

Review:

**Nandini Sahu's *Sita-A Poem*
(The Poetry Society of India, New Delhi, 2014)**

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Interpretation of Ramayana is written and re-written by several authors and poets; the interpretations focus on the character of Lord Rama and '*Rama Rajya*'. '*Sita - A Poem*', written by Prof. Nandini Sahu, is a long poem deconstructing the character of Sita from *Ramayan*. It is not only the account of sufferings and sacrifices made by Sita but vociferous accounts about evolution of a woman; one who is not only a wife but an independent single mother, a daughter, a daughter in law, a wife, and a princess. The poem is written in a strong tone, and it expresses intense emotions. The poet describes her feelings and resentment towards a patriarchal society. The repetition of phrase 'Oh Rama!' is done to evoke the emotions of readers that they are asking the direct question in the expectation of an answer. Throughout the poem language is lucid, thought provoking, metaphorical, and full of events from mythology, history—yet the poem is most contemporary, asking the existential questions of life to the readers.

We have Sita in day to day live characters as in a girl who is denied education is Sita; the girl who has been harassed for dowry is Sita; the aborted unborn female fetus is also Sita; and the one who was raped in moving bus in Delhi is also Sita.

Call her what you may – Sita, Janaki.

Vaidehi, Ramaa – she is Woman.

She is every woman, the propagated, interpolated role model. (Sahu: 1)

Woman is not only shown as subjected to crime and injustice but also the prowess images of empowered women are there in the book. With the tools like

education and awareness, woman is marking her presence discernible. For example the readers can find Sitaas much in Florence Nightingale and Mother Teresa.



With every line of 'Sita - A Poem', one can go through the journey of a woman from history to present. Each line speaks something about present atrocities and limited choices of women whereas it also gives the account of existence and tolerance of woman. An age long phrase 'respect woman' will always exist as for not being respected ever. Can respect be something to be bargained for? Or will this phrase of demand exist forever? A woman is a human being as well and respecting her like the other counterpart is something she deserves. When will a country like India become first world country? It cannot become first world nation without providing enough social security to the woman followed by the fact of political and financial security that definitely comes later. Although financial security gives independence while political one provides stand to a woman but the question is where the society reaches being intolerant towards woman.

According to United Nations, women empowerment general issues are realization of self worth, right to have their choice, equal opportunity, power to regulate their lives, and ability to contribute in creating a more just social and economic order. Are these issues applicable for third world country like India or nations like India? After long time, still the voice of Sita seems unheard. India has a never ending list of atrocities committed against woman as honor killing, denial of property rights, dowry subjugation, lack of legal protection, 'housewife' status, sexual exploitation and so on and so forth. Patriarchal society has seasoned the women into malleable creatures. To prove this here is an instance from 'Manusmriti' the position of woman is as it is quoted "as a girl, she should obey and seek protection of her father, as a young woman her husband, and as a widow her son". These are derogatory, sexist and misogynistic laws which society is following since ages. There are many controversial scriptures too available as highlighted by the other religions going against the honor of women among Hindus. A scripture from *Ramchaarit Manas*, goes as: '*Dhol Gawanr Shudra Pashu Nari, Yeh Sab Tadan ke Adhikari*'. It is to be noted that simply pulling out the word woman 'Nari' and declaring that Tulsidas told women are ought to be beaten and scolded 'Tadanke Adhikari' as per Hindu treatises. Thus, the complete sentence should be comprehended within the context of the story as Drum, Ignorant, Illiterates, Animals and Women are ought to respect boundaries.

The paradox is 'Sita' is the epitome of womanhood while on the one hand she is a dutiful wife and has crossed her boundaries (abducted). According to the epic, woman should be treated like illiterate and animals. In contrast to this 'Sita - A Poem':

Frailty, thy name is not woman. But I have
Learnt, the feeble and freckle mind of a woman
For the golden-deer became her hydra -headed monster.

(Sahu:28)

Its unpretentious brilliance is revealed in strong yet subtle imagery, and the natural and autobiographical tone heightens its poignancy. The imagery of Hydra-headed monster is not only used to denote a destroyer it is more like a metaphor for woman's power of self sustenance and recreation like Mother Nature.

In 'Sita - A Poem', every form of woman is treated as the incarnation of Sita. Every woman who is suffering and even those who have made their own way and been surviving with honour in the male chauvinist society, all are incarnations of Sita. Female infanticide is very common in metropolitans; more the medical facilities are more atrocities towards woman, at least in India. Sahu says:

Even today, there are men
eating flesh of loving kids and draining their tender bones
in a drain in Noida; there are parents killing and
some resulting dead bodies in the trauma centre of AIIMS

(Sahu:24)

Is it necessary to bind a woman with a 'term' Feminism or Womanism is not enough to voice a woman. In the country like India where lies the paradoxes about the sexuality and role of women, it will be always a mystery to solve, of course, for machismo Indian men. Intellectual souls like Nandini Sahu, Kamala Das, Meena Alexander, Bharti Mukherjee etc. giving new definition for woman's identity and her freedom of living on her own.

Television and cinema are the powerful medium in connecting huge geographical areas. Do they have a responsibility? Is it really carrying its responsibility well? Well, No! Indian television is busy carrying woman's exotic image and establishing India as a land of snakes and magic. On the awareness side, television is more focused on the recent government policies and comparison of the success of present government with the failure of previous one. Where is woman from the picture? It is the misogynist media seasoning woman about her submissive duties. Being a powerful medium, television and cinema have responsibility of correct portrayal of woman. Woman could only be seen as sacrificing idol or a vamp, all in all as brainless creatures.

So from a general point of view, 'Sita - A Poem' will be compared with two women centric movies; first one being Rajkumar Santoshi's 'Lajja' which has two binary characters i.e. men and women. Men are named with the synonyms of Lord Ram whereas women are named with the similar names of Mata Sita. For example: antagonists (symbolizing patriarchy) in the movie are 'Purushottam', 'Raghuvir' and 'Gajendra'. And protagonists of the movie are 'Vaidehi', 'Janki', 'Maitali' and 'Ramdulari'. Important point to be noted is that woman is not fighting for economic freedom but she is basically striving for basic right of sustainability. 'Let live' is the basic demand which the movie conveys. In the poem, Ravana, Lakshman and Ram all are symbolizing patriarchy. It also highlights that the root cause of third world country woman is different from that of the woman of the first world. Second movie being the latest one by Anirudh Roy Chaudhury is 'Pink'. While promoting the film Mr. Amitabh Bachchan said in an interview to TOI (Sep 16, 2016)— "It's very embarrassing when we visit abroad and people there say *You are from India, the land of rapes*. I want that to go. I don't like it when people call us a third world country or developing country'. The movie is pivotal in putting forward the woman's voice which has been ignored since long. The whole proposition of movie is about the wrong images of woman carved out by the patriarchal society. Viewers would see Sita in all the three female characters of the movie that are fighting against all odds to be heard. Fate of a woman is still same. Purity, sanctity, grace, dharm all are fragile if its concern to woman bearing a delicate thread which can be broken with slightest effort.

And the question which we see in the poem is asked by Sita, not only from her husband but also from the whole society. If there is Ram for every Ahalya, where was he when a girl of 24, Nirbhaya (The unfortunate rape case) was brutally raped and murdered in a moving bus in Delhi. Ram is the symbol of law and order made for the protection of women.

From India to the farthest US, there is no change in the status of woman. She is treated as an object from the first world to the third world. The safety and security for woman is in the agenda of all politicians; they appear to work on it but have not done anything so far. Politician like Mulayam Singh Yadav (Former CM, UP) defends rapist of Badaun, a village in Utter Pradesh, by saying “*Rape ke liye phaansi dena ghalat hai, ladkon se ghalti ho jaati hai, hum satta mein aaye to kanoon mein badlav karenge* (Handing death sentence for rape is not fair... boys make mistakes... there will be changes in the law if we come to power)”. An All India Women’s Congress (AIWC) president Shobha Oza said, “It was unfortunate that politicians talk in such an ‘insensitive’ manner on issues related to woman. On the other hand, globally speaking, Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump gave sexist comment on his opponent Hillary Clinton. Other than this, he has said lot many foul words in defaming the gender and accusing woman for taking undue advantage of being woman (using sexuality as a tool).

Concluding the article, here are a few lines from *Trump: The Art of the Come-back* “Women have one of the great acts of all time. The smart ones act very feminine and needy but inside they are real killers. The person who came up with the expression ‘the weaker sex’ was either very naive or had to be kidding. I have seen women manipulating men with just a twitch of their eye — or perhaps another body part.”Remember the words are coming from US Presidential candidate. This is probably the image of woman in the first world or the third world. Poet invokes woman to have courage and stand for what is right; it is quoted like-

You aren't adored
Like Maheshwari or Saraswati. Wake up to
The call of Nirbhaya, let them call it blasphemy.

So, in the above line, blasphemy does not convey the literal meaning but actually the word used for great disrespect and disbelief for the government.

A futuristic movie 'Matrubhoomi: A Nation without Women' by Manish Jha is the depiction of dystopia in an Indian village populated exclusively by males due to female infanticide over the years. The film examines the impact of female feticide and female infanticide on the gender balance and consequently the stability and attitudes of society.

Even matrilineal society (Kerala and Northern India) could not be the possible answer to the desirable respectful status of the woman. Every society is changing, of course, for the betterment but the final destination of every woman cannot be like Thomas Hardy's pessimist heroines who are born only to suffer. Not even the 'Israeli Kibbutzim' which practices gender equality. It is neither matrilineal nor patriarchy. In the book *Sociology: Themes and Perspective*, M Haralambos describes Kibbutzim as an 'ideology emphasized sexual equality and rejected the Western pattern of parental roles, especially the mother role. In particular there was reaction against the traditional 'Jewish mamma', the supposedly overprotective Jewish mother'. (Haralombos: 394) Even in this system, the gender based discriminations are made. So if Sita says 'Lav-Kush. They are 'Sita-Putra'. She does not indicate to matrilineal setup, rather she is emphasizing upon the importance of single-handed parenthood which she was providing to her teen kids.

Is any society or world notion is competent enough to answer the questions raised by 'Sita - A Poem'. Even matrilineal societies in India are not the answer to it because the pattern is changing with time and the nurturing the kids is taken as the weakest attribute of woman. Lav-Kush, Biggest question to utopia, if ever it had happen or it will happen, is raised by Sahu in the given lines as it say:

In your *Rama Rajya*, is this the law of nature?
Oh you preserver of justice, you accomplished
'*dinajanarakshna*', the weak man's protection
And '*mitrajanarakshna*' in the *KishkindhaKanda*.

Will it be as just as nature if there were to be ever the *Ram-Rajya*? Given lines is an expression of paradoxes of patriarchy. Being optimistic, it could be hoped that woman gets the right to choose the father of her child someday; the time may come when only she has the right to choose his partner and father of her children. Hope the society and family would not decide 'the master' of her. She could say *no* to anyone from the lecherous man to the suitable groom.



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