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## A Critical Analysis of the Character of Sita in Valmiki's Ramayana

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### Abstract

**Aims:** *Sita, the heroine of the Ramayana, was the daughter of King Janaka of Mithila and Queen Sunaina. She was found in a furrow as a baby. Sita grew up to be a beautiful, compassionate and wise princess, embodying grace and virtue. Her marriage to Prince Rama was arranged through a contest where suitors had to string a powerful bow. With divine strength, Rama broke the bow and won Sita's hand in marriage. Their union symbolized a loving and ideal relationship, grounded on mutual respect and duty.*

**Methodology and Approaches:** *When Rama was exiled to the forest for fourteen years, Sita chose to accompany him instead of staying in the luxurious palace. They endured isolation and hardship in the forest, living righteously and a simple life. From the forest Ravana, the demon king of Lanka, abducted her, driven by his infatuation. Rama, with the help of Hanuman, waged a great war against Ravana to rescue Sita.*

**Outcome:** *Later on, when Sita returned to Rama she faced the trial of Agni Pariksha to prove her chastity. However, Sita was exiled once again, this time to the forest alone, where she found refuge with Sage Valmiki and gave birth to twin sons, Lava and Kusha. At last, Sita was summoned by the Earth, her divine mother, to return to her original home. The earth opened and took her in, ending her earthly life.*

**Conclusion and Suggestions:** In order to know the character of Sita clearly, it is analysed at five levels as shown in this article. The five levels are: (A) Sita as a daughter, (B) Sita as a wife, (C) Sita as a daughter-in-law, (D) Sita as a mother, and (E) Sita as a woman.

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Sita, the heroine of the *Ramayana*, was the daughter of king Janaka of Mithila and Queen Sunaina. She was found in a furrow as a baby. In order to know the character of Sita clearly, it is analysed at five levels as shown and explained below. Sita is cared by the king and the queen from the very moment she was found. They took her as a precious child. Sunaina looked up at the sky and drew in a deep breath. She turned to Janak and said that they found her in a furrow in Mother Earth. It was like a mother's womb for her. So they called her Sita.

Sita's birthday had been established as a day of celebration by royal authority. They did not know the actual date of her birth. So they celebrated the day she had been found in the furrow. On the sixth day of her birth, gifts and alms were distributed to the poor in the city, like it was done, on every especial day. The queen and the king treated Sita as a especial child. After the public ceremonies, the royal couple had arrived to the massive temple of Lord Rudra. The temple priest offered prasada to the royal family after the prayers. Sunaina touched the feet of the priest and then led Sita by the hand to a wall by the side of the *garva griha*. On the wall, a plaque had been put up in memory of the vulture that had died defending Sita. A mask of its face had been made before the bird was cremated with honour. Cast in metal, the mask recorded the last expression of the vulture as it left its mortal body. Sita had made her mother relate the whole story on several occasions. Sunaina had been happy to comply. She wanted her daughter to remember. Sita touched the mask gently. And as always, she shed a tear for the one who had also given her the gift of life. In this context the following lines are worth quoting, "The seven-year-old Sita had been playing with her father in his private office when Janak's chief guru, Ashtaavakra, had walked in. Janak had bowed to his guru, as was the tradition, and had requested him to sit on the throne assigned for him" (25)

In the above quotation, it is clear that Sita was very close to her father when she was young and she grew up as a loving daughter. Sita touched the feet of Janak and Janak blessed her. She also touched the feet of Rishi Ashtaavakra and walked out of the chamber. Sita is devoted to her elders since her childhood. As she crossed the door, Sita stopped and hid behind the door out of Janak's eye sight, but within earshot. She desired to hear what question had been troubling her

father. This shows that Sita is trying to help her father since childhood. The young Sita stood nonplussed. She had heard whisperings in the corridors of the palace. Her father was becoming increasingly eccentric that they were lucky to have a pragmatic queen in Sunaina to look after the country.

Sita's mother had not taken her to the slums abutting the fort walls. When the last time she had asked, she had at last been given an explanation. She had been told that it could be dangerous. That someone could get beaten up over there. Sita believed that her mother was just making excesses. Finally, eccentricity had gotten the better of her. Concealed in the clothes of a maid's child, Sita slipped out of the palace. An oversized angvastram was wrapped around her shoulder and ears, serving a cover. Her heart was beaten with excitement and nervousness. She repeatedly looked behind to assure that no one noticed her embark on her little adventure. Sita passed the Lord Rudra temple garden late in the afternoon and stole into the slums. Her mother's words were heard in the ears; she had armed herself with a large stick. Now, for over a year she had been practising stick-fighting. As she entered the slum area, she bilked up her nose. Assaulted by stench she looked back at temple garden, feeling the courage to turn back. But immediately, the excitement of doing something banned took over. She had waited a long time for this. She went farther into the slum quarters. The houses were made of bamboo sticks and randomly spread cloth awnings. The confined space between the houses served as the streets on which people walked through the slums. These streets also served as open toilets, drains and open-air animal shelter. There were excreta and mud everywhere. Sita pulled her angvastram over her nose and mouth, absorbed and appalled at the same time.

Outside a slum house, a mother was feeding her child from a thrifly plate. Maybe her baby was two or three years old. He sat in his mother's lap, bubbling happily as he dodged the morsels from her hand. Every now and then, he compelled the mother and opened his mouth with dramatic concession, allowing her to stuff small morsels of food into his mouth. Then, it would be the mother's turn to coo in delight. Pleasing as it was, this was not what allured Sita. A crow sat next to the woman. And she fed every other morsel to the bird. The crow waited for its turn. The woman fed them both turn by turn. It is worth to quote the following lines in this context, "Sita smiled. She remembered something her

mother had said to her a few days back: Often the poor have more nobility in them than the actual nobility.” (28)

From the above quotation it is believed that Sita’s mother had taught Sita the lesson of life since childhood. And Sita was also happy to see the lesson that happened at real life. Sita loved the good sight of others. She also liked to experiment new things so she visited the slum. Sita turned around. She had seen enough the slums for her first trip. She promised herself that she would again return soon. From among those princes who come to win Sita’s hand, Prince Rama is the only one who can lift the bow and pass the test to get the hand of Sita. After the marriage of Rama and Sita, they become husband and wife. From the very moment of the marriage Sita is very much devoted to her husband Rama. Sita becomes an ideal wife and she is a symbol of loyalty and devotion to Rama. Rama also loves Sita dearly and cares for Sita. Rama and Sita have spent twelve years happily in Ayodhya.

Dasharatha loves Rama the most among his four sons and Rama being the eldest son, Dasharatha decided to hand over the throne to Rama. The king’s decision of handing over the throne to Rama spread all over the country of Ayodhya. Everyone in the city was happy but Manthara, a maid servant of Kaikeyi, speaks hateful words of Rama and reminded Kaikeyi of the two boons Dasharatha had granted her long ago, in the battlefield when she saved his life, boons that she had yet to claim. That night, when the king came to Kaikeyi’s courtyard expecting a happy welcome of Kaikeyi but in contrast of it she asked to send Rama to the forest where he had to live as a hermit for fourteen years and Bharata be made the king of Ayodhya.

Rama left Sita and went to the king in answer to the message brought by Sumantra. Sita was expecting Rama to return in a chariot with the royal umbrella, followed by a great retinue. But Rama returned alone, unattended, with none of the royal insignia. And she noted on his face the glow of some fixed resolve. Rama was thinking as he came how he could break to his beloved the news that his father had decreed that he was to go to the forest. It is worth to quote the following remark of C.Rajagopalchari in this regard, “Something troubles the mind of my lord, thought Seeta, ‘but what can anything matter so long as there

is our love?’’ And she asked him:’’ What is the matter? Why do you look so strangely?’’ (Rajagopalchari. *C.Ramayana* 95)

From the above remark it is clear that Sita knows something strange happening to Rama. But Sita exclaims that nothing can matter so long while there is love. Sita is ready to face any strange things that may happen to them. And one important thing is that when addressing Rama, Sita uses the words ‘my lord’ and that shows that Sita takes Rama as her God. As an ideal wife she has a deep respect for her husband. In response to Sita, Rama told the story of the king who had promised the two boons to Kaikeyi. When Sita heard this unexpected story, her love for Rama manifested itself as anger that she could consent to part with him and live in comfort in the palace while he was a homeless wanderer in pathless forests. Sita expresses her desire as:

I have long wished to go to the woods with you and rejoice in the sight of great mountains and rivers. I shall spend the time most happily among the birds and flowers, bathing in the rivers and doing the daily rites. Away from you, I do not care for Heaven itself. I shall surely die if you leave me behind. I implore you to take me with you. Have pity on me. Do not forsake me now. (96)

Sita, instead of living in the palace without Rama, thought of following Rama in the forest and spend their time together happily. In the forest with Rama she wanted to rejoice the sight of great mountains and rivers. She dared to spend her time happily among the birds and flowers by bathing in the rivers and doing the daily rites herself. She said that she didn’t even like to live in Heaven if she had to part with Rama. This shows her deep devotions to Rama. Sita as a daughter-in-law, embodies the virtues of devotion, respect, and resilience. In the *Ramayana*, Sita marries Rama, the prince of Ayodhya, and seamlessly integrates into his family, showing deep respect for her in-laws, particularly for Rama’s father, king Dasharatha, and his stepmother, Kaikeyi.

Sita’s character exemplifies the ideal daughter-in-law, balancing her duties towards her husband and family while maintaining her strength and integrity, especially during her trials in exile and captivity. Sita’s unwavering loyalty to Rama and her ability to uphold her values under adversity further highlight her significance as a role model in familial relationships.

In traditional Indian culture, the role of a daughter-in-law is pivotal. Sita is expected to uphold family values, maintain harmony, and contribute to household duties while navigating complex relationship with her in-laws. Sita embodies these expectations serving as a model for many women. Her action reflects the virtues traditionally associated with a good daughter-in-law, making her a timeless figure of strength and devotion.

Sita's marriage to Rama is marked by mutual respect and love. When she chooses Rama as her husband, she not only shows her passion but also aligns herself with the values he represents - duty, virtue and righteousness. This union of values is foundational for her role as a daughter-in-law; it establishes her commitment to Rama's family and their legacy. Upon their arrival to Ayodhya, Sita shows grace and humility. She embraces her role within the family, treating her in-laws --- King Dasharatha and Queen Kaikeyi with love and showcases her ability to navigate familial relationships delicately. She embodies the ideal daughter-in-law, participating in family rituals and traditions, which reinforces her commitment to her new home.

Sita's respect for her in-laws is evident throughout her story. She stands by Rama, supporting him during his trials and demonstrating loyalty even in challenging circumstances. For example, when Rama is exiled, Sita chooses to accompany him, a decision that highlights her unwavering commitment to her husband and, by extension, his family. This act not only strengthens her bond with Rama but also showcases her role as a supportive daughter-in-law willing to endure hardships for the family's honor.

The exile marks an important turning point in Sita's life. Her choice to follow Rama into the forest, leaving behind the comforts of palace life, reflects her deep love and sense of duty. During their time in exile, Sita faces numerous challenges, yet she remains resolute. Her strength during these trials underscores her role as a daughter-in-law who not only supports her husband but also upholds the family's honour in the face of adversity.

Sita gave birth to child in the forest alone. If she has been in the palace this would have been a great event; she would have been surrounded by her sisters, mother-in-law, servants and midwives. Music would have been played, sweets would have been distributed and banners would have been unfurled. But

there in the forest she was all alone, lying behind a rock, on soft green grass, watching the stars all night, bearing the pain until Aruni, goddess of dawn, appeared in the sky and encouraged her to give the final push.

The rules of impurity and purity, so important in a palace, are not applied in the forest. She had to be up on her feet immediately to take care of herself, eat the berries and the fruits and the shoots and roots that would give her enough energy to feed her baby. Valmiki was busy writing his songs and his wife had to pasture for food for her children. She could not be hoped to feed Sita too, and her newborn. Valmiki named the boy Luv and looked over him while he slept so that Sita could have some time for herself, to gather firewood and bathe, collect some water, tend to her little kitchen garden and collect some clay from the riverbank to make a few pans and pots.

Soon the boy was able to crawl. One day, when Sita was away, and Valmiki was lost in writing the verse portraying the eve of Rama's coronation, Luv simply wandered away. Valmiki suddenly felt an uneasy silence and came to know that the baby was gone. He searched Sita's hut and his hut and found no trace of the boy. The boy was found nowhere. Valmiki was filled with terror. Then he heard Sita returning by singing her favourite lullaby. In panic, Valmiki collected some Kusha grass, bundled it in the shape of a doll, and used the power of siddha collected through months of tapasya to create a child who had the very likeness of Luv. Sita walked in with Luv in her arms. Then she saw the other child in Valmiki's lap. Sita did not question or admonish Valmiki. She just picked Kush up and turning to Luv said, 'See, you have a brother. A twin brother.'

Sita stands on a pedestal of her own. She is inaccessible. There she will stand, as she has always stood, through the ages. She will shine truly for all time as the one with glowing ideal of womanhood. Nevertheless, the passing of time and the contact with western civilisation have inclined, may be, to a slight change, just now in the attitude to that ideal. Glorious and great as she is, she is not all that she should be. She may be said to lack some basic qualities according to present-day notions. Sita is too submissive and too gentle. A wife may be devoted and loyal to her husband, yet she need not on that account wholly surrender herself to him. No woman, however low, should be depressed of her individuality if it can be helped. Man should give her what is her due. A lady nurtured on western ideas



and culture can understand the wife standing by her husband in sorrow and in happiness, and serving him faithfully in his hour of need. He can certainly appreciate the wife working in accordance with him undergoing the arduous hardships, if need be, for a great cause. But he can see nothing to admire in her completely losing her personality in that of her husband without the will of her own. That a woman should have no independence, no separate existence at all from her husband's, is a slight ideal offered to the entire womanhood, is probably the feeling held by the more advanced people today. People think that the ideal which robs a woman of her right to act for herself is an ideal not worth much. The father protects woman in childhood, the husband in youth, and the son in old age. A free life does not befit a woman; is one with little sense in it and, therefore, fit to be discarded. The affinity of the modern woman to regard this unquestioning faith of the wife in the husband as rather extreme, is perhaps responsible for her being left somewhat cold on reading the sublime story of Sita. Even the great Rama can hardly have a right to do with Sita as he pleased.

In the *Ramayana*, readers meet Sita for the first time in ‘‘Ayodhya Kanda’’ when Rama comes to her to tell the news of his having to dwell in the forest as exile for fourteen years. Greatly dismayed on seeing him looking low and downcast, she asks him the reason for the change in his appearance and Rama gently breaks to her the terrible news that his father has banished him to the forest. Then, he yields to give her a bit of advice that in his absence she must do this and that and how she must be careful not to speak of him before Bharata. These words of Rama slightly hurt Sita because Rama has spoken of going away without her, she only tells him with these words: ‘‘Why, Rama, how is it you speak so lightly of so serious matter!’’ But Rama, thinking of the hardships to be endured in the forest, hesitates to take her along with him. He describes to her at length, of the wild beasts and other horrors of the forest. Sita meets them all with great spirit. Here readers find no menial submission of the wife to the husband. It is the wife who is assuredly having her own way and only the husband giving it. Rama is dubious to take her with him in spite of all that she says. He still tries to deter her and then, driven to despair, but she drops her adjuration and begins to taunt him:



O! What will my father, King of Mithila,  
think after having got as his son-in-law,  
O Rama ! the embodiment of manliness ,  
when you behave like a woman?

(Web: 5:30pm, 6 November 2024)

Usually these words are brought up against Sita as a colossal transgression of duty. Surely a wife enjoying the endless love of her husband can say in private what she pleases, with exemption.

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