International Journal of Research (IJR)
p-ISSN: 2348-6848
e-ISSN: 2348-795X
Vol. 9 Issue 03
March 2022

Exploring Ahalya through the lenses of Sita in *The Forest of Enchantments*

Ms. Sneha Biswas
Assistant Professor
Amity School of Languages
Amity University Chhattisgarh
sbiswas1@rpr.amity.edu

Abstract:

Sita in her scholarly journey called Sitayan gives abstract space and rehabilitates these ladies, who have since ages confronted judgment and embarrassment. This paper expects to concentrate on Sitayan as a womanist composition that values careful security, energizes orientation fairness, advances compassion, and undermines the connection between the edge and the standard. I will also explore the character of Ahalya through the lenses of Sita. Divakaruni's Sitayan in The Forest of Enchantments (2019) is a promising piece of writing that is absorbed Sita's quest for selfhood. This work is particular from other retellings of Sita's story since it is indiscriminatory in nature with regards to the portrayal of fringe voices. Focusing on aggregate great and strengthening of ladies for a huge scope makes this scholarly endeavor a remarkable talk. The importance of Sitayan's womanist viewpoint combined with its base spotlight on the authenticity of the minimized characters to move towards the middle makes this account even more significant in contemporary terms and specific while compromising for those they love. The womanist point of view of Divakaruni makes a device of ladies' composing that is rationalistically provocative and promising.

Keywords: Feminist, Margins, Empowerment, Selfhood, Empathy, Voice, Silence.

Walker as a fervent social extremist and open essayist joins most extreme importance to a writer's scholarly freedom. Divakaruni's Sitayan reverberations with Walker's soul of scholarly opportunity as it conveys the uncelebrated demonstrations of female fearlessness with a conviction that most contemporary portrayals need. Divakaruni's narrating in the voice of Sita is in-

Copyright © authors 2022

discriminatory in nature since she gives importance to every one of the female characters. She drains with her characters sincerely to be unified with the embarrassment and minimization that they have suffered since ages. Her story reintegrates the fringe female characters into the standard by articulating their voices. Stories coming from different female characters converge into a brought-together entire in Sitayan and make a feeling of interconnectedness. The edges are given a persuasive voice and interspersed to start an exchange with the standard. The Forest of Enchantments obliges the impactful Sitayan which addresses and moves the contemporary and future ladies. It trains ladies to defend their confidence, to be unflinching, and particularly while compromising for those they love. The womanist viewpoint of Divakaruni makes a device of ladies' composing that is persuasively interesting and promising.

Adhering to the original content of the Ramayana, Banerjee has placed her Sita on the focal point of her "Sitayan". Prior Banerjee has composed a book "The palace of Illusions" which retells the narrative of Mahabharata according to the point of view of Panchaali. The personality of Sita has consistently charmed Banerjee since her youth. It took her an extensive examination to depict the personality of Sita as she felt that the personality of Sita was more than the Indian culture thought about her to be. She read the four unique variants of the Ramayana- - - Valmiki's Ramayana, Kamba Ramayana, Adbhuta Ramayana, and her top choice, the Bengali form of Krittibasi Ramayana. Also, she read the different society tunes expounded on Sita. Banerjee needed to undermine the customary approach to seeing Sita. Sita has been perceived as "great and easygoing" and "tolerant", bearing her adversities with "quiet emotionlessness". Banerjee has demonstrated Sita to be a solid individual who confronted her difficulties with solid astuteness and common sense. She has changed the picture of Sita from a compliant to a radical and a champion. However, Sita is a goddess, a manifestation of the goddess Lakshmi, yet she has depicted the personality of Sita as a human, with human shortfalls and henceforth it is engaging. The novel does not just re-recount the narrative of Sita, yet additionally depicts different ladies' characters of the epic, who were either disregarded or neglected in the original epic. Sita has given an alternate point of view to those ladies' characters and has shown that their feelings and aims were colossally misconstrued or explained in an off-base way. We observe the personality of Sunaina, who was an insightful and capable pioneer who directed lord Janak with his question of court issues. We observe the

Copyright © authors 2022

personality of Urmila who draws our most extreme compassion. Her fantasies about having a prosperous hitched life were broken to pieces when Lakshman deserted her for a long time to accompany Ram. The personality of Kaikeyi and Surpanakha has additionally been depicted from an alternate perspective than the typical insidious assessments that individuals have about them. An equal record we experienced with the personality of Ahalya. Brahma had made Ahalya, who is the best decision of a spouse for sage Gautam. Yet, Indra's captivation for Ahalya implemented him to camouflage as Gautam and intercourse with her in isolation. Sage Gautam angered at the injustice of both and wrongly reviled Ahalya who was tempted by Indra's wile trickiness. Chitra Banerjee in 'Sitayan' unfurls the harmful male centric shows wherein disciplines were additionally gendered. The offender Indra gave with the discipline of the ejection of thousand vulvas on his body yet the guiltless Ahalya for quite a long time was censured as a stone with a guarantee of recovery by the hint of Ram's feet. Kindled and disappointed with the unjustifiable treatment with Ahalya, Sita scrutinized her "Doesn't it go against the dictates of dharma? You did nothing wrong. You were tricked by Indra. Why should you be made to suffer for his sin? For being a victim? It was unfair." (Divakaruni 134)

The clever beginnings with the Sage Valmiki getting some information about Sita's perspective on the "Ramayana" that he has formed, gave a new turn to the story written till then. Sita said that he could not depict the sufferings and despondency that Sita had felt during her season of expulsion and every one of the sufferings and put-downs she needed to suffer: " "What occurred when I was alone in the darkness, under the sorrow tree, you don't know. You don't know my despair. You don't even know my exhilaration, how it felt- first in the forest and then in Ayodhya- when I was the most beloved woman in creation." (Divakaruni 2) The sage commented that it was Sita herself who knew every one of the sufferings she confronted, and she was the one who could do equity to her own story. Not just Sita expounded on her own sufferings and misery, she additionally re-recounted the narratives of different female characters who had been misconstrued, misjudged, or frequently neglected or accused, or who had never been thought widely. These ladies' characters to be specific Sunaina, Urmila, Kaikeyi, Surpanakha, Ahalya, Mandodari, and so on demands Sita to retell their accounts too: " Write our stories too. For always we have been pushed into corners, trivialised, misunderstood, blamed, forgotten- or maligned and used as cautionary tales."

Copyright © authors 2022

(Divakaruni 4) It took Sita monstrous mental fortitude to defend herself and demand everybody to allow her to go with Ram to the woods. Whenever Sita was enamored by Ravana, it took her monstrous boldness to be solid and not yield to the cravings of Ravana. It took her a great deal of mental fortitude and persistence to hang tight for Ram, to protect her from an obscure island that she had been spellbound. After she was safeguarded by Ram and later disgraced and dismissed by the individual, she cherished the most, it took her colossal mental fortitude to bring in the fire to hold her poise: "love and happiness might not be in my control, but at least my dignity still remained mine. I might not be able to have the life I wanted, but I could choose the manner of my death." (Divakaruni 245)

Sita's womanist enthusiasm to get stylish rest for the dismissed ladies in Valmiki's story and her passionate work to coordinate them into the texture of her account makes her the novelistic girl of the relative multitude of ladies she addresses. Womanism however frequently alluded to as an idea propounded by Afro-American artist, writer, and social extremist Alice Walker is currently a worldwide peculiarity. The idea holds ladies strengthening and quiet conjunction of the genders in our public as its most impressive instrument. Reconciliation of the disregarded and the underestimated into the standard is a definitive point of womanism. It does not have confidence in slandering the other by extending the fracture between the sexes and trusts in universalism. The deadly hushes and conscious underestimations are impeding the development of moral portrayal, and this is the motivation behind why Divakaruni through Sita's portrayal offers refuge to every one of the unheard voices. Sitayan sasses without anxiety since it celebrates womanhood. This retelling overflows with mindfulness that is a fundamental device in the possession of contemporary ladies. Sita gives voice to the voiceless as a liberatory signal. Whenever she represents different ladies, she in a manner legitimizes her own decisions.

The feminist ethos in *The Forest of Enchantments* resonates with a determined any desire for recreating the connection between the genders by voicing the profoundly upsetting issues, befuddling feelings, human shortfalls, and disparate perspectives on ladies who have been distorted ever. The repercussion of Sita's obstruction is motivating as it has helped in removing the pessimism and repetitiveness regularly appended to a lady's composing that attempts to restore different ladies. She has a dream that is encouraging for the female characters in her story, yet in

Copyright © authors 2022

addition for contemporary ladies who need support. Sitayan enlightens the dim corners of our mind by making coherent statements that are accommodating and engaging. In such manner, Melanie L. Harris battles that, “Womanist story not only reveals the necessity for womanist themes such as self-love to combat the existence of self-hate, but also provides road maps for living whole and free” (Harris 140). Jacques Derrida, an Algerian-conceived French-Jewish savant in his acclaimed work The Truth in Painting that was initially distributed in 1978 and later meant English from French in the year 1987, emphasized his praised hypothesis of deconstruction by adding to it the antiquated Greek philosophical idea of parergon. It is the outer, fringe, or extra to the middle it borders. To notice the outskirts of the edge is to legitimize its presence and, in a manner, challenge the middle. The edges are apparent, yet imperceptible, as they are permitted to fall into the void of secrecy. The women's activist texts tend to undermine the progressive system of an andro-driven focus to an orientation touchy request. This novel of Divakaruni gives force of enunciation to the edges; subsequently, the edges slowly advance into the focal point of the story. The edges are interspersed in Sitayan and are given a perceptible voice. It very well may be appropriately expressed that Sita's quest for selfhood tracks down comprehensive articulation in her narrating. Her story is not caught up in lobotomized wistfulness, however running against the norm it is extremist, entrancing, and significant for contemporary and future ladies.

This novel dives into Sita's inventive focal point that gives a fair-minded record of the fringe characters. Regardless Sita's mom Sunaina will be an adept decision. An exemplification of beauty, eminence, and reasonableness, she had the most extreme judiciousness in issues of home life and state. She tutored the realm by helping her significant other, the ruler of Mithila, yet never supplanted him. She was very much aware of the way that individuals of her realm laid their confidence in a male ruler. Sunaina covertly prepared Sita in hand-to-hand fighting under the direction of gifted female heroes. She knew Sita's future would be testing and in contrast to that of different young ladies. Whenever her little girls Sita and Urmila are very nearly married she advises them about numerous things, yet for Sita, she holds a few selective useful tidbits. She states, “If you want to stand up against wrongdoing if you want to bring about change, do it in a way that doesn’t bruise a man’s pride. You’ll have a better chance of success” (Divakaruni 46). This womanist thought of keeping up with harmony between the genders is engaged upon now.

Copyright © authors 2022

As the sisters enter intimate life and bid goodbye to their fatherly realm their mom offers them one more piece of guidance that would moor them during difficult stretches. A maternal concern is obviously apparent as would be natural for her: “Pull yourselves together. . . . We come into the world alone, and we leave it alone. And in between, too, if it is destined, we’ll be alone. Draw on your inner strength. Remember, you can be your own worst enemy—or your best friend. It’s up to you. And also this: what you can’t change, you must endure.” (Divakaruni 54) Sita lays base accentuation on the word persevere through that her mom conveyed. She realize that the way into a delighted intimate life and achievement was concealed in the possibility of perseverance that ladies had devotedly followed for ages. Sita's mom taught in her a respect for customs, a profound feeling of compassion, fortitude, and decency. Sita realizes that a tranquil life called for genuine penances between the accomplices joined by the promises of marriage.

Sitayan unearths the story of a violated lady Ahalya, spouse of sage Gautam who had been reviled by her significant other and transformed into a stone. She recaptures her human body when Ram contacts the stone with his feet. Indra had deceived her in the appearance of Gautam and allured her. She lost regard according to Gautam and was disposed of as a shamed lady. Her story required legitimate translation to cleanse her of the disgrace that had been poured on her for ages. Sita sees that Ahalya was blessed with uncommon excellence and that her lack of approachability appeared to be burdened in layers of secret. Gautam was happy with Ahalya's promise of quietness (Maun vrat), however, Sita could feel the hidden aggravation and unrest that lay hidden in her. The subtext that encompasses Ahalya's promise of quietness is upsetting and smooth in its own extraordinary manner. Ahalya addressed Sita and consented to respond to just a solitary inquiry. Sita needed to know why Ahalya was condemned for the wrongdoing that she didn't perpetrate purposely. She was a casualty, at this point she was demonized and rebuffed as an offender. Ahalya countered Sita's question by telling ng her that:

I tortured myself with these same thoughts many times as I lay stone-bound. Yes, that was part of the curse—that I should feel every moment of my interment. Finally, an answer came. When you put your hand in the fire, knowingly or unknowingly, do you not get burned? Such is the ancient law of the universe. Of karma and its fruit. The idea of motive is irrelevant to it. (Divakaruni 134)

Copyright © authors 2022

On exactly the same evening, Ahalya showed up in her fantasy. The regret on the substance of sage Gautam convinces Sita; that Ahalya requests retribution which she achieved through the 'vow of silence'. To rebuff him for the remainder of his life, she chose not to talk ever to him. Ahalya's emotionless quiet was likewise a response to the twofold standard society who embodied her with the two outrageous ways of life as a pure lady and a two-faced spouse. Through the personality of Ahalya it is plainly noticeable how the respectable weight is connected all the time with a lady and how society generally faults a casualty, not the guilty party. Sita needed replies to different questions that surfaced to her essentially zeroing in on the possibility of equity, fair play, and nature of absolution. Ahalya would not answer, yet later Sita in her fantasies designed replies to her questions. She reached the decision that Ahalya had a cracked world before her; subsequently, the most secure decision was to get back to her better half to keep away from additional embarrassment. She had chosen to rebuff her better half for charging her without a fair preliminary and lobotomizing her life by transforming her into a stone. She never addressed him and rebuffed him through her pledge of quietness. She would have rather not squander her words on him or legitimize his foul play by getting back to him with enthusiasm and love that she had recently supported for him. Sita at this point comes to trust that in affection if "Once mistrust has wounded it morally, love can't be fully healed again" (Divakaruni 136). The fragile subtleties of hetero love are really concentrated by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. She depicts the fleeting idea of trust, the significant profundity of a lady's adoration, the horrendous aches of nervousness on being misconstrued, and the misery of being distorted. The violated ladies vent their opinions through Sitayan. It is a mooring that is promising and redemptive for all ladies.

Ahalya is a remarkable inverse of Sita and she chooses not to voice her fire which is against every one of the activities taken against her by her soulmate Gautam. Her silence made the injustice speak up for her. Though she had taken the vow of quietness, she decides to move her lips for the great human, like Sita who left all the comforts and luxuries of her adorned life behind her just be in the embrace of her beloved and standing by his side in every aspect of the phrase. Ahalya had burnt her hand before in the experiences of marriage and she knows exactly of the dangers that Sita might encounter for her undaunted love and compassion. She felt it right to give her a pinch of advice that she may look for at a time of dire need. This novel gives us good insight into the

Copyright © authors 2022

lives of all the women who are sidelined in telling the tale of an e extraordinary man like Ram who strolled the earth to set a model for the approaching ages. By looking deep into it, I find the character of Ahalya, a flip side of Sita. The amalgamation of voice and silence, dark and glow, day and night- it made a compact meaning to the ways women can tackle with their otherhood. Chitra Banerjee's version of Ramayan joins the difficulties looked at by Sita with backbone. Ram denounces her and lets her be in a world brimming with thistles. Her unavoidable agony was "Ram: monarch, father, warrior, husband. The beloved who abandoned me when I needed him most. My greatest joy and my greatest despair." (Diavkaruni 03)

In the seclusion of Valmiki; she tracked down her solidarity in parenthood and achieved her obligations as a single parent. Bearing emotionless mishaps in her day-to-day existence, she courageously denied the proposal to carry on with the remainder of her existence with the family as consequently she needs to demonstrate her sacredness again and this time before the residents of Ayodhya. She answers back by leaving the proposition "Because if I do what you demand, society will use my action forever after to judge other women. Even when they aren't guilty, the burden of proving their innocence will fall on them. And society will say, why not? Even Queen Sita went through it." (Divakaruni 357) Sita's refusal to play out the last fire trial embraces her to venture out from an optimistic status and free her from the shackles of man-controlled society. Valiantly she stood firm to safeguard her womanhood and nobility. Sita is viewed as resolved who regardless of being tormented; violated the cultural standards by liberating herself from the human world. Her solicitation from mother earth to part is a demonstration of discipline for her better half in light of the fact that being an exemplification of equity and regulation he denied his significant other from equity. In this way, Sita decides to vanish with mother earth to free herself "I might not be able to have the life I wanted, but I could choose the manner of my death." (Divakaruni 245)

Since birth, the mind of an Indian lady is formed with the goals of Sita however society has confused her characteristics and intelligence. She is recollected by any kind of future family for her abstinence and ethereal nature in light of which the decrees of society anticipated that every lady should imitate the traits of her personality. The male-centric arrangement never perceived her genuine strength and consistently doled out her bendable picture to coordinate. The creator in the clever depicted her personality all the more convincingly. It's our general public for whom a lady

Copyright © authors 2022

is ideal till the time she is stifled past this her distinction and presence have no importance. The haziness of man-centric culture neglected to get the genuine characteristics of Sita. She is the person who brought up issues for her own freedoms as well as for the individuals who were the muffled victim. In Lanka, she monitored herself against the stink eyes and break shows to support her character. She is more self-assured about the choices she made in her life. She realizes how generally one can be gentle in any relationship without losing one's honor. 'Sitayan' overall is the strong string of stories that confers a clear extent into the existences of contemporary ladies. Her independent voice sheds new understanding into the name "Sita". Whenever a lady is honored with the well-known adage "may you be like Sita", it mirrors that a lady should have the two sides of her tendency of sublimity, of humanism, and simultaneously incensed to save her honor and nobility when it's at risk. Sita and Ahalya are the characters that are very much relatable in today's world. We can seek guidance and women can find a ground to live with honour without losing their individual shadows.

Works Cited

Divakaruni, Chitra Banerjee. *The Forest of Enchantments*. Harper Collins, 2019.

Satapathy, Amrita. "The Forest of Enchantments: Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Sitayan." *International Journal of English: Literature, Language and Skills*, Volume 8, Issue 2, July 2019, pp. 06-09.

Harris, Melanie L. *Gifts of Virtue*, Alice Walker, and Womanist Ethics.Palgrave, 2010.

Walker, Alice. *In Search of Our Mothers'* Gardens: Womanist Prose. Phoenix, 2005.

Copyright © authors 2022