

A Psychoanalytical Study of Female Characters in Volga's "The Liberation of Sita".

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Abstract:

This paper is an attempt to study the conscious of female characters portrayed in *The Liberation of Sita* – a collection of stories by Volga, a noted feminist writer in Telegu. It ascertains that how women suffers because of male dominated ideology and tries to depict the psychological turmoil of female characters during their suffering which eventually leads them towards learning and understanding of life. There is a supposition from the past that women belong to the world including their family members (as wife, sister, mother, and daughter) and it prevails in the society as an ideology of patriarchal dominance. Women always shed their love to their near and dear ones but never complain if it is not offered back to them. Weather it is mythology or history of literary tradition, everywhere women has been observed as inferior and suppressed creature. This study focuses on number of questions that awakes the conscious of mythological female characters - Sita, Surpanakha, Renuka, Ahalya and Urmila in *The Liberation of Sita*, such as; do they have some identity of their own? Whether their interests are taken into consideration by males? Why they are treated as the source of objectification? Is it necessary to sacrifice their wishes for the sake of Paativratyam dharma or for the sake of motherhood? Why they are always getting enquired to prove their chastity on the basis of suspicion? And why they are believed to be inferior and fragile? All these questions come forth in this work after having an introspection of the psyche of female characters that paved a way to make a psychological study in order to see their exploitation under the influence of males' chauvinism even in myth. This paper tries to investigate Paativratyam dharma and the concept of motherhood that governs the mind of female characters which is actually the cause of their suffering. Besides this, the study tries to highlight the submissive nature of women which is adhered to their minds as an inherited trait. It also attempts to show their gruesome and excruciated sufferings which ultimately lead them to state of comprehensive learning of life and their lives. The whole process of tormentation and agony leads them to seek liberation from patriarchal dominance which is vividly described in the masterpiece of Volga's *The Liberation of Sita*. These characters are portrayed as helpless creatures being the victims of male dominance and with the passage of time endure psychological turmoil which eventually leads them to see their real identity. They have realized that their worth is not more than an object and they have suffered extraneously but with progression they have attained the wisdom of life to be peaceful in their lives. Ultimately, at the end, it can be drawn after studying the psyche of female characters that they belong to themselves at first and should not sacrifice their wishes and ambitions to attain an illusionary happiness.

Keywords: Objectification, Paativratyam, Chauvinism, Volga, Dominance, Liberation.

Introduction:

The Liberation of Sita is an exquisite masterpiece in the field of Indian translation in English by T.Vijay Kumar and C. Vijaysree, originally written by Volga (Popuri Lalitha Kumari), a noted feminist writer in Telegu. The original title of this work in Telegu is *Vemukta* which is a collection of five stories. This study attempts to describe the conscious of the female characters, their awakening, learning and liberation from the patriarchal dominance so that they can see their real self and what actually they are. In this literary piece of art, instead of depicting the glimpses of Lord Rama's exile, killing of a demon Ravana, we encounter Sita's quest for her identity and of course the acquisition of knowledge of life through feministic insight that enables Sita and other female characters to get acquainted about their status and dignity in the eyes of male

counterparts. It can be regarded as an excellent example of feminist fiction in translation studies where writer seems enquiring in temper while representing the voice of females through the psychological exploration of the mythical characters of Sita, Urmila, Surpanakha, Rukmani and Ahalya. The methodology applied to this research is descriptive one and the psychoanalytical study is applied to all the five stories of this work so that we can see the inner state of mind of all the characters and visualize the actual reality, causes and consequences of their suffering. The objective of this study is to portray mythological female characters as victims of male's chauvinistic attitude and their liberation from it. The motivation for this study came after reading the mythological portrayals described by Volga with new dimensions of modernity adhered to her personality. It provides us an opportune to have psychological introspection of characters as well as the author. With the discussion of mythological characters it is actually an attempt to seek liberation towards individual independence and love for the self which is ultimately the outcome of this paper. This paper intends to represent the ideals of Sita being a devoted wife and the trauma she undergoes in her life. This whole process leads her to an enlightened state where she becomes self sufficient to see herself and can make her liberation. But the main focus of the study is to see the voice of mythical women with the tone of modern feministic critique. Meanwhile the focus will also highlight the patriarchal ideology of Rama towards Sita described in this work. If we look at the mythical portrait of Sita, she has been described by Sheeba V. Rajan in her study on "Lilamani as Sita: An ideal idol of Indian Womanhood and Wifeness" as "Sita in the epic *Ramayana* showed great wifely patience and forbearance" (1). In similar manner, other female characters described by the writer are also submissive, suppressed and sufferers and seek liberation through learning the reality of their existence. But it seems possible to the readers only when we study their internal conflicts of the mind.

Psycho analytical theory:

"Psychoanalysis itself is a form of therapy which aims to cure mental disorder by 'investigating the interaction of conscious and unconscious elements in the mind'" (96)

Sigmund Freud is the propounder of psychoanalytic theory, popularized during 1960's that stirs the whole field of literature and paved the way for making a new study of characterisation in literature and human personality in general. This Austrian psychological theorist has given us new dimensions to study the human behaviour and personality. He has given the concept of *Id*, *Ego* and *Superego* to study the conscious, unconscious and sub-conscious mind of a human being, to study the personality of a man/ woman in real sense. According to this critical theory, real personality of a human being lies beneath the layers of human mind. *Sublimation* and *Reaction* formation, concepts given by Freud are really relevant and applicable in context to the character of Sita and other female characters. Sublimation according to Freud, *"is the possibility that initially conscious awareness such as unresolved conflicts, unadmitted desires or traumatic past, if suppressed or left unaddressed by an individual, will ultimately shift into the individual's unconscious. An individual may also shift such suppressed desires into something grander i.e., more sublime than it actually is in reality"* (33) And Reaction Formation *"is the situation where a person undergoes transference of motives or reaction. A person who is too modest, too affectionate or too solicitous may actually harbor the opposite emotion. For example, a mother who lacks maternal instincts and resents her child may anxiously deny her actual impulses by behaving in a very concerned or overprotective manner towards the youngster"*. These terms are relevant to study the psychological turmoil of the character of Sita and the self realisation experienced by other female characters. Gurien within this context speaks, *"Of all the critical approaches to literature, this has been one of the most controversial, the most abused and least appreciated"* (Gurien 125). According to Charu Sheel Singh, *"Psychological criticism in the present context will, by and large, mean psychoanalysis"*(164). Rosemary H. Balsam in her study on, *"The War on Women on Psychoanalytic Theory building: Past to Present"* has defined this theory as, *"Psycho analysis, unfortunately, has been and still can prove a significant problem for women. This has taken the form of waging war on them by direct and indirect blind affirmations of the common antifemale bias"* (3)

Discussion:

Coleman views regarding to psychoanalysis is very apt and suggestive to have a psychoanalytical study of the character of Sita and other female characters described in the *Liberation of Sita*. Coleman says, "Of course, literature cannot provide either the theoretical or practical basis for understanding and treating specific cases of abnormal behaviour, but it does complement psychology in giving a different kind of understanding of such behaviour. Literature yields valuable information, for example, about personality dynamics, about mental disorders prevalent during a particular historical period the inner experiences of those who have undergone such disorders". (8) After taking this notion into consideration Sita can be seen a character who suffers and bear the torture as psychological disorder in her life because of Paativratyam dharma to which she always gets entangled. Following discussion justifies and tries to solve the riddle that how all the female characters suffer and their personality gets deteriorated with patriarchal chauvinism.

The very first story 'The Reunion' introduces the meeting of Sita and Surpanakha in the forest. And when Sita meets Surpanakha, her state of mind asserts readers about the care and affection that Sita feels for women and particularly for Surpanakha which becomes evident with the following lines:

Do women exist only to be used by men to settle their scores? Rama and Lakshmana would not have done this to Surpanakha. . .Rama's objective was to provoke Ravana, . . . to find a cause to start a quarrel with Ravana, was accomplished through Surpanakha. It was all politics. (4)

While taking characters, incidents and situations from the Hindu mythology, Volga tries to justify how even in mythology females are treated as a source of objectification. After studying the psyche of Sita we come to know that to harm Surpanakha was just the part of politics in order to have combat with the demon Ravana. Sita's conscious is further awakened when Surpanakha asks her number of questions that makes her more sympathetic and compassionate. She feels heartfelt towards Surpanakha's sufferings caused by her husband and Lakshmana. Sita believes that she might have bear gross humiliation during the time she has spent in the forest. She thinks sympathetically with full of concern towards her grief:

Has she spent all her life in loneliness?
Has she showered all her love on that garden?
Poor Surpanakha. (5)

At this point when we study the psyche of Sita, it comes to us as revelation that Surpanakha has received affection from the Mother Nature when she suffers and works as a guiding force in her life. We can also see the best example of humanism and concern for others through the character of Sita. Because she has not shown any cruelty towards Surpanakha to be the wife of a King instead she behaves in a very kind manner like a common woman. Sita feels grieved for the situations of Surpanakha.

Sita being a devoted wife, initially tries to suppress her mind and neglects her understanding of Paativratyam dharma as revealed to her by other characters. She bears mental distortions and intolerable sufferings given by her husband and takes it as a decision of fate without making even a single complaint. At his moment of time Sita is also disowned and lives in forest like Surpanakha but, '...Surpanakha could see peace and dignity. There was no trace of distress'. (9) Because the ideals of a devoted wife has taken place in the mind of Sita to such an extent that she is unable to see her wishes and interests which is her own and not of her husband. The character of Surpanakha is portrayed as a guiding force to Sita in order to strike her conscious that helps her in achieving liberation from the male dominance on her mind and personality. Therefore Surpanakha says:

don't look at how I am today and imagine the all this happened easily, Sita I have become tough by facing upto the challenges life threw at me. I have been able to find happiness in trying to understand the very meaning of beauty. (20)

Surpanakha's understanding of the life of a woman and of course about herself is echoing with the great saying of William Shakespeare i.e 'tis none to you, for there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so' (Act2, scene2, p11). At the same time it is an echo of the finest exemplary thought of John Milton occurs in 'Paradise Lost'. He says that the mind is in its own place can make hell out of heaven and

heaven out of hell. Surpanakha has learned this thing as the outcome of sufferings that happiness is a concept of mind and it is up to them whether to remain happy or sad about the situation. She feels bad about her disfigurement initially but later on she has started living her life with much vigour and strength. She says:

There is no difference between beauty and ugliness. I observed many living creatures and understand that moment and stillness are one and the same.....I, who hated everything including myself, began to love everything including myself. (24)

It reflects the phase of woman's suffering when she starts realising that suffering is imposed upon her and it is the desire of male that women should live in an excruciating and gruesome environment so that the shackle on women's mind can always be found. But at the same time it enhances the conscious of women to think why they actually suffer which Volga actually wants to convey through these characters. After making a psychological introspection of Sita's mind we also come to know about her *eco-feministic* approach when she is consoled by the Mother Nature in her moment of distress and solitude. She says, 'I too like the forest life. When Rama abandoned me, this forest softened my sufferings.' (24)

In second story "Music of the Earth" there is a strong depiction of male's chauvinistic ideology which is used against women to suppress them. It becomes clear when Rama says:

When I'm with you, your thoughts can't be elsewhere. If your mind veers away from me even for a fleeting moment. I can't bear it. (19)

These remarks of Rama show the control that a man wants to have on his wife, which is in fact an attempt of Rama to control the psyche of Sita so that she cannot even think of her own and make decisions of her life without consulting her husband. Sita at once come across Ahalya, another woman in this work who is disgraced by the society. And when she meets her and sees the expression of anger, anxiety, and fear on her face. It leads her to a state of wonder and amazement. It simply frightens Sita and pricks her conscious to think again on the role of her husband in her life. Rama is worried about the visit of Sita with Ahalya because he believed that it would make her more conscious and made her more questioning and introspective in nature. It is revealed when Rama says:

my mind did not wander elsewhere. I am thinking about what you said about Ahalya . . ." 'Rama sealed her lips In the intoxication of that kiss. (20)

But the sense of enquiry enforces her to ask her mother-in-law about Ahalya. Her mother-in-law also informs Sita about the ideology of male chauvinism. She says, "As you know men consider women objects of enjoyment" (21). Sita was already told by Ahalya that she was disowned by her husband for the mistake she had done unknowingly after getting deceived by Indra (God in Hindu mythology). Sita's mother-in-law also asserts the female psychological acceptance of male's ideological discourse that they have been made for them to be objectified. She says, "Whatever is written in one's fate will happen. There is nothing we can do" (22). Ahalya while narrating her story points out to her husband a question:

"Did I see through his (Indra) disguise?" (20)

But the question was relevant to her husband only. Sita retaliates that Rama only tries to see truth and untruth but Ahalya shackles her conscious when she says:

But he does enquire, doesn't he?' Ahalya said sarcastically

Meaning?

'Meaning...What does conducting an enquiry imply, Sita? Distrust, isn't it? Wouldn't it be better, instead to believe in either your innocence or guilt? (27)

This is the sturdy blow on Sita's face by Ahalya with the modern feministic voice. It enables Sita to think upon actions of her husband, although she is not complaining about her husband. Sita is compelled to think upon the situations that she faces and becomes more conscious about the actions of Rama through which he makes her deprived of various things according to her choice. Ahalya at the end blesses Sita and warns her that she should never agree for a trial and bow to the authority. Ahalya's question revisits the mind of Sita

that she shouldn't go for chastity test and also remembers her narrating that all men are same. Sita's belief of Paativratyam gets deteriorated with Ahalya sayings that lay spacious emphasis that she is nothing for her husband. And ultimately Sita starts realizing her miserable situations and liberating her from the concept of motherhood and Paativratyam dharma as a demolishing force for the identity of women. She says:

These children are not just my children, Rama. They are the symbols of the life force of this universe. I have realized that they belong to the whole universe. Of course, you and they too, believe that they belong to Ayodhya and are the heirs of Raghu Vamsa. You should act according to your belief. . .(40)
I am the daughter of Earth, Rama. I have realized who I am. (41)

These words uttered by Sita shows the complete alteration in her personality as she boldly and in a straightforward manner speak of her responsibility and also persuade her husband to be aware of his duties. She therefore emphasized Rama that the children also belong to him. At the same time she also highlights the relation of man to the universe. In this way she liberates her from the concept of Paativratyam dharma. The description of Sita is now entirely a strong character who speaks against her authoritarian husband also echoes in one of the finest poem of Nandini Suha's poem *Sukamaa* which is taken from her collection of poems i.e *Sukamaa and Other Poems*. She says:

I, Janaki, the mother of Lava-Kusha, demand justice today from the noblest king on earth, for the wrong done to a pregnant woman and her unborn children.
And justice for the fatherless teens. If justice cannot be given, what right has the king got to adorn Ayodhya's venerated throne?
Aren't his queen and sons a part of his subjects? Deserting three guiltless people, is it called honourable ethics?
Oh Lakshmana! As a citizen, do I, too, have some fundamental rights? (105)

In the third story 'Sand Pot', another female character gives presence and strike the conscious of Sita in order to liberate her completely. Rukmani Devi is introduced to the readers which is also a mythical character portrayed by Volga to show the females suffering and also made her a source of learning to Sita. She also suffers under the ideology of male chauvinistic attitude. It is revealed in the story that she was brutally killed by her own son Parshurama and under the orders of his father. Neither father is able to take care of his wife's emotions nor is son able to feel the pathos and cry of his mother. After her enlightenment she came to know about her identity and the real self. Therefore through her art she tries to project the fragile nature of women and links herself and woman in general to a pot, which can be broken anytime. So, she warns Sita:

If they understand that their Paativratyam and fidelity are like these sand pots, they will be live in peace. (50)

Rukmani Devi has liberated herself from the patriarchal ideology, renounced the Paativratyam dharma and the concept of motherhood and started living peacefully on her own with the help of art. She is portrayed as a character who brings morals to the readers especially for women which is also prevalent in one of the modern text written by Sudha Menon entitled as *Devi, Diva or She Devil* where the writer portrays the modern women with full of sufferings in the modern world of Business, corporate world, cinema and sports but at the same time highlights their moral courage by representing the modern women from different challenging fields who after facing challenges in life have overcome their problems and achieved their goals of life that they have set for themselves. Rukmani raised Sita's conscious more by saying:

A situation where children as their mother who their father is or where a husband asks his wife who fathered her children comes only in the lives of some women and you'll understand my words. (55)

Indirectly, her remarks are meant for Sita and conveys that she is trying to save her Paativratyam dharma but what has been done to her is just the outcome of mistrust and suspiciousness. These words continuously inflict the mind of Sita about her situation and the reasons behind that through the stream of consciousness. At the end of this story Sita reminds her trial by fire. She realizes the significance of the pot of Renuka and what it symbolizes. And why Ahalya, Renuka, and Sita herself suffers. It is all because of being the victims of mistrust and suspiciousness. Nature plays a great role in the life of most of the female characters as a

strong force to provide them comfort. Nature is highly influential in their lives as a strong psychological force and is represented as an encouraging source, affectionate like mother. It becomes clear when Sita lies in a mood of distress and sees no one in darkness, then utters the Mother Earth:

Am I not here, my girl? The affectionate words of Mother Earth gave her strength of a thousand elephants. (62)

The last story entitled 'The Liberated' describes the psyche of Lord Rama as an individual and husband as an authority. In an instance Sita asked her husband to tell her what is it that he loves the most about their relationship? Rama answers:

Protecting you like an eyelid protects the eye. If a thorn pierces your foot, I must pluck it out. I must, myself, kill the wild animals that approach you. The thought that I am protecting you gives me greater pride and pleasure than sovereignty over Ayodhya. (71)

These words clearly indicate the authorial psyche of Rama and enables Sita that she is also like an object or merely like property to her husband and has no special value in her husband's life. Rama's words depicts that he believes himself more powerful and projects himself as protector for her. Volga then attributes another mythical character with a voice and sense of questioning like a modern woman who speaks boldly for her rights and exploitation. Volga describes Urmila, the younger sister of Sita who speaks for her own sufferings that she also misses being a victim in Hindu mythology. She has not been taken into consideration when her husband Lakshmana went on exile with his brother Rama. She was treated as an object who is devoid of feelings and emotions. In her isolation, Urmila chooses to be in solitude. When Sita met her she shares her learning with Sita, and says:

What is anger? What is sorrow? What is joy?

What is the relation between my body and these feelings and emotions that I experience?

Many such questions they engulfed me. I began to observe my body, my thoughts, and the emotions they triggered within me, that's why I desired solitude. Not loneliness, solitude. The solitude in which I could converse within and with myself". (75)

Urmila also heightens the sense of questioning in the mind of Sita with proper logic and reasons behind their sufferings. She says that the sufferings occur in their lives due to the lack of power which is in possession of males. She has realized that power is the main cause of their sufferings through which men has made them deprived of realizing themselves of their identity and forces them to see themselves through the eyes of males that patriarchal chauvinism has set up for them since centuries ago. She says:

We must acquire this power Akka..... than I will feel I have liberated myself. I will feel only joy within myself! Great peace, Much love! Compassion for all. (77)

Sita is again troubled with the thoughts of her sister and is thinking whether this discourse has any role in her life or not. Undoubtedly it strikes her mind and enforces her to think upon the life she was living with the conception of Paativratyam dharma and the concept of motherhood. But she consoles herself as she thought Rama is a man of principles and cannot commit wrong at any cost. Volga at the end made the description of Sita as the character who is not weak and miserable as Rama believed but instead strong after she liberates herself. Sita, at the end appears even more protective to Rama than Rama is for her, narrator says:

by giving him his sons, Sita had cleared the way for, his liberation. She had always stood by him. She had always protected him. (97)

Findings:

1. If we look at mythological female characters, they are soulful, obedient and submissive towards males. Woman is sacrificing in nature, can do anything to save her Paativratyam dharma. But Volga has provided a voice to these mythical characters to speak for their own and narrate their life and the injustice that has caused a huge turmoil in their lives.
2. *The Liberation of Sita* has an objective of morality to the readers. The moral determines that it is not bad to follow traditions to be an obedient wife like Sita, the savior of Paativratyam dharma or to hold

the concept of Motherhood but at the same time it is essential to see themselves at an individual level in order to see their real self, so that they cannot get exploited through patriarchal chauvinism.

3. Peace for women is important and they must be careful about it so that, if required, they can liberate themselves to have peaceful living in spite of being miserable creatures. In this way women can diminish all their sufferings.
4. Women suffers in this particular literary piece of translation because they lacks power so it should be the prime concern of all modern women to seek power and gets liberated from the authorial power of males being husband, brother, father, Boss etc.
5. Volga has provided a favorable justice to the mythological characters. It becomes possible with her attempt to give an opportune to these female characters to speak for their rights who are shunned of from centuries ago.

Conclusion:

To sum up, we can say that the female characters portrayed by Volga is depicted as traumatic who suffers, experience, learns and liberate themselves from males' dominance and their patriarchal ideology which is entirely hypocritical towards them and not in favor of their interests. The following statement that occur in the study of Negin Heidarizadeh, '*The Significant Role of Trauma in Literature and Psychoanalysis*', is properly apt and suggestive for all the leading mythical characters described in *The Liberation of Sita*. She further emphasized it by saying, "Significantly, trauma does not always have a negative meaning;.....It is a movement which illustrates an episode of changing which begins from trauma, suffering and pain to knowledge and understanding; it is this female psychoanalysis development that makes the novels receptive to feminist-psychoanalysis reading" (4). All these mythological characters have experienced the evolution through which they have liberated themselves. They have faced pain, anguish, anxiety and trauma throughout the story and finally it leads them to new understanding of life and to see themselves in real sense. It helps them to liberate themselves from the clutches of patriarchal chauvinism. In short we can say that Volga tries to acquaint the women to put herself into the text as well as into the world and history by her own moment, a notion which is highly emphasised by Helene Cixous in *The Laugh of the Medusa*. Even if we look minutely at the TV serial *Ramayana* made by Ramanad Sagar also fails to provide least opportunity to female characters where they can hardly speak for themselves. They have been portrayed as submissive, obedient and sufferable creatures. But in *The Liberation of Sita*, Volga provides platform to everyone where they can speak for themselves. Characters are given an opportunity to see their consciousness and realize that sufferings are not in their fate but power is the root cause of their suffering and must be attained to eradicate their sufferings.

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