

Myth-Centric Creativity in Amish Tripathi's Sita: Warrior of Mithila

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ABSTRACT

Although writing an old myth according to the present scenario is really an arduous undertaking but in literature, there has always been a tradition of retelling the old myth or history. Consequently, the tradition has emerged as a literary genre in itself. In contemporary society, there is an umpteen number of writers who use their creative faculty in simplifying and correlating the old traditional stories with the modern aspect of personal as well as professional life. Mr. Amish Tripathi, an Indian author is one of those writers who have dipped their feet into this genre. Amish victoriously annex international stardom with his "Shiva Trilogy" but his winning position in this field is consolidated with the publication of Sita: Warrior of Mithila. It is the second novel of his Ram Chandra Series which has knocked up an uproar all across the world. In the novel, Amish has yet again twisted the delicate fabric of the most majestic Indian epic the Ramayana which expounds on the journey of virtue and its ultimate victory over vices. He has laced the old myth of Sita, right from her birth to her abduction with the narrative which has created a sensation among youngsters. The novel presents Sita as a woman warrior with strategic attributes rather than a demure bride of Lord Ram. So, the present paper attempts to explore myth-centric creativity in Sita's character and how Tripathi's Sita juxtaposes with traditional Sita.

Keywords: *arduous, myth, warrior, strategic, demure*

Introduction

Since the beginning of time, Sita has been memorialized as pativrata, an obedient wife and a very symbol of womanhood. According to ancient myth, Sita was the daughter of mother earth. Janak found Sita from a furrow while he was plowing a field as a part of a ritual or Yagna. He adopted her as his daughter. Hence, Sita is known by many names like Janaki as the daughter of Janak, Maithili as the princess of Mithila, Bhumi, and Sita, as the daughter of the earth. Moreover, she is acknowledged as a submissive wife of Lord Ram who had to suffer for fourteen years exile along with her husband. Her life in exile was no easy task. She had to agonize over the separation of her husband due to her abduction. However, things were peaceful after Ram's victory

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but Sita's suffering had no endings. She was asked to prove her chastity by agnipariksha that entirely shattered Sita. Later in the epic or myth, "her bare feet seem to be saying; we have come so far, it is over" (*Edge*) and she embraced mother earth for her honor. In this sense, the proverb "as you sow, you shall reap" proves superficial in the context of this most virtuous woman. Though Ramayana is the most impressive narrative about virtue's victory, yet it may lack poetic justice. For, the most virtuous female character of Ramayana is still unrewarded. Almost in every version of Ramayana from texts (like *Tamil, Sri Ranganathan Ramayana in Telgu, the old Javanese Kakawin Ramayana*, etc.) to films, Sita is struggling for her Honour and pride. But Amish Tripathi brings out a different side of this most acclaimed woman of Ramayana through his novel *Sita: Warrior of Mithila*. In the novel, Sita is introduced with all the attributes that a modern woman is supposed to be possessed. The novel mainly concentrates on the character of Sita, right from her birth to her abduction which makes it more of Sitayana than Ramayana.

Analysis

Creativity, the ability to bring something new out of the old. It is an act of creating new ideas and imagination or turning old ideas into new ideas. It is not a mere act of copying but an act of generating something different from the old. There is no doubt that Mr. Amish Tripathi possesses this quality well. He is never afraid of bearing the great pain of going through the histories, mythologies, and the works of the past. He is one of those writers who organize myths according to the need of society. His charm lies in recreating the mythological figure as a character that appeals much to the human heart. He gives a chance to his readers that they may relate themselves with a figure like God or Goddess. We can safely agree with Deepak Chopra when he writes "Amish's mythical imagination mines the past and taps into the possibilities of the future. His book series, archetypal and stirring, unfold the deepest recesses of the soul as well as our collective consciousness" (iv).

Amish amazes his readers by presenting Sita, as a warrior, Vishnu, and Prime minister of Mithila in his remarkable work *Sita: Warrior of Mithila*. For, Sita, never earned the title of a warrior according to the ancient myths. So, it's very surprising to have Sita in the form of a warrior. In the novel, she is an inborn warrior who is mysteriously found in a furrow guarded by the vulture. She is presented as equal to Ram rather than a helpless woman. She is embellished with masculinity. She is "almost as tall as Ram. Lean. Muscular. Wheat-complexioned" (211). She is a courageous girl with a never-ending fighting spirit. In this context, Shvetaketu, a character in the novel says:

"She has the wisdom of king Janak

But she also has the pragmatism
and fighting spirit of queen Sunaina" (V, 51)

Unlike traditional Sita, she is physically strong and too bold to lift Pinaka, (the legendary bow of Mahadev, Lord Rudra) with her left hand and pull it with her fingers. It is only a part of Tripathi's imagination since in mythology Sita is never described as having the strength to lift the bow. It is only Lord Ram who lifts and twists the bow during his swayamvar. In addition, Sita, in the novel, knows how to handle weapons, like laathi, arrows, and knives, etc. She is endowed with all the knowledge of Martial Arts and capable enough to outmaneuver the Lakan's army. When she is surrounded by the fifty soldiers of Ravana's army in the absence of Ram and Laxman, she doesn't escape but faces every arrow, coming from Ravan's army. She does not surrender herself in front of Ravan and "hit back with the bamboo lathi, straight at the Lankan's head, knocking him off his feet" (12). However, according to mythology, Sita was a helpless woman during her abduction. But Tripathi's Sita in the novel is an empowered woman. when she is abducted by Ravana in his Pushpak vimana, he fails to get control over her and it is with the help of toxins that he could arrest her.

His Sita is not a submissive bride of Lord Ram but an outspoken lady. She dares to debate with Saints like Vishwamitra and Arishtanemi. She confidently talks about woman's rights and equality in front of the patriarchal society. This reflects in her conversation with Bharat, brother of Ram. She says:

"The path I prefer is that of
Balance. Balance between the
Masculine and the feminine" (XXVI, 26).

Besides this, she is rebellious. She prepares herself to combat with Lankan's army when she comes to know about his sudden attack. Her rebellious outlook can be traced to when Mithila has to suffer from Ravan's fourth *Prahar*. She is "breathing hard, her eyes flitting like that of a cornered tigress, anger bursting through every pore" (224) when a quarter of the Mithilans are either dead or badly injured by Lankan's attack.

In stark contrast to traditional Sita, Tripathi's Sita is a cunning lady and always aware of her action, speech, and her surroundings. In the novel, she is aware of Ravan's arrival in Swayamvar. Therefore, she plans the day before her swayamvar and "decreed the sequence in which the great kings and princes will compete" (226) since she wants Ram to practice first with the bow to kill a hilsa fish from hundred meters above the ground and win swayamvar. According to Valmiki's Ramayana, the task of splitting the bow of

lord Rudra was arranged for Sita's Swayamvar. There is no such competition for swayamvar where a competitor was required to lift the bow to kill hilsa fish fixed on a revolving wheel.

Indeed, traditional patriarchal society always denies female superiority and her leadership. Perhaps, this may be the reason that Sita was never given the title Vishnu in ancient myth. Declining the patriarchal notion, Amish portrays Sita as a strong lady who earns the title 'Vishnu by Vishwa Mitra. Vishnu was a title in an ancient society that was given to the greatest of leaders. It was supposed that Vishnu worked in partnership with Mahadev who was considered the destroyers of evil. The aim of Vishnu's life was to convert his people into a new way of life. Vishwamitra finds Sita a strong candidate for the title of Vishnu. He says "Sita will be the Vishnu. The Vishnu will rise during my reign. The time has come. This country needs a leader. We cannot allow our beloved India to suffer endlessly" (73). Therefore, she is taken to the capital of the Malayaputras: Agastyakootam to perform the ritual of becoming Vishnu. As Sita reaches there, the whole crowd starts chanting:

"Om Namō Bhagvate vishnudevaya

tasmani saakshine namo namah.

Salutations to the great Vishnu

Salutations, salutations to Lady Sita (XIV, 160).

However, in ancient myth or Ramayana, Sita is never described as prime minister of Mithila. There is no detailed information about her contribution to Mithila, as a prime minister. Contrary, in the novel "the sixteen-year-old Sita had been administering the kingdom reasonably well" (107). As a prime minister of Mithila, she implements some major changes like she appoints her trusted friend, Samichi, as the chief of police. It is her quality as a good princess that she is not ready to leave Mithila when Mithila is in danger from Kushadhvaj, his uncle. There is no evidence in mythology that can prove that Kushadhvaj was an enemy of Mithila. This may be done by Amish only to create a twist in the myth. As a princess, Sita devotes herself to two projects; One is the road that could connect Mithila to Sankashya and the other is permanent housing for the slum dwellers. Sita is very much conscious of the outer moat being the city's main water supply. She is careful that any enemy could not poison the water outside. So, she orders for a deep lake within the city as the protection of their kingdom. Even she organizes the market of the city and gives permanent place to the vendors to ensure orderliness. Moreover, she saves the villagers from the frequent attacks by the tiger. She fights bravely and kills the tiger. She denies keeping the skin of the tiger while it is considered a mark of bravery. In this way, as a warrior, she does not fight for her gains. As a prime

minister of Mithila and warrior, Sita is much conscious about her people. When the villagers were in danger from a tiger, she saved the villagers from the tiger attacks. She had made clear to Samichi and policemen that she has no intention to keep the skin of the tiger while it is considered a mark of a brave hunter.

Another interesting creativity done in the novel is that it demystifies divinity. As, Sita is worshipped as Devi maa with divine power, so it becomes difficult for an ordinary man to imagine the supernatural Devi crying like human beings. In the novel, Sita is presented more as a character than a divine Devi. She is an ordinary woman who becomes a goddess due to her chastity and Sacrifice. She has a human heart. She has all the feelings, emotions, and fear that an ordinary woman possesses. She is a Devi without any supernatural powers. She "had always been afraid of the dark" (XV,168). When she is on her journey to Agastyakootam in the novel, she sees the river of blood from her ship and she clutches her pendant of Rudraksha in fear. Her heart is thumping with fear at the time of her journey.

Adding to this, her sense of love can be seen clearly in the novel when her mother Sunaina comes to meet her in Gurukul at her last stage of life. However, we never find any information of such incidence about Sunaina in ancient myth. It is only a piece of Amish's imagination in order to give universal appeal. It is indeed beyond human imagination to think, figures like God and Goddesses burst out crying but Amish thinks differently. When Sita sees her mother after a long time, she bursts out into crying. Moreover, she has hidden feelings of love for her partner like a common girl she always thinks about her future husband in her free time. She has a heart of a common girl who always feels a need for a partner and wants to be a bride. Expressing her feelings, she says:

"Maa, as always, was right...

I need a partner... I will

Complete my Karma... But

I can't do it alone" (XI, 107).

Conclusion

To conclude, it can be said that Amish wonderfully mingles old myth with modernity. His Sita is entirely a modern version of a traditional Sita. She is an empowered ideal woman as a modern woman is expected to be. Her character as a warrior rather than an ideal woman in distress changes the entire plot of Ramayana in a very wonderful way. He presents Ram, Sita, and Laxman without supernatural power. The use of medicines to reduce pain and injury, the use of white powder by Sita, toxins by Ravana for her abduction, and his *puspak viman*, which runs not by magical powers but by modern technology

reflects the modern tone in the novel. Moreover, the novel tends to present modern themes like woman empowerment, equality, science, technology, cast issues, and so on. To capture the youngster's attention towards the old myth, he twists the delicate fabric of old Ramayana. The procession of selecting Sita as Vishnu, the Swayamvar scene where the competitor is given the task of killing a revolving fish, Sita's role as Prime minister and the changes made by her, her meeting with her mother, and the death of an elephant in the jungle, her fighting with tiger, her meeting with Soorpnakha, etc. are part of his creativity and do not belong to the old myth. Thus, Amish skillfully modifies the character of traditional myth related to Sita according to the need and interests of society.

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