



CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI'S *THE FOREST OF ENCHANMENTS* as SITAYANA

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Abstract:

Mythology has possessed a great insight in Indian culture. It portrays the male characters and their goodness and adventures, but it fails to attempt the position of female characters. Some of the Women writers like Chitra Banerjee, Kavitha Kane have revisited the myth and finds the female protagonist. Henceforth they attempt to exhibit the voice of the female characters which are unsung in mythology. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Forest of Enchantments* portrays Indian mythology in Sita's perception. It also portrays other female characters who are unheard so far in epic. Divakaruni's novel *The Forest of Enchantments* may be rightly called as *Sitayana*. Divakaruni has changed the vision of Sita in minds of readers from soft and silent woman who is an embodiment of sacrifice to the woman with strong courage with modern thoughts, who finds her identity in her world.

Keywords: mythology, identity, desire, courage, womanhood, love, endurance

Myth is intensely implanted in our Indian customs, traditions and religion. Myth is not a form of old fairy-tale it hold some purposes, motives, values that carry on from generation to generation. Mythologies were written, construed, stated upon men in the form of traditions. “ Myth fulfills in primitive culture an indispensable function; it expresses, enhances and codifies beliefs; safeguards and enforces morality; it vouches for the efficiency of ritual and contains practical rules for the guidance of man”.(Kumar 132). Feminist retellings attempts to examine the epic through female protagonist and it becomes more interested when it heard by women in their vision. Their voice gives space to other female characters and emotions and their state of being in Epics.

Indian Mythology has fewer women portrayals who able to speak their voices in mind over male dominated society. Draupadi and Sita are such characters who are able to withstand in their decisions but it was almost unheard and unsung in epics. Earlier women were not given importance in literature. It was world with man hierarchy and their view upon women and their characters. After decades women writers emerged themselves in literature. Women must have an education and she also must have to attain a position in the society to open up her views. They have to be the voice of women who are suppressed. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is one of the women feministic writers, portrays the thoughts of women through her writings.

The current paper dealt with female protagonist Sita, she spaces the revisit of other female characters. Divakaruni's has portrayed her novels from feministic perspective to human perception throughout the decades. In *The Palace of Illusions*, she unfolds the story of *Mahabharata* in Draupadi's view. Draupadi's willingness and emotions were clearly exhibited in feminist perspective through her novel. In *The Forests of Enchantments*, she portrays Sita in a humanistic view and she has used Sita as voice of other female characters in Ramayana. Through their other feminine characters Urmila, Kausalya, Kaikeyi, Manthara, Ahalya, Mandodari, Shurpanakha and Sunaina who has been spoken out less portrays their own self through the voice of Sita.

Ramayana one of the greatest epic in Indian culture portrays the life of Ram from his childhood, adventures, achievements in male perception. In Ramayana portrays the life of Ram in great way but in Divakaruni's *The Forest of Enchantments* portrays the life of Sita and it also dealt with flaw of Ram as human being. Ram as a Godly nature has also some flaws. When Ram strung bow and it was time for the marriage, he immediately states that he had made an vow that all his brothers will marry from the same family to avoid conflict in future. Sita, wisely interpreted and had given a suggestion of niece and she says that "Your desire to avoid conflict among brothers in good one, Prince Ayodhya, but perhaps you should have informed us of this vow before you strung Shiva's bow" (Divakaruni 36). When he decides to do agnipraksha for others sake is also a major flaw in his nature and he also failed to have affection with his mother who was isolated by the King.

The study attempts to examine the self identity and womanhood of the Sita, where she started to write her own story Sitayana. The novel moves in present and past scenario. Maharishi wrote *Ramayana* which appears in his dream vision. He had thought that it would be sung by lav and kush to Ram. When Sita read that it doesn't show Sita's exhilaration in forest and in Ayodhya. Maharishi said "You must write that story yourself, Ma," said 'for only you know it.' Sita, daughter of Janak, wife of Ram and the princess of Ayodhya who lost everything at expect her babies. At the end of the novel she again went to the earth where she came from. Divakaruni used Sita as a tool for the voice of other women characters in the novel who were unable express their own will in Ramayan. Their voices were heard in Sitayana.

Sunaina, the real ruler of Mithila because whenever Janak had to take tough decision in his emperor, he will always consult Sunaina. Sita grown up by seeing this and guidance from her mother Sunaina. "She was,

in some ways, the real ruler of Mithila, sharp of intellect, clear vision, balancing kindness with justice”(Divakaruni 9). When Sita was finally to get married to Ram, Sunaina has given her enough guidance of how to take care of herself and her sisters and how to behave with mothers in law. She asked her not to take stand in one side and she clearly states picture of Ayodhya. She also tells her to be firm in her decisions.

Sita had many suitors none of them could lift the bow, and Sita knows the bow is waiting for the right person to lift. Bow often spoke to Sita that “I am making you more stronger” (Divakaruni 26). It is making her more strength and making her *endure* things because it often suggest that “ You will need the strength in future” (Divakaruni 26). Sita met Ram for the first time and she knows that he was the person to strung the bow. Beside the warning from the priest that she will be given the blessing to marry the suitors whom she likes but she has to face the difficulties. Ram’s firm decision on marriage kept her awestruck that all the brothers will marry from the same family. Sita found a solution; She was very proud of Ram who keeps his promises that “Sita will be my only consort and beloved, all days of my life”(Divakaruni 56). Ram also announces that he will marry only once in lifetime.

Sita’s life after marriage was not so happy and she has to manage so many things. She had a wonderful relationship with Kausalya and in many times she has been the voice of her. When Kausalya gifted her the gifts of her mother and she was in little guilt whether Sita would like it but Sita said, “I love everything, you’ve given me Kausalya-Ma”(Divakaruni 64). She said in loud voice and make her happy. Even she had sorted her relationship with the King and he often ask her make the dishes liked by the king and be with him. Slowly King has also started to be with her. Divakaruni has portrays the life of queens in kingdom who were unable to express their own will and can’t able to do things to her sons. Sita here stands the voice of Kausalya in Divakaruni’s novel.

Divakaruni has used Sita as tool to voice other feminine characters in novel. Sita has to befriend with Kaikeyi. Kaikeyi asked Sita to visit her in her chamber and she questioned Sita about her delay visit. Sita answered witty, Kaikeyi has her about the healing medicinal plants and Sita also impressed her with like “My skills are nothing compared to yours, Kaikeyi-Ma” (Divakaruni 79). She was very much impressed by her and she asked for the fight with her where Sita voluntarily gets defeated to win the heart of Kaikeyi. Sita a real miracle worker has good terms with all the in laws in the kingdom. Kaikeyi beloved of King asked for two wishes that Bharat should rule the kingdom and Ram has to be forest for fourteen years. Divakaruni expresses the mother nature of love and she always wished for good of their children, because of some kind of guilt and insecurity she has done this which the author makes us to clearly understand the nature of Kaikeyi. So Sitayana has been the true voice of Kaikeyi and able express her motherly nature. Here Divakaruni broke and spoke about the stereotype women who will always obey their husband’s words. Sita has taken her own decision to move to forest with Ram and she ready to face all hurdles in future.

Urmila, sister of Sita was contrasting character to Sita, a very playful in nature. Even she could not have a whole hearted love from Lashkman as Sita, who failed to explain his concern for her. Lakshman was always surrounded by Sumithra. Lakshman had left her in Ayodhya, “What was the use, I thought to Myself, of living on when I’d been rejected by one man I had adored with all the heart since the day I met him?” (Divakaruni 281).

Sita has also taken some wrong decisions in her life as a human being, she has been so keen to ask for the deer even though Ram and Lakshman says about the inevitable animal. She also accepts that it was her mistake. Divakaruni her dealt that Sita had dream of following the fake deer whether she gets into trouble. She accuses Lakshman for not saving the life of Ram when he was in danger. She also crossed the Lakshman rekha led her brother-in-law. As a human, she also has her own flaws same as Draupadi in Mahabharatha. Divakaruni picturesque the character of Sita as a strong and stubborn woman with some flaws like Shakespeare’s tragic heroes.

Sita was abandoned by King Ravana of Lanka, he did this for the sake of her sister Shurpanakha. Sita was left under the Ashoka tree with red flowers, she was guarded by the demons day and night. Sita knows that Ram will come and rescue her, she has spent a year there. There she has faced many traumas and tortures by the demons but she didn’t leave her courage and prayers. Ram with the help Hanuman and other members rescued her.

After return Sita was eagerly waiting see Ram. When she saw him, his face was different from daily one. Ram says that his duty is over and she is now free to go anywhere as she wishes. “I have resuced you, Sita,” (Divakaruni 242) said the voice and “it was my duty to resuce you” (Divakaruni 242). Because he felt shame and guilt as Sita lived in another men palace for a year. Sita was dumbstruck when she hears this. Sita calls for the Agni to test her loyalty. Sita asked Bharath, “Brother-in-law, I must ask you to don one lst thing for me, Build a fire there is nothing left for me in this earth now that my husband whom I loved more than myself” has guilt and doubt of me. Divakaruni says that Sita did *agnipariskha* to prove her loyalty and it is of feminine quality in her. After that Sita sat in throne and she willingly takes the responsibility of Ayodhya with Ram and the rumors started to spread which says Ram has spoiled the reputation of Raghu vamsa. After Ram heard he decides and takes firm decision that Sita should be abandoned in forest.

Lakhman left Sita in the forest near the ashram , Valmiki and Indra took care of Sita as their own daughter. Sita is blessed with twins Lav and Kush. Valmiki brought up them and made to learn all ethics and war nature to be followed by the young prince. Both of them are good at singing too. Valmiki wishes that Ramayana has to be sung before Ram with the voice of his own children. Divakaruni has portrays Sita as Supreme Being who able to handled all her situation with compassion, courage, strength and endurance. When Ram asked her to Agnipariskha again. As a wife once she had proved herself but again when it comes to test

her dignity, she with her bold thought said, “O King Ram, I must reject your kind offer to allow me to prove my innocence again. Because this is one of those times when a woman stand up and say, *No More!*”(Divakaruni 357). And one last thing she said to her husband before being a goddess from human that “ I forgave you a long time ago” (Divakaruni 358) which only Ram could hear. Because her love for Ram is “It is like a ocean. Unfathomable. Astonishing. Measureless” (Divakaruni 358).

Divakaruni’s *The Forest of Enchantments* shows the love and courageousness of Sita as the real warrior of Ramayana. Divakaruni’s protagonist not only searches her own self, identity but for all the women characters also. The study thus analyses Sita as the embodiment of strong character in Ramayana and she will leave an impression in the heart of the every readers how a women should be. Indian mythological stays in the minds of the readers. Thus, it shows that all the women will be blessed with saying *May you be Sita*.

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