

# FROM A VICTIM TO A WARRIOR: JOURNEY OF SITA IN AMISH TRIPATHI'S "SITA: THE WARRIOR OF MITHILA"

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## Abstract

*Myths and Epic tradition of this nation are prototypes of history and these traditions laid the foundations of many multilayered oppressions which are evident even today. This religious, Indian society holds Epics and Myths as the finest example to guide their conduct and their various roles in the family. Hence it will not be an exaggeration to say that the predicament of Indian women largely depends on the set of Mythological or Epical traditions followed in a particular family. The present study is exploration of the Sita's journey into Mythology. It is an act of comparing and contrasting her depiction in the earlier version and latest version. Here the earlier version refers to Valmiki Ramayana and the latest one is the depiction of Sita in Amish Tripathi's Sita: The Warrior of Mithila. Here Sita is not merely a character of Ramayana but she is the epitome of journey of Indian women's predicament in the various phases of time. The new cult of writers like Amish Tripathy, Ashok Banker, Ashwin Sanghi and Anand Neelkanthan are bold experimenters. They experiment with mythology to make it much more palatable, logical and digestible as per the taste and demand of present time. This may be the result of change the way society look at mythology. Juggle with mythology is no longer a sin but creativity now. Mythology is no longer a taboo, a line carved on stone which cannot be altered. But these writers not only altering it but also decorating it with new flavors and connotations. It is right to say that they have helped mythology regaining its popularity. These writers have also opened new realms of research by their new analysis and hyper looping of time. Youth, these days have become aware of their myths, and their own adventures. These writers have brought Indian culture and history amongst young Indian readers who had almost forgotten their rich ancient culture and craving for the western one. For instance, Ashok Banker and Amish Tripathi have blended mythology with fantasy mode. With this kind of implementations these writers are modernising the Indian myths. Amish Tripathi has created purely a fantasy fiction out of the mythical stories. Amish tried a new perspective with this traditional way of handling mythology and has given it a new outlook.*

**Keywords:** *Mythology, Modern Retelling, Journey, Society, Society, Ramayana*

## INTRODUCTION

Indian society has remained a very complex entity. People know it for its diversities and colorfulness. But it is equally known for its hierarchical structure based on Class, Caste and Gender. On trying to search the origin or the beginning of this hierarchy or rather discriminatory system one often finds himself or herself standing in the midst of Mythology. Mythology is a vast collection of epical narratives like Vedas, Purans, Upnishads, Manu-Smriti, Ramayana, Mahabharata etc. India has remained a patriarchal society. Even the goddesses could not escape their plight whether it is Sita or Ahlaya. If one wants to explore the reason of hardships which women in India face today then one has to investigate the traditions, Myths and Epics first. The real root of the pain lies beneath many folds of traditions which got slowly nurtured by mythical ideologies. Myths and Epic tradition of this nation are prototypes of history and these traditions laid the foundations of many multilayered oppressions which are evident even today. This religious, Indian society holds Epics and Myths as the finest example to guide their conduct and their various roles in the family. Hence it will not be an exaggeration to say that the predicament of Indian women largely depends on the set of Mythological or Epical traditions followed in a particular family. The present study is exploration of the Sita's journey into Mythology. It is an act of comparing and contrasting her depiction in the earlier version and latest version. Here the earlier version refers to Valmiki Ramayana and the latest one is the depiction of Sita in Amish Tripathi's Sita: The Warrior of Mithila. Here Sita is not merely a character of Ramayana but she is the epitome of journey of Indian women's predicament in the various phases of time. Every journey begins with inception, and the inception of Sita leads us to Vedic era and Brahmnical concept of social set up and society.

## MYTHOLOGY AND INDIAN SOCIETY

As discussed earlier, Indian society has always remained patriarchal. In this patriarchal set up there are many unconstitutional, untold, self proclaimed rules of values, sexuality, marriage, relations in the family, economic

liberation etc. These rules are not laid down after following any legal procedures, surveys or observations but outcome of specific culture metaphors. There are many ancient texts which in detail discuss not about the world wisdom but the subtle expression of patriarchy. Indian patriarchy gets expressed in Mythology through strong symbolism. These symbols have always remained on extremes like Goddesses or Nymph. And in middle remains domestic women, shackled in her roles of Pativrata and Sativrata. Through many legends women were made to believe that they are created merely to be helping hands in cosmic task which is to be fulfilled by their men. Most of the epics and legends highlighted self-sacrificing as a one and the only test of becoming a pure woman. She was always represented through images of ritual practices where here only aim was to become a faithful wife and devout mother. All such examples can be found in Manu-Smriti. These rules in themselves are self explanatory of the time and Brahminical concept of life and status of women. In the third chapter of Manu-Smriti, we find first signs of gender discrimination. There is a shloka which guides how to get male progeny and avoid female progeny. It is as cruel as female feticide of present time.

युग्मासु पुत्रा जायन्ते स्त्रियो अयुग्मासु रात्रिषु ।

तस्माद् युग्मासु पुत्रार्थी सन्विशेद आर्तवे स्त्रियम् ॥ 3-48

It means by copulating on even nights sons are conceived and daughters on the uneven nights. Hence one who wants sons should approach his wife on even nights of the month. In the same chapter in one of the shlokas women are presented merely an object of sex and beauty. It also highlights the deep rooted concept of the skin tone and beauty in the Indian minds. However, India in itself was once a victim of racial discrimination at hands of European people but same Indian people always want a wife having white tone of skin.

यदि हि स्त्री न रोचते पुमांस न प्रमोदयते।

अप्रमोदात् पुनः पुंसः प्रजनं न प्रवर्तते॥ 3-61

If wife is not radiant with beauty, she cannot attract her husband for mating. And if she has no attraction for him no children will be born. Here the choice of husband matters but not of the wife. She is compelled to compromise to conceive a child. More over radiant beauty is nothing but the body shame for the women not having radiant or bright skin.

स्त्रियां तु रोचमानायां सर्वं तद् रोचते कुलं।

तस्यां त्व अरोचमानायां सर्वं एव न रोचते॥ 3-62

It states that if wife is radiant or having a fair skin with beauty she will be able to illuminate whole house; but if she is destitute or ugly having dull skin, all will become dull. Every aspect of being woman is taken into care by Manu in his sermon. Manusmriti Modern Retelling and Revisiting Mythology

Mythology, Epics, Literary Traditions, fables and folktales have been at the very root of the many cultures and civilization. In most of the cases as in India these things decide the social set up and temperament of the nation. Mythology and mythological characters are viewed as beacon, embodiment and epitome. Mythological characters become the prototype or an official standard example to serve values and philosophies. Some time they are used to serve political and patriarchal interest. In the Western World Bible remains undisputed authority of Christian values and philosophies. On the other hand, in India we don't and we can't follow single text or ideology. Indian has always been remained a plural society in terms of culture, language, food and even mythology. As a result in India one cannot and should not hold a single text as guiding authority of Hindu way of life. The basic concept of Hinduism lies in pluralism. There are Vedas, Puranas, Smritis, Samhitas, thousands of versions of Ramayanas, and hundreds of Mahabharata beside local folklores and fables to define the periphery of rituals, customs and social set up. India has evolved in a very strange way than other cultures. The pluralistic notions instead of becoming a chaos have converted in to a strange harmony and hegemony. The generations over the years keep on learning and unlearning the things, the frequent becomes rare and rare turns in to forgotten. Common people of this land generally don't know and read Puranas and Vedas. But the Ramayana and the Mahabharata has remained a frequent source of solace for masses. It may be due to their popular adaptation and cinematic presentation on television and big screens across the nation. The Ramayana in particular remained frequently retold, revisited and redefined epic. It will not be an exaggeration to say that each generation and each region of this nation has its own Ramayana. Though, there is nothing new in this as the writers across the world refer back to their conventional mythology to address contemporary issues by reinterpreting the past in the light of the present. The twentieth century poet and critic T.S Eliot in the essay "Tradition and Individual Talent" termed it as, "pastness of the past will be present in the future." The use of myths in literature is not a new phenomenon and this tradition was initiated by Homer's Iliad and Odyssey. The mythical characters and themes in Greek mythology were recounted in history as symbolic representations of cultural beliefs, values, prejudices and philosophies. Thus, the mythology is perennial and keeps growing in terms of perspectives and connotations. Commonly the myths are resplendent with rich themes and narrative forms. The literary artists from every epoch make use of these themes and forms in their art. Today many bestsellers and popular books include lesser known stories from Indian mythology and these stories help them to attract the greater mass. It is an act of retelling what has been forgotten and to give new flavor and aroma to what has been already known. Hindu mythology has evolved as a popular genre; re-reading, re-analyzing, re-

refurbishing and re-visiting gave a fresh dose of antidote to readers who want to know their roots but as a history, as a lecture but as an adventure. It gives them chance to arrive at new meanings and to feel the necessary changes which were not possible in earlier times as epics and mythology remained in tight corner of scriptures. But today mythology has changed its color and flavor to suit to the new demands. The high dose rationality, practicality and pragmatism have attracted young readers to the modern mythological fictions. The myths and the traditional styles of the narratives played an important role in revival of culture and in acting as a unifying force within the society. It helped in imagining an Indian nation state with an identity, history and culture of its own. Myths, as Nietzsche suggested, worked as cultural foundations that saves the society from fragmentation. It builds cultural bonds that brought people together to justify life as desirable in spite of its dark moments. Contemporary readers and writers no longer see the mythological characters as Gods and Goddesses only who are beyond any questioning and humanizing. Rather they present them as a human. Contemporary writing of Hindu mythology do not treat it as holy text; which cannot be touched and altered, there are creative interpretations and the stories are analyzed, dissected, delve into ambiguous areas and derived meanings are corroborated by discussions and dialogues of readers, thinkers and academicians. In these modern mythological retellings epics are reinterpreted in such a way which makes them more human less godly. The protagonists possess all human emotions including the weaker ones. Their struggles and battles may not be always seen driven by higher purposes. The narrative of the myths has changed as universal journeys of characters are retold from individual's point of view. These bring out the human side of the Gods and have made it possible for readers to relate to them in newer ways. The characters are critiqued, scrutinized; story and plots are questioned and connected with contemporary ideologies and issues. The new cult of writers like Amish Tripathy, Ashok Banker, Ashwin Sanghi and Anand Neelkanthan are bold experimenters. They experiment with mythology to make it much more palatable, logical and digestible as per the taste and demand of present time. This may be the result of change the way society look at mythology. Juggle with mythology is no longer a sin but creativity now. Mythology is no longer a taboo, a line carved on stone which cannot be altered. But these writers not only altering it but also decorating it with new flavors and connotations. It is right to say that they have helped mythology regaining its popularity. These writers have also opened new realms of research by their new analysis and hyper looping of time. Youth, these days have become aware of their myths, and their own adventures. These writers have brought Indian culture and history amongst young Indian readers who had almost forgotten their rich ancient culture and craving for the western one. For instance, Ashok Banker and Amish Tripathi have blended mythology with fantasy mode. With this kind of implementations these writers are modernising the Indian myths. Ashok Banker pioneered this practice of modernizing the myths in Indian fictional writing. But he endeavored to stay true to the original mythical stories by replicating them. On the other hand Amish Tripathi has created purely a fantasy fiction out of the mythical stories. Amish tried a new perspective with this traditional way of handling mythology and has given it a new outlook. The trend of successful novels having mythological content started in 2003 with Ashok Banker's bestselling eight-volume Ramayana Series. The international acclaim received by Banker and the commercial success of his novels indicated the interest of the people in the mythical past. Many novels followed the tradition started by Banker and today, the novels that are retellings of the Indian mythological stories top the charts. Among the texts considered in the foregoing discussion, Amish Tripathi's Shiva Trilogy and Ramchandra Series are the most popular. To sum up, one can put up following points

- 1- These Modern Mythological Fictions treat God and Goddesses as more human than super human.
- 2-The blend of fantasy and myths makes it more acceptable and digestible for new readers.
- 3- It gives new flavor and new angles for the readers who have already read the ancient versions of Epics or Mythology
- 4- Hyper Looping technique of likes of Amish blends known with the unknown. It takes to new place yet known places so reader may find a kind of connection.
- 5- Equal treatment or in some cases more favor to female characters.

The Ramayana and Mahabharata have long nourished Indian popular culture, whether through village storytelling, puppet-shows, television serials or Bollywood movies. Indian novelists writing in English used to be known abroad purely as a source of strenuous literary works; now they regularly produce gaudy blockbusters that marry these ancient tales with the latest trends in genre fiction.

Contrasts Between Valmiki Ramayana and Sita: The Warrior of Mithila

Point	Valmiki Ramayana	Sita: The Warrior of Mithila
Protagonist	Story circles around Rama, the Vishnu Avtaar and his killing Ravana to save world and Sita.	Story revolves around a daughter found by matriarch Sunaina, who becomes Lady Vishnu. She has the responsibility of saving the nation
Presentation of Sita	Vaidehi, Janaki or Sita, wife of Shri	Sita: the lady Vishnu, who marries Rama

	Rama. Sita gets abducted by Ravana but she remains chaste and proves her chastity by Agnipariksha	and makes him her partner in her greater cause. Along with Rama she defeats Lankan troops in Mithila. She is the savior, ruler and excellent administrator.
Cause of Conflict	Here the main cause of conflict is the Deva and Asura ideology. Ravana was demon and Rama was the incarnation of Shri Hari Vishnu born to kill Ravana and redeem the world.	Here the main cause is the class contrast between rulers and traders. Main cause was the war of Kacharpa which led to deterioration of Sapt Sindhu kingdom. And somewhere another reason is the politics between Vayuputras and Malayputras
Treatment of women	Sita is the divine child found by Janak. She could lift Shivdhanusya with single hand. But she remains unaware or perhaps refuses to use her powers and becomes victim of others and of her own people. Most of the other women characters like Ahlaya, Ansuya, and Mathara etc. are shown as weak and meek character, and they are also the victim of patriarch society.	Here Sita is raised by Sunaina a true matriarch mother and queen. She becomes a rebel and excellent warrior. She is chosen Vishnu by Parsurama. She selects Rama as her partner and they both join hands to control Ravana. There are other strong female characters like Samichi, Manthara, Sunaina, and Radhika who know what they want and how to get it from the society.
Caste System	In Valmiki Ramayana we find many incidents like Nishad Episode, Shabri Episode and Shambhuk Vadha that makes it a text advocating caste system in the society. Shambhuk was killed for being shudra and practicing penance to reach heaven.	Here we have Sita who thinks the present caste system is the root of all the problems. She advocates a caste system based on work and skill not on the birth. She readily accepts Nagas the outcast community in her service. Samichi becomes her friend and companion.
Lakshmanrekha	The Lakshmanrekha remains one of the strongest symbols referring to the bondages and boundaries within which a woman should remain or rather be kept. Sita has to suffer because she walked out of that boundary.	Amish, exclude the myth and symbolism of Lashmanrekha. He refrains from using any such symbol signifying conditioning of a woman in patriarch society of that time. Rather he presented progressive side of the society where Sunaina and Sita are burning examples of Matriarch way

### SITA: A CONTRASTING BALANCE FOR MALES AROUND

In his Sita: The Warrior of Mithila, Amish successfully portrays Sita as a harmonious balance amidst the contrasting weaknesses of the male around. It begins with her father Janaka who fails as a ruler to do his duties and indulges in Scholarly readings and conferences. He was a born Kshatriya but he was doing the karma of a Brahmin. Sunaina her wife runs the kingdom and later on Sunaina passes the legacy to Sita. Dashrath the king of Saptasindhu becomes the victim of his own short temperedness and despair after the defeat in the war of Karchapa. He also becomes victim of polygamy and family politics. Rama is the victim of his own ideology which wants him to be always on the right side. For him being pragmatic and diplomatic too is wrong. His adherence to rules made him to accept the exile into the forest. Bharat always craves for creativity and freedom; he tries to find peace in the chaos. Sita counterbalances all these weaknesses like a counter balance. She tries to reason with Rama about his adherence to rules; she tries to make him pragmatic. Rama hates polygamy seeing the fate of his own father and politics in the royal family. Her conversation with Bharat in the Ayodhya makes him realize the difference between the masculine and feminine way. She is also the counter balance of her father's scholarly pursuit. She becomes a rebel and a pragmatic and practical ruler who sees all the problems around with different perspective. The following figure is a graphical representation of this contrasting balance among Sita and others around. She is presented as solution to different flaws which are there in the leading male characters around her. She is the centre of the gravity or she is the counter weight to set equilibrium in the cosmos of her existence. She is presented as a neutralizer, as an antidote for the excess of everything.



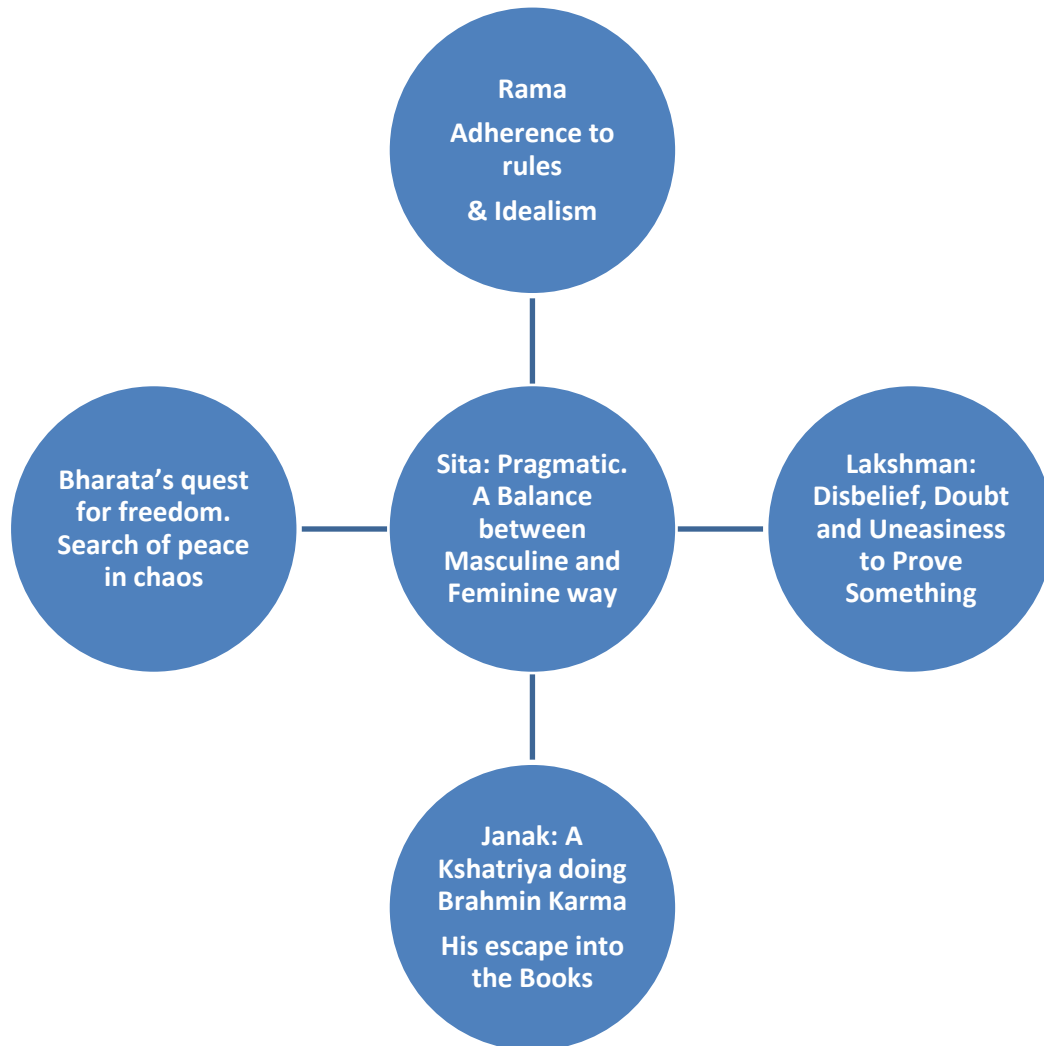


Fig.5.1 Sita a Contrasting Balance for Males Around

### FROM BEING JUDGED TO BEING JUDGMENTAL

Sita has found a new role and responsibility with changing time. Earlier she was only a symbol of Pativrata and Sativrata woman, ready to make sacrifices for her man and family. She was used and still being used as an example to control the innate power that lies within every woman. She is put ahead every woman to condition her to accept and sacrifice. We have left Sita many centuries behind thinking that she was adjustable and will be adjustable but there are few who tried to bring back her to reality of the present time. Modern writers in their mythological retellings or mythological fictions have dared to romance with the myths and fables. They have questioned the set frame within which characters were molded for centuries as a part of one or the other agendas. In Valmiki Ramayana we find Sita; being questioned for many things. She is abducted by Ravana by trickery, maya of golden deer. People blame her of being tempted by the golden deer. It was she who sent Rama behind the golden deer and then Lakshman to help his yelling brother Rama. Lakshman have sensed the plot so he refused to go away then Sita insulted him with her harsh words to send him away. But the blame game does not stop here she is also accused of crossing the Lakshmanrekha the boundary of safety. She crosses it so she had to bear the aftermath. Sita the loyal wife had to go under the fire trial to prove her chastity not for her husband but for society. Sita gives the trial only to be blamed again by her own subjects in Ayodhya. She becomes a blot for the image of just king so she is again sent to forest and that too when she is pregnant. She again readily accepts the decision and remains absorbed in her twin sons till accidentally they all get reunited after Ashwamegh Horse's abduction by Lav and Kusha. Rama gets his successors and offers Sita to reunite with him but only after a public trial. Sita instead of giving another trial calls the mother earth to come and take her away.

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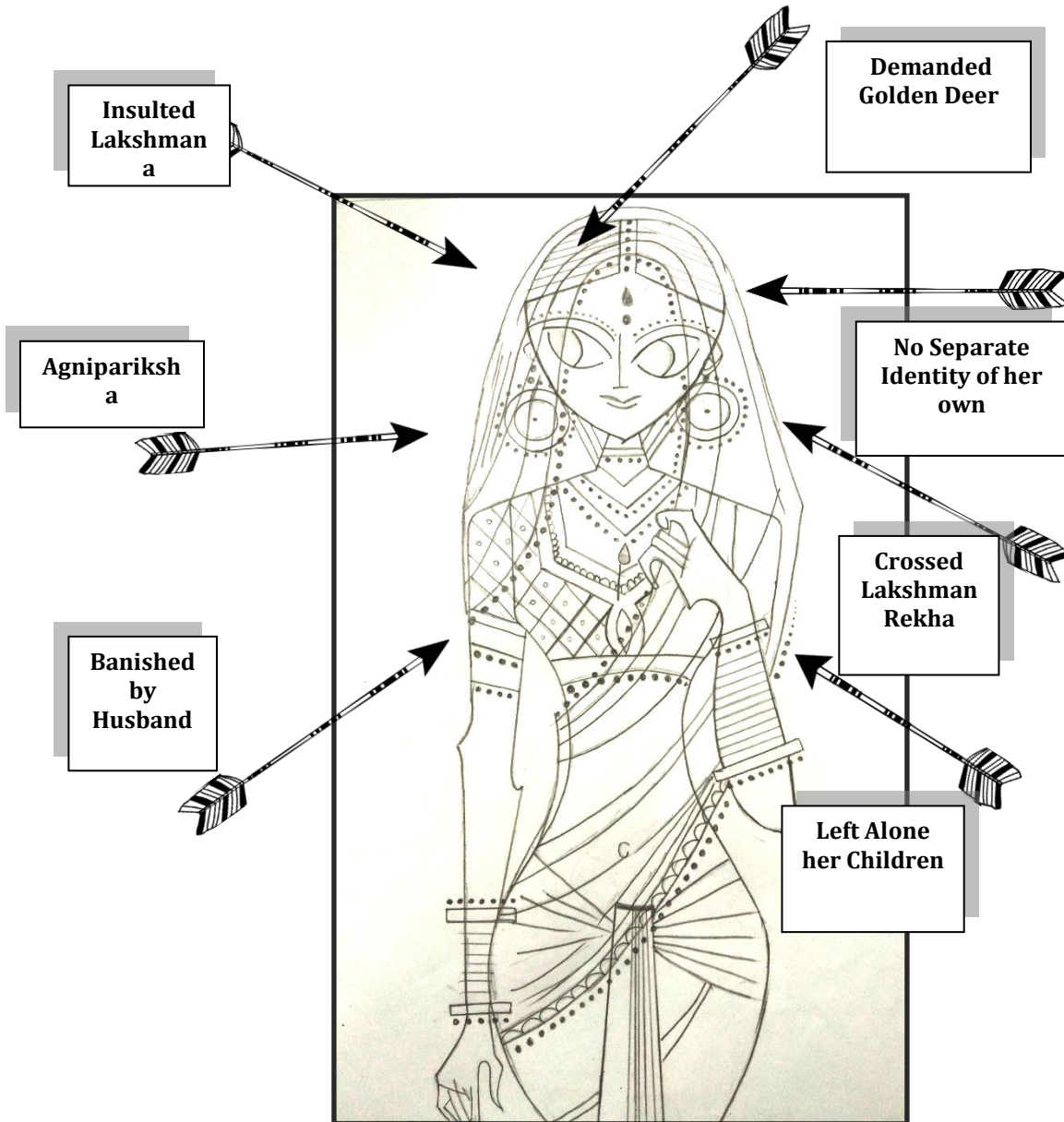
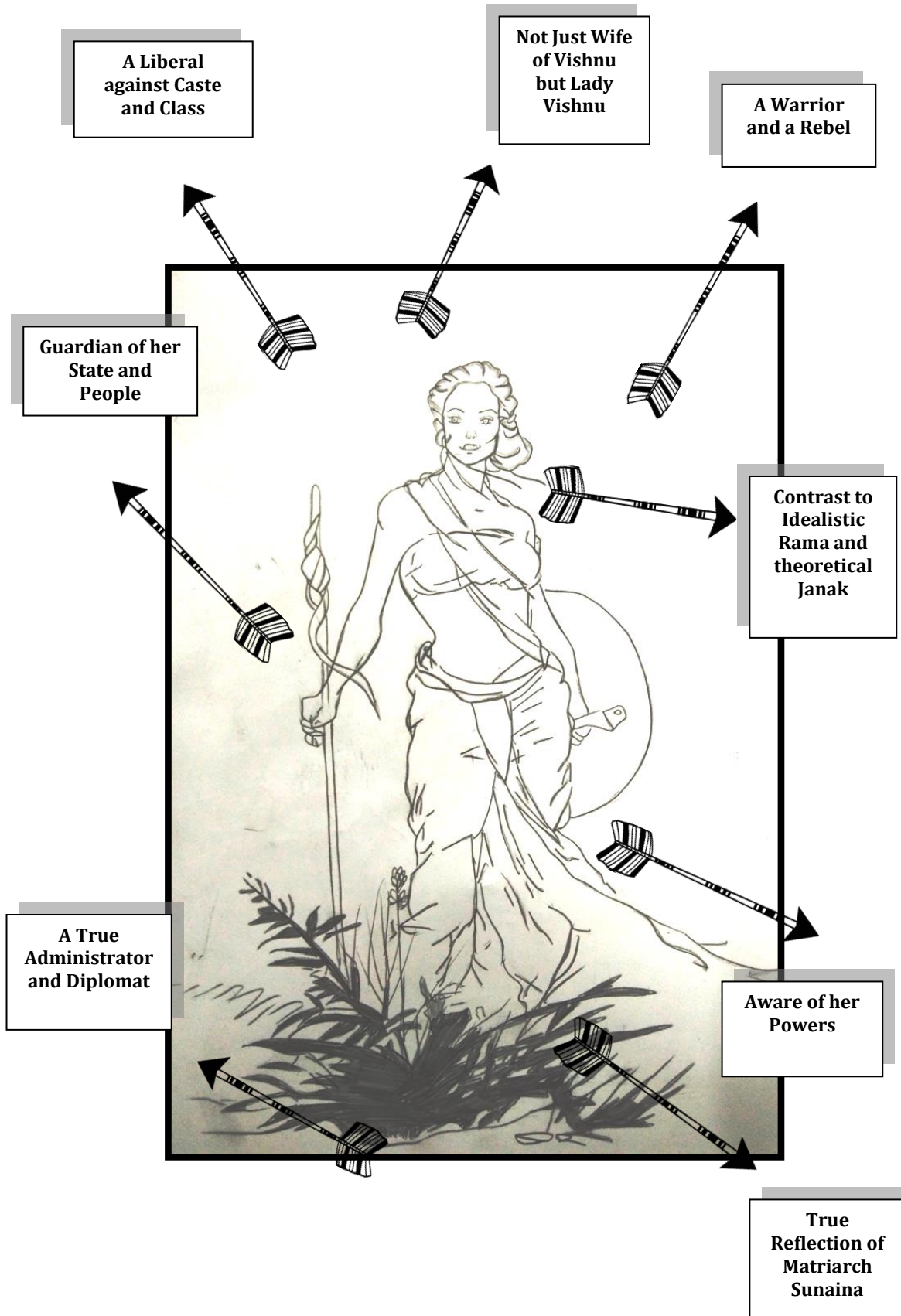


Fig.5.2 Sita in Society in Valmiki Ramayana

Sita who is being judged from centuries becomes judgmental in Amish's Sita: The Warrior of Mithila. She is brought up by Sunaina a true matriarch who always answered her questions. She satisfied her curiosity, she makes her well aware of her reality, whether it is the story of her coming into their life, her role for Mithila and even her bigger roles. Sita is explorer she wants to explore; she explores the slums and sees harsh reality. She learns from her own experiences, she knows how to fight. She becomes rebel, she breaks royal seal of her uncle and also ribs of people who ridicules her and her father. She makes choices and chooses side; she makes partnership with both Malayputras and Vayuputras. She refuses to be a political tool. Rather she makes a master stroke by choosing Rama as her companion for life. Thus she indirectly unites two opposing ideologies and camps which are led by archrivals like Vashishtha and Vishwamitra. She is the one who sees the problems rationally. She thinks caste and class problem is the real issue not the Ravana. She becomes a true partner; she is no longer a responsibility of Rama but becomes asset. She becomes Lady Vishnu to help the Male counterpart Rama. She is contrasting pragmatism to Rama's fanatic idealism. She is the solution of weaknesses of Rama. She guards herself and Rama in the forest. She readily accepts Nagas and becomes their true friend. She also performs her duty as the ruler of Mithila excellently. She also puts forward economical and development reforms in her kingdom. She is no longer the one is powerful yet unaware of her own powers. She is fully aware of her skills, strengths and powers. She is a true warrior able to fight whole battalion of Ravana single handedly. Here Sita changes her status and becomes a warrior from a victim...

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5.3 Sita the Warrior

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## FINDINGS

Sita was always powerful; her being a weak or strong was never a question. It is her portrayal which makes her appear weak or strong.

Sita in Amish is aware of her realities now unlike the Sita in Valmiki Ramayana. She knows who she is, what is her story. She also knows her strength and weaknesses and also the weaknesses of other around whether her father, her husband, her gurus or his husband's brothers.

Sita in Amish successfully secures a balance between extremes like Vayuputras and Malayputars, between Humans and Nagas, Between Kshatriyas and Vaisys, between different ideologies and even between Masculine and feminine way to lead the world.

In Amish's Sita: The Warrior of Mithila she becomes an asset to Rama not a responsibility. It is not Rama who is protecting Sita, but it is Sita the lady Vishnu who plans and arranges for security in forest.

Sita becomes a ruler, an administrator, a reformer who rules, reforms and develops her Kingdom.

Sita here is not a victim of any ideology rather she questions the old ideologies. She has her own secular and rational views on caste and class discrimination in the society.

She has her own meaning of loyalty of people. She runs her kingdom very rationally. She knows how to reason and argue. She openly discusses with all. She dares to question and find the answers.

She is no longer a victim of any boundary called Lakshmanrekha as she abolishes all the boundaries. She is rebel who knows how to fight for truth.

She is liberal who treats everyone equally. She readily accepts Jataayu and other Nagas who remain outcaste by others. She treats them as human with same love and care. She even sacrifices her safety for saving Jataayu.

Sita in Amish's Sita: The Warrior of Mithila, refuses to be a political tool for Vayuputras and Malayputras, as she tries to find her own reality and her own purpose. And it is Sita who helps Rama to find the balance.

## CONCLUSION

Thus Amish's Sita: The Warrior of Mithila can be said a journey in to the consciousness of Indian womanhood. Sita here becomes the symbol, the epitome of the progress, spiritual awakening of the women. Sita has travelled through many narrow alleys and lane to arrive here. She has shown the gradual progress in each progressive version of Ramayana or the critical books written on the Ramayana. But these two books at present stands as two extremes called the inception and destination. Valmiki Ramayana frames the questions and Amish's Sita: The Warrior of Mithila tries to provide the solution. The researcher has tried his level best to describe journey through these two extremes by exploring the layers which holds the history, customs, myths and anecdotes related to her.

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