

Gender manifestations and implications of Sita in Ramayana

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Abstract:

Women Identities have been represented with less calibre and competencies in Indian tradition and culture. These manifestations had huge implications on culture, traditions and family legacies across India. Sita, most illustrious and powerful women in Indian culture, has been provided a traditional and family-oriented role. This research paper is an investigation in to the purposive gender manifestation of Sita in Ramayana and its implications for Indian society, culture and women. The study concludes that women have been provided feminine and submissive roles by Male chauvinist tradition started from Rama, has transformed in 20th century, with the emergence of New modern Sita for Indian society.

Key words

Feminism and Indian culture, Male chauvinism, submissive representations, mistaken identities or misrepresented, future of Indian women

Introduction

The calibre, power and capabilities of women and their representation with roles and responsibilities have been fewer in representation and lesser in documentation. In India we could find that women have always been cozy and comfortable with a shadowed identity rather than an individual representation of talents and authority. The social cultural and religious values with historical significance and myths to support the socio mental framework of women in India has always been subdued and sublime. Can these sublime identities contribute? Men with a patriarchal framework of mind and representation have always subdued women due to fear and psychological complications in Indian history. Men need to grow as always.

Women have always provided moral support, courage, confidence, morale booster for men to perform which has been hardly acknowledged in Indian society. Her role in family building, relationships and having a social bonding is given new names of customer relationship and human resource management in HR text books. A symbol of culture, reflecting humane values, teaching ethical and moral behaviour

to children and maintaining in a family, she is a true friend, philosopher and guide. A support in crisis in moral and spiritual guidance has shaped families in India.

In the evolutionary history of the country India, these selfless ideology based women have contributed by leading lives of excellence which has indeed built the moral, cultural, social and spiritual strength of India. This has helped the country to move with greater strength with power and energy in challenges and problems which are unimaginable. There is a need to revisit, understand and examine the selfless contributions made by Indian women in shaping the future Indian before 5000 years.

These visionary women and their contributions have remained passive, silent and often it has gone unnoticed in the pages of history, philosophy, religion and science. This study is an attempt to provide knowledge on such simple transformatory women who have been the continuous inspiration for living for millions of Indian families.

One such renowned, magnanimous and psychologically rich and yet simple in living women has been Ma Sita from Indian Ramayana. By following a simple living with sublime orientation and devotion to family with husband, has transformed in to a goddess & symbolic representation of Indian women.

The journey, the transitions, challenges and problems, issues and controversies with analytic, empirical and descriptive analysis on this iconic Indian woman, Sita from domesticity to divinity would be dealt in this study.

In the following section a brief on various theories of feminism would be provided in brief with detailed commentary on Sita as literature review:

Literature Review:

Western Theories of feminism & Indian symbolism of Sita

Social existence:

It was found in the earliest of feminist writers (Beauvoir's 1949) women identity was represented as "one is not born as a woman and one is made". This clearly speaks volumes on the nature of psychological control which the society had succeeded and the social stigma which has provided the outer boundaries of her existence.

We could find that Sita has social existence and living which has been predominantly decided by her father and later by her husband. The social framework and gender-oriented limitations which prevailed during her time (Tripathi, Amish,2017) made her undeterred as she has strongly emulated herself in to a Goddess in the psychological construct of Indian women for centuries.

Biological Existence and identities:

The early writers of feminism tend to represent biological (Laquer 1990). classification and differentiation. These classifications are crude form of understanding and representing which had an intention of authority, control with power and support of supernatural elements.

The early feminist writers who were Anglo American provided an understanding of gender from social and psychological construct which had said about gender development and internalization of norms and procedures, mechanics.

However, these early writers intended to focus more on norms and procedures which could possibly lead to gender development which focused on contradiction and not on similarities, which had an intention to divide and not to assimilate and see as human development and humane development.

The role of gender has a critical and crucial role to play in societies (Vasconcelos, Sandra Guardini 2008) for development, progress and upliftment.

We could find that though biological classification has determined her as a woman, the feminine nature has brought her subtle power, influence and dominance which has surpassed the character of Ram.

Ram is ideal and obedient to social and cultural norms, but Sita is majestic and magnificent as she transforms her identity in to a magical new identity even among crisis in Lanka.

So, it indicates the undeterring will power of Sita has won this world and her character has been adored, for which Gods have surrendered and granted her divinity, which she has used for transforming Indian women with a magical, phenomenal inspiration.

Liberal feminism:

During these periods of intellectual arguments, we could find that feminism had taken a dimension of liberalism in nature, which does prevail only in theoretical considerations. In these writers Friedan (1963), we could find that liberal aspects, dimensions, prevalence in societies has been elaborated and contributions were made. These have increased the intellectual weights of philosophers with no real impact.

Sita is truly a magical melody which has total authority and control over Ayodhya and society which is very subtle, deep and profound. She is a liberalist in thinking, open minded, modern in approach, with effective decision-making skills and has functioned as a participatory leader.

This shadowed leader of inspiration has transformed Rama and his kingdom, after which he took the entire city people (Kumar, T.Vijay and C.VijayaSree 2016) abode to Heaven. The inspirational transformation of Ayodhya with a liberal mind-set was done by her, single handedly, with her strong mental association and presence with them.

Gender based human control systems:

Cultural and institutional mechanisms take the honour and privilege of subordination of women in gender hierarchy systems Rubin's (1975) which enabled effective gender control practices.

The social norms with religion and cultural as the outer boundaries had determined living of Sita, but her integrity and (Chatterjee, Sohini 2014) patience had won the hearts of millions, as it has manifested in the living mental identities of Indian women.

Social Marxist feminism:

The concepts of Labor of Marx revolutionised the world, but women who were a subjective phenomenon in Friedan (1963), history was approved and the same philosophy was adjudicated. Men are superior and women tend to be inferior seem to be perspective of Marx who had been a social revolutionist as well.

The threads of Marx and influences of Human identity could be seen in Ayodhya, a land of male dominance and supremacy. However we do find that the family brought up of Sita in Mitila (Bhargava, Anju 2012) by Janaka, the king who had revered and respected women and had special place for women in his courts. He consulted Gargi, a famous philosopher before any decision. This shows the genetical orientation and cultural learning from her parents had indeed transformed her to new levels, which had surprised Rama and Ayodhya.

Threads of differentiation:

The plot for women, liberation, identity as a separated subjugated, humiliated species which has not been provided its role nor acknowledged has been ill-treated.

So, when the concepts were framed on feminism discussions and debates were held as to what kind of theories or philosophies or directions must be provided for future, signs of progress but slow and very low. There was a debate as to how women have to be conceived in thought and in reality. They intended to project women as feminine and symbolically unconscious (OR) women as a coherent concept with scopes of elaboration. Discussions, arguments, comments, views and opinions were shared and it had led to the development of significant theories in content with clarity but with no focus on approach and implementation mechanisms which is still a failure.

The differentiation in identities and gender treatment has been there for submissive behaviour and nature of women in Indian societies. This woman of pride, Sita with her power and calibre had created new landscapes and identities for women which had helped in glorious restoration (Singh, Vikram 2017) of Indian women's place and pride in personal, professional and social spaces.

Diverse feminism:

Women live under different social, family and personal conditions of life which influence their identities (Lloyd 1993) and living. How different are these women living across different countries? What is the implication of culture, religion and masculinity in defining her role and operations in systems of the world? These aspects and dimensions are covered in diverse feminism.

The diversity in her nature and approach has provided and emancipated her as the role model for Indian society. The way to win life with blessings of religious saints had been provided by her. The path and guidance (Bajpai, Mehak, 2018) shown by these saints had made her to achieve in family, personal and heavenly spheres which is phenomenal indeed.

Gender and subjectivity – Bones of contention for Identity:

In the feministic literature we tend to find that subjective feminism had become a most dominant, vibrant and reflecting theme (Arneil 1999) during 1990s. The nature and extent of subjectivity, factors and its influencing roles, impact on women were discussed and evaluated during this period of time.

The subjective perspective of the time, dictations of Rama, social and cultural norms had never made her sublime in revealing her identity. She had shown courage, strength and character during (Majudar, Nandini 2013) all the crisis in her life. The independency in decision making and the capabilities had made Ravana to surrender to her sheer feministic confidence and courage, admiring & lovable.

Modern contemporary perspectives on Feminism:

The feminist writers, thinkers, scholars and intellectuals have brought out new forms of feminism on their traditional roles in family, living and in their self-identity. These dimensions have added new impetus and thinking on the various issues on this - feminist standpoint theory, standpoint epistemology, cultural feminism, social feminism, gynocentric feminism & woman-centered theory.

Sita is the most modern women representative of India, preserving Indian identity, culture values and morale. She has been traditional and orthodox in her approach due to social norms and restrictions. She is bold, daring and energetic, ready to face any situation of life. She was mentally strong that her rescue day would come very soon. This attitudinal contemporary contribution has been made by Sita for her followers and which is admired by the world over.

Social difference Feminism:

This theory is the most popular and contributing theory as we could find its roots from various theories which have historical and contributing significance which is provided as a table below:

Social difference feminism theory

Theory name	Contributors and year
Social difference feminism	dialectical and Marxist historical materialism (O'Brien 1981)
	social psychology and situational sociology , 9Smith 1987);
	object-relations school of psychoanalytic theory (Chodorow 1978)
	cognitive development analysis and moral psychology (Gilligan 1982)
	Interpretive social science (Harding 1986)

Sita was able to make a society of difference and has been inspirational in bringing in social change and transformation of Indian values and ethos (Singaravelu, 1982) which is magnificent. The ideologies, customs and beliefs which are followed in every Indian family today has her as the true inspiration.

But unfortunately, this magnificent, legendary Icon of India, Sita had been ignored and left over as the saints, mystics and society praise Rama and has not recognized her to that extent.

Research gaps:

1. Although we could find that western feminist theories have evolved over a period of time, we could not find the contributions of Indian feminist theories on Sita, which is really unfortunate.
2. The magical transformation of Sita from domesticity to divinity has not been captured or studied nor discussed in any form of research
3. The significance and importance of transition of Sita and her contributions to Indian society has never been studied
4. As no research has been done on these dimensions, this research is an attempt in this direction.

In the next section of this study, research methodology for this study would be provided in detail.

Research Methodology:

Women – Priceless gift of nature – discovered and paths to new identities – Differential feminism

Sita, a priceless gift of nature was discovered in the gardens. The King Janaka in his own words says;

“When I was ploughing the fields, a girl sprang up behind my Plows” (Ramayana 1.65.15). This adored gift of nature, when Janaka saw it is described by him as;

“A treasure and pride for the eye,

Once, as it chanced, I ploughed the ground, ‘

When sudden neath the share was found

An infant springing from earth,

Named Sita from her secret birth”

Women always has been priceless gifts of nature and these gifts ought to be discovered with pride and sublimity. The treasure of India was discovered and this treasure returned to mother earth (Ralph Griffith, Ralph.T.H. Griffith 1974) as she came. So, this research is an investigation in to the nature and qualities which made her transform from domesticity to divinity.

The nature and ability of Sita and her nature of difference as a distinct women would be dissected and analysed in this research.

Deconstructive feminism:

The mighty nature of Sita, the magnanimity and the ability to take any circumstance in stride is evident as she describes exile in forest for 14 years in to a life of discovery in the following words:

‘The earth will yield me roots, these I will 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 nigh all fearless with delighted eye

To sport with thee my limbs to cool, in some pure lily covered pool

While the white swans and mallard’s wings are splashing in the winter springs

This nature of transformation from kingly life to forest life is possible with a balanced mind only. The nature and character of Sita and the ability of transformation would be deconstructed in this research.

Liberal feminist – Sita:

The liberal free will attitude of Sita guides her activities and actions in Kingdom and in forests. This liberal nature of Sita and the implications on social, moral, religious frameworks in Indian context would be explored and analysed.

This research would be exploratory in nature as it would explore in to the nature and character of Sita from Domesticity to Divinity. The three major feministic themes

- Differential feminism
- Liberal Feminism
- Deconstructive feminism would be used for analysing Sita. These three analyses would be provided in the next analysis chapter & finally based on the discussions and suitable conclusions would be provided.

Discussions and evaluations

Lamenting Rama and Brave ideological Sita

Valmiki Ramayana has provided Ma Sita special place and recognition and has provided an iconic image (Pattanaik 2010) as she has excelled in all her roles in a most effective way. She had done her role as a daughter, as a wife and mother and she is a complete total personality which is transforming and transformatory. Due to the virtuous and pious living, a life of honour and sacrifices, with pain and suffering, but nowhere we could see her lamenting on it. Rama laments on Sita's separation but Sita remained confident and brave in Lanka with hope and aspirations for future. This clearly shows us the psychological confidence which she had in fulfilling her domestic chores, yet to remain brave and strong in tough challenging situations. This psychological character has gained her recognition, name fame and divinity – but after returning to Ayodhya she still remained simple in thought and actions. This true idealistic way of thinking and behaviour has changed the course and direction of life by adding color and divinity in the landscape of her life and living. It seems magical and profound, but still has simple approach, thinking and has indicated the pathways for divine transformation and idealization.

Family background and Training: Role of King Janaka:

She has been a dutiful daughter and as a child she had learnt all her responsibilities, duties, power and training given by King Janaka. In his court we could find incidents where the highest nature of philosophical discussions were held. We could find that incidents were there, the discussion regarding self, Soul and the highest ideal search for Brahman, were evaluated, debated and dissected. We could find that Sita is an outcome of such highest and pure knowledge which has led to internal search, in which she obtained divinity, which was lesser known and acknowledged by philosophers and writers.

Brihadharanyaka Upanishad:

In this Upanishad we could find the intense and heated exchanges between male and female philosophers in which the female philosopher, Gargi was asked to keep quite or the head would be chopped off by Yajnavalkya. This shows the sheer male dominance which was prevailing in King Janaka Presence during Ramayana period, the most idealized period of Indian history.

We could also find instances where sulabha and Sage kaushika having debates regarding personality, self and Brahma. But the sage lands defeated with this female mystic as she succeeds in the arguments. We could also find Gargi, the very famous philosopher was the personal advisor to King Janaka on administrative and philosophical affairs. It has to be acknowledged that King Janaka showed lot of respect and honour for women and their knowledge during his times of reign. (Ws1). This social

environment and personal training by courtesans during Ma Sita time had shaped her personal identity, knowledge and philosophical supremacy.

Sita was 9 years at the time of marriage as per Valmiki Krit Ramayana. She had a purpose of living and a search for Brahman at this tender age due to the upbringing of his father. The saintly philosophical discussions and debates had shaped her search for meaning for life and she pursued it consistently even after marriage and during the crisis in Lanka. This one single character of consistent pursuit and search for Brahman had provided blessings by Saints which had provided her divinity in domesticity.

Social influences after marriage & Decision-making skills of Sita:

After a brief stay in Ayodhya, Rama leaves to forest for 14 years. At this time again Ma Sita shows her mettle and decision making that she would stay with Ram despite tough challenges but Ram was willing to leave her in the kingdom and go alone. This strength in character and decision-making capabilities shows her a real heroine, least recorded by saints who wrote Ramayana.

Rama's ignorance of Sita and her divine nature:

Even Unfortunate Rama, was not aware of the transitions in Ma Sita her divinity nor he was willing to acknowledge. The one good thing he did in Sita Rama married life was that he asked her to enter fire to show the world that she is as pure as fire and a gold which never tarnishes in quality or standards even after thousands of years.

Hanuman too Ignorant of Sita and her powers:

When Hanuman reached Lanka and he was searching for Ma Sita in Asoka vanam. He was in the top of the tree, and yet he was not able to see her due her divine powers. Hanuman searched for a whole day and then prays to Ma Sita as the last hope to reveal her divine presence. Then he could see Ma Sita sitting beneath the same tree where Hanuman was searching the whole day. Ma Sita was totally composed like Saint Arut perum Jyothi from Tamilnadu, in not revealing the saintly nature and identity which is truly phenomenal. So the stay in Lanka had made her more divine and saintly which was put to acid test by Rama in which she comes out successfully.

Divine power of Sita – exhibited to Rama:

When Ma Sita was pregnant, Rama asks Lakshmana to leave her to ashram as her character was doubted again by a citizen of Ayodhya. She takes this suffering also as the grace and gift of God, and lives in the ashram of Valmiki. During these tough times, Rama decides to ascend throne again. Some ceremony has to be performed and the golden statue of Sita is made ready for the function. In this time, Ma Sita visits Ram and his kingdom spiritually with her soul. This time Rama sees her and she disappears in few minutes. Rama cries and laments for Sita, but Sita is composed spiritually as she has grown leaps and bounds in the search for Brahman.

Conclusion

Divine Exit from world – Ma Sita decision:

After she comes back from the ashram, Ram asks her take acid test second time, highly stupid and immature. Will God reveal and prove divinity twice? It was unbearable for Sita, she bowed her hands and prayed to mother Earth, the earth opened and she left abode to her mother nature again, now again Rama only cries. Very sorrowful state as he does only cry as a child, not knowing consequences, an immature king indeed.

Ma Sita divinity was revealed in her activities, thinking and in her maturity in which Rama fails miserably. He could have been wiser and more mature but unfortunately Indian men are like that and it's a social malady indeed.

Let us rejoice the divinity of success and heavenly abode of Ma Sita admits such ignorant and intolerable husbands and in-laws to manage in their life. Her life and living are a true representation of Indian women and their horrors and suffering with even Lord Ram, very unfortunate. It has taught Indian women that domesticity can lead to divinity with family background, unfortunate king and doubting husbands with children also.

A real representation of Indian women and conditions – Thanks to Valmiki for giving true representation on plight of Indian women. This has made more courageous women in millions in Indian history which is not documented and represented as they live silently and patiently with mercy, duty and faithfulness to husbands and they also abode heavens in the paths of Ma Sita, silently.

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