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Title: ANALYSIS OF SITA IN THE EPIC

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**General view of how women in epics are portrayed** –

Oxford dictionary defines “epic” as a long poem, typically one derived from ancient oral tradition, narrating the deeds and adventures of heroic or legendary figures or the past history of a nation. Women play a foundational role in epics. As regards to portrayal of women in Indian mythology, names like Draupadi, Sita, Savitri, Ahalya and Arundhati comes to the fore. They are all depicted as role models for Indian women – Savitri as the ideal wife, ready to sacrifice, Sita as the obedient woman, Draupadi as the woman who did not complain eventhough she was forced to be the wife of five princes. Sometimes, women also are used insignificantly for a scene or an event to be fulfilled.

I shall take an example from Ramayana, the epic – where the King, King Janaka receives a bow as a gift from Lord Shiva. Since it was time for Sita to get married, king Janaka had called all the suitors for Sita in front of him and made a challenge that whoever could carry the bow and fling the arrow could be married to Sita. All the kings tried but couldn’t carry it as it was difficult for them. King Ravana had proclaimed it was very easy and said that he could lift up the bow with his finger. After he failed to do so, King Rama then stepped up and lifted the bow with ease and flung the arrow. Because of this, Sita’s prayer was answered and she could marry Rama. One wonders why the choices in marriage portrayed are not available for the woman? Does she not have a voice herself?

**Analysis of Sita and why I chose it**

Sita - the crown princess of Ayodhya - the heroine of the epic is depicted in ideal roles such as being an ideal woman and an ideal wife. Beyond all of this, her role in the Ramayana, her actions and her beliefs display a certain strength of character. By studying the epic, one can understand the inner workings of the Indian society and can appreciate why certain things are the way they are – This is why I chose Sita’s character for my analysis.

**How significant is her position in the story –**

As the heroine of Ramayana almost everything that happens in the epic revolves around what Sita does. From the beginning of the epic till the end – it is around Sita that all the scenes and events take place. Her position is so significant that it was because of her that the war broke out between Ram and Ravana. There would obviously be no Ramayana without Sita.

**Elaboration of Sita and her role –**

Devi Sita – the heroine of the epic, Ramayana, the wife of Ram, the daughter of King Janaka played a very important role in the Ramayana. Ram saw Sita before they got married and once they saw each other – it was like love at first sight! So, Devi Sita prayed that Ram would be the husband she should marry.

Since Sita was madly in love with Rama, Sita went up to the extent of even deciding to go with Rama after he was exiled by his father for 14 years in Ayodhya although Ram told her to stay in the Kingdom of Ayodhya. This is true, romantic, ideal love. Sita was a character who we could see from the play who was always focused in what she did and determined to do what she had to. For example, we see when Sita was in the forest and when they heard Ram calling for help, Sita forced Lakshman to go to aid Ram and find out what happened even though Ram instructed Lakshman to take care of Sita when he went to find out the golden deer that Sita wanted. Sita also went through a lot of pain and hardships in the epic such as going through fire to prove she was pure and being banished from the kingdom by her own husband to name of a few examples.

**Does the epic indulge in stereotyping women?**

Ramayana, the epic definitely does indulge in stereotyping women. Devi Sita was stereotyped as an “ideal” woman who subordinates to the man in the epic. Is the idea of having a voiceless subordination truly “ideal”?

After Ram defeats Ravana in the war - when Hanuman, Lakshman, Sita and Hanuman come back to Ayodhya, the people of Ayodhya proclaim that Devi Sita was not pure and that she needed to do the ‘Agni Pareeksha’ that is to go through the fire to prove and to check whether she is pure or not. Sita passes the test and proves that she is pure. The burden and the onus to prove that she is pure lies with the woman? Does she not have a voice of her own?

Another place that intrigued me is where Sita is pregnant and she is about to give birth. The people of Ayodhya do not believe that the children were Ram’s. The people convinced Ram to send her away and as Ram loved the people of Ayodhya more, he decided to banish Sita and send her in exile. While it did not matter to her that she was send away in exile, she enjoyed being in the forest and spending her time there with nature. Like the river which flowed in the forest with the trees nearby, there were even ducks and swans to keep her company! However, it raises the question - Does Sita have a voice and an identity to protect herself? The portrayal of her at the receiving end of male domination is disturbing indeed.

I am thankful I got the opportunity to do a character analysis of Sita in the Ramayana and thoroughly enjoyed the time thinking through and documenting my ideas!

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