



A READING OF THE VANAYATRA IN RAMAYANA: SITA'S PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

The present paper deals with the psychological evolution of Sita, in *Valmiki Ramayana* through a reading of the major incidents occurred during the period of *Vanayatra* in her perspective. It tries to trace out the various stages of her psychological growth from utter dependency to absolute self-reliance.

Key Words: Dependency, Self, Emancipation, Realization

Introduction

Being a traveler holds myriad dimensions. It makes one to abandon the familiar and venture to the unexplored, unseen and unknown space. It can be physical, psychological as well as spiritual. While some journey only means entertainment, some other would turn to be turning point in one's life. An introspection is also a kind of journey to the self identifying the profound merits and flaws of the psychological space which everyone carries within. An enclosed space could not provide wisdom to human beings. Every journey is an experience, every experience is an insight and every insight is an emancipation from one's state of being.

Leaving one's surroundings to a new atmosphere shall certainly have a reason which is usually classified as push and pull factors. To elaborate, certain journey are the result of persuasion for a better environment. But people at certain situations will also be forced to abandon their habitat due to unexpected reasons or calamities. It is also crucial to note that how each journey influence the people engaged in it. Many a time it appears nothing significant but sometimes it would provide immense opportunities for those people to discover and evolve to a new self.

The present paper also deals with such a journey from the most renowned Indian epic *Ramayana*. It is an attempt to analyze how the experiences, trials and tribulations encountered in the *Vanayatra* along with Sri Rama and Lakshmana plays a significant role in the evolution of the character of Sita. The translation of the *Valmiki Ramayana* by the famous Indologist and Economist Bibek Debroy based on the Critical Edition of the same published by The Baroda University serves as the primary source for this study. The present paper aims to trace her progress from an innocent, virtuous girl to a powerful lady with voice. It is crucial to note that until the moment that Rama meets her to take leave to the forest, her voice is rarely recorded in the text. Later it is the presence of Sita in the forest with Rama altered their future in drastic. Besides portraying the psychological dimensions of Sita's character on and after her journey to the forest as revealed by Valmiki in *Ayyodhya* and subsequent *Kandas* highlighting the merits as well as the flaws, the major objective of this study also includes an evaluation of how the journey turned for Sita as a cleansing experience which in turn transformed her as a self accepting and assimilating soul free from humane sorrow and frailties. On the whole this paper can be said as an

effort to describe travel as an insightful experience in life as that of diversions, sins, ignorance, emotional outbursts, prolonged waiting, anxiety and destruction.

The Beginning Phase

Sita, the princess of Mithila and eventually the wife of Sri Rama stands in the apex owing to her adherence to *Dharma* and truth in all the roles she performed in life. She was regarded as the daughter of Mother Earth but brought up under the care of Janaka, the king of Mithila. She was tended in royal care and loved by everyone as the wife of the mightiest Sri Rama. She was a storehouse of beauty and virtue and also has been admired by everyone for her devotion. Though praised in the text several times as supreme woman with all auspicious qualities it is crucial to note that her voice has been rarely heard until Rama reaches Sita's abode to inform his decision to leave the kingdom to forest adhering to his step mother's decision. When Rama reminds her about the hardships she may have to face in the forest she replies:

O Lord! Earlier, in many kinds of ways, I have given you pleasure. Therefore with you, I wish to leave for the forest... The idea of being brave and dwelling in the forest appeals to me. Because of my pure soul and love, I will be without any taints. I will follow my husband. My husband is my divinity. Even if I die, I will be fortunate in remaining with you

(*Ayyodhya Kanda* 209).

She desires to seek pleasure in the forest with her husband and enjoy everything fearlessly. It is to be noted that Kaikeyi only needed Rama to leave the kingdom. She never insisted Sita to follow Rama. It was her decision. She showed audacity to step out of the golden chamber of the castle to the gross realities of life. But it has also to be noted that what made her audacious is not her self confidence but the presence of Sri Rama. She is fearless with Rama but can not live a moment without him even if she is in the castle. Thus it is clear that Sita has attributed her existence to Sri Rama. Attributing one's existence certainly involves a degree of psychological dependency. She finds the world in

her husband or in other words her environment made her to believe that she does not possess an independent life.

She says:

O bull among men! However, the wife alone reaps her husband's fortune. Therefore I have also been instructed to reside in the forest. In this world and in the next, for a woman, the husband alone is the refuge_ not a father, not a son, not her own self, not a mother, not a friend (*Ayyodhya Kanda* 206).

What she has been followed is what her ancestors had taught her. They had already instructed her the need for a wife to be always there to serve the husband. But at certain situations, when her absence is inevitable, she should retire patiently. What has been written in the scriptures, at chosen situations, has to be altered for the common good. For instance Urmila had never insisted Lakshmana that she should accompany him. Urmila remained patiently for years as for her the will of the husband matters the most.

The Transition Phase

As far as the life of Sita is concerned, the day she left for the forest is crucial. It was on that day that Sita became visible to the people of Ayyodhya without any obstructions. This is same with the case of the readers too. As she begins to live in *Panchavadi*, one could trace the real Sita with all human flaws and frailties. When Sita saw the golden deer roaming around, she told her husband to grab it. But Lakshmana reminds that:

I think this is the rakshasa Maricha in the form of a deer. O Rama! When kings came in to the forest for hunt, this wicked one, who can assume any form at will, disguised himself and killed them. He is skilled in the use of maya and has used maya to create the form of a deer... O Raghava! A deer with these kinds of wonderful jewels does not exist. O Lord of the world! There is no doubt that this is a maya in this world

(*Aaranya Kanda* 87- 88).

But as trapped in desire, the supreme among women and her husband paid no heed to those words. After sometime Rama left to capture the deer, she hears a loud scream which sounds similar to her husband's voice. When she became afflicted, Lakshmana comforts her by saying that Rama could not be defeated by any one. Though she knew Rama more than anyone else she forced Lakshmana to leave the hermitage quickly for the protection of her husband uttering undesirable words:

O worst of your lineage! I think that you love me and that is the reason you have spoken in this way. O Lakshmana! O wicked and cruel ones always act in a colourful way towards their rivals and hide their true character. Since you have alone followed Rama in to the forest, you are extremely wicked. You have disguised this for my sake, or perhaps you have been engaged by Bharata...O Soumitri! There is no doubt that I will give up my life in your presence. Without Rama, I will not remain alive on this earth even for an instant

(*Aaranya Kanda* 93- 94).

Thus it is absolute fear that made her suspicious even towards the most devoted Lakshmana. Eclipsed by fear she forgot Rama's glory and infinite potential. It is also important to note that she forced Lakshmana to leave and remained alone in the hermitage as she was fearful to accompany Lakshmana to her husband. It is the same fear that again made her to cross the line drawn by Lakshmana for her protection. When Ravana disguised as an ascetic, she should have tell the truth to him and request him to wait. But there also she feared causing displeasure to him and perform what has been taught by her ancestors.

The phase of Self Realization and Reliance

The next phase of Sita's life starts from her prolonged waiting for Sri Rama in Lanka. This marked the initial transition in her. The one who feared rakshasas and worried over Surpanaka became able to restrict the advances of Ravana alone. It was a period of realization for her as she took the responsibility of all the catastrophes. Kept aloof from Rama she began to identify the potentials of

herself. The Sita who the reader sees at the end of the great war was the one devoid of fear. But the transformation remains incomplete. One could see Sita accepting the fire test ordered by Rama as even then she attributes her existence to her husband. She firmly believes that she can not live without him. What has been the driving force in Sita to restrict Ravana is her belief in her husband. The proposed evolution completes only when she being abandoned by Rama with no prior knowledge. Even after She could subsist on herself. She began to take decisions independently. She nurtured two children without the help of her husband. At last the emancipated Sita declared her independence, she never desired to live once again with Rama. Sita, devoid of wordily attachments returns to the lap of Mother Earth by safely giving the children to their father.

Conclusion

It is clear from the above mentioned points that the two principal journey that Sita undertook in her life is what transformed her as an independent and emancipated human being detached from wordily pressures. The one who could not live in the earth without her husband consciously leaves the same earth in which her husband was alive. What has been pivotal here to perceive is that the most celebrated symbol of Indian female is also, like the modern women, the one who has experienced the intricacies of both being with the one and being the one.

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