



International Journal of Sanskrit Research

अनन्ता

ISSN: 2394-7519

IJSR 2020; 6(6): 115-116

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www.anantaajournal.com

Received: 16-08-2020

Accepted: 02-10-2020

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Environmental aspects in *Rāmāyaṇa* through the portrayal of Sītā

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Introduction

The Epic *Rāmāyaṇa* is a classic Sanskrit work, which closely interrelated with some ecological values. The epic developed from a single verse that created from the sorrow about the separation of a snipe bird couple. Those cupid bird couple compared to the Rāma and Sītā. The third chapter of *Rāmāyaṇa* is *Āraṇyakāṇḍa* because of it deals with the exile of Rāma and Sītā with Lakṣmaṇa. The development of the *Rāmāyaṇa* story, throughout keeps a symphony with the nature. The battle between Rāma and Rāvaṇa, and its final and cruel effect the abandonment of Sītā were the after effect of the abduction of Sītā, in the *Āraṇyakāṇḍa*. According to the *Rāmācaritamānasa* of Tulasidāsa, the first meeting of Rāma and Sītā was also taking place in a lovely garden. So then, Sītā the female protagonist of the story herself is the 'daughter of the Earth' is obviously not a matter of amazement.

Sītā: The Daughter of Earth

A character like this cannot be seen anywhere in the world literature. The birth of Sītā was in a unique way. When Sīradhwaja Janaka, the king of Mithilā ploughed the land just after immolation, a newborn baby girl appeared from the earth. He named the baby as Sītā for the reason that of her appearance from 'sita' which means the plowshare.

क्षेत्रं शोधयता लब्धा नाम्ना सीतेति विश्रुता ।
भूतलादुत्थिता सा तु व्यवर्धत ममात्मजा ॥

Sītā's different names such as Avanijā, Avaniḅālā, Bhaumī, Bhūmijā, Bhūmiputrī, Dharaṇīsutā, Dhariṛīsutā, Kṣitijā, Medinīsutā, Medinīputri and Vasudhatmajā are remembering her birth from the Earth. This uniqueness in her birth point toward that Sītā was an agricultural deity among ancient Indian society. Finally, the image of that specific deity transformed into an epic heroine and an ideal woman.

The end of her life journey also related to the earth. When Rāma asked her to prove her purity of chastity in front of the crowd, she exhorted her mother Earth to provide her a shelter. She asked to give a shelter in the lap of the Earth if she is entirely pure with her mind and body.

यथाहं राघवादन्यं मनसापि न चिन्तये ।
तथा मे माधवी देवी विवरं दातुमर्हति ॥
मनसा कर्मणा वाचा यथा रामं समर्चये ।
तथा मे माधवी देवी विवरं दातुमर्हति ॥
यथैतत् सत्यमुक्तं मे वेदिम रामात् परं न च ।
तथा मे माधवी देवी विवरं दातुमर्हति ॥

When Sītā repeated her truthful words three times, a big excavation appeared in the earth and Bhūmīdevī appeared on a golden throne that decorated with many ethereal gemstones supported by serpents. She rapidly disappeared from there with her daughter Sītā within a split second.

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Obviously, nobody can find any other sublime emotional moments in the world literature, which is equal to this scene depicted in the *Valmiki Rāmāyaṇa*. Finally the daughter of Earth found her permanent shelter in the lap of her own mother.

Sītā in Exile

When Rāma decided to respect Kaikeyi's boons from Daśaratha and lead life in the forest, he asked Sītā to be in Ayodhyā. However, she did not agree to stay in Ayodhyā without her husband, Rāma tried to stay back her by pointing out the difficulties in the forest life, whereas, Sītā had a clear viewpoint about the characteristics of forest life. After all, she is Bhūmiputrī by birth and grown into an agricultural society. When the journey to the forest began and it comes to cross the river Ganga, Sītā praised to the river goddess and the offerings got up to make their journey comfortable. The *Āraṇyakāṇḍa* also encloses several scenarios related to Sītā and environment. Sītā was very sociable with her environs, including birds and animals in the forest. While Rāma searches for Sītā after her abduction, he mentions Sītā's interest towards birds, plants and animals. He asked those environs about Sītā.

अस्ति कच्चित्त्वया दृष्ट्वा सा कदम्बप्रिया प्रिया।
कदम्ब यति जानीषे शंस सीतां शुभाननाम् ॥
अथवार्जुन शंस त्वं प्रियां तामर्जुनप्रियाम् ।
जनकस्य सुता तन्वी यदि जीवति वा न वा ॥
भ्रमरैरूपगीतश्च यथा द्रुमवरोहसि ।
एष व्यक्तं विजानाति तिलकस्तिलकप्रियाम् ॥
अहो त्वं कर्णिकाराद्य पुष्पितः शोभसे भृशम् ।
कर्णिकारप्रियां साध्वीं शंस दृष्ट्वा यदि प्रिया ॥
अथवा मृगशावाक्षीं मृगा जानासि मैथिलीम् ।
मृगविप्रेक्षणी कान्ता मृगीभिः सहिता भवेत् ॥

When Sītā abducted by Rāvaṇa, the entire world suffered darkness, there not even a breeze, the sun became diminished.

प्रधर्षितायां वैदेह्यां बभूव सचराचरम् ।
जगत् सर्वममर्यादं तमसान्धेन संवृतम् ॥
न वाति मारुतस्तत्र निष्प्रभोऽभूद् दिवाकरः ।

Sītā requested with tears to all her surroundings to inform Rāma that Rāvaṇa abducted her.

आमन्त्रये जनस्थाने कर्णिकारांश्च पुष्पितान् ।
क्षिप्रं रामाय शंसध्वं सीतां हरति रावणः ॥
हंससारससंघुष्टां वन्दे गोदावरीं नदीं ।
क्षिप्रं रामाय शंसध्वं सीतां हरति रावणः ॥
दैवतानि च यान्यस्मिन् वने विविधपादपे ।
नमस्करोम्यहं तेभ्यो भर्तुः शंसत मां हृताम् ॥
यानि कानिचिदप्यत्र सत्वानि विविधानि च ।
सर्वाणि शरणं यामि मृगपक्षिगणानि वै ॥

Sometimes different symptoms, dreams and birds sound, gives some signals about the happiness and sorrows in human life. Sītā was ensuring about the animals and birds that they can inform Rāma about her abduction by Rāvaṇa. Meanwhile, the environment expressed their feelings towards the helpless Sītā with some natural phenomenon. Trees asked her to do not cry by quivering their branches, which were full of birds. The

lotus pond with distressed lotuses and scared aquatic creatures became very sad due to their best friend's helpless condition. Animals such as lions, tigers etc. quickly and angrily followed the shadow of Puṣpakavimāna with Sītā. Mountain peaks seems to like the raised hands requesting do not cry by seeing Sītā's grief. Streams are like the tears of the mountain. Rāvaṇa abducted Rāma's Vaidehī. There is no virtue, no truth, no candour and no compassion. The entire universe cried that, all destroyed by this misery. Frightened deer babies cried with gloomy faces. Fairies became very fearful by seeing Rāvaṇa and cried at the helpless Sītā^[1]. In response to Rāma's question about Sītā^[2], animals got up and sauntered towards the South.

क्व सीतेति निरीक्षन् वै बाष्पसंरुद्धया गिरा ।
एवमुक्ता नरेन्द्रेण ते मृगाः सहसोत्थिताः ॥
दक्षिणाभिमुखाः सर्वे दर्शयन्तो नभः स्थलम् ।
मैथिली हियमाणा सा दिशं यामभ्यपद्यत् ॥
तेन मार्गेण गच्छन्तो निरीक्षन्ते नराधिपम् ।
येन मार्गं भूमिं च निरीक्षन्ते स्म ते मृगाः ॥

Even though, after the returning from forest Sītā did not forget the simple life in the exile. During her pregnancy period, she expressed her wish to visit the holy hermitages besides the river Ganges.

तपोवनानि पुण्यानि द्रष्टुमिच्छामि राघवा
गंगातीरोपविष्टानामृषीणामुग्रतेजसाम् ॥

Sītā in Aśokavanika

While reaching at Laṅka, Rāvaṇa, offered all the royal prosperities and his entire wealth to Sītā. Nevertheless, she did not give any attention to his assurance. She sat under a particular tree (*śiṃśapa*) in the Aśokavanika^[3] with sorrowful heart.

Agni and Sītā

The Agni played an important role in the life of Sītā. When Rāma hesitated to accept Sītā after the war due to his suspect on her chastity, she purified herself in the Agni. Agni did not cause any injury on her body conversely became cool for her. Agni himself appeared with Sītā in front of Rāma, and stated about the purity of Sītā. He asked Rāma to accept her without any doubt about her chastity and dedication towards her husband. In addition, while Hanuman to set fire in the whole Laṅkā the fire became cool to him due to the prayer of Sītā to God Agni.

Conclusion

Sītā, the daughter of the Earth can be considering as a seraph of ecological aspects in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The existence and cessation of the epic heroine Sītā is greatly unified with the Earth. There is no other character like Sītā in the worldwide literature that is much closer to soil and nature. The five Elements in the universe significantly attached with the characterization of Sītā. In other words, Sītā is the apt example for the positively connected humanism to the environment.

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