

## GENDER AND SOCIETY IN INDO-ANGLIAN LITERATURE IN REFERENCE TO *SITA: AN ILLUSTRATED RETELLING OF THE RAMAYANA* BY DEVDUTTA PATTNAIK

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**Abstract:**

*Indo-Anglian literature has given new dimension to the old beliefs and customs without disturbing the core beliefs of society. Devdutta Pattanaik, who put feminist approach to gender and society in Sita and created a new picture of Sita who is strong and firm enough to take her own decisions.*

**Keywords:** *feminist, gender, mythology, society, identity.*

**About Indo-Anglian Fiction:**

Indo Anglian literature is the literature by Indian writer who writes in English language and whose native language could be one of the numerous languages of India. It is also associated with the writer of Indian diaspora. It comes under the border realm of postcolonial literature. There is much change in the early Indo- Anglian literature and modern Indo- Anglian literature. So, it is getting much attention all over the world. Modern Indo-Anglian literature has given the new sight to the fundamental beliefs, customs, and religion and sometime it has given a shake to the fundamental beliefs of society. Some writers like Devdatt Patnaik; Amish Tripathi has given the new dimension to the mythology. They interpreted the mythology, ancient scripture stories from new prospect. Gender and Society depicted in early Indo Anglian literature was different from the modern one.

**Gender and Society in Indo-Anglian Fiction:**

Gender and society are interconnected to each other and gender gets its identity through society. Gender gets shape from the society and society gets shaped from literature. As Simone de Beauvoir said, "One is not born a woman, one become one."

In the Indo-Anglin literature female gender depiction has changed it has the influence of movements like feminism. Feminist approach to literature is concerned with the gender, role, position, and impact of women in a literary text. It is not only concern with literature but it is socio-political issue that fights for the social, economic and political rights and for the cultural place of women. It also examines that weather a literary

text expresses a particular patriarchal ideology or challenges it.

**Devdutt Pattanaik:**

Devdutta Pattanaik is an Indian author who writes in English, so come under Indo- Anglian writer. He is known for his work on Indian mythology and he tries to interprets Indian ancient scriptures, stories, symbols, rituals form different prospective or we can call from modern prospective. In the formation of society, ideology of society mythology also plays an important role. His opinion is that "no society can exist without myth as it creates notions of right and wrong, good and bad, heaven and hell, rights and duties." (*Hindustan Times*). He has deep knowledge of Indian mythology and through his writing he try to show simplified version of myths through which simplifies notion of rights and duties can be form. In *Sita* he reconstructs the sweet submissive image of Sita who accepted all the patriarchal norm and accepts all the prejudice made to her.

***Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana* by Devdutta Pattanaik:**

It is story of Ramayana which is retold from female's prospective. In mythology Sita is shown as a victim of patriarchal society and who accepts everything meekly but Devdutta Pattanaik's Sita's silence is loud enough that the patriarchal society is forced to think Ramayana from her prospective. In *Sita*, Sita is a feminist character and who challenges patriarchal society and its ideology. Sita's childhood was spent in listening on discussions on Veda's and Upnishada's by this she understand purpose of living. She was well versed in many languages due to her interaction with many sages. Not only Janaka but other sages also know about her cleverness. In interaction with Vishwamitra, he noticed that Janaka's daughters used to ask question like Gargi and sons of Dasharath were preferred obeying commands. Janaka told her at the time of marriage to bring happiness into the marriage, rather than seek happiness from it. He knows that his daughter does not need to seek for happiness but she herself is the fountain of peace and happiness.

Sita was physically strong enough to play with Shiva's bow which was not handled by many strong people. After her rescue she killed Ravana's twin, a demon with thousand head, stronger than Ravana then was she not able to kill Ravana herself? Sita could have freed herself by her own strength. But it is her husband's honor at stake.

Ram knows that his wife is strong enough to understand the duty of king and queen. He never tried to control her, he has given her freedom to take decision and she always did what she thinks better. Ram also admits that she never listen to others. He once said to Laxman that "When I told her to stay in the palace, she insisted on accompanying me to the forest. When you told her to stay inside the hut in the forest, she insisted on stepping out. When I was rude and tried to set her free from the obligations of marriage after I killed Ravana, she insisted on walking through fire, displaying her chastity, and returning to this city with me. If I tell her that she is the subject of gossip and so cannot be associated with me in any way, she will ask complex questions that I will not be able to answer." (Sita, 274) This conversation shows that Sita was very firm in making decisions and don't just follow the patriarchal belief. She accompanies Ram in forest to take care of him and Laxman because she always thinks as a mother as they are her responsibility. When Ravana took her to Lanka their also she felt miserable not for herself but for the Dashratha's sons. 'She would manage herself, but would they?' This is the perfect feminist attitude of Sita that, 'women, strong enough to take care of herself but is men independent enough to manage everything by himself alone?'

#### **Ram in Devdutt Pattanaik's Sita**

From feminist point of view Ram always treated as a man who did injustice with Sita. But Ram never lived his life as a husband. He always lived as a scion of Raghu clan or King of Ayodhya. Ram once said to Sugriva as a king you should take care of all like father takes care of his children.

He always thinks Sita as his better half who could understand him as she is also a queen of Ayodhya. As a husband he never try to dominate her. He does not need to control over a wife to be a husband. After killing Ravana, Ram rescued Sita but he does not stake any claim of her. He neither punishes her nor accepted her. In ancient time sages does not accepted such women and they cursed them. But Ram set her free and Sita has not accepted this, she proved her chastity with the bonfire.

In today's circumstances this decision of Ram is not acceptable as a husband but it has to think from Kings Prospect, at that time women used to be headed for the adultery. To take decisions from that point also he needs to be intervening, balance his ruthlessness with compassion. In the conversation between Ram and Laxman Ram spoke about Sita he admitted that 'she can only understand why I abandoned her because she is daughter of Janaka, a wise man. She alone will not see herself victim, as I have not seen myself when Kaikeyi forced me into exile. I can rely on her.' Sita is not just become the victim of this decision but Ram himself was also become victim.

Ram was *maryadapushottum* he was *ekvachani*, *ekpatni* and *ekbaani*. It means he never violate what he said one, never married other than Sita as he never treat her as commodity, for him she was always his refection his other self. At that time kings used to marry more than one girl for many reason sometimes for land, for son etc. but Ram had never did so he gave respect to his wife, he gives freedom to take decision.

For performing religious rituals husband needs wife according to Hindu culture. So, Ram did all the rituals with the sculpture made of pure gold as pure as Sita. At this point we really feel Sympathy for Ram as he is clutched by the rules of society. He is incomplete without Sita. But according to rules she was a stain on the royal reputation of King. And Ram become victim of his own royalty. He was helpless, locked in his own kingdom, not able to express his love for her, alone in royal kingdom. After meeting Luv and Kush Ram said, "Ram rejected the queen of Ayodhya, never his wife. Past fourteen year in palace is worse than fourteen years in forest." Ram was tortured and tormented by his own royalty and finally entered in *Sharayu* river by chatting Sita's name.

#### **Janaka:**

Janaka is a king and father of Sita, not biological father; she was not sprout from her seed. But for Janaka fatherhood, not sprout from seed but from heart, a father who was chosen by Sita to be her father. He was childless after getting her Janaka had three daughters. Janaka was satisfied with four daughters he does not have longing for son like Dasharatha. He was a wise man; he had respect for knowledge and women. Once Sulabha an intelligent woman came to Janaka and advised him to get knowledge from Veda. He followed the instructions of her and arranges a conference on Upanishada which was attended by scholar of that time like Ashtavakra, Gargi and Yagnavalkya. He was the real feminist who gives education to her

daughter and made her powerful that she could take her own decisions.

**Society:**

It was society who did injustice to Sita. Ram has never rejected Sita. It was *maryadapurushottama* who has rejected her. *maryada* means limit, Ram was always confines himself in limitations of king. He accepts to go for exile only to follows his families reputation, he rescue Sita himself for the reputation of clan otherwise Sita could have rescued herself or Hanuman was strong enough to rescue her. He abandoned Sita because anyone should not gossip about king or Raghu clan, king should always think of his people and his family will not come before it. King is father of his tenants and queen used to be their mother. Society demands scarify from mother for their children, mother can do anything for their children as Sita did for people.

And Sita did everything for their biological child also, she was the first single mother who brought up their children alone, she used to live and work in *arshram* for them but never return to Ayodhya. She put an example in front of society that a single woman is not weak but strong enough to live alone with their children.

**Conclusion:**

Devdutta Pattnaik had given new prospective to whole Ramayan, here Ram is not the main character but Sita, incidences are unfolded from the vision of Sita. Sita has shown as educated, independent, strong women. Pattnaik had never put Sita in the limitations of society; she has

shown equal to Ram, firm enough to take decision for herself. Through retelling this mythological story Devdutta is try to change the image of Sita and indirectly try to change the female role model of society. In the end also when society accepted her as a queen with respect, Ram accepted her and requested her to come to him but she rejected everything for her dignity. She lives and die for her respect.

Through reconstruction of Mythological story Indo- Anglian literature is try to expose the hypocrite belief of society and try to give new dimension to the mythical, spiritual, gender base beliefs and customs.

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