

# Redefining and Revisiting Sita's Narratives: Reading Saraswati Nagpal's *Sita: Daughter of the Earth* (2011)

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## Abstract

The present article analyzes Saraswati Nagpal's *Sita: Daughter of the Earth* with the hypothesis that Sita has been dealt unjustifiably by the male centric power structure. The Contemporary authors endeavor to shape Sita's character and re-build her story to voice a new perspective. Contemporary writings are female oriented; however in ancient writings there was less narration of women in works so it is important to know about the *Ramayana* through Sita's perspective. In ancient times, the writers laid less emphasis on the women characters. The women characters in ancient writings are marginal for instance Sita's character is mainly known for her meek, weak, submissive image in the classic texts. In ancient writings, the narration of Sita was less and someone else spoke on her behalf for instance in the Tulsidas *Ramcharitmanas*, the shloks of Sita were not recited by her but by someone else on her behalf and also in Valmiki's *Ramayana*. Sita is shown as a strong character but her narration is very less as compare to other male characters. In *Ramcharitmanas*, there are 10902 verses but very less shloks are represented by Sita as compare to other male characters in *Ramayana*. In the text *Sita: Daughter of the Earth* Saraswati Nagpal shows Sita's perspective which is not shown in ancient *Ramayana*. However in contemporary writings writers deconstruct and write through the perspective of Sita who is earlier shown as a subordinate to Rama in the classic text and is brought to centre in the contemporary texts. The contemporary writings abolish the existing frame and show her light and many writers attempt to retell *Ramayana* from the perspective of Sita and to break stereotypical image of Sita presented in ancient texts. The research offers new perspective on Sita's story and contributes to the existing knowledge about the mythical characters like Sita and makes an attempt to contextualize the entire discourse carried on under the wake of life narrative in the social-political conditions of the time.

## INTRODUCTION

A graphic novel is a book made up of comics content. The word "novel" refers to long fictive works, and "graphic novel" includes imaginary, non-imaginary work. It is not similar from the term 'comic book', which is used for comic's periodicals. Richard Kyle composed the term "graphic novel" in an essay in the November 1964 issue of the comics Fanzine Capa-Alpha. This term achieve popularity in the comics association after the publication of Will Eisner's *A Contract with God* (1978). The term Graphic Novel is not broadly defined, the

Webster's dictionary definition of 'graphic novel' is "a fictional story that represented in comic-strip format and published as a book" and the simplest definition is given as "cartoon art that tells a story and published as a book". There is a developing library of Indian graphic fiction of the non-genre collection which appears as a vibrant turn-of-the 21<sup>st</sup> century appearance is constructed as strong community of creators and readers. Necessary to this progression in any culture is to break free from the custom of genre fiction, for instance science fiction or heroic fantasy. If there is one accurately Indian genre which persists, it must be the endless retellings of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* epics. The aim of adapting these deep-rooted classics, discovered by the Amar Chitra Katha series, has been duplicated by more contemporary publishers such as Campfire, Vimanika and Virgin/Liquid/Graphic India. They are modernising them with technically extraordinary computerised representations, which copied the Hollywood blockbuster look of Slick Western comic-book production from Marvel and Dc address to their fan audience. Of far leading interest are graphic novelists like Amruta Patil, Abishek Singh or Vikram Balagopal, who are companion to these timeless tales their more personal and refreshing takes. In graphic novels in India, as elsewhere, it is the real world which present so much outlook. Orijit Sen's *River of Stories*, published in 1994 by Kalpavriksh, is broadly taken into consideration as the primary work. Sen started functioning on his comic strip journalism in 1991 by accomplishing some visits to the Narmada Valley in western India to analyse the impact of construction of the Sardar Sarovar Dam on the regional population. The advancing circumstances of 'Untouchables' or Dalits is contextualised in *Bhimayana : Experience of Untouchability* written by Srividya Natranjan and S.Anand and drawn by Durgabal and Subash Vyam, by visit often the autobiography of Dr. Bhimarao Ambedkar (1891-1956), the considerable legislator and greatest of affirmative process and an untouchable himself. Urban India is a common setting of these books. The style in which these graphic novels are manufactured in India relies lesser on the corporate conveyor-belt management system of editors, writers, pencillers, inkers, colourists and letterers.

A recent development in the genre of graphic novel has included the lesser known characters and their lives, for instance, *Sita: Daughter of the Earth* is a graphic novel which narrates the story of Sita, wife of Lord Ram. Since it is a story of Sita's life and Sita is the narrator of the story, it also falls in the genre of life narrative. So, in fact, *Sita: Daughter of the Earth* combines both the genres of graphic novel and life narrative to achieve dual purpose of; Sita's perspective and visual and pedagogical use of Sita's story. The theory of life Narrative as a method of narration which postulates individuals to form an identity by integrating their life experiences into an internalized, evolving story of the self.

It is the collection of memories and observations, even if one's own or someone else. This assign to countless genres and methods, under which can be constitute autobiography ,biography, memoir ,diaries, personal essays and more recently digital forms such as blogs and email. Life narrators and historians state that life narrative

and life history are helpful intellectually as they present first hand narration and accounts of people and their relation with society, history.

In 1975, psychologist Ira Progoff noted the specific regards that journal writing, or autobiographical writing could have. The data of Progoff's research showed that life narrative elevates particular growth and information, but also that it could "draw each individual's life fronting wholeness at its own meter". Exploration into Life narrative has also establish that it can simplify the exposition of feeling, a change in personal thinking and the progress of a feeling of self-constraint and esteem, specifically in individuals with low self-confidence. It has also been claimed that auto-biographical narratives support with these deep matter as it let on the dispute to be compromise with in a new, distinct and uncommon way. Life writing also provides knowledge, as well as concern and feeling about ancient times to be recollected. In Saraswati Nagpal's *Sita: Daughter of the Earth* focused upon Sita's experiences, her individuality through Life Narrative and shows the contemporary trend of life narrative through which perspective of Sita is well-grounded and well-founded. However in Valmiki's *Ramayana* Sita is strong but she is quiet. She is fierce as she endures a trial by fire to prove her faithfulness, and is strong as she defies her husband when he asks her a second time to prove her purity. In Valmiki's *Ramayana* no pain and agony of Sita had shown, but contemporary writers tried to depicts how she feels, what are her emotions and beliefs. Ancient texts are male centric texts but now contemporary writers writes female oriented text in which females are the protagonist and heroine of the texts for example Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni *The Palace of Illusions* and *Liberation of Sita* by Volga. Contemporary writers also writes on the marginal characters for instance Kavita Kanne's *Sita's Sister* and *Lanka's Princess* in these books focus is on marginalized characters like Sita's younger sister Urmilla and Ravana's Sister Shrupnakha.

#### *Sita: Daughter of the Earth*

The graphic novel *Sita: Daughter of the Earth* is a description of the *Ramayana*, focusing on Sita, Rama's wife. Sita's mother is Bhudevi, but she is adapted by a king. Admirable and brilliant, she has a pleasant life before it is time to marry. Thereafter hearing of the courageous deeds of the warrior prince Rama, she decides to subject a provocation to title her as a Bride. The castle holds a great bow, which was wondrously manufactured to be hardly possible for a ruthless man to life. No surprise – the hero Rama breaks the bow, beginning their lives together.

Like an epic heroine, Sita faces many struggles. Nagpal's story has a feminist slope; Sita is fearless and devoted, also she speaks up for herself and others. At the end of the book, she makes a choice that shows that she is a truly principled heroine. *Sita: Daughter of the Earth* is a captivating graphic novel and an accomplished introduction to the *Ramayana*.

*Ramayana* is primarily a life narrative of Ram therefore Sita's story is deemed as unimportant or just a supporting one. However, anybody reading the *Ramayana* cannot deny the fact that Sita has been a sufferer and

victim in the story of *Ramayana* without any fault of her own. She was victimized simply because of patriarchal social structure where women do not hold any important position in the society and rather were sidelined from the whole scenario therefore in the contemporary society of gender social system it becomes important to bring forth Sita's narrative or her story which further highlights different shades of the patriarchal structure of ancient Indian society. In the text *Sita: Daughter of the Earth* by Saraswati Nagpal, has tried to emphasise upon the incidents of *Ramayana* through Sita's perspective, focusing upon Sita's character and smallest events and occurrences which have been excluded from the Indian epic *Ramayana*. The main incident in *Ramayana* was the war between the Rama and Ravana. It was the most incensed and turbulent war in the historical backdrop of the Treta Yuga began. It started as day break and finished at dusk as Trijta narrates every incident to Sita; "Your Rama has achieved the impossible! He and his Vaanaras have built a bridge of floating stones across the ocean"(p.67). This reveals how Rama was fulfilling the expectations of Sita; she was waiting for him since so long and refuses to go with Hanuman, furthermore she thinks he is not only a dutiful Son but also a dutiful husband. She was expecting him to save her from Ravana and he did. Both devils and vaanaras died in immense numbers. But at the end Ravana the King of Lanka died in the war. Ravana's enormous body fallen thud, afterwards Rama sent Hanuman to Ashoka Vatika to get Sita from there to him. Sita was very happy and excited to meet Ram after so long with her heart pounding with excitement and fervour, she went to meet her husband. She was loaded with gratefulness when she saw the upbeat countenances of Vaanaras, who had put their lives in peril for her sake. Everyone is happy to see Sita returning back to Lord Rama, but Rama was silent and sad his quietness dazed here. Sita noticed torment in his eyes and his voice, when he talked, was confined and substantial. Rama was upset because there are some conditions and rules of Ayodhya which cannot let him take back Sita as his wife as Lord Ram says "Princess Sita, according to the laws of Ayodhya, I cannot take you back as my wife...for you have spent almost a year in another man's place. Your chastity will be viewed in suspicion"(p.67).

This incident shows Rama's words sliced through her heart. Her spouse no longer trusted her. All her happiness depleted out of her in a minute. She felt embarrassed and betrayed, and thinks that her waiting goes all in vain she was not at all expecting this from his husband as she was innocent. Rama gave more priority to his kingdom rather than his wife. It also shows he was supporting stereotypical and patriarchal rules and regulations that attributed with a woman and he was considerate towards his kingdom and the traditional laws. Her embarrassment then swung into anger and she chose to murder herself that exact second, so Sita ordered Lakshmana to set fire for her because she lost her husband's trust, so that she can end her life. Rama sobbed however but remained silent. Everybody was astounded, however nobody set out to question Rama's choice or Sita. It was, all things considered, an issue just for a husband and wife to settle. So Lakshmana sorrowfully compiled with her com Build me a fire! Since I have lost my husband's faith, I shall end my life now"(p.73).

However if we closely analyse the incident it shows Sita was thrashed badly and she was disrespected and demeaned likewise in Mahabharata the question against the chastity of Draupadi was raised by her relatives but in case of Sita her purity was questioned by her own husband, her suffering is different, she was not at all expecting this from her husband. The fire blazed, the air sparkles as the moving flares consume bright. Her eyes diluted and sweat moved her skin. Sita prays to Bhudevi to give her strength to do this. Sita ventured into fire. "Bhudevi! You know I am innocent. You know I have suffered. Give me strength to do this" (p.73). But when blazes in gulfed her, they felt like cool smooth window hangings and rather than the smell of burning skin, she notice the fragrance of rose and sandalwood. "What..Why I am not burning?" (p.74) The Lord Agni refuses to burn Sita "Rama, I cannot burn this pure, innocent and loyal lady. She has passed the Agni Pariksha. No one should mistrust her now" (p.74). Sita has now passed the Agni Pariksha no one would mistrust her. The fires God saved her and lead her out of the fire and being a loving wife Sita also forgives Rama for doubting her. Excited to get back home, they mounted the Pushpaka Vimana and Sita was alleviated to be with Rama, he was at his glad, loving and caring self again. "Welcome back Sita! You have suffered so much. But you have upheld the reputation of Rama and Ayodhya. May the gods bless you my daughter" (p.75) says Kaushalya to Sita after she returned home back. It was the day after their fourteen years out ended. They entered ayodhya as yells of happiness reverberated through the streets. The most touching gathering was of Urmilla and Lakshmana Sita's sister courage of fourteen years broke up in tears. After coming back to Ayodhya Sita invested all her time by satisfying the duties of queen. Ayodhya succeeded with under Rama's run. Two years passed when Rama and Sita realised that she is pregnant. "You must not strain yourself. Carrying a baby requires you to rest...You pamper me too much, my lord! I am perfectly well, and so is our child." (p.77) This reveals the Rama's love for Sita and how caring he was towards her. He forbade her from striving and dealt with herself like a mother. The royal residence chambers resonated with happiness and giggling and splendid day light of amicability filled their lives yet not for long. "My lord, you have not eaten well, and have not slept for days now. What worries you?. Please tell me.... Nothing, my queen. It is nothing" (p.77). Like a venomous example in my predetermination, murkiness climbed by and by, throwing shadows on the light of my life. Certainly it was terrible to the point that Ram was reluctant to impart it to Sita, so she chose to discover it herself. A couple of days after the fact, she summoned her trusted dasi Malvika and sent her to recognise what is bothering to Lord Rama. The following day when Malvika returned, she knew without doubt, that she had brought ghastly news and Malvika portrayed what she had seen the people of Ayodhya starting to question Rama as they were doubting on the purity of Sita "How are you so sure that there was a fire test in lanka? Did you see the queen enter the flames? We have been lied to by King Rama who, in his love for Sita, has forgotten the law" (p.78). The people of Ayodhya started these kinds of conversation against Sita. Sita expressed gratitude towards Malvika and sent her away, making her guarantee to keep quiet about the issue. For quite long time, she cried in

isolation, wailing over my destiny. I agonized on the issue for a few days. Though Rama and Sita lived in similar chambers, the quiet between us developed overwhelming. We both grappled with our souls to discover an answer for this excruciating challenge. For her to being a queen her first responsibility is to take care of her citizens and her relation with Rama comes second and she decided to leave the Ayodhya for the sake of her citizens. The just response to this test was a troublesome, difficult one. Next night she dressed herself in the clothes of hermit and went to Rama's room, she knew that Rama is aware about the fact that she is leaving Ayodhya forever but he did not stopped her, for him, too, it is the only way to stop the aspersion created by citizens of Ayodhya. "I know what worries you, my lord. There is only one solution, and I am ready to carry it out....Sita..I do not know what to say"(p.80). Rama's setback towards Sita when she was leaving the palace was rued as his acceptance towards her decision of leaving the palace. Only the Rama and Lakshmana know about this because the sisters or mothers of Sita never let her go. Reluctantly Lakshmana compile with her summon and drove her chariot to the woods, concealing her tears she abandoned her lamenting husband, her sisters, her family and Ayodhya. In the moonlit night, Lakshmana left me at the forest. Once more, I was distant from everyone else. Her feet were swollen and delicate, and she shouted out in torment as she wandered the backwoods for quite a long time .Blackout with thirst and hunger, she fallen on the forest floor, Maharishi Valmiki discovered her there and he in second knew her identity. "My divine vision tells me that this is Queen Sita"(p.81). He revived her with sacred water. I arose, astounded that I was yet alive. Maharishi takes Sita along with him to his Ashram. At Maharishi Valmiki's Ashram, the Rishis and their spouses invited her as a daughter. I fell into the beat of a recluse's life- cooking and cleaning amid the day and praying on the Goddess at night. The months flew by and, Rama and she were honoured with not one, but rather two youngsters and at that time she was missing her husband. Her children grew up as recluse young men, and with each passing day, they started to resemble their father. Not only their appearance, but rather their thoughts, speech and capabilities developed to co-ordinate Rama. From grammar to philosophy, history and legislative issues Luv and Kusha learnt everything with characteristic expertise. Be that as it may, nothing came to them with ease than the art of war. They were, after all, considered the children of the best Kshatriya on Earth. There was one lesson, though, that her children worshipped regardless of anything else .It was likewise what Maharishi Valmiki loved to teach. Maharishi Valmiki had created in verse the account of Rama and it was this Ramayana that her children sang each day. Listening to the tale of her own life filled her with tenderness and yearning of her affection. One day King Rama had invited Maharishi Valmiki for an important yagya and there he wants to sing Ramayana in front of Rama and also wants Luv and Kusha to accompany him for the court of Ayodhya. Her children left with Maharishi Valmiki to meet their father. Despite the fact she was at the ashram, her heart was with her children. She could envision the people of Ayodhya wondering about the sweet voices of her children. She was certain they would captivate the natives with their melodies. When Luv and Kusha reached Ayodhya Rama

asked about them“ These boys are radiant as princes. They glow like children of a god. Who are they” (p.85) Maharishi Valmiki introduce them and told him that their mother is Queen Sita and their father is none other than Lord Rama himself. After knowing that they are his own children Rama was very happy to meet them after so long and asked about Sita, then he sent a royal messenger from Ayodhya and requested her presence in Rama’s court. On the way of Ayodhya she was in deep thoughts. She felt strange coming back to a lifestyle she had forgotten. Numerous inquiries filled her psyche. When she entered Rama’s court she was welcomed by an aware quiet, she saw Rama after twelve years and her eyes gets lost in his glorious image, her eyes savoured his eminent image. Rama held only love and yearning for her, but his words are those of a King of Ayodhya he says “Queen Sita! It gives me untold happiness to see you again. In front of this assembly and all the gathered citizens of Ayodhya, please put to rest any lingering doubt of your innocence (p.87). They did not have the sound of adoration she needed to hear. Rama again asked her to prove her purity so that people would not think that he did not broke any law by taking her back as his queen but Sita was very hurt by his words, because for her Fire test in Lanka and Twelve years of separation are enough to prove so she decided to not live there in the Ayodhya because natives of Ayodhya will always doubt her she says “but mortal memories are fickle. People forgot the Agni Pariksha in Lanka. And in a few years, people will forget my oath today, and again accuse me of violating the law. (p.88).At that point before the gathered people and her family she announced that on the off chance she is pure in her thoughts, words and deeds at that moment her actual mother take her back, she will be glad to return back where she came from. Cries of shock rang through the court as the Earth splits in front of her. The ear shattering commotion terrified people who were gathered there. Sita’s actual mother showed up from the profundities of earth she says to Sita “Sita, you have suffered much. Come to me, my daughter! You are right. Your work is done (p.90). Bhudevi called Sita to her in a cherishing voice and told her that you did not have to suffer more now. Rama had not anticipated that she would abandon him. The whole gathering was as stunned as Rama was at the presence of Bhudevi. Citizens panted as they understood her virtue had been demonstrated valid. She was genuinely guiltless as she asserted. Sita vanished into earth that day.

## CONCLUSION

The article endeavours to unveil and highlight the new and distinct version of Sita’s story by analyzing *Sita: Daughter of the Earth* in terms of locating life narrative. Life narrative as a method of narration has been used to integrate the life experiences of Sita into an internalised evolving story of her. It further highlights how life narrative gives us a new approach and new elucidation to look at Sita, however also assists in reconstituting the reality which is individual, personal and valid. Moreover, the article aspires to relook and revisit major events in Ramayana from Sita’s perspective. Life narrative has been used in order to highlight how Sita has perceived the reality; additionally it also liberates Sita from all kinds of acquisitions that have ever been laid on her.

Furthermore, the article is an attempt to break the stereotypical image of Sita presented in the ancient texts and to discuss her life through her own point of view.

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