Chapter IV

The Reflections of *The Ramayana* in Indian English Poetry

From my sorrow came this song.

There is no poetry without compassion

-P. Lal – *The Ramayana of Valmiki*

[English Translation of *The Ramayana]*
Chapter IV

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4.1 The Literary Renaissance in Indian English Literature

The Anglicizing period started from 1835. Between 1835 and 1855 the number of ‘Educated in English’ increased rapidly. The introduction of western culture, manners, and ways of life led to the infiltration of western tradition and culture. The establishment of new schools and colleges attracted the youth, especially in Calcutta. In 1853, Study of English literature was introduced as a paper. It was thought that the introduction of study of English literature would build a bridge the gaps between the Indian and English people. By the beginning of 19th century, the East India Company became more or less a master of situation in India.

Indian students were attracted towards English literature particularly English poetry. Many turned into staunch admirers of English poetry and developed a potential to create poetry in English. They were deeply influenced by the romantic poets. But it is curious to notice that some Englishmen admired Indian culture to such an extent that they deprecated the idea of introducing western civilization and Christianity into India. Sir William Jones organized the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784 and Sir Thomas Munro expressed his love for Indian Culture thus:
If civilization were ever to become an article of trade between the two countries, England would greatly benefit by the import Cargo

(Iyengar 1985:24)

Sir William Jones began a trend for oriental reference in English poetry of the romantics like Shelley and Campbell. William Jones introduced Indian mythology in English Poetry.

Campbell had taken recourse to Hindu Mythology. In his Pleasures of Hope Campbell invokes the Hindu deity ‘Brahma’ (the law-giver) to redress the terrible injustice meted out to suffering Indian population. Bishop Heber and D L Richardson had composed a sizable body of English Poems on purely Indian topics. It was entitled British Indian Poetry. By 1840, Indian Young men who possessed the talent to create poetry had inherited the new languages – English and consciously made efforts to enlarge the expressive range by substantial lexical borrowings. The study of English and English literature was like a rich fertilizer from the west in the sapless native soil.

Indians learnt at first to read and speak and comprehend English with enthusiasm. Soon they took up writing. The infiltration of western culture the adoption of western way of life and western scientific techniques had certainly given a jolt to India’s traditional life. The shock had also some positive impacts. The long dormant intellectual and critical impulse was quickened to sudden life. An integral
transformation came about in Indian intellectual life which brought alertness in the minds of Indian youth who became alert in thought and action. There was the reawakening of the Indian spirit. The tolerant Indian mind not only met the violent challenges of western culture and its impact but also embraced the new culture and accepted what all was good in it.

Sir William Jones pioneered Sanskrit Studies in Europe. He was the first westerner to render a classic Indian epic into English. The interest in ancient Indian classics arose in Europe when William Jones published his translation of *Sakuntala* in 1789. Sanskrit appeared to him more perfect than Greek, more copious than Latin and was exquisitely refined language. In the following decades almost all important Sanskrit classic works were translated in the major European languages. William Jones (1746-1794) came to India as Judge of Supreme Court at Calcutta. He became a deep admirer of Sanskrit language and the works written in Sanskrit.

William Jones became a great pioneer of orientalist writings. His *The Enchanted Fruit* is based on the Mahabharata story of the five Pandavas and their consort Draupadi. He wrote nine hymns on Kamadeva, Prakriti, Indra, Surya, Lakshmi, Narayana, Saraswati and Ganga. William Jones started the trend for oriental references in the poetry of the romantics.
The first fruits of English education according Surendranath Banerjea were violently pro-British. They were charmed by the novelty of western culture. As a result the early Indian writing in English was ambivalent in nature.

N Venkata Rao writes in his *Annals of Oriental Research* that Cavally Venkata Boriah (1776-1803) was the first English prose writer of eminence and his brother Cavally Venkata Ramaswami was the first writer of English verse and then came Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, Kashi Prasad Ghosh and Michael Madhusudan Dutt.

4.2 Beginnings of Indian English Poetry

During the Indian Renaissance of the nineteenth century India responded to the impact of the west and of modernity. This response worked as a stimulus which caused the birth of Indian English literature which had access to national consciousness. Indian poetry in English began in Bengal; the province in which the British first gained a stronghold. In addition, this poetry was largely an urban phenomenon, centred in Calcutta. In fact, for the first fifty years, it was confined entirely to a few Bengali families, who were residents of the city. Then gradually it moved to Madras and Bombay. Even today Indian poetry in English remains largely urban. English was an elite language in India and Indian poets in English came from upper classes and castes.
After Independence, Indian writers in English enjoyed literary independence which was reflected in the attempt of Indian critics to argue for a special identity for Indian literature in English. K.R. Srinivas Iyengar’s ‘Indo – Anglian Literature’ (International Book house, Bombay 1943) was the first book that discussed Indian English literature as a distinct independent field of study.

The term ‘Indian English’ is in use since 1960’s. Sahitya Akademi’s official endorsement is evidenced in the early 1980’s. (M. K. Naik’s ‘History of Indian English Literature’).

Henry Louis Vivian Derozio was the first Indian poet in English. Derozio was Indian not only by birth (he was born in Calcutta) but by self – definition. Derozio’s love for India is expressed in several of his poetical works. In his short life of twenty one years he had a brilliant career as a teacher, poet, intellectual and a true journalist. In his poems like The Harp of India and My country in Thy Day of Glory Past, he strikes a nationalistic note. Derozio expressed his ambivalence towards Hinduism in his poem The Fakeer of Jungheera. He was obviously influenced by the Romantics especially Byron, Scott, Moore, Shelley and Keats, but he loved India and wanted to represent the Hindu culture. He was anxious about the correct representation of Hindu culture and grieved the plight of India in his times. In defense and praise of his country he wrote,
O! many a hand more worthy far than mine

Once thy harmonious chords to sweetness gave:

Those hands are cold, but if those notes divine

May be mortal weakened once again,

Harp of my country, let me strike the strain.

(Iyengar 1985:36)

**Sita in Michael Madhusudan Dutt’s Poem**

Madhusudan Dutt’s *Captive Ladie* is a heroic tale with an epic sweep. ‘Sanjukta’ is the captive lady who is rescued by. The hero, a minstrel, but ‘love’s triumph’ is short lived. The lovers commit suicide to escape capture by the enemies, who hold the city in siege.

Michael Madhusudan Dutt was a true Christian but at the same time was proud of India’s greatness, its resources its beauties, its ancient culture and its unquenchable heroism. He felt he could write volumes on glories of ancient India. He learnt Hindu Mythology, and took sources from it for his poetic creation.

**Sita Identified with India**

The story of Valmiki’s Sita had powerfully stirred Dutt. It is evident in his *Meghanad Badh Kavya* (The slaying of Meghanad) but also in his fragment titled *Queen Sita: Prologue*. The situation is that of Sita’s abandonment by Ram. In Madhusudan Dutt’s perception, Sita is humanity personified. He also possibly identified the figure of Sita with that of his country suffering from repeated waves of foreign aggression.
and in his times it was British invasion. The poet seems to turn to himself to look at his plight as a captive in the captive land and captivated by the language of the captors.

*The Captive Ladie* (1849) has a symbolic title. A great deal of meaning adheres to the image of ‘captivity’ in the poem. The heroine Sanjukta is rescued by the hero a minstrel, but ‘love’s glory’ vanishes soon.

The minstrel’s song in the poem refers to the most famous mythological figure Sita in the Indian imagination. When Dutt wrote *Captive Ladie*, he had the image of Sita in his subconscious mind. Sita too was rescued again and again only to be abandoned. Sita was ‘India’ for the poet who was to be rescued and her glory to be restored. Sita thus lingered in the imagination of the early poetry of Indian renaissance of indo – English literature.

### 4.3 The All-pervasive Sita

**Toru’s depiction of Sita**

Toru Dutt was an original talent in Indian English poetry who tried for the first time for the transformation of Indian English poetry from mediocrity to authenticity. Though fascinated by French romantic poetry, and had a remarkable command of English, she departed from the Anglomania of her predecessors and returned to her roots in India.
She was the product of the Indian renaissance brought about by English education.

Toru Dutt’s *Ancient Ballads and Legends of India*, began a new dawn in Indian English writing. Being Hindu by race and tradition, Toru learnt English. She was French woman at heart, but became a poet in English, blending three souls in her personality and three different traditions. Her personality was the happy amalgam of these three aspects and she pioneered the Indian women’s English literary tradition in mid-nineteenth century. Toru had enjoyed the free air and free life of Europe but at a point she strongly felt the need for roots. Once she was in India, she felt her feet on hospitable soil and felt the need to satisfy her secret longings for roots in the consciousness of her race.

As a child Toru had heard the stories, of Hindu epics and *puranas* along with her brother and sister from her mother. The deep magics of the stories full of mystery, miracle and local tradition had captured her imagination. Her Christian faith never conflicted with her addiction to the tales of her tradition. She realized her roots in her own land responding to the heart beats of her antique racial tradition. She was proud of her tradition the cultural heritage, myths, folklore legends and the classical literature of her country. Her study of original Sanskrit literature and the great epics strengthened the inner need for links with
the living past of India. The tales of Savitri, Ram, Sita, Lakshman, Dhruva and many others were not less than Greek tragedy for her.

Toru studied Valmiki’s Ramayana. The study of ancient epics gave her woman’s imagination a free play and she began projecting and interpreting India’s past and glorious tradition. She responded to the traditions of India with the intensity of a romantic poet. Toru Dutt’s poem ‘Sita’ is marked with a rich autobiographical touch. There is a dominance of nostalgic strain, which is common among romantic poets. The poem recalls her childhood. She is haunted by the memories of her past childhood when the three of them – Aru, her sister, Abju, her brother and herself gathered around their mother to listen to the stories of the Mahabharata, Ramayana and Puranas. She loved to listen to the stories not only because they were dear to her, but they were narrated by their mother. Toru pays tribute to the story – telling genius of her mother. ‘Sita’ captured her imagination as a very touching and lovable heroine. In a letter to her French friend Clarisse Bader she wrote,

Can there be a more touching and lovable heroine than Sita? I do not think so. When I hear my mother chant in the evening, the old lays of our country, I almost always weep. The plaint of Sita when banished for the second time, she wandered alone in the vast forest, despair and horror filling her soul, is so pathetic that I believe there is no one who could hear it without shedding tears.
In the poem *Sita*, Toru depicts Sita’s plight in her second exile, when she was banished by Ram. It begins with nature description but strikes the pure elegiac note.

*Three happy children in a darkened room!*  
What do they gaze on with wide – open eyes?  
*A dense, dense forest, where no sunbeam pries,*  
And in its centre a cleared spot. – *There bloom*  
*Gigantic flowers on creepers that embrace*  
*Tall trees; there, in a quiet lucid lake*  
*The white swans glide; there, “whirring from the brake,”*  
*The peacock springs; there, herds of wild deer race;*  
*There, patches gleam with yellow waving grain;*  
*There dwells in peace the poet – anchorite.*  
*But who is this fair lady? Not in vain*  
*She weeps, - for lo! At every tear she sheds*  
*Tears from three pairs of young eyes fall amain,*  
*And bowed in sorrow are the three young heads.*  
*It is an old old story, and the lay*  
*Which has evoked sad Sita from the past*  
*Is by a mother sung... ‘Tis hushed at last*  
*And melts the picture from their sight away,*
Yet shall they dream of it until the day!

When shall those children by their mother’s side

Gather, ah me! as erst at eventide?

(Iyengar 1985:71)

Dense forests, cool nights of Indian forests, the colorful flowers like champak and lotus, gliding swans and different sounds and sights of forests that appealed to her are all described in the graphic sketches in her poem.

The scenes of the forests open up before the eyes of the children who are taken into a trance, listening to their mother’s story. They can visualize the sight of Valmiki’s Ashrama, from where blue smoke rises from holy altars. As a truly romantic poet, Toru is touched by the beauty of different aspects of nature. The Vivid description of Valmiki’s hermitage, and that of Sita in her sorrows, the tears of Sita mingling with the tears of three children – Toru, Aru, Abju, who weep because Sita is weeping, is all very touching. The short but almost perfect poem in pentameter, recalls the sad story of Sita and at the same time pays tribute to Toru Dutt’s mother’s genius for storytelling. The last two lines,

“When shall those children by their mother’s side

Gather, ah me! as erst at eventide?

strike an elegiac note on the early death of Abju and Aru. The short poem effectively evokes an unforgettable emotion in readers. The poem
“Sita” shows Toru Dutt, yearning to return to her splendid childhood days and her haunting association with her mother’s recital of “Sita’s story.

The poem appeals to us as a sad evocation of innocent and happy childhood, her nostalgia for the past memories of her mother who told them stories from Hindu epics and *Puranas* in her mother tongue and her sad feeling of the alienation from her roots in Bengali language as she shifted to English language.

**Sita’s Feminine Anxiety and Lakshman’s Dilemma**

*Lakshman* is another beautiful poem in Toru Dutt’s *Ancient ballads and Legends of India*. In her episodic poem in balladic metre, Toru Dutt picks the human element in the epic Ramayana. As M K Naik rightly says, Toru Dutt successfully Indianizes her idiom in English. It is evident through Toru Dutt’s poem that Indian English poetry in her hands graduated from mere imitation to authenticity. The situation of the poem is this;

Lakshman had mutilated *Shurpanakha*, (Ravan’s sister) by chopping her nose off for her indent advances towards Ram and himself. Ravan, in vengeance, appears in disguise of *Sanyasi* near the dwelling of Ram Sita and Lakshman in the forest.
Sita, being fascinated by the beauty of golden deer, who is Maricha Demon in reality, requests Ram to fetch it dead or alive, not knowing that it is the conspiracy of Ravan to send Ram away to a distant place. Ravan had sought the services of Maricha, who transforms himself into a beautiful golden deer, according to the order of Ravan. Now Lakshman was also to be sent to a distant place so that Ravan could abduct Sita. When Maricha was being killed, he gives out a heart-rending cry “Oh Lakshman! Oh Sita!” in Ram’s voice. This cry of Ram for help frightens Sita and she forces Lakshman to go to rescue Ram. Lakshman is fully aware of the might and valor of his brother Ram and is reluctant to leave Sita alone in the forest as he has to abide by the order of Ram to safeguard Sita in Ram’s absence. At this juncture the poem opens:

_Hark! Lakshman! Hark, again that cry!_

_It is – it is my husbands’ voice!_

_Oh hasten, to his succor fly._

_No more hast thou, dear friend, a choice,_

_He calls on thee, perhaps his foes_

_Environ him on all sides round,_

_That wail, – it means death’s final throes!_

_Why standest thou as magic bound?_

(Gokak V K 1970:51)
Toru Dutt reflects on the human element in the epic, capturing it in almost Miltonic diction. Lakshman’s struggle with the emotional backlash of a panic stricken woman, his dilemma whether to obey Sita or Ram is very human. Sita is not an epitome of virtues and sublime mental stature, but is a woman with feminine anxieties.

*Is this a time for thought – Oh gird*

*Thy bright sword on and take thy bow!*

When Lakshman is struggling to convince Sita that Ram is a divine incarnation born on Earth with a purpose and cannot die until he accomplishes it, Sita is not convinced.

*Ah, no and I must run alone,*

*For further here I cannot stay;*

*Art thou transformed to blind?*

*dumb stone!*

*Wherefore this impious strange delay!*

*(Gokak V K 1970:52)*

Toru Dutt re-arranges the material taken from Valmiki. She had read different versions of the episode and has included all the developments in the version of this episode. The *Krittivasa Ramayana* naturally had an impact on her as she belonged to Bengal and had read his version. She had liked the version of *Krittivasa*. There is similarity in the ideas of Krittivasa and *Adikavi*. The treatment of the theme and
episodes is somewhat different in *Krittivas Ramayana*. In Valmiki’s *Ramayana*, Lakshman rebukes Sita when she blemishes him. In *Krittivas Ramayana*, Lakshman displays quiet demeanor and does not rebuke Sita.

In Toru Dutt’s poem, Lakshman does not criticize Sita. He is deeply hurt by her words, but does not comment on the nature of women as Valmiki does. He softly asks Sita to allow him to part. The version of Toru Dutt is similar to Bengali *Ramayana*, but the way she presents the situation and handles it, is influenced by her own imagination. Griffith by then had published his translation of *The Ramayana* in English. Toru Dutt’s poem is free from its influence.

When Sita starts rebuking Lakshman as a cowardly man, she compares Ram to the sun and Lakshman to the dazzling cloud. When the sun shines, the cloud also dazzles and without the light of the sun the cloud fades like shapeless mass of vapor dun. This simile marks Toru Dutt’s power of imagination.

Valmiki’s Sita criticizes Lakshman as *anarya, nirdayi* and *kulanagara*. Toru Dutt’s Sita does not make use of such abusive language. It is clear that she does not want to show Sita as an unsophisticated and uncivilized woman using abusive language. Lakshman also does not criticize Sita in abusive words. He is depicted
by Toru Dutt as a respectful younger brother –in- law, who understands the mental plight of Sita in a quite mature way. He forgives her rebukes.

_Thy grief and language wild and wrong_
_allow no other course._

_Mine be the crime,_

_And mine alone – but oh, do thou_

_Think better of me from this time._

_for well I know_

_That grief and fear have made thee wild,_

_We part as friends – is it not so?_

_And speaking thus – he sadly smiled._

_When Sita says,_

_Is there a motive thou would’st hide?_

_He perishes – well let him die!_

_His wife henceforth shall be mine own!_

_Can that thought deep imbedded lie_

_Within thy heart’s most secret zone!_

_Search well and see! One brother takes_

_His kingdom – One would take his wife!_

_A fair partition!_

_(Gokak 1970:53)_
The accusations are unbecoming of her stature. But Toru Dutt’s portrayal of Sita appeals to us as it is certainly psychological and convincing. Though Toru Dutt has included all the developments in the version of this episode, the poem has its own originality and therefore can be described as a ‘transcreation’.

The credit of making extensive and in depth use of Indian tradition in a foreign language like English goes to Toru Dutt. She was first to make an extensive use of Indian myth and tradition in English, successfully indianizing her idioms in English language. As M. K. Naik aptly says, Indian English poetry really graduated from imitation to authenticity. It was because she not only revered the mythical characters, but loved them deeply and was proud of the art of storytelling that resides with Indians and has kept the oral traditions alive for centuries. She inherited the rare gift of storytelling, of arousing interest and curiosity and narrative skills from her mother who with such skill had created an imaginary world before the eyes of her children.

*At end of her poem, ‘Jogadhya Uma’ Toru Dutt writes,*

*Absurd may be the tale I tell*

*Ill-s suited to the marching time*

*I loved the lips from which it fell*

*So let it stand among my rhymes*

*(Iyengar1985:64)*

Toru Dutt’s poems on *Sita* not only express her love towards the great mythical characters but embody the Indian ethos.
**Sita’s Story by Meena Alexander**

Toru Dutt’s poem *Sita*, evokes ‘sad Sita’ from the past- the lone Sita in the dense forest in Valmiki’s hermitage with her eyes soaked in tears of grief. Toru Dutt turns nostalgic while recollecting the story of Sita, narrated by her mother. She remembers her mother’s narration getting transformed into ‘speaking pictures’ coming alive before the children’s (Aru, Abju Toru) minds’ eye.

Meena Alexander’s poem ‘Sita’ ‘story’ (1989) is different in its tone and content. Meena Alexander tries to rewrite the story of the wronged woman (Sita) afresh. The poet narrates the story of Sita who abandoned all the pleasures of the royal house and went on exile with her husband Ram. In her exile she was abducted by Ravan, again making her the prey of male domination. Meena Alexander describes Sita’s condition as suspended between heaven and earth, though she has many homes.

*A father’s house*

*a mother’s fragrant bed*

*a husband’s sword*

*that grazed her cheek*

*quiver and hung*

*as if in ether,*

*suspended*

*between heaven and earth*
(Alexander Meena 1989:16)

The poet describes her pathetic condition like this, when she is banished for the second time.

despair, trepidation,

sullen words of rage suppressed,

lips sore and scraped

the ragged end of loss

tied down and knotted to her waste

as she waits in hillside garden

pale Sita

whose palms

flutter like sails

cut from a bolt of blue.

She kneels in the dirt,

She touches a tree

a muddy rock

a shrub

Whose incandescent scent

almost recalls

a furrow

where a king,

her father found her.

(Alexander Meena 1989:13)
In spite of her hardships in exile and her sufferings, Sita gets in return – humiliation, insult, suspicion and a compelling of her beloved husband to once again go through the fire ordeal to prove her chastity. Sita here symbolizes the woman caught in the clutches of male domination and male prerogatives. Meena Alexander writes in the poem *Cutting Trees*,

*Lovely Sita would have burnt  
had mother earth not opened?*  

(Alexander Meena 1992:14)

**The Questions Return**

Vijaya Dabbe, a Kannada poet, has written a monograph about Nagachandra’s *Ramchandra Charita Purana* (also known as *Pampa Ramayana*), a Jain Ramayana in Kannada. In her award – winning collection of poetry, Vijaye Dabbe deals with the story of silent and oppressed Sita. The poet ponders why Sita never wrote her view of events in *The Ramayana* when she had the resources and time to do so. In her poem *The Questions Return* (1996) she writes.

*You had the words  
Father Janaka taught you,  
The songs your nurse maids gave you.  
Palm leaves lay all about.  
Sita why didn’t you speak?  
The Ashoka tree spread its shade  
There was your own brimming sorrow  
and time enough.*
What more did you want?

Sita, why didn’t you speak?

(Richman Paula 2008:44)

The poet further says,

    Later leisure once more yours,

Lava and Kush grown,

The ashram full of peace

and your whole life flowing past you.

Sita why didn’t you speak?

(Richman Paula 2008: 44)

The last stanza intends to say how Sita’s silence has paved way for the oppression of women through the ages.

To all my questions,

only her silence,

heavy as earth.

I look up and the feelings flow

from her eyes into mine

but wordless.

And my own questions

come back to me.

(Richman Paula 2008: 44)
The poem is translated from Kannada into English by Shashi Deshpande and Pratibha Nandakumar

**The Shadow of Sita**

Lalitha Lenin writes in her poem *In the shadow of Sita*, how the shadow of mythic Sita hovers over women till today. Her Malayalam poem is translated into English by Rizio Yohannan Raj. The Poem *In the shadow of Sita* which was first published in 1997 reflects upon the mythic character of Sita that represents the ideology of patriarchy, as internalized by women. Indian women from ages have firmly believed that Sita is the image of perfect woman, a standard, against which women’s actions will be measured. The patriarchal society has always been carefully isolating women from the new ideas for their liberation. It is against the patriarchal ideology that women should move beyond Sita’s shadow. Lenin considers Sita’s lingering effects on women’s lives even today. She examines the appeal of Sita’s character in women’s lives as well as dangers of identifying with long – suffering Sita. Lenin writes Sita’s shadow

*Cuddles me*

*like a cow that licks her Calf*

*to draw it closer to her udder.*

(Richman Paula 2008:108)

Lalitha Lenin voices the inevitability of women to cast them in the mold of the chaste Sita.

*I am still*

*in the shadow of Sita.*

*hear beat, bat of an eyelid,*
voice lilting – everything

is caught in the dark nights

of wingless white – clad Sita.

(Richman Paula 2008:108)

Lenin wonders how the tiny shadow of Sita could shroud the entire universe. The shadow has many inner hues.

In its dark cavities,

there’s the merger

of purity and apathy,

the blaze of sacrifices,

calls of prohibition and

past sins buried in black holes

while great stars burn themselves out.

(Richman Paula 2008:110).

The shadow of Sita has been, for ages, teaching to be a silent sufferer.

The shadow,

Trains me in self – oblivion

by being servile to custom,

and without sowing the seed

in the fret of the loose terrain,

Tames me on the trident of restraint

into paying the fine without fail.
They tell me,

Shadow is shade too,

Some others hold

That it is fulfillment itself.

I just know, it sticks like glue, and

petrifies my heart into a piece of marble.

(Richman Paula2008:109)

Even though a woman wishes to move beyond the shadow of Sita, she is discouraged by the patriarchal society that frightens her saying,

it is the sea of death

beyond the shadow.

others say, it is the desert.

I am unnerved, it is danger either way.

The modern woman feels an urge to shake off the oppressive burden of Sita’s image and be autonomous, to realize her own self and live on her own.

How I wish

I could take a step

Just one step,

beyond this shadow

in search of truth!...

(Richman Paula2008:110)
Lenin voices the dilemma of the modern woman who is restless, caught between the haunting hold of tradition and her desire to be free to pursue the truth of her existence.

**Questioning Sita**

**Bina Agarwal’s Two Poems on Sita**

Bina Agarwal, one of India’s foremost economists, narrates Sita’s dual victimization and her silence over it, in her poem *Sita Speak*. The poem was first published in 1985 in *The Indian Express* (Nov. 17). The poem questions Sita, as if in conversation. The poem sparked varied responses from the readers. The editor of the paper even received many angry letters by men. On the contrary, several south Asian women’s groups appreciated the poem and made it accessible to the non-English speaking people by translating it into Bengali and Hindi. The poem inspired many social activists who used it as the basis for skits performed to protest the oppression of women.

As Paula Richman writes,

*Seldom in Valmiki’s telling, do we hear Sita’s voice without the mediation of Male spokesmen who surround her and protect her. In order to examine Sita separately from her male spokesmen, Sutherland Goldman focuses on Valmiki’s depiction of Sita’s confrontation with Ravan in his pleasure garden where he usually sports with members of his harem. When confronted by Ravan, Sita defends herself by upholding the patriarchal notion that her sexuality belongs to her husband alone. After Ravan leaves, however Sita despairs because Ram has not yet rescued her, she comes to realize how wretched her dependence upon men is, thereby opening up a small crack in the ideological structure of*
Valmiki’s narrative. Sutherland Goldman suggests that Sita’s interaction with Ravan and its aftermath awaken Sita to the terrors of female dependence upon men’s power. [Richman Paula 2001:17]

Bina Agarwal urges Sita to speak up-

*Sita speak your side of the story.

*We know the other too well...

The poet comments on Sita’s silence thus:

‘With your husband you chose exile,

*Suffered privation, abduction

*then the rejection –

*The chastity test on scorching flames

*the victim twice victimized.

*could these flames turn to flowers

*without searing the soul?

*they say you, devoted wife,

*questioned him not

*and let him have his way.

(Richman Paula 2001: 239)

Agarwal writes that Lakshman was known to vent his quick temper whenever he perceived an act of injustice being perpetrated. The poet wonders how Lakshman was silent over Ram’s act of banishing pregnant Sita to forest. When Ram was exiled for fourteen years, Lakshman opposed it and had advised Ram to go against the decision
and seize what was rightfully his, by force. But Sita was banished to forest and Ram asked Lakshman to leave her in the forest, he was silent. Bina Agarwal questions Sita why she kept silence when Lakshman obeyed his brother’s orders.

Your brother – in-law

So quick to anger

on his brother’s behalf, left you,

mother – to – be

alone in the dark forest,

exiled again.

his brother’s command!

some citizen’s demand!

was injustice to you

not worthy of his anger?

You, loving sister – in – law

bore this in silence

and let him go away.

In the first stanza, the poet ironically speaks of the concept of ideal daughter as the one, who obeys the order of her father silently, bowing the head in obedience.

Your father married you to a prince,

told you, be pliable as a bow

in your husband’s hand.
Didn’t you note

Ram broke the magic bow?

They say, you, ideal daughter

bowed your head in obedience

as you were sent away

(Richman Paula2001:239)

After her second banishment in full pregnancy, Sita lives her life alone taking care of her two sons as a single parent. Her struggle and pain go futile when her two sons join Ram later and their lineage is accepted.

The sons you nurtured with such love

amidst nature and the wild woods,

sons with the prowess to challenge

their father’s army,

were disarmed with a word

unhesitant they joined him,

heirs of his land Their lineage accepted

yet your purity still doubted.

(Richman Paula2001:240)

The last two stanzas bring out the paradox in the life of Sita. Sita who could lift the divine bow in play with one hand and could command the earth with a word was silent. The poet asks “how did they silence you?”

The poets who wrote your story

with such sympathy for those
who questioned your fidelity,

proclaimed: women like beasts and shudras
deserve a sound beating.

How could such verses bring you glory?
yet they recited them as holy and
unchallenged got away

(Richman Paula2001:240)

The above stanza brings out the paradox that chaste Sita was punished and those who damaged the self respect and dignity of ‘womanhood’ by saying that like beasts and shudras, woman also deserves sound beating, are unchallenged and never punished.

Bina Agarwal’s second poem *Beyond Captivity* rethinks the meaning of Sita. Sita here is conceived in a different way. She is identified with the force of nature and therefore is beyond captivity. The poet imagines Sita not as ‘imprisoned’ but free as Nature and able to undergo constant renewal. The first poem *Sita Speak* questions Sita and the second poem *Beyond Captivity* provides answers by rethinking about Sita.

*New leaves on the Ashoka*

translucent

filtering the morning light

as do the blue veins of an infant’s wrist.
Innocence.

Pristine freshness of spring leaves
everywhere. Yes also in that grove where
Sita, nature’s source,
thought herself a prisoner
also in that Ashoka Vatika

The poet also speaks of the influence of Sita’s legacy on the lives of women for ages,

Sita our legacy!

Why did you need
to prove your innocence?

Did the flames cool on touch – as they say?

For your sisters, the fires come ablaze.

Before the fullness of their summers

They perish. Innocent. Can they prove it?

Can you prove them so?

(Richman Paula 2001:241)

Agarwal thinks that Sita cannot be captive of a name, a religion or love.

Sita shree, stree
captive of a name? A religion? Love?

Was that love that bound you? or those

nuptial knots before the fire —
The omnipresent fire.

Love perished with your test

(Richman Paula 2001:241)

4.4 Ahalya in Modern Poetry

Ahalya is a minor and stigmatized character in the authoritative Ramayana tellings. Valmiki’s Ramayana and Kamban’s (Tamil) ‘Iramavataram’ narrate the same basic plot of Ahalya’s story. Indra, king of vedic Gods takes on Goutama’s form (Ahalya’s sage husband) and seduces Ahalya when Goutama is busy performing his daily ablutions at the river. After enjoying sexual relations with Ahalya, Indra leaves the cottage of Goutama but encounters Goutama returning home. Goutama, all his accumulated Tapas turned into rage, curses Indra and Ahalya. Though the basic plot is same in the two authoritative tellings, Ahalya’s story differs in the two tellings in specific ways. Valmiki’s Ahalya eagerly welcomes the embraces of Indra, Kamban’s Ahalya believes that Indra is Goutama (as Indra comes in Goutama’s form) but later finds that she is deceived by Indra. Valmiki’s Ahalya commits the sin of adultery and Kamban’s Ahalya is not an adulteress but a good wife always longing for affection from her husband. Valmiki’s Ahalya is cursed to become a ghostly presence in the ashram, invisible to all creatures. On the contrary Kamban’s Ahalya is cursed to turn into a stone incapable of feeling pleasure. Both the
stories of Ahalya are ‘Ram Centred’ which portray Ahalya’s deliverance from the curse by the grace of Ram.

Ahalya has been perceived in a new light by modern poets and writers. Though Ahalya is a minor character carrying a stigma, in all ancient sources, modern Indian writers have written stories and poems with Ahalya’s perspective. Ahalya is elevated as a significant character in the modern portrayals.

“Ahalya’s tale lives on in modern – day – poetry, including works by Rabindranath Tagore in Bengali and English. It is retold numerous times in stage enactments as well as in film and television productions” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahalya)

Many writers have reinterpreted the Ahalya legend from a very different perspective. She is also depicted as a rebel and the story is told from her angle. R K Narayan in his Ahalya’s Story (The Ramayana: A shortened modern prose version of the Indian epic), adds psychological details and portrays Ahalya with compassion. Rabindranath Tagore considers in his poem on Ahalya, what she might have felt as a stone and later when she is relieved from her curse by the touch of Ram’s feet. Tagore’s Bengali poem Ahalya is translated into English by William Radice.
Tagore’s Ahalya

What were your dreams
Ahalya, when you passed
Long years as stone,
rooted in earth, prayer
And ritual gone,
Sacred fire extinct
In the dark abandoned
forest ashram? Earth
merged with your body did
You know her vast
Love, did hazy awareness
haunt your stone?
And keep you blindly dimly
half – awake?
When life’s excited zest
Rushed along branching paths
in numerous forms
To conquer the desert, did it
rise in outrage
Circle your stone and crush
your sterile curse?
Didn’t its pounding blows
shake you awake?

Did you long asleep on her
breast, enter

That place of oblivion cool as
endless night

Where millions sleep forever

without fear

Resting their life’s exhaustion

in the dust…

Tagore describes Ahalya after she is relieved from her curse, and from her stone form, to life;

Today you shine

Like a newly woken princess calm and pure

You stare amazed at the dawn world. The dew

which moistened your stone at

night shimmers now

On your black, loosely – flowing

Hair.

The world smiles;

you recognize the smile.

You gaze; your heart swings

back from the far fast,

Traces its lost steps. In a
sudden rush.

All round, your former
knowledge of life returns…

Like first

Created dawn, you slowly rise
from the blue

Sea of forgetfulness You stare

Entranced;

The world too is speechless

face to face

Beside a sea of mystery none
can cross

You know afresh what you
Have always known.

(Bhattacharya Pradeep Manushi – India org)

Chandra Rajan, a sensitive modern poet catches the psychological nuances of cursed Ahalya’s situation

Goutama cursed his impotence

and raged …

She stood petrified

un comprehending

in stony silence

withdrawn into the secret cave
of her inviolate inner self...

she had her shelter

sanctuary

benediction

within perfect inviolate

in the oneness of spirit

with rock rain and wind

with flowing tree

and ripening fruit

and seed that falls silently

in its time

into the rich dark earth.-

(Bhattacharya Pradeep Manushi -141 Mar- April 2004)

The Image of Stones in S. Sivasekaram’s Poem Ahalya

S. Sivasekaram’s poem Ahalya presents Ahalya as the victim of three males. The poet names none of the four involved in the story. The questions of purity, morality are irrelevant in the Sivasekaram’s poem. He brings out the tragedy of Ahalya who is a stone, whether she is alive or not. Even as a living being, Ahayla had been like a stone in the company of the stony figure – Gautama her husband. After her union with Indra, by deceit, Ahalya turns into stone by the curse of Gautama. Sivasekaram makes use of the image of stones to suggest the tragedy of Ahalya’s life. The setting of a landscape of wilderness filled with stones adds meaning to the story of Ahalya in the poem (1995). The poem is translated from Tamil into English by Lakshmi Holmstorm.
Ahalya

Stones

Above the earth, beneath the earth,

hillocks and mountains,

rocks and fragments

upright, fallen,

stones.

Her husband, the sage, was a stone.

The god was a lier, but

no stone he,

only a male deity, who lived

to survive the curse

and she who had lived like a stone

coming alive for that instant alone

truly became a stone.

On a day much later,

an avatara who crossed the seas to rescue a lover,

only to thrust her

into burning flames –

who feared the town’s gossip

and exiled her –

a god, yet unworthy of touching a stone –

stumbled upon her.
Had she not changed again
stone becoming woman
to live like a stone with a stone
Had she remained truly a stone
she might have stood forever,
a mountain peak, undestroyed by time

(Richman Paula 2008:158)

4.5 The Powerful Kaikeyi

Amreeta Syam’s Long Poem on Kaikeyi

The marginalized, minor and stigmatized characters in the ‘Ramayana’ surface in the works modern South Indian Writers. There are poems and works of fiction by these writers on Ahalya and Shambuka express different perspectives. They have evoked fair amount of curiosity and interest in the readers by giving a new twist to the traditional accounts in the story of Ramayana. But very few works have Kaikeyi as the central figure. Long ago the Sanskrit poet Bhasa had given a new twist to the traditional story of Ramayana (8th century) in his Pratima Nataka.

According V B Srivastava, The dramatist had succeeded to a great extent in cleansing the stains put on Kaikeyi’s character. It was Kaikeyi’s assertion that Dasharatha errand of fourteen years banishment to Ram was meant to fulfill the curse of the parents of ShRavan. It was
ordained. She was only an instrument in the hands of God to execute the curse. Therefore only Dasharatha himself was responsible for his separation from his dear son, which caused his death. She was not to blame. The decision of Ram’s exile was a unanimous and was concurred by the saints. Ram’s exile was necessary to weed out the demons. Kaikeyi confesses that she demanded fourteen years of banishment to Ram out of sheer mental anguish and slip of tongue. She had uttered fourteen years in place of fourteen days. In this way Bhasa has succeeded in carving his characters to a new height, removing the disgrace on their personality (Srivastava 2009:188).

The Marathi writer B. B. Borkar has presented Kaikeyi with a new perspective in his Marathi novel “Priyakama” in 1983. A musical Marathi drama Dhadila Ram Tine ka Vani written by D.G. Godse has a different perspective on Kaikeyi. By sending Ram to exile, Kaikeyi enabled Ram’s character as an exemplary ideal human being. Amreeta Syam, the Bengali writer has dealt with Kaikeyi’s character in her long poem Kaikeyi

Amreeta Syam’s Kaikeyi, the heroine of the long poem is not a typical one-dimensional character, as depicted in Valmiki’s Ramayana. She is a complex and dynamic character who boldly faces the consequences of her act of driving the avatar (Ram) himself into exile. She is not as pure and ‘Satvik’ like Koushalya, Ram’s mother and a dumb shadow like Sumitra neither! As in Valmiki’s story, Syam
depicts Kaikeyi as a loving mother who dotes on Ram. She is extremely happy that Ram would be coronated. But when Ram ignores Kaikeyi’s request to be with her on the night before his coronation and spends the night in Koushalya’s chamber, Kaikeyi suddenly awakens to the realization that Ram belongs to Koushalya and it is Koushalya who is going to be the ‘Queen mother’, and it is not her son Bharata, who will be crowned. Through the series of dramatic monologues, Kaikeyi’s character fully fleshes out and appears psychologically convincing. ‘Reason’ and ‘Instinct’, in Syam’s words, “the ego’s grasping claws and the heart’s selfless love” are at war. Her ego overtakes her heart’s selfless love for her people and forces her violently to beg her two forgotten boons from King Dasharatha. The depiction of the sequence leading to the reversal in Ram-doting Kaikeyi’s attitude is depicted completely true psychologically. Kaikeyi’s knows the consequence of her act-her complete isolation in the palace.

Kaikeyi in Amreeta Syam’s poem does not accompany Bharata in his mission of bringing back Ram (as depicted in Valmiki’s Ramayana). The poet deliberately makes a change here in order to remain true to the characterization of Kaikeyi, which she has painstakingly brought alive. Here Kaikeyi even urges her son Bharata to rule the kingdom only when Bharata leaves Ayodhya, Kaikeyi comes to the sad realization that she lost her husband and her son for nothing. She had let nothing stop her in getting her desire fulfilled- the desire to see her son sitting
on the throne of Ayodhya. Even the threat of widow-hood could not stop her. The widow-hood and her nightmarish isolation come as realities. The great tragedy of Kaikeyi’s life is the rejection of her awesome sacrifice by her own son Bharata.

The poem is in five parts and portrays the complex and intriguing process of Kaikeyi’s development as a character in four phases of her life- as a wife, mother, the widow and the crone. The poem has the prologue and epilogues. Her character is well introduced in the prologue. Amreeta Syam, by selecting the autobiographical technique, seizes the reader’s attention per force and drags into the inside the intriguing. Kaikeyi appears as a grey haired crone with withered eyes, clutching at the palace walls. She appears content watching her grand children playing, in the first part of the prologue. A gradual undergoing of a complete metamorphosis is seen in the second section of the prologue. The past is re-captured in the vision of Kaikeyi- a glorious queen hood, her ambitious nature, love of her husband, pride of getting good sons... Kaikeyi recaptures the moments of her glorifying in her race.

The poet sketches Kaikeyi’s childhood vividly. Kaikeyi was always ambitious, loved riding and always dreamt of becoming a queen and not a consort only. At the age of 13, Kaikeyi is married off to middle aged Dasharatha. She is shown as Dasharatha’s favourite queen. When Sumitra is brought to Ayodhya as a new queen, Dasharatha does not
spend a single night with her. Instead he goes out for a second
honeymoon with Kaikeyi. The clever Sumitra later wins Kaikeyi’s
compassion by attending on her. As a queen, she knows how to rule
the kingdom. She has her own spies, even without the knowledge of
Dasharatha. It is Kaikeyi who educates Ram in the tricks of kingship,
in the inevitable hypocrisy but never tells him about her spy-network,
as she wants to remain a perfect mother.

Kaikeyi sees her younger version in Sita, possibly because of Sita’s
doting on Ram. Kaikeyi understands the agony of Sita, when Sita’s
chastity was questioned. She urges Sita to protest against her
banishment as her inner conscience pinches her always that it was she
who had given lessons to Ram to give primacy to the subjects’ wishes.
But Sita acquiesces as,

\[ \text{She was disillusioned} \]
\[ \text{A love that dims} \]
\[ \text{And sputters into} \]
\[ \text{nothingness} \]
\[ \text{is often worse} \]
\[ \text{than no love at all.} \]

Kaikeyi urges Ram to bring back his wife for the horse-sacrifice. A
golden statue is made in place of Sita,

\[ \text{The pure cold metal} \]
\[ \text{Was perfect for} \]
him

who turned away

from a human being

Kingship bled emotion

out of him.

When Sita disappears, Kaikeyi suffers in her agony of losing her dearest daughter-in-law. There is a modern interpretation to the disappearance of Sita. It is not mythical vanishing into the bowels of earth. Syam’s Sita wanders off none knows where.

The poem comes full circle in the meaningful epilogue where we see Kaikeyi playing with her grandchildren. Kaikeyi has re-assured her life and tries to realize and define happiness. She warns future generations not to imitate Ram who turned Sita’s image into a lifeless metal.

Kaikeyi implores the readers not to become oblivious of the relation between a man and wife in the process of their deification.

Kaikeyi’s tragic experiences of life have taught her lessons so she advises,

Ask questions my grandchildren,

Always,

Rule with your hearts.

But keep a little
of yourselves
aside
for life and
laughter.

The poem ends with Kaikeyi’s nostalgic memories of her golden
days of love with Dasharatha.

Two horses galloping
With the wind
The black-haired woman
Impatient, laughing
And the steady warmth in
the man’s eyes
the love in his voice,
Dasharatha.

Kaikeyi’s portrait comes fresh alive in the words of Amreeta Syam.

(Source: Bhattacharya Pradeep’s article Kaikeyi That Horrible Woman Understood at Last (24 April 2001)
http://www.boloji.com/index.cfm?md=content)
4.6 Sita in Long Narratives

Kumar Asan’s Sita

The classical myth and legends of India have provided great material for the creation of the literary world. ‘Sita’ is one such great material. Many poets and writers have rendered their visions about ‘Sita’ There have been faithful translations of the original Valmiki Ramayana with the same thrust of Valmiki’s portrayals of different characters in *The Ramayana*. Some creative writers have handled the “great material” with the new ‘visions’ new perspectives and interpretations.

Kumaran Asan’s Malayalam poem “*Chinta Vishtayaya Sita*” is unique with its philosophical reflections, emotional content and the originality of conception. The uniqueness of the poem is in the poet’s conception of Sita. The long poem *Chinta Vishtayaya Sita* in Malayalam (1919) is translated into English by Rizio Yohannan Raj and is available to the English speaking world. The poem is Kumar Asan’s Magnum opus, his masterpiece. Kumaran Asan had cherished a passionate interest in the Indian Renaissance movement led by Raja Ram Mohan Roy which had the liberation of women as its most important agenda. This spirit of Indian renaissance is infused in his poem, in his making of Sita who suffers at the hands of her husband, the protector of Dharma but she is strong enough to question Dharma, even *Smriti* edicts that have relegated woman to the position of a slave, a puppet. Her sacrifice and suffering are the legacy of the wife and mother, world over. But Sita stands as the symbol of love that transcends itself. There is a perfect fusion of the poet’s vision of love and the gist of the invaluable traditions of our culture. Sita emerges as a strong woman who questions her lord’s uncharitable disposition in the name of
‘Dharma’. Asan appears a stout champion of the truthful cause of faultless womanhood subjected to needless punishment.

Sita appears very different from the helpless victim and patient sufferer. In her ‘reverie’ she turns to be a merciless judge of men and things. Sita turns an apostle of truth. Asan’s depiction of Sita appears as a significant departure from the Sita of Valmiki and the other later authors. Sita’s words sound as a clarion call from an enlightened feminine voice of the Renaissance period that women should not be treated as slaves or puppets and taken for granted by the patriarchy.

Does the king intend

That I should again appear before him

Prove my innocence and live as his consort?

Well, does he take me for a puppet?

(Das Bijaykumar 2004:122)

At the same time Asan presents Sita’s ambivalent thoughts. In the process of re-assessing her life and events, though she criticizes Ram’s behavior towards his wife, she broadens her vision to see Ram with different perspective as a ruler imprisoned by his own position as a ruler like a caged bird longing for freedom from the governing. Her new insights release her from her bitterness towards Ram. The gradual evolution of her thought is significant.
The long poem consists entirely of Sita’s expanded soliloquy. Kumaran Asan chooses the right moment. He has chosen a pivotal moment between two of *The Ramayana*’s most touching and dramatic events – Ram’s ‘Ashwamedha Yaga’ and Sita’s decision to return to Mother Earth, as she feels that her role as a human incarnation is over on the Earth. Sage Valmiki has taken her two sons – Lava and Kusha to Ayodhya to participate in the ‘Ashwamedha Yaga’ and recite Valmiki’s poem of Ram. The departure of Valmiki with her sons creates a rare opportunity for Sita to re-assess the events of her past. She is lost in remembrance of things past. In her broodings, the entire Ramayana comes to us in a series of flashbacks. All the events are seen from the suffering wife’s angle. The poem is in the form of a long monologue and the poet presents Sita in a new light. The soliloquy of Sita is so touching and convincing that one never gets tired of reading it because of the poet’s conceptional originality.

Sita is alone at sage Valmiki’s hermitage. There is another turning point in her life. The opening of the poem is the declaration of the crucial turning point that lets loose the flood – gates of her emotions. Sita is lost in a train of thoughts which are unleashed conscious as well as subconscious. Kumaran Asan captures this feverish exercise of Sita’s excited mind. He creates a unique occasion of billowing feelings and rare insights while Sita breaks loose of her woeted composure and scrupulous restraint. Her inert thoughts which were lying long in her mind, surface at this time and the momentary reverie transforms her into a different Sita, whose indignation and moral fervor are at their height.

*The turbulent sea of thought*

*that raged within Devil’s mind*

*brought shifting waves of moods*
to the pure shores of her radiant cheeks.

The valiant lady contemplated
thus in great anguish.

Nothing is certain;

Our fortunes are fleeting:

We plod along our feverish ways yet

the world reveals its mysteries to none

(Richman Paula 2008:67)

From nightfall to sunrise the next day, Sita considers herself with Ram. Her moving moods are mirrored by changes in the natural world. From darkness to sunrise Sita is immersed in thought. Asan presents Sita’s ambivalent and conflicted thoughts about her marriage which provided her bliss of companionship with Ram but also brought intense suffering.

Heavens, it is a cruel rope

one gets for loving intensely

Men display their prowess by offering
their women as bloody sacrifices”.

(Richman Paula2008:75)

“Some would pledge the crown to a son
then send him in exile to an ascetic’s life.
Their sons, in their turn would impudently
abandon a pregnant queen in the jungle.
If illustrious rulers themselves
thus turn away from righteous path
Dharma will come to ruin, and soon
the world will turn uninhabitable

Sita has not revealed the truth to her sons, that they are sons of Ram. She remembers her struggle to reconstruct her life by the ascetic ethos of Valmiki’s hermitage and the proximity of the pious wives of Sages who were compassionate, calm with equanimity of mind. She criticizes Ram’s behavior who, to uphold truth, obeyed his father and to uphold Dharma sent his pregnant queen to forest. According to Sukumar Azhicode,

She was betrayed by her own husband, the illustrious Ram of divine antecedents, who coolly threw her to the wolves at a time when he should have firmly stood by her. If Ravan surrendered himself to the temptation of feminine charms, Ram yielded to the stronger allurement of royal power, which is worse, is everybody’s guess. Even the bonafides of Ram’s celebrated loyalty to the dictates of state craft are questioned here vehemently. The gentle, mournful, soft – spoken Sita of our school day dreams vanishes, and in her place appears a critical sharp- tongued, passionate woman speaking out for the legitimate rights of the women of all times.
Sita expresses her own view on Dharma.

*Though the practice of morality
should refine one’s nature, One’s flaws
can instantly defile all rites
and make even Dharma seem invalid”.

*Did this king care for his people’s wishes
When Bharatha’s mother mercilessly
Snatched away the sovereignty
Which was so near at hand?
That was to upload Truth
and this to safeguard Dharma!
Even the misdeeds of shrewd men
May be praised by the populace.*

(Asan’s Sita thus comes to possess the protest and resentment of the new woman. But Sita evolves in her thought and emotion. It is Asan’s imagination that Sita’s proximity with the ascetic ethos of Valmiki’s hermitage and its inmates, the wives of the Sages has an effect on her life. Sita naturally imbibes the ascetic ethos of the hermitage. The spiritual practices in Valmiki’s Ashram change her into a real ascetic making her thinking mellow with intellectual maturity. In the beginning of the poem, Asan shows Sita moving through a set of
moods and reasoned reflections. Which are mirrored by changes in the natural world. The fusing of Sita’s evolving thoughts and emotions with the changing nature – darkness to light is unique. The nature provides a perfect background for Sita’s multiple complexes, shifting moods, ambivalent and conflicted musings about her life, her marriage, her companionship with Ram, the intense emotional and romantic moments spent with Ram juxtaposed with intense suffering in her later life. She recaptures the moments of pain and agony caused by the cruel treatment meted out to her.

As the night gradually turns into day, Sita finds a change in her moods. She becomes aware of her new life, reconstructed in the hermitage. Sita’s reasoning re-assesses Ram’s actions. She has practiced compassion for others in Valmiki’s Ashram. Now her mind is filled with compassion for Ram, as she looks on him with a different perspective. Her sympathy intensifies as she can see Ram imprisoned by his own position as ruler, like a caged bird that longs to free itself from the burden of governing. Asan’s Sita thus emerges with new insights. This insight releases her from the bitterness towards her husband.

_Alas! I do perceive how,

under the guise of splendor you

my remorseful lord are living as a

captive in the prison of justice._

(Richman Paula 2008:82)
Sita, who was bewailing her lot and exploded in her righteous indignation against her husband’s uncharitable disposition is now reconciling herself to it. The ill feeling slowly Vanishes from her mind as she feels herself cleansed and purified in mind. The ambivalent state of her moods is now calmed enabling her to make a re-assessment of the whole situation.

_The horizon of my mind is clearing up,_

_my perception turns brighter day by day,_

_The river that joyously joins the ocean_

_reflects the light of self – revelation._

(Richman Paula 2008:84).

Sita’s mind is full of forgiveness for Ram.

_Lord kindly forgive me,_

_Your wife,_

_Who lives with my pride,_

_For the flaws I saw in you_

_When my mind was agitated_

(Richman Paula 2008:84).

Sita can see Ram in a new light. The whole poem appears as a journey of Sita’s soul as she re-assesses her life and reaches self – realization. She looks at life with Ram’s perspective, contemplating that
“The course of justice is terribly painful, alas, kings are not their own masters!”

The poem is one of the best soliloquies in Indian poetry. Sita’s soliloquy is an elegant and rational assessment of her life with Ram viewed retrospectively. Ram appears to her a person caught in the contradictions of earthly existence in an imperfect world. She also realizes the truth that their human life on the earth is coming to a close and the time has come to quit the earthly existence.

The ideology of Kumaran Asan is significant as he can see the possibilities of new spirit as well as its limitations. Asan is touched by Sita’s wifely devotion that absolves Ram again and again. Accordingly Prema Nandkumar, Asan’s soliloquy of Sita is full of sorrow but has a glow of the ‘Eternal Feminine’

The conclusion is very natural, says Prema Nandkumar, which has a terrible beauty about it all the same. After the entire narrative based in the sylvan surroundings of Valmiki’s hermitage, where Sita had sat in reverie comes to a conclusion and we enter the court of Ayodhya for those few last lines:

*Her comely head bent and eyes fastened on*

*The feet of the sage conducting his precious charge to her husband’s court, Sita followed him where the great nobles waited upon*
the king.

She spoke no word. She gave one look
At her husband’s anguished face.
A glance at the assembled court.
The next moment
she had released herself and stepped across the great divide.

Whereas in the Uttarakanda, we have a long description of Vasundhara coming in a throne from the depths of earth, Asan gets to the core of the idea and this is how myths are transformed to gain entry into contemporary hearts (Nandkumar Prema 2004)

Asan’s conception of Sita is original and unique and the philosophical reflections have brought grace to the poem. Sita, exploding in righteous indignation against Ram’s unjust disposition calms herself, gaining equanimity of mind, which she had learnt in the companionship of saintly figures in Valmiki’s hermitage. Sita pays a tribute to the saintly women thus.

Saintly women! The glow
Of whose faces is not diminished by
Thoughts of prickling envy, forever burn
Bright as the quenchless lights of the tranquil
Homes of these anchorites!
My thoughts are carried back
To the self same love you so tenderly
Bore in your hearts for all creation
Tree or bird or beast, the same affection you
Had for men and gods alike.

The poet’s vision of ‘love’ is personified in the form of Sita as he conceives Sita as the symbol of love that has an ability to transcend itself. The final overcoming of her resentment and indignation is symbolic of the lot of all sentient and sensitive human beings. The process of Sita’s churning of her unconscious and the surfacing of her long lying, inert and dormant thoughts, is presented so naturally. So also the composure she gains in the end after seeing into the life of things.

As Amaresh Dutta (1987) puts, “The protagonists seem to cast off their Earthly garbs, ceasing to be individuals, they become transcendent symbols - Prakriti and purusha or Paramatma and Jeevatma. Sita herself is transformed into the Eternal mother the all – suffering but also all enduring principal of life”. Amaresh Dutta finds a hint of “Advaitic unity”.


Rizio Yohanna Raj’s Pellucid translation in English captures the original spirit of the poem Chinthavishtaya Sita.
Kumaran Asan’s Sita is intellectual who can make an intelligent assessment of her life. In the process of self realization, she emerges into a real ‘Yogini’ with her compassionate actions and her equanimity of mind.

**Iyengar’s Epic Sitayana**

*Sitayana* has a fresh approach to the Saga of *The Ramayana*, the organizing principle being – Viewing of the saga in a totally new perspective – as essentially the story of Sita. The epic is not just a translation of the story of Valmiki Ramayana, nor is it a mere retelling. K. R. Shrinivas Iyengar makes occasional use of Tulsi (Hindi–*Avadhi*) and Kamban (Tamil) while the debt to the original Valmiki Ramayana, is clear. He has preserved the original idealistic foundations.

Sita is the central figure in the epic, the mainstay and purveyor of the proliferating reflection. Throughout the epic, Sita remains the brooding spirit of the whole Saga. Ravan’s *Ashokavana* provides the venue for Sita’s brooding as well as the poet’s speculative exercise. The huge simsupa tree with its sheltering foliage, standing in the midst of the park become’s sita’s support and symbolizes Sita’s divine origin and earth born destiny. The poet symbolically portrays the union of Earth born Sita with the majestic *Simsupa* tree.

Under the shadow of such *Simsupa* Sita unleashes her thoughts, broodings and her queries. Sita’s thought projected in such ambience
lies at the heart of the “re-interpretation” of the old Saga. Sita indeed goes musing through the whole epic. Her musings vary from purely private reminiscences to deep metaphysical and unresolved questions.

It is essentially the story is Sita, who though ‘Supreme Shakti’ incarnate, suffered in her human incarnation. Her life was a saga of great suffering, infinite patience and boundless forgiveness. In Sitayana, Sita is the central character. The poet has convincingly effected the slant towards Sita. The emphasis is shifted to Sita’s character and obviously the poet is aware that the ‘woman question’ should receive fuller treatment. The cosmic aura of the epic has a traditional appeal to the devout readers at the same time. Sitayana has contemporary relevance when the new era is moving towards rectification of the age-old wrongs and injustice done to women in a male-dominated society in a masculine civilization.

The myth of Ramayana has the essential vitality to be capable of putting on newness appropriate to the temper and psychic needs of a new epoch.

Sita raises many questions - “Why should the pure and innocent be powerless to resist evil? O when will our earth be made safe for the pure and the sane? Why should everything, even the highest and the holiest carry within it the seeds of perversion? Why evil? Why do people with their fine upbringing and deposits of culture succumb to fits of
folly? Why there is the cursed perversity in males. Many questions go on getting mulled over in Sita’s Stream of consciousness. If Ravan was the symbol of ‘evil of the world’ – a cosmic malignity, why boons were showered by Brahma on him and other monsters? She also realizes that the boons only boosted their ego leading to self – destruction. Sita is haunted with questions like -- Why does man have debasing hobbies like war and lechery?

The poet recalls the legendary stories of rank injustice, such as Jamadagni decreeing the death of his wife Renuka at the hands of his son Parashurama, and the petrification of Ahalya who fell a victim to Indra’s lecherous onslaught. K R Srinivas Iyengar writes about a number of women characters voicing the protest against the injustices meted out to them by men. Their voices strike a note of rebellion. Sita’s story provides him enough space to focus the woman theme. Ahalya and Lopamudra (Agastya Sage’s spouse) comment harshly on the crude and inhuman treatment of women at the hands of ‘mindless human male’. Ahalya is shown prophesizing the abominations she sees on the screen of future - women slaved, widows dying on the funeral pyres of their husbands, bride-burning, dowry deaths and so on.

Sita is also outraged by the cruel treatment man towards woman but she is aware of the divine in woman as ‘Shakti’, who represents the consciousness of more than one woman. Hence the Sityana assumes a cosmic dimension as the issues involved are on a cosmic scale. The
character of Sita, however transcends the limitations and is modernized in the hands of the author, who compares her to Ibsen’s new woman, taking advantage of certain heroic lines in Valmiki’s Ramayana (Rao Srnivas 1989:101-127)

V. Y. Kantak remarks “All doubts and queries were caught up and absorbed, as it were, and stilled by the power of myth and image... which was both explanation and assurance enough. But in the recasting of The Ramayana for a new age, a new mental climate and altered conceptual mechanisms and the speculative element is bound to have a freer run. Such reflections bring the central figure of Sita closer to the contemporary Indian mind which can freely echo her doubts and queries. This kind of fresh access to the “Ramayana inheritance is an aspect of the author’s own discovery of the presentness of the past” (Kantak V. Y. 1989:101-127) at the same time he is aware of her role in the human world as long suffering pure woman, passively accepting the role she is cast in. The poet intends to show Sita in her “glories” who is articulate in her silence and dignified in her protest against male delusions and depravities. Sita is human and also divine. He writes of such womanhood in Sityana. The opening stanzas in the prologue have a Miltonic echo. The opening lines strike the key-note on the poem.

Of womanhood I write, of the travail
and glory of motherhood,
of Prakriti and her infinite modes
and unceasing variety,
of the Primordial Shakti’s myriad
manifestations on earth
of the lure and leap of transcendences
of the ruby feminine
(Iyengar K R S 1987)

‘Sitayana’ takes Sita to the awakening of womanhood for the betterment of humanity because woman symbolizes the ‘Primordial Shakti’ According to V Ch N K Srinivas Rao, Sita acquires the character of the Indian ‘Female archetype’. Since it is Sita’s story, there are – instead of Bala, Ayodhya Aranya, Kishkindha, Sundara, Yuddha and Uttarkandas, - the Mithila Ayodhya, Aranya, Yuddha, and Ashram Books. Ram is not seen directly in action in Sita’s absence.

The episode in Mithila, reveals Sita’s power when at play, a ball disappears under the box, in which an enormous bow had been kept. Sita is in girlhood, playing with her sisters in Mithila, in her parental house. Sita raises the box a little with her left hand while the right rescues the ball. Janaka, the father of Sita, is overtaken by surprise.

Drawing near in her native innocence,
Sita now took a close look.
raised the box a little with her left hand
while the right rescued the ball.
Happening to come just then, Janaka
was overtaken by surprise and cast on his beloved child a glance
of gloried recognition
Janaka realizes that Sita is no ordinary child. He recognizes her as ‘consecrated icon of power’ and thinks that Sita must get a husband stronger than her. Janaka arranges for a Swayamvara and announces that only the hero, who strings the bow of Shiva, can marry Sita.

In the book of Ayodhya, Sita meets Arundhati (wife of Vasishta). Arundhati after seeing Sita suddenly exclaims.

*Sita, Sita, my tired old eyes yet see
you framed in infinity.

you’re come to humankind as a power,
a penance and a promise.*

(Iyengar 1987:168)

Prema Nandakumar, daughter of K R Shrinivas Iyenger, who is also a famous Indian writer in English, remarks:

*Power, Penance, Promise - Sitayana is a progressive revelation of this triune radiance that is Sita (Sita Power Penance, Promise).*

Sita determines to accompany Ram in his exile. Though Ram cannot be easily persuaded, Sita convincingly argues.

*This my lord, this popular assumption
that were but Doll’s House creatures
foolishly engrossed in colourful clothes
and glittering jewellery,
happily contained by domestic chores,
the securities of home*
and boudoir and the throes of child bearing
and rearing, is mere fancy.

If as the partaker of your Dharma,
I’ve the right to share your throne,

Why, it follows, I must with equal joy
feel the thorns of exile too.

No cheap juvenile enthusiasm, this,
Nor female obstinacy,

I’ve been schooled in Mithila’s famed
Retreats in seasoned austerities.

(Iyengar 1987: 421)

The truth implicit in these lines is that man and woman have equally important roles to play in life woman is not an ignorant cog in a gigantic life machine, and if a woman suffers on earth, it is because of the superstitious notions and blind tradition with crass selfishness which turn her in to a blinded slave. The author depicts the Sage Patnis as enlightened women.

Lopamudra, Sage Agasthya’s wife, criticizes the division of labour in ‘man’s world’ thus,

this lunatic division of labour – woman for the home, and man for the battlefield! – has driven a wedge and splintered humanity.
While the sons get trained to become killers in the horrid game of
war, the daughters get entrapped in the male’s net

Of pride, possession and lust


The book Ashoka depicts Sita as a strong woman, rejecting the
pleas of Ravan, his wealth and riches. She is firmly wedded to the
memory of Ram. Sita had strengthened herself in the company of the
Sage Patnis. Even during the long months of imprisonment, Sita is not
alone. Trijata and Anala, daughters of Vibhishana keep up her spirits.
Sita gains strength to face Ravan’s threats and blandishments. Her
insights and inner strength turns imprisonment into Ashram and
penance. Her loneliness provides her time and space to get stronger
from within and become self sufficient and to wait with patience for
future.

Instead of the stereotypical weeping and crying, we see Sita as Devi
with her new powers acquiring a rare poise. Prema Nandkumar figures
out the transcendental element in the book Ashoka. The author has
given the subtitle - Epic of the Earth – Earth-born Sita’s story is
essentially our story too. Sita, born of earth, daughter of mother
Madhavi, is symbol of all of us. Sita’s story speaks of the greatness of
the lady who remained in an apparently vast and foliage-rich garden,
but she was really imprisoned there by unscrupulous Demons and
constantly teased and terrified by ugly ogresses. Well, we too are on this
earth, a vast garden limning the splendor of prikriti. But we are also
imprisoned by our own senses (Karma and Jnan endriyas) and are
threatened by a variety of fate-made, man-impelled, self created
sicknesses - sickness of the body and mind. We are imprisoned by
birth, imprisoned by the lust of others, imprisoned by our own longings.
The myth primarily is so strong that its parameters can be extended to
include the experiences of whole mankind. Sita’s story tells us what we
are, where are we going, and what should our goal be.

In the book of Yuddha, Mandodari, Ravan’s wife is shown in her
deep mourning.

A pause, and Mandodari gave a groan of

Desperation, and said:

Where unreason and passion sit enthroned

all good sense goes a hiding.

the insanities of lust and power

have their own queer compulsions

and what are we, the females of the race

but expendable trinkets?

(Iyengar 1987:481)

Ravan is bound to perish. Before death he has encountered the
nightmare of death in his dreams. There is no way left for Ravan he has
to be killed by Ram. Before his death he seeks the “forgiving” by his
wives:
There can be no simple cancellation
of the mangled time between.
And so my Queen and my Shakti, whom I’ve
too long taken for granted:

forgive me, and the males of the species
for all our egotisms
and iniquities – but it is too late
to undo my transgressions.

(Iyengar 1987:569-572)

It is Sita who raises Ravan to such realization and the recognition of
Sita as the manifestation of “Primordial Shakti”. Sitayana takes Sita to
the awakening of womanhood for the betterment of humanity as woman
who symbolizes the primordial Shakti is in reality the one, who can
move the world towards betterment and progress.

Thus the title is justified and also the shifting of the emphasis from
Ram to Sita in the epic. Sita shows her dignity even in her retreat from
the worldly life by going back to where she came from.

*Did her marble purity,*

*a fire that burnt Ravan’s might of arms,*

*need further attestation?*

*Goodbye, then to dear visible Nature,*

*the rich flora and fauna,*
the many hued and poly foliate

splendor of Earth – existence!

(Iyengar 1987:835-836)

Sita is human and graciously divine heroine imbibing the qualities of innocence and also wisdom gentleness, strength love and compassion. All these qualities are reflected in her motivations and actions. Her musings on cosmic reality leads the readers to greater revelations. It is here Sitayana assumes a cosmic dimension as the poet discusses issues on a cosmic scale, keeping at the root of the Hindu ethos. The bold utterances of Sita are pointers in this direction. With the touch of such modernity the traditional character of Sita comes alive relevant to the contemporaneity in Sitayana. Prema Nandakumar writes, “Sitayana has now become a serious topic in the Feminist discourse and I am very happy about it for Indian women have magnificent role – models to achieve an ideal life of harmony and strength of purpose” (Nandkumar Prema 2004).

Sitayana contains 5995 stanzas (with the prologue and Epilogue each containing twelve stanzas) and has seven books. It is written in the 10-7-10-7 Syllabia unrhymed quatrain measure. ‘Sundara Kanda’ of Valmiki is the ‘Book of Asoka’ in Sitayana, placed at the centre of the book. ‘Book of Asoka’ being central to the epic, gives meaning to the rest of the tale. The seven books are further divided into seventy seven cantos; more than half are completely new creation. Though there is
good deal of direct translation from Valmiki’s Ramayana, improvisation is there. Prof. Iyengar has taken inspiration from Kamban and Tulsidas and there are allusions to great Indian and English writers.

**Sita Shakti Kavya**

The poem is a long graphic narrative, throwing light on yet another dimension of Sita’s character. Sita in the narrative, is presented as an empowered mother and a single parent, imparting value based education to her sons Lava and Kusha. The poem represents the value system ‘Samskar’ imparted by Sita to her children Lava and Kusha.

Ram banishes Sita to the forest when he hears some people of Ayodhya mouthing foul words about Sita, as she had been abducted by Ravan. The pregnant Sita takes shelter at the hermitage of the sage Valmiki.  *Sita Shakti Kavya* (The epic of Sita’s empowerment) begins here. The anthology recounts how Sita finds a transformation in her as a powerful mother. She is now no more a weak wife of Ram. There are graphic details of Sita giving a good value based upbringing to her children. She emerges as a spiritual guide to the people around her in the forest. She is a friend-philosopher to her sons. The anthology depicts Sita emerging as the all-powerful empowered divine mother. She enriches the life of the people around her in the forest, especially her *Sakhis*, filling their lives with meaning. Eventually Ram also realizes in her, the powerful feminine form of God and on behalf of him
and all the citizens of Ayodhya, begs her forgiveness praying to her to reside in his heart.

Sita has her own human limitations. She pines for the love of Ram. She tries to forget the pain of separation by being in the company of her Sakhis and narrating them the anecdotes from her life.

In Valmiki’s Ramayana Sita’s role as a dutiful and sacrificing wife naturally comes out keeping in line with the philosophical and social perceptions of that age. Other virtues of Sita were not emphasized. Sita’s role as a strong mother to bring up her twins- Lav and Kush as ideal persons and ideal citizens has not found sufficient emphasis. The depiction of Sita in Pradeep Wagh’s poem is of a strong mother, who shapes the personalities of her two sons. Sita narrates some anecdotes and incidents in her life which represent the value-system imparted to her sons.

The fourth chapter of the anthology has Wood-Apple episode, which is the highlight of the anthology. Sita gets the wisdom from Nature in a dramatic way. Sita spends joyous moments in the forest with her Sakhis, recalling and narrating the episodes of her life. Eventually, Sita gets an opportunity to relate the happiest moments of her past, chesageng the sweet nostalgic memories of the Wood-apple episode. She tells her Sakhis, how a creeper, the humble green grass, a way-side rock, the mighty sun, mountain and wood-apple tree tought her the essence of human life, human duties and a fruitful life.
Ram-Sita-Lakshman were in the forest. Once Ram told Sita that a distance of about four miles from the hermitage on a mountain top, he happened to see a Wood-apple tree with beautiful fruits, but the road leading to the Wood-apple tree was fraught with danger, and not safe to tread. Because of the thorny bushes along the way and the fear of wild animals of the forest, it was not accessible.

Sita decided to fetch the Wood-apple fruit as her lord wished to eat it. She woke up early the next morning and went out in the dark, holding a small wick lamp in her hand. Ram and Lakshman were still sleeping. Thorns pierced the soles of her soft feet. But to her surprise, she found a path by the side of the thorny bushes which did not have thorns. In the dim light of the dawn, a huge creeper entwining a huge tree-trunk looked like a huge serpent. The creeper seemed to talk to her thus:

Ignorance leads to fear
It is the light of knowledge
that brings home
The truth crystal clear.

Sita resumed her journey towards the mountain. As it was the beginning of the monsoon, the grass beneath felt wet to her feet. Sita wondered to herself as to how all of a sudden in the monsoon season grass sprouts over on the earth. Sita felt that the green grass was speaking to her:

Oh! Raghuvansh Vadhu,
Listen to me,
Even if you are faced with difficult times
Keep the seeds of truth safe and secure,
Like how I keep mine in dry summers
For when the time is favourable and good,
And there are auspicious showers,
The seedlings of truth shall sprout
To enhance the beauty of the world
With flowers

On her way to the mountain-top, to reach the Wood-apple tree, she encountered a big rock on which there was a vigorously flowing stream. The rock seemed to say thus:

Oh! Beloved of Ram
In life you shall encounter, I say
Extreme difficulties in every way,
Never be perturbed by these,
Never lose good courage please,
One who deliberates peacefully,
She alone can take decisions precisely.

Sita continued her journey. The dawn was foggy and Sita saw a hazy image of a man who was clearing the forest path, cutting the thorn bushes and sweeping aside stones. The man was plucking the leaves and flowers and was spreading them on the path. Sita froze in terror to see a stranger in the forest. But soon the image of the stranger vanished in the fog. She was happy that the path was cleared somehow.
The sun shined in the eastern sky and it seemed to Sita that the sun was saying thus:

> Oh! Sita, listen to me with care  
> Be there rain, hail or storms mighty,  
> Whatever be the events in life,  
> Never leave your path of duty

She saluted the Sun-God and moved ahead and reached the mountain. The mountain seemed to advise her:

> Janaki!  
> One who abides by  
> Truth, Persistence and industriousness  
> She alone  
> Shall deserve the love of God,  
> One who adopts these virtues  
> She alone  
> Shall walk with the head held up high

Sita prayed to the mountain to give her strength to climb it. Sita reached the Wood-apple tree laden with lush green apples. She prostrated humbly before the tree, requesting the tree to give some apples to fulfill her husband’s wish. The tree seemed to speak,

> A woman is the embodiment of motherhood. She showers love from her soul. Like a tree is indeed offering affection to one and all.

Sita stored all the messages of wisdom in her heart and made attempts to reach the fruits. But the fruits were beyond her reach. She remembered Ram and prayed to him to help her get some fruits for her. To Sita’s surprise, a bough of the tree bent towards her. Sita plucked
the fruits to her heart’s content and tied the fruits in her garment. Just then she happened to see the looming vision of the same stranger who had cleared the forest path. She thought she had an illusion that the stranger was sitting on the bough of the tree and bending it. She did not have time for verifying her illusion.

When she reached the hermitage, she saw Ram seated outside the hermitage. She bowed in reverence to touch his feet and suddenly saw bruises all over his feet. Ram’s feet were wet with mud. His hands, too, were bruised by thorns and stones. Sita realized that it was Ram who cleared the path of the forest for her and it was he who bent the bough helpfully towards his wife. Sita was overwhelmed with emotions when Ram appreciated her immense effort to fulfill her husband’s wish and her infinite love for him. Ram spoke to her that a husband too should understand the aspirations of his wife and should keep himself by her side to help her in times of sorrow and happiness. He explained how both of them heard the thoughts in each other’s hearts and how wonderful it is to live a harmonious life. The writer’s imagination of the Wood-apple tree and the wisdom Sita gains from Nature are beautiful addition to the ‘Kavya’ and to the depiction of Sita’s image, as Sita herself is the incarnation of Mother Earth.

The anthology has twenty five chapters. In most of the chapters Sita emerges as a true divine mother, a spiritual guide to her sons. The writer focuses on Sita as a strong “Single Parent”, capable of bringing
up her children, moulding their personalities as protectors of righteousness. Sage Valmiki gives them good knowledge of the Vedas, martial arts etc. Sita strives for their physical, emotional and spiritual development. Sita’s inherent inner spiritual strength manifests itself in the upbringing of Lava and Kusha. She teaches her sons the essence of life, the spiritual happiness that comes from ‘love’ for all the beings. Love for God has different forms- some may love him as a consort, some like a brother, some like a kin, and some like father-mother. She preaches:

"Be cautious and guide your heart towards God’s purpose"

The ocean of life is endless
How will you reach the shore?
Remember the God Almighty,
Do only good deeds,
Purify yourself completely
Then, you shall reach the shore.

In Chapter Eleven, Sita tells her friends the way to bring up children:

Knowledge, devotion and truth
Be this tonic for your infant
Love strength industriousness
Feed this recipe to it
At every step good values
Give to your darling child
Oh! Mothers, but do remember
The good Lord in your mind
May they grow from strength to strength,
Your loving daughter or son,
This upbringing will make her or him,
A deserving world citizen.

Sita teaches Lava and Kusha about the spiritual development which is possible only in human species. The poet thus provides an enormous space for Sita for her self-actualisation. Sita emerges as a powerful woman and an empowered mother in Sita Shakti kavya.
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