the book, although from a unique viewpoint. Sita is portrayed to possess a distinct personality and emerges as a knowledgeable beautiful girl, in opposition to the cliché of Sita as a meek princess. The stories about her exemplary leadership and her close relationship with her family are really encouraging.

The novel's opening scene features Sita's kidnapping. Tripathi writes poetically on Sita's activities during the time of her captivity by Ravana and his companions. Furthermore, the crucial justification for Ravana's kidnapping of Sita is revealed. In the second chapter, the story's emphasis shifts to Sita's developmental years. The story about King Janaka and Queen Sunaina finding a baby whom they name "Sita" has been expertly crafted by the author. This account of Sita's discovery is considerably different from the tales and stories that have been told in the past. The difficult situations, Mithila is going through, were very effectively used to describe King Janaka and Sunaina's visit to a remote shrine. On their journey back to Mithila, they discover an infant being guarded by a wounded vulture, when it was being pursued by wolves. When Queen Sunaina notices this, she approaches and defends the infant from the wolves. She scoops up the infant, gazes up at the sky, and gives her the name Sita. She says to Janaka, "we found her in a furrow in Mother Earth. It was like a mother's womb for her. We will call her Sita". (33)

Sita is first shown as a typical little girl who strives to defend herself from perilous situations. She is apparently neither fearless nor dominant. In an attempt to keep her under her close guard, Sunaina forbids Sita from going to the slums of Mithila, where she has been previously assaulted by boys. Later, considering her daughter's inherent curiosity, Sunaina urges her to get an appropriate education. As a coming-of-age novel, *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* expertly captures each stage of Sita's growth.

While narrating the story, Amish Tripathi uses his trademark multi-linear or hyperlink style, revealing the backstories of several characters before eventually bringing them all together through a shared bond. In an interview with *Firstpost*, he describes this writing style as;

I can't claim to have invented this style; it's been around for some time. The basic idea is that multiple truths can exist. All of us are in the same room, but one month later, each one of us will have a slightly different recollection of this day. Do we know well enough the back story of all the characters of the Ramayana? So, I thought it would be interesting to have the back stories of the main characters, which converges into a common narrative. (Tripathi)

Sita's life is completely transformed when she is sent to Shvetaketu's gurukul to cultivate the qualities expected from a princess. Her childhood tales are incredibly intriguing in Shvetaketu's gurukul and her encounter with Hanuman, whom she calls "Hanu bhaiya" is fascinating. Hanuman and Jatayu are portrayed as protecting Sita from danger and serving as her brothers, play a significant role in the narrative.

In terms of her ideas and outlook on life, Sita seems to be quite simple. Even though it is well known that Sita was adopted, she seldom gives up her relationship with her mother Sunaina. Sita's opinion on her parentage and her love for her mother are skilfully expressed by Amish Tripathi. Sita thinks about her genetic mother as she is away from her family, but she never harbours any negative feelings about her mother Sunaina, who makes a big impact on Sita's life. Winning her mother's assurance, Sita develops a sense of security, confidence and self-image. She is totally conscious that in order to advance in her life, she must strengthen herself in all the aspects. She has proven herself to be an effective leader and real fighter during her stay at the Ashram. Sunaina after learning about her daughter's responsibilities, declares Sita to be the new guardian of Mithila. She informs her that the future of her nation depends upon Sita and she inculcates her duties on her. She tells Sita:

I want my name to be redeemed, Sita. And I want you to do it. I want you to bring back the prosperity to Mithila... and once you have done that... you have my permission to leave Mithila... you are meant for greater things. You need a bigger stage. Perhaps, a stage as big as India. Or maybe history itself... (Tripathi103)

After Sunaina passes away, Sita takes over Mithila's management, whereas her father Janaka totally submits to the domain of philosophy. Sita is granted the power by the progeny of Mithila since their approach to life has changed when she assumed her position within the social and political contexts. "... mithilians became self-reliant in terms of food, medicines and other essentials" (113). Sita plays a key role in motivating her pupils to accomplish their goals.

In contrast to her administrative position in Mithila, Sita is noticed by sage Vishwamitra. Due to his frequent visits, sage is capable of recognizing Sita as the defender of the country. Vishwamitra observes Sita with a keen eye.

Tall for a thirteen-year-old, she was already beginning to build muscle. Her straight, jet-black hair was braided and rolled into a practical bun. 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. (51)

After ensuing Sita as appropriate Vishnu, sage Vishwamitra notifies her of his decision by presenting her with the silver knife bearing the fish-and-crown sign, which is believed to be the sword of Lord Parashu Ram, the previous Vishnu; "if the fish symbol had a crown on top, it meant that you were the Vishnu... „this Knife is yours, Sita“ said Vishwamitra softly" (86).

Sita's vision is a magnificent representation of the celestial kingdom. Sage Vishwamitra is yet another important key character in the story. However, it's unclear what he's trying to accomplish. It's intriguing and kept a secret how he met Ravana and sage Vashishta. The connection between Vashishta and Vishwamitra, the leaders of the Malayputra and Vayuputra clans, respectively, which formed the foundation of a considerable chunk of the narrative, finally deteriorated into animosity. They are tasked with finding the next Vishnu, or saviour, who will lead the country toward redemption. While the wise Vashishta choose Rama as the subsequent Vishnu, Vishwamitra chooses Sita for the title of Vishnuhood.

The narrative reaches its pinnacle when Sita visits sage Vishwamitra in Agastyakootam. During her short trip to Aghastiyakootam, she considers her upcoming commitments. At this point of the novel, Tripathi transforms Ramayana's Sita in its entirety. Sita's journey to Aghastiyakootam raises her above the level of an ordinary princess and makes her a queen. Sita highlights questions of governance, justice, emancipation, and morality in her conversation with Vishwamitra. They talk about caste structure, money collection and dispute resolution. She also converses with Vishwamitra and studies a variety of topics in depth to train herself:

Some of them were purely educational on science, astronomy and medicine, others were subtle lessons designed to help her clearly define, question, confront or affirm her views on various topics like masculinity, femininity, equality, hierarchy, justice and freedom, liberalism and order, besides others. (164)

Due to looming duties, Sita is mandated to serve the country. Moreover, Sita is never lured to the monarchy since she works as a supervisor, and she is always attempting to be a positive person. When the experienced and wise sage Vishwamitra chooses her to represent and protect India, the fearless Sita accepts the humbling without reluctance. Despite being aware of how difficult the training would be, she is prepared to overcome the obstacles in order to demonstrate that she is Vishnu. Sita even refrains from going back after learning that sage Vashishta had chosen Rama for the title of Vishnuhood.

Her astute decision to marry Rama so as to have a partner in Vishnuhood and the measures she followed to get equipped for her Swayamvar are mesmerising and show the character's significance. It is disclosed to readers that “Sita had other plans. Plans to work with Ram in partnership as the Vishnu” (186). Tripathi portray Sita as smart and courageous for meeting Rama in private before the Swayamvar to ensure she takes the correct decision.

She turned and looked at the man she had chosen to be her husband. She had heard so much about him, for so long, that she felt like she practically knew him. So far, all her thoughts about him had been on reason and logic. 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 that she loved. (205)

Sita and Rama are capable to carry out their duties attributable to their partnership as the appointed Vishnus. It is pleasantly gratifying to see a Sita who is neither obviously dependent on her husband for her livelihood nor in subservience to him. Amish Tripathi emphasises the need for a female power to stave off challenges to the society and restore the

glories of the reign in his novel through the figure of Sita. In the book, matriarchs have set a lot of crucial norms and ideas. Pragmatism and reality are said to have been taught to Sita by her mother, who ruled the country when King Janaka was preoccupied with philosophy and indifferent with his realm. Another important figure in the story is Samichi, an orphan who is rescued from Mithila's slums and who later chooses Sita as her companion.

The novel differs from the typical feminist plot and questions presumptions about Ramayana's female protagonist. The story concentrates on how she evolved as an individual rather than trying to analyse incidents from the viewpoint of a woman seeking acknowledgment. Sita was a woman of common origin who rose to become queen during the period when lineage was the most significant factor. It does not attempt to evaluate incidents from the viewpoint of a woman seeking acknowledgment. "She was an adopted child who went on to rule the land. In a royal family, where blood is everything, it takes immense strength of character to achieve all she has. Sita's story at the pinnacle of her strength needed to be explored," said Tripathi.

Ultimately, it is found that Amish Tripathi is skilled at creating powerful female characters. He created various mythological characters and depicted them, for his novels, in accordance with his own specifications. He modifies the mythological characters to fit his own perspective with consideration of contemporary consciousness. The central female characters in the book are all fixedly independent. The entire human race is dominated by them. Tripathi reconstruct Sita while taking into account current society. In the book, she plays the dual roles of producer and destroyer. Her destiny, as well as the futures of the tribes that depend on and adore her, is the one that is decided by herself.

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