

Transforming Sita: A Reconstructed Narrative Of Sita In Amish Tripathi's Sita: Warrior Of Mithila And Volga's Liberation Of Sita

Princy Macwan

¹*Kadi Sarva Vishwa Vidyalaya, Gandhinagar, Gujarat.

How to cite this article: Princy Macwan (2024). Transforming Sita: A Reconstructed Narrative Of Sita In Amish Tripathi's Sita: Warrior Of Mithila And Volga's Liberation Of Sita. Library Progress International, 44(4), 156-159

Abstract

Myths help people understand their culture and traditions. While the epic Ramayana has often been retold and reinterpreted, many of its characters have not been given enough attention or depth. Sita, the Ramayana's main feminist heroine, is a prime example of a devoted wife (pati parayan nari). She is also portrayed as a compassionate and wise avatar of the goddess Lakshmi, with courage and empathy. In modern retellings by authors like Amish Tripathi and Volga, Sita retains her foundational qualities but is also depicted as a warrior. This paper aims to present a new, multifaceted version of Sita, portraying her as a damsel in distress, an obedient and humble woman, and a warrior. It argues that Sita can be a contemporary role model for women, showing radical qualities rather than mere rebellion. The paper examines Sita's portrayal in two specific works: Amish Tripathi's "Sita: Warrior of Mithila" and Volga's "Liberation of Sita." It tells Sita's story from her perspective, focusing on her lesser-known journey before her marriage to Ram.

Keywords: Transformation, Reconstruction, Women characters, Indian Mythology, Feminist narrative

Introduction

Mythology focuses on human values and the ideals that guide us toward a better future. Mythical stories are widely accepted because they resonate with our real-world family dynamics and reflect our origins and the ancient culture and traditions that once shaped our civilization. Indian mythology, in particular, showcases the rich heritage, culture, and social standing of Indian ancestors. One of India's greatest epics, the Ramayana, narrates the story of Rama, an incarnation of Vishnu. Although the Ramayana has various interpretations, it is commonly presented as a folktale where Rama is the world's savior and Sita is portrayed as submissive and meek, adhering to her husband in all aspects of life. The Ramayana is an ancient epic that is part of every Hindu household and is universally recognized. Sita is a central figure in the Ramayana, long regarded as Lord Rama's chaste and noble companion. Her virtues of wifely submissiveness and dedication have been extolled by many female characters throughout the epic.

Many female characters in the Ramayana and Mahabharata are portrayed as delicate, sensitive, and chaste. This study focuses on the character of Sita in two notable novels by Amish Tripathi and Volga. While the traditional Ramayana story is widely recognized, these two works offer a fresh perspective on Sita's character.

Significance of the study

The Ramayana is an extensive and ancient epic in world literature. Valmiki's Sanskrit Ramayana, written in the Treta Yuga about a million years ago, tells the mythological story of Lord Ram, Sita, and Ravana. From the beginning, Lord Ram is a central character in Valmiki's epic. Sita is regarded as the embodiment of womanhood, her life filled with upheaval and conflict, yet she remained composed and dignified throughout. The values she upheld and symbolized during her arduous life have become the epitome of womanly virtue, revered by generations of Indians, past, present, and future. Sita, also known as Siya, Maithili, Janaki, and Bhoomija, is the protagonist of the Hindu epic Ramayana. She is the foster daughter of King Janaka and Queen Sunaina, and the devoted wife of Lord Rama. Sita is noted for her devotion to Rama, as well as her purity, chastity, sacrifices, and courage.

In contemporary fictional works, the portrayal of Sita often lacks the universal spirituality present in traditional stories. Authors like Amish Tripathi and Volga employ strategies to humanize a character worshiped as a goddess in scriptures

and society. According to this approach, it is a person's karma that defines their divinity. Tripathi portrays Sita as a regular girl, a twin princess of Mithila and foster child of King Janaka, who becomes the monarch of Mithila and is well-skilled in martial arts and philosophy.

In this paper, Sita is portrayed as a warrior rather than merely a symbol of female virtue. Tripathi depicts Sita as Ram's equal partner, showcasing her as a wise woman rather than just a beautiful one. She advises Ram on various occasions, and remarkably, Ram often accepts her counsel without question. This portrayal reflects a belief among female characters that they are equally capable of undertaking all the tasks traditionally carried out by men in society. Sita is depicted as a fighter, not a damsel in distress, thus transforming the entire plot of the Ramayana in these works. The narrative incorporates themes of equality, the caste system, and social unrest, presenting a more progressive view of Sita's role.

Analysis

Each retelling of the Ramayana is influenced by unique contexts, including literary conventions, social interactions, beliefs of religious communities, and regional cultures. The authors' political and social perspectives, historical context, literary preferences, societal status, and religious convictions shape their reinterpretations of the Ramayana. These modifications and variations reflect the composers' perspectives at the time of creation.

Contrary to the traditional belief that Valmiki's Ramayana is the definitive text, literary and performative traditions in India have explored and analyzed the Ramayana's numerous narrative traditions. These retellings reveal an infinite number of interpretations and renditions, offering a variety of perspectives. While these retellings build on the popular grand story, they often critique it. Through these retellings, diverse cultural identities challenge and seek to dismantle a monolithic construction of the Ramayana.

Amish Tripathi's *Sita: Warrior of Mithila*

Amish Tripathi's **Sita: Warrior of Mithila** challenges stereotypes by presenting Sita as an active young princess eager to govern a vast India. Tripathi, a renowned modern writer celebrated for his Shiva Trilogy, where he portrays Lord Shiva in human form, is reimagining the Ramayana in his new series. The first book focuses on Ram's biography, while the second, **Sita: Warrior of Mithila**, tells Sita's story from her childhood to her kidnapping by the demon Raavan. This portrayal of Sita as a powerful woman has garnered both criticism and praise. In Tripathi's work, Sita is depicted as both physically and intellectually strong. He presents her not just as an *adarsh bhartiya nari* (ideal Indian woman) but as a warrior of Mithila. The character of Sita highlights the internal struggles over women's rights, showcasing her as a figure of strength and resilience.

Tripathi seeks to challenge the conventional view of Indian women in today's patriarchal society, where they are often expected to be devoted wives and modest individuals, by reimagining Sita through the protagonist of *Sita: Warrior of Mithila*. The story begins in Dandakaranya, where Sita is out with Makrant, a Malayaputra, gathering banana leaves for lunch. This introduction positions readers to see a conscientious Sita, who is later revealed to embody Vishnu. Sita assumes various roles—daughter, wife, sister, sister-in-law—but her strength and ability to handle any situation with grace and confidence stand out.

Tripathi's early revelation of Sita's greatness and hidden aspects captures the readers' interest in her as a warrior. The narrative then shifts to Sita's childhood. Thirty-eight years prior, Sita, an abandoned infant, is rescued and adopted by Mithila's royal couple, King Janak and Queen Sunaina. Initially, Sita is depicted as an ordinary girl, neither particularly strong nor weak, struggling to protect herself from threats. To safeguard her, Sunaina keeps her from venturing into dangerous areas, such as the slum where she had previously been attacked. Recognizing Sita's curiosity, Sunaina directs her toward appropriate education. Sita's life changes significantly when she is sent to Shvetaketu's gurukul, where she acquires the skills befitting a princess. *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* is a bildungsroman that adeptly portrays every stage of Sita's growth.

Sita: Warrior of Mithila introduces readers to a female warrior who stands out from the traditional depiction. In Tripathi's portrayal, Sita is more attractive, powerful, and intelligent than the usual image. She is not a figure of oppression but rather someone who relishes new experiences. Her enthusiasm for riding the Arabian horse gifted by her uncle Kushadhwaj is a testament to her adventurous spirit. Sita is direct and responsive to challenging situations, as seen when her uncle attempts to merge Mithila into Sankshya. Subsequently, she is sent to Shvetaketu's gurukul, where she studies fundamental disciplines such as philosophy, mathematics, science, and Sanskrit, along with specialized subjects including geography, history, economics, and royal administration.

Tripathi also portrays Sunaina as a strong woman. While her father, Janaka, valued philosophy and non-violence, Sunaina took a more pragmatic approach, advocating for common sense and practical solutions. When Sita feels discouraged,

Sunaina encourages her with the words, “running away is never the solution. Confront your problems. Manage them. That is the way of the warrior” (Tripathi, 99). Under Sunaina's guidance, Sita also studies martial arts and warfare.

Sita's brilliance and sharpness astound everyone in the gurukul, including her *Guru*. Her generosity and spirit are truly inspiring. When *Rishi Vishwamitra* visits *Shvetaketu's* *astram*, he is equally charmed by Sita's skills. The chief of the *Malayaputhra* tribe, *Vishwamitra*, is in charge of choosing the next *Vishnu*. People who are considered to spread virtue and model a new way of living are referred to as *Vishnus*. He paid close attention to her behavior and saw the spark she had. As *Vishwamitra* observes Sita, “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 exactly in her hand. She caught the spear exactly at the balance point on the shaft” (Tripathi, 51).

Sita's martial arts skills are prominently showcased in several scenes. During an attack on their camp by the Lankans, she defends them despite her impaired vision, relying on her acute sense of sound. Tripathi notes, “There were great archers who could shoot arrows by relying on sounds. But very few could throw knives at the source of a sound. Sita was one of those very few” (Tripathi, 4).

One of the most significant aspects of Tripathi's portrayal of Sita is that her physical beauty is not overstated or excessively highlighted, unlike in many legendary tales where protagonists' attractiveness is idealized and without flaws. Tripathi aims to depict Sita as realistically as possible. Ram is initially captivated by Sita's delicate beauty, and he is struck by it when they first meet. Despite this, Sita chooses to accompany Ram into exile, believing she should share in his trials. She seeks protection from Jatayu and prepares somaras, which slow down the aging process. Ram's brothers are initially skeptical, thinking Ram would not find a woman of such qualities. However, Sita proves them wrong, demonstrating that she embodies the strength and qualities Ram sought. “Ram wanted to marry a woman in front of whom he would be compelled to bow his head in admiration” (Tripathi, 210).

Volga's *Liberation of Sita*

The *Liberation of Sita* is a collection of short stories that revolve around the persona of Sita and her conversations with other female characters like *Soorpanakha*, *Ahalya*, *Renuka*, and *Urmila*. By composing these stories, Volga demonstrates her cognitive process. A sequence from her dance drama *War and Peace* served as the inspiration for “*The Reunion*”. Volga refutes this claim and portrays Sita and *Soorpanakha* as worshipers of beauty and lovers of peace, in contrast to how the grand narrative has traditionally blamed them for the start of the Great War. However, despite being used as pawns in the *Rama-Ravana* conflict to further the *Aryan* kingdom; these women are unable to free themselves from humiliation, disgrace, and mistrust. In Volga's interpretation, Sita is a single parent who raises her sons in the home of the saint *Valmiki*. Ram, the ruler of *Ayodhya*, has rejected her after having saved Sita from Lanka's demon king *Ravan*. The desolation of the women *Ahalya*, *Surpanakha*, *Renuka Devi*, *Urmila*, etc. is not mentioned in the *Ramayana*. But Volga accomplishes it in this book. Here, Sita appears in a different light—as a defenseless, abandoned mother who finds solace in the words of other similarly dejected women characters. Each of these individuals that Sita meets has previously crossed her path in life. *Soorpanakha* is depicted in *The Ramayana's* grand story as a demonic being. However, in her short story “*The Reunion*,” Volga tries to include the problems of *Soorpanakha*. Since her sufferings were due to her longing after a married guy, they were never justified. In addition, Sita and *Soorpanakha* are never described as confidantes; rather, they are always seen as adversaries. Volga advances to show that they are acquaintances. *Soorpanakha's* empowerment and the actions she takes to accomplish it are depicted in the story. In Volga's writing, *Soorpanakha*, who is invariably shown as a terrible monster, gives Sita wise counsel.

Sita was confronted with Rama's scorn and taunts, despite the fact that she loved and worshipped him. She was brave enough to move away from this man, even abandoning her children, to pursue her own career. Many women in *The Ramayana*, including Sita, are victims of patriarchal conventions. *Ahalya*, *Renuka*, and *Urmila* have had almost identical experiences to Sita. Volga draws these ladies into discourse with Sita in order for them to share their wisdom, expertise, and experiences, empowering Sita even more. Volga was able to instill a sense of collective consciousness in these women through the gathering of these five short stories. Each story arises as an independent story recounting the lives of distinct women from *The Ramayana*, yet these stories are linked by Sita, who develops a tie amongst these women. Each story and the lady character in the story assists Sita in taking a step closer to independence.

When she met *Soorpanakha* years later, her hatred towards Sita and her family subsided. She learns the value of self-discovery and fulfillment from her, which resides not only in raising her children but also in discovering herself. *Ahalya*, informs her about the intricacies of the widely held belief in female fidelity. She encourages her to cheer herself up because everything is for the best and will aid in the path of self-realization. Sita's meeting with *Renuka Devi* was likewise an unforgettable event. *Renuka Devi* was the victim of her son's horrific attack, which was ordered by his own father due to suspicions about her virginity. Sita finds the counsel valuable as the time comes for her to hand over. The final meeting

with *Sita's* own younger sister *Urmila* made her realize that wisdom of life is not destined to a particular age group. Though *Urmila* is younger than *Sita*, she is more enlightened and erudite than *Sita*. She advises *Sita*: "Each of these trials is meant to liberate you from Ram. To secure you for yourself. Fight, Meditate, look within until you find the truth that is you" (Volga-, 81).

Conclusion

Mythologies typically deal with the subject of good against evil, with good triumphing over evil. To fulfill this plan, a male-centered character with numerous sub characters is used. In these epics, strong female characters are mostly absent or have a minor presence. Female characters are mostly admired and worshipped. However, they lack the strength to compete with a male counterpart. Male characters frequently outperform female characters, who are typically calm and sensitive. Women are portrayed as weak and insecure as a result of this. Women have been submissive to men in Indian culture since ancient times, despite displaying considerable emotional endurance and natural flexibility to their surroundings.

Fiction writers usually resort to mythology and history in order to derive today's societal problems. Our mythology is largely patriarchal. Female characters play minor roles in all of the stories. Modern retellings of patriarchal traditions take a different approach, allowing readers to hear the unheard voices. *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* is an original novel. It casts Lady *Sita* in a very different light. Tripathi represents *Sita* as a skilled warrior, unbiased ruler, and ideal wife. *Sita* is a modern woman due to her unconventional portrayal as a self-sufficient, powerful, and wise lady. As a result, Tripathi's *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* could be regarded as a journey into Indian feminine consciousness. *Sita* is converted into a female emblem of progress and spiritual awakening. The friction between the characters and their voices shapes the five short stories in *The Liberation of Sita*. The five female protagonists of Volga oppose patriarchal narratives that limit their tales or voices to a single meaning, as well as narratives that harmonize differences. When these individuals tell their stories to *Sita*, they explore their differences.

To conclude, the study projects reconstruction of two different narratives on *Sita*, one from the novel *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* by Amish Tripathi and the other one, a collection of different stories by Volga, *The Liberation of Sita*. The former is written in a multi-layered storytelling approach while the latter is told from the perspectives of several female characters in different storylines. Both the texts are notable for the fact that contemporary writers attempt and endeavor to provide a worthy and satisfying space for women like *Sita*. All of these retellings create new possibilities for reimagining these female figures.

Works Cited

1. Griffith, Ralph T.H. *The Ramayan of Valmiki*, London: Trubner & Co, 2008.
2. Kane, Kavitha. *Lanka's Princess*. Rupa publications India Pvt, 2017.
3. Kumar, T. Vijay, and C. Vijayasree, translators. *The Liberation of Sita* by Volga (P Lalita Kumari), HarperCollins Publishers, 2016.
4. Pattanaik, Devdutt. *Myth=Mithya: Decoding Hindu Mythology*. Penguin Books, UK, 2006.
5. *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana*. Penguin House, UK. 2013.
6. "Sita as Gauri, or Kali." In *Search of Sita: Revisiting Mythology*, edited by Malashri Lal and Namita Gokhale, Penguin Books, 2009, pp. 18-20.
7. Sharma, Agni. *Ramayana*. Dreamland Publications, New Delhi, India. 2012.
8. Tripathi, Amish. *Sita: Warrior of Mithila*. Ram Chandra Series, Westland Publications Ltd., New Delhi, 2017.
9. *The Immortals of Meluha*. Westland Publications, New Delhi, 2010.
10. Volga, (P.Lalitha Kumari). "Sita Herself can Save Us." *The Liberation of Sita*, translated by T.Vijay Kumar, HarperCollins Publishers, 2016.