Chapter VI

Conclusion

The Muse of *The Ramayana*---

“Age cannot wither her. Nor custom stale

Her infinite variety.”
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Conclusion

6.1 *The Ramayana* - a Metaphor for Indian Life

*The Ramayana* with its timeless appeal has been a living mythology, despite being one of the most ancient literary records. The epic has a dynamic relation with the society in all the ages. Though a religious text, *The Ramayana* has not remained static over the years, like many other religious texts across the world. Though there are authoritative tellings in *The Ramayana* tradition, the epic maintains an open-endedness which is rarely found in other religious traditions. The capacious structure of the story of *The Ramayana* explores different aspects of the human characters, touching upon the universal truths regarding the human conditions in all the ages. The complexities of all the human feelings, activities and conditions are found in the story, along with rich alternative perspectives, potent to be relevant to the contemporaneity. This is the reason why the epic exercises a great influence on Indian psyche. No wonder if *The Ramayana* has captured the imagination of Indian English writers to the present day.

There are varied reflections of *The Ramayana* strewn over a rich number of literary works in Indian English poetry, fiction and drama. The different versions, variants, retellings, from Kamban to the present day writers, have told the same story differently; shifting their emphasis and focus on different characters. Each variant is better seen in its own
specific social context, before it is juxtaposed with the authoritative
tellings and each variant or version reflects different social concerns
and a changing social milieu.

It is the Indian English writers who have brought paradigm shifts in
their works which reflect the theme and characters of the epic. As the
products of ‘Literary renaissance’, they have inculcated the best of the
western thought mingled with the wisdom of their own tradition. The
impact of the western liberalism in attitude and outlook are expressed
in their rational approaches to the ancient epic. This impact has
enabled them to re-examine and re-assesses the ancient literature in
the light of their ‘new wisdom.’ Indian English writers have responded
meaningfully to the story of The Ramayana with the awareness of what
the age demands of them and their literary ideas and ideals. The varied
reflections of the themes and characters of the epic, their various
perspectives and creative insights are all their enlightened reactions to
the age old epic tradition.

6.2 A New Approach to the Old Tradition

The writers have given a contemporary twist to the situations and
characters of The Ramayana story, thereby showing unending relevance
of the epic to the contemporary society. This shows their shift in the
sensibility. They have used the theme and characters of The Ramayana,
as symbols, images and archetypes with new connotations of the old
archetypes. They have explored the role of ancient paradigms in modern
life. There are ambivalent responses to *The Ramayana* story in all the genres of Indian English literature. Those who have questioned the myths also have an unfailing reverence for them.

### 6.3 The All-Pervasive Sita in Indian English Poetry

The researcher has observed that Sita is all-pervasive in Indian English Literature. In poetry, the poets have convincingly effected the slant towards Sita archetype. A variation can be seen in the reaction to the archetype of Sita, from Toru Dutt to the present day poets. *The Ramayana* story fascinates her, making her proud of her cultural heritage. The poems of Meena Alexander, Vijaya Dabbe (English translation), Lalitha Lenin (English translation), and Bina Agarwal voice the injustice meted out to Sita by the patriarchal value system, and question the silence of Sita over it. Here, Sita is made the symbol of the woman, caught in the clutches of male prerogatives. The poets write the stories of the wronged women afresh. They consider the dead weight of tradition on the women of all ages. Thus the ‘Sita archetype’ acquires various connotations. Kumaran Asan’s Sita (translated), is intellectual and mature enough to find the meaning of her existence by assessing her life and the role of Ram in her life.

K R Srinivas Iyengar’s epic poem *Sitayana* focuses on Sita, making her the central figure of his poem. The focus is shifted from Ram to Sita. Sita acquires new dimensions- divine and supernatural. Pradeep Wagh’s *Sita Shakti Kavya* reveals yet another dimension of Sita.
archetype— as an empowered mother, as single parent, who imparts the best value based education to her sons in the forest. Though banished by Ram, she never bears any grudge and bitterness towards him but accepts her lot with a smile and divine composure. The poems on Ahalya and Kaikeyi express different perspectives. The characters are seen in their own perspectives.

In fiction too, there are ambivalent approaches to *The Ramayana* story. Raja Rao’s novel *Kanthapura* reflects peculiar Indian sensibility in which Indian mythology is inextricably embedded. Raja Rao is proud of his spiritual and cultural heritage. He uses the ancient and recurrent motif of ‘The triumph of the good over the evil’, which serves as the most appropriate metaphor for the freedom struggle (The battle between Gods and demons). The whole story of *The Ramayana* gets reflected in the novel in a miniature form. The symbols and archetypes are meaningfully realized.

The ‘Ramayana myth’ becomes a social reality for R K Narayan. His novel ‘The Dark room’ reflects the mythological evocations of social life in India. The novel explicitly harks back to the Sita myth, as the writer is touched to see the plight of Indian women. At the same time he recalls to his mind, Ibsen’s Nora (Doll’s house). This serves as the best example of interliterariness, and intertextuality. Ibsen’s Nora and Narayan’s savitri (the Protagonist of the ‘The Dark Room’), think the same in the beginning: they do not know what to do with their lives.
But Ibsen’s Nora moves out of her house in search of her identity but Savitri, though tries to escape in an exile, returns to her obligations as a mother, as she is the child of Indian psyche.

Mulk Raj Anand’s concept of ‘new myth’ conforms to the expectations of the horizon of readers in his age. His new myth is a deliberate, conscious re-interpretation of the traditional myths and archetypes. Mulk Raj Anand is a social reformist and an innovative winter at once. He paradoxically uses the old sources ad breaks away from the set pattern, replacing with new ideals.

The protagonist of his novel Gauri, imbibes the strength of mythical Sita in facing her predicaments in the beginning, but at the painful climax of her life, she shakes off the burden of ‘Sita image’ and finds a new path of life afresh. The ancient story of The Ramayana gets reflected in the novel but the writer suggests that in course of time men and women evolve as not to repeat the same mistakes of the past. The old myth is transformed into a ‘living myth’, giving the message to live up to a new contemporary myth, struggling to become an individual in all the dignity of one’s strength and weakness.

The major paradigm shift in sensibility can be seen in the novels, and short stories of women writers English. There are new versions of the old archetypes, acquiring new connotations. Sita is a neurotic character in Anita Desai’s Where Shall We Go This Summer revolts against the male tyranny. Nayantara Sahgal’s protagonists are rich,
educated belonging to ‘High class Society,’ but they crave for their space (even Sita was a queen). Sonali in the novel *Rich Like Us* is a fine Indian specimen of the new woman and Rose, a foreign lady, who assimilates herself in Indian culture, is not able to escape the deep impact of mythical Sita. Anita Desai highlights the confinement of women in futile domesticity and shows how adherence to the old myth becomes a psycho-emotional reality for Indian women. The protagonist ‘Sita’ in her novel reflects mythical Sita’s helplessness and confinements. Bharati Mukherjee’s novel *Holder of the World* considers the impact of mythical Sita even on women of alien culture who eventually settle in India. But the women in her novel find answers while solving the riddles of their lives, in shattering the old myth of Sita. They have concerns for their survival values.

In the creative interpretations of *The Ramayana* story, the reflections still acquire new dimensions. Here, Sita is reconceptualised. Shurpanakha and Ahalya are individuals, who realize the need for self-actualization. Shurpanakha in Volga’s “Reunion” (English translation) rebuilds her life in the surroundings of nature. Shashi Deshpande’s Sita in the short story “The day of Golden Deer” is not a believer in fate. She thinks she is responsible for the consequences of her own actions.

The fictional genre provides the freedom to the writers, a free play of imagination and they successfully transport the archetypes to the modern era and re-assess them. The female protagonists are archetypal

The protagonists strive to carve a niche, a respectable and equal place for them within the social order. They reflect the need for a meaning in life. There is a shift in the ‘traditional virtue syndrome’ in the writings of feminist writers. The image of ‘women’ is deconstructed and reconstructed from male literature. The reflections of *The Ramayana* in their work show the need of re-examining and re-assessing and re-writing the old myths which will help the modern women to find themselves stripped of false sanctity and to empower them with the human virtue of courage. They revisit the mythical women tapping their feminine consciousness from an awakened women’s point of view.

The marginalized and stigmatized characters who are considered as minor characters surface in the works of south Indian writings.

**6.4 The Marginalized on the Forefront**

In Indian English Drama, K. V. Puttappa’s *Shudra Tapaswi* (English translation) the modern sensibility of the writer is displayed. The writer has ambivalent responses towards the Shambuka episode in *The Ramayana*. Puttappa, as a true devotee of Ram, did not want to criticize the act of Ram’s killing of shattering the myth of sub alterity. He makes Ram find a real ascetic in Shambka and venerate him. Ahalya
and Shurpanakha stand as symbols of oppressed women and victims of male dominance. The two stories on Ahalya by K B Sridevi and Pudumaipittan bring about the element of psychological depth into the story of Ahalya. In both the stories of Ahalya, the modern retellings do not glorify Ram, but focus on Ahalya, protesting the injustice meted out to her. N S Madhavan’s story of “The Predicament of the Modern Ahalya” (translation), bring to light, the plight of beautiful young women, paired off with older husbands, bereft of any desire or excitement. Conjugal understanding is no longer taken for subservience. Some modern Indian English writers do not reject the myth but arrive at meaningful and creative reinterpretations of them.

It is the need of the modern time that men and women have to look forward to fresh knowledge of themselves, trying to discover what is relevant to their lives in their contemporary existence. Women cannot approximate themselves to the images of ideal womanhood like Sita. The women writers revisit the mythological heroines for reassessment of their relevance. Their endeavour is to liberate the old myths from the fallacies that they are relevant one sex.

The researcher has observed the all pervasiveness of ‘Sita archetype’ with a significant variation in the continuity of her archetypal extensions. The archetypes are all the same but the realizations are different. The reflections of Ramayana in Indian English
literature highlight both the flaws and positive attributes, to learn from the flaws and improve on them.

6.5 Scope for Further Research

Different aspects of The Ramayana can be studied today from literary point of view, even though basically it is considered as a religious text. Those aspects can be brought in the purview of Indian English Literature. Similar research can be undertaken to assess the reflections of The Mahabharata in Indian English Literature. Indian English Literature can be studied from different perspectives for research.