



Aesthetics of Postmodern Literature: The Retellings of Sita in Volga's *The Liberation of Sita* and Amish Tripathi's *Warrior of Mithila*

Dr. Anjali

Assistant Professor, Dept of English, College of Vocational Studies, University of Delhi, email: anjaliahlawat007@gmail.com

Abstract

The paper attempts to reimagine the mythological character of Sita as an aesthetic symbol of Postmodern Literature, representing the fragmentation and nonlinear narratives that characterize postmodern storytelling of conventional Sita portrayed in the epic *Ramayana*. These fragmented narratives encapsulate the uneven trajectory of Sita's consciousness that she experiences during her life. Furthermore, the paper also explores multiple perspectives guiding the lives of other characters in both texts Volga's *The Liberation of Sita* and Amish Tripathi's *Warrior of Mithila* especially female characters such as Sunaina, Surpanakha, Mandodari, Ahalya, Renuka, and Urmila. This discussion draws on the lens of various postmodern literary aesthetics, including Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts of polyphony and heteroglossia, focalization, and non linear narrative techniques. Besides, the paper examines how modern literary aesthetics deconstruct the conventional image of Sita, portraying her as an efficient warrior and administrator in Amish Tripathi's *Warrior of Mithila*, underlying the agency of each female character in Volga's *The Liberation of Sita*. By narrating key events that involve Sita's interactions with other female characters, the narrative challenges the fragile and submissive figure of *Ramayana* to a capable warrior and administrator of Mithila, a devoted wife of Rama who willingly accepts exile and a strong mother, nurtures her both children while staying in a jungle. The postmodern aesthetics seek to challenge the mainstream narratives and question the prevalent truth, offering multiple perspectives through fragmented storytelling.

Keywords: *Re-imaging, lens, characters, postmodernism, fragmentation, focalization, perspectives etc.*

Postmodern literary aesthetics involving fragmentation and nonlinear narratives are the modern ways of storytelling that seem to offer oppositional meanings. These techniques disrupt a narrative's sequential order of events and represent the story in fragmented episodes. H. Porter Abbott, a research professor, in his book, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, discusses the techniques of fragmentation and non-linear storytelling to understand the critical framework of storytelling. He talks about how non-linear narratives help to engage readers by evoking their emotional or logical responses. Besides, using decentring as a postmodern literary technique offers equal importance to various viewpoints of multiple characters rather than a single character within a text. The idea is reinforced by Bakhtin's concept of polyphony, which encapsulates the multiplicity of voices and viewpoints that foreground marginalized voices in a text. It challenges conventional truth and authority and provides a fresh perspective on the characters and events by exploring contemporary issues like gender, parity, and liberation.

In addition to this, T. S. Eliot, demonstrates the disorganized state of modern existence by placing literary texts against one another through the techniques of fragmentation especially in his poem *The Waste Land*. He says that the psyche of each human being is radically changed after the large scale destruction in the wake of World War I and. Eliot uses several images, fragment and portion of conversation, academic ideas, distant words, formal styles, and tones within his poetic work to represent humanity's scratched consciousness in the modern world, with its barrage of sensory perceptions. In *The Waste Land*, he states, "These fragments I have shored against my ruins" (431) that places the poem in the canonical tradition which enforces the readers to understand the deeper meaning of the text. Eliot shows the contemporary state of humanity through postmodern aesthetics like fragmentation, non- linearity, themes and images in the literary tradition while respecting the existing literary canon.

Volga's *The Liberation of Sita* and *The Warrior of Mithila* by Amish Tripathi, re-imagine the life and agency of Sita through postmodern aesthetics such as fragmentation and multiple perspectives. The reinterpretations of both texts not only question the conventional structure of power of literature but also redefine cultural narratives through fragmented episodes and multiple perspectives through voices of the text. Seen from the prism of postmodern aesthetics like fragmentation and nonlinear narrative, both the texts dismantle the conventional portrayal of Sita in Amish Tripathi's *The Warrior of Mithila*. In addition, the use of multiple perspectives through

polyphony and heteroglossia in Volga's *The Liberation of Sita* enriches Sita's character with new proportions different from the existing one. These retellings also address the contemporary issues of gender, individuality, and agency of the present time. These works provide an insight to the reader regarding the mythological narratives with a fresh outlook that establishes the link between the past and present. Volga's feminist retelling deconstructs and stands against patriarchal hegemony by focusing on the emotional and psychological dimensions of not only Sita but other female characters of *Ramayana*. In contrast, Tripathi's storyline constructs Sita as heroic archetype within the more extensive mythological outline that fights against humility for the welfare of mankind. These lenses of fragmentation and multiple perspectives help to deconstruct the existing reinterpretations and reconstruct the myth of Sita from an alternative perspective.

Postmodern aesthetics like fragmentation, nonlinear narrative, focalization, and multiple perspectives through the description of each character in literature cause rapture in the linear plot and provide multifaceted interpretations. Volga's *The Liberation of Sita* offers a unique perspective about the women characters like Surpanakha, Ahalya, Renuka, and Urmila of epic *Ramayana*. Bakhtin's concept of polyphony reinforces the idea of multiple perspectives that give power to marginalized voices, oppressed by patriarchal dominance in Valmiki's *Ramayana*. In the first part "The Reunion" of Volga's *The Liberation of Sita*, Sita learns that Surpanakha has acquired wisdom and satisfaction in her life. Surpanakha tells Sita that everything seems beautiful to her eyes as she does not find any difference between beauty and ugliness. The conversation brings a radical change in Sita, and she comprehends that she is solely responsible for her happiness without seeking it from anyone else. As a result, Sita liberates herself from this materialistic world and enjoys the newness of this life. Surpanakha's journey of self-exploration and transformation deconstructs the conventional storyline where no space is given to other female forces. The second part "Music of the Earth", narrates the story of Ahalya, who is sexually exploited by Lord Indra, who disguised himself as Ahalya's husband, the sage Gauthama. Consequently, she turns into a rock as the sage curses her for her infidelity. During the conversation, Ahalya tells Sita that if a man conducts an enquiry, he doubts her integrity and chastity. It helps Sita understand life's true meaning and the futility of human relations. Volga represents Ahalya as a brave and resilient character who does not require any approval and validity from others to prove her chastity. The

character of Ahalya empowers Sita to look into herself as Sita takes pride in her status as the wife of king Rama before the fire trial in a meeting that takes place earlier in the text.

The next part, "The Sand Pot" is narrated by its protagonist Renuka, the mother of a vedic sage and warrior, Parashurama. Renuka compares the matrimonial fidelity of a woman as fragile as a sand pot that may be shattered anytime. She raises questions about the wisdom of patriarchy of that time as her own husband sage Jamadagni asks his son Parasurama to behead his wife. According to the husband, his wife has violated *paativratyam* or fidelity by looking at a passing man. If Renuka has committed a crime while seeing another man except her husband, Sita's crime seems even more significant when she lusts for Marica, a golden deer and craves its possession. Sita does not bother to Renuka's words but later she experiences the same agony as faced by Renuka. Sita's own sons get annoyed with her when she liberates herself and prefers to join Mother Earth rather than go back to Ayodhya. The voices like Renuka make Sita understand the harmful impact of patriarchy on women and motivate Sita to raise questions for her existence, reconstruct the mythological character of Sita unlike the traditional storyline where she seems submissive and fragile. The last story "The Liberated" shows Sita's concern for her sister Urmila who has spent fourteen years in isolation without meeting anyone after her husband's exile. It shows that Urmila's sacrifice seems greater than Sita as Sita has the company of her husband during exile but Urmila has to remain alone without the company of her husband. Volga represents Urmila as an epitome of virtue and boldness as she comes to pacify Sita. She empowers Sita to give up power and each trial will liberate Sita from Rama. These multifaceted voices help to reimagine Urmila's character as prominent as of Sita with a fresh perspective that has never been written about in the past.

Similarly, Amish Tripathi's *The Warrior of Mithila* fragments the linear tale of Sita, situating her as the central figure of a heroic narrative. Tripathi disrupts the submissive and docile image of Sita that is traditionally associated with her and represents Sita as a warrior and a leader. The fragmentations employed in the text intertwine Sita's personal, political, strategic, and emotional magnitudes that offer a holistic yet non-linear representation of her life. Amish Tripathi's *The Warrior of Mithila* employs fragmentation and a non-linear narrative structure that makes it a multi-layered story which is entirely different from Valmiki's *Ramayana*. These fragmentations critically examine the characters' different perspectives and provide a unique reading experience to the readers. The novel comprises multiple perspectives of the other characters such as Sita and

her journey in how she transforms from a witty and an impulsive daughter of King Janaka and Sunaina to an able and efficient queen of Mithila, and Ram who questions the chastity of Sita to follow the traditional dharma established by his forefathers, and important characters like Sunaina and rishis who provide education and war skills to Sita in her childhood. Sita's leadership and her personal sacrifice are explored through fragmented narratives and non linear plot that highlights the essence of different simultaneous storyline. *The Warrior of Mithila* uses flashbacks to reveal Sita's upbringing when she is found by King Janak, her training as a warrior at Shweatketu ashram, and her transformation as a protector of Mithila after the death of her father and her mother's illness. These visuals compel modern readers to understand the mythological characters and their decisions accordingly. The text describes the development of Sita's character in a broader aspect where she actively participates in the management of her kingdom Mithila with her mother Sunaina. She also has a political strategy to deal with other states like Lanka and Ayodhya.

Focalization refers primarily to the lens through which the reader sees characters and events in the narrative thus enabling the reader to understand a particular context or setting. Predominantly it focuses on reader or listener rather than the narrator. This concept emphasizes the consciousness of the reader through which the narrative is filtered. An internal focalization presents the story from the perspective of a character's emotions and thought in a narrative. A reader tries to feel and experience the character's thoughts, feelings, and perceptions. In contrast, the external focalization focuses on character's actions and efforts without giving importance to any internal thought or emotion. The last is known as zero focalization that is also known as omniscient narration that provides all-knowing perspective to the narrator who reveals characters' thoughts, feelings, and experiences of multiple characters of a text. Focalisation helps readers to criticize and analyze the information revealed by the narrator of any text that shapes the reader's interpretation of events and characters.

Both the texts, Volga's *The Liberation of Sita* and Amish Tripathi's *The Warrior of Mithila* employ focalisation techniques to reimagine the mythological character of Sita with an alternative perspective. The story shows Sita's internal struggle, her reflections on her own life and her relationships with other women like Surpanakha, Ahalya, Renuka and Urmila that plays a vital role in her self- discovery. Then the narrative shifts from the internal to epic's external events such as her routine household chores, fight and war, and nurturing of her both children make readers to

see Sita as an independent individual rather than a character who is always defined by her relation with her husband Rama. Volga gives voices not only to her main protagonist but also to other marginalized female characters. Focalization as a narrative technique challenges the dominant patriarchal perspective of the epic *Ramayana*. The text also employs first-person narrative technique to explore the themes of independence, individuality, and emancipation.

Similarly Amish Tripathi's *The Warrior of Mithila* employs both external and internal focalization in which the external focalization presents the character of Sita who is born and brought up in Mithila that has become the hub of political tensions and chaos due to demonic king Raavana and his allies. Gradually, the story progresses, the external focalization shifts to internal that allows readers to experience Sita's inner strength and motivation that establishes Sita as an able warrior and administrator. Sita is focalized as an active agent of her destiny who takes her own decision such as choosing Rama as her husband, acceptance of exile, nurturing of her children while staying at jungle and prefers subsume into the womb of the earth rather than to return back to Ayodhya as a queen. Thus, Volga's *The Liberation of Sita* focuses solely on internal focalisation as Sita's self-journey highlights her evolution into a liberated individual through her interaction with other female characters in the text. In contrast, Amish's *The Warrior of Mithila* creates a balance between the internal and external focalisation that presents Sita as a strong warrior and leader having her freedom and choices to exercise her agency.

To sum up, both texts employ many postmodern literary techniques such as fragmentation and nonlinear narratives, multiple perspectives, intertextuality, and critique of power and patriarchy within the text that provide a richer and more comprehensive understanding of Sita's character of *Ramayana*. In *The Liberation of Sita*, Volga raises their voice against the patriarchal norms that have victimized other female characters of the epic. Surpanakha's transformation from a mutilated woman to becoming a symbol of toughness and healing inspires Sita to embrace her individuality. Similarly, Renuka's story that how she gets redemption by not following the traditional norms established by patriarchal society. Urmila's silent endurance how she works on to find the true meaning of self without depending on anyone highlights the importance of self-being to navigate repression and frustration adds depth to Sita's journey. In the second text, *The Warrior of Mithila*, Tripathi uses multiple perspectives to represent Sita as a warrior. The plot flourishes through the voices of allies as Jatayu and adversaries as Raavan, Sita's actions are framed within a broader

socio-political context that show her actions and decisions make her not only a warrior but a true leader who fights for the wellness of her kingdom Mithila. This polyphonic approach shifts the identity of Sita from a devoted wife or victim to an energetic leader who shapes her own destiny. Volga's *The Liberation of Sita* portrays the character of Sita who seeks for her internal peace and self-awareness. The text seems rooted with feminist ideology that aims to empower Sita by redefining her relationships with other female characters of epic *Ramayana* and discards patriarchal expectations.

In contrast, *The Warrior of Mithila* represents Sita as a heroic figure of Indian mythology who has actively participated in shaping history. The story does not follow the traditional sequence of writing a story but critically re-examines important moments and fills in required gaps at suitable times. This non-linear approach emulates the epic traditions by unfolding these narratives through interconnected tales. The postmodern aesthetics blend the tradition and modernity that presents Sita as a heroic narrative with physical and intellectual agency, whereas Volga's nonlinear techniques tend to criticize the patriarchal structures. To sum up, these texts exhibit how fragmentation and multiple perspectives may provide a new space for interpretation and challenge the conventional norms. This multiplicity justifies the relevancy of ancient myths in modern storytelling.

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