

SUBVERTING PATRIARCHAL NARRATIVES: EXPLORING BHYRAPPA'S DEPICTION OF SITA THROUGH HISTORIOGRAPHIC METAFICTION

*SUBVERTIR LAS NARRATIVAS PATRIARCALES: EXPLORANDO
LA DESCRIPCIÓN DE BHYRAPPA DE SITA A TRAVÉS DE LA
METAFICCIÓN HISTORIOGRAFICA*

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Received May 11 2023 **Revised version accepted** September 13 2023

How to cite Anjana, S., & Savitha, A. R. "Subverting patriarchal narratives: exploring Bhyrappa's depiction of Sita through historiographic metafiction." *The Grove. Working Papers on English Studies*, vol. 30, 2023, pp. 17-36. <https://doi.org/10.17561/grove.v30.8022>

Abstract

The Ramayana, the ancient Hindu epic, has been retold and rewritten in various narrative forms by numerous writers from different countries. It has a global appeal that has inspired authors worldwide to create unique Ramayanas. Among these recreations, Bhyrappa's *Uttarakaanda* stands out with its multiple story views. This research paper, titled "Subverting Patriarchal Narratives: Exploring Bhyrappa's Depiction of Sita Through Historiographic Metafiction," delves into the author's methods of retelling the age-old narrative. The present study utilizes the conceptual frameworks of postmodernism, with a particular emphasis on historiographic metafiction. By delving into the deconstruction of grand narratives and

questioning traditional elements that impede women's rights, the article aims to shed light on important thematic concerns. Specifically, the primary focus of this research lies in the analysis of the author's work titled 'Sitayana,' where the narrative spotlight is shifted from Rama to Sita. Through a meticulous examination of the author's adept incorporation of alternative perspectives, the paper explores how this approach resonates with both Indian literature and its readership. Moreover, the article critically engages with the power dynamics that influenced Rama's actions and shaped his understanding of dharma.

Keywords: Grand narratives, postmodernism, historiographic metafiction, Sitayana, Dharma, Mythology

Resumen

El Ramayana, la antigua epopeya hindú, ha sido contado y reescrito en varias formas narrativas por numerosos escritores de diferentes países. Tiene un atractivo mundial que ha inspirado a autores de todo el mundo a crear Ramayanas únicos. Dentro de estas recreaciones, destaca *Uttarakaanda* de Bhyrappa por sus múltiples puntos de vista de la historia. in to English. Este trabajo de investigación, titulado "Subvirtiendo las narrativas patriarcales: explorando la representación de Sita de Bhyrappa a través de la metaficción historiográfica", profundiza en los métodos del autor para volver a contar la narrativa milenaria. El presente estudio utiliza los marcos conceptuales del posmodernismo, con especial énfasis en la metaficción historiográfica. Al profundizar en la deconstrucción de las grandes narrativas y cuestionar los elementos tradicionales que obstaculizan los derechos de las mujeres, el artículo pretende arrojar luz sobre importantes preocupaciones temáticas. Específicamente, el enfoque principal de esta investigación radica en el análisis de la obra del autor titulada 'Sitayana,' donde el centro de atención narrativo se desplaza de Rama a Sita. A través de un examen meticuloso de la hábil incorporación del autor de perspectivas alternativas, el artículo explora cómo este enfoque resuena tanto en la literatura india como en sus lectores. Además, el artículo aborda de manera crítica las dinámicas de poder que influyeron en las acciones de Rama y dieron forma a su comprensión del dharma.

Palabra clave: Grandes narrativas, posmodernismo, metaficción historiográfica, Sitayana, Dharma, Mitología

1. Introduction

Postmodernism is an elusive concept that defies a rigid definition. It emerged in the late 1920s as a departure from modernism. While modernism and

postmodernism share commonalities, their attitudes diverge. Whereas modernism laments the state of affairs, postmodernism celebrates it. Postmodernism deviates from the traditional path of grand narratives and modernist ideologies, instead emphasizing micro-narratives, subjectivism, skepticism, and irony. In his introduction to *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Lyotard characterizes postmodernism as “incredulity towards metanarratives” (Lyotard xxiv). Postmodern works often critique the Enlightenment thinkers who proposed overarching narratives intended for universal acceptance. Postmodernists question the foundations of knowledge claims and strive for a sense of liberation from past limitations (Taylor and Winquist 304).

It is essential to comprehend postmodernism's influence on various disciplines, such as art, literature, philosophy, and popular culture. Postmodernists deny the notion that language can accurately represent reality and instead emphasize language's role in shaping our worldviews. This movement has resulted in a rejection of the modernist emphasis on originality and authenticity in art as well as a blurring of the boundaries between various art forms. Postmodernism in literature is frequently characterized by fragmented narratives, multiple perspectives, and self-reflexive techniques that draw attention to the act of narration. It is essential to acknowledge that postmodernism continues to shape our understanding of contemporary culture.

Postmodernists posed challenges to the understanding of history and social issues. History and Postmodernism are intricately intertwined, and historians who engage with Postmodernism assert the existence of multiple subjective truths. Postmodern historians introduce new themes that give visibility to aspects such as ethnicity, culture, tradition, and gender, which were previously overlooked or marginalized in mainstream history. Postmodernists fostered a “new desire to think historically” and viewed critical and contextual thinking as essential elements of historical contemplation (Hutcheon 88). Writers influenced by Postmodernism extensively employed narrative techniques, introducing revolutionary shifts in the knowledge base. They incorporated intertextual elements such as parody, playful irony, pastiche, historiographic metafiction, and fragmentation into their writing techniques.

2. The Ramayana as a Subject for Postmodern Analysis

In particular, the *Ramayana* has been a vital resource in “establishing and reinforcing this communal narrative, as its limited array of principal

characters, comparatively straightforward storyline, framing of Classical India as a 'golden age', and clear delineation of ideal morals and social behaviour make for a well-rounded guiding narrative" (Mangharam 80). *The Ramayana*, an ancient Hindu epic, offers a fascinating subject for postmodern analysis, given its numerous adaptations, interpretations, and cultural variations. Postmodernism, with its rejection of fixed meanings and authority, challenges traditional perspectives on the *Ramayana*. This epic lends itself to such examination due to the existence of multiple versions and the diverse retellings by different communities, regions, and authors. Each adaptation of *The Ramayana* reflects the specific social, cultural, and political context in which it was created, presenting unique interpretations and adaptations of the original narrative.

Postmodernism's emphasis on subjective interpretations and the existence of multiple truths is particularly relevant when studying *The Ramayana*. Rather than seeking a single, universal meaning, postmodernism highlights the role of individual interpretation in shaping understanding. *The Ramayana*, with its rich symbolism, intricate characters, and moral complexities, invites multiple interpretations and varying understandings. By analysing the different retellings and adaptations of *The Ramayana*, a postmodern approach would explore how these variations reflect the evolving values, beliefs, and concerns of diverse societies and individuals. As a result, there exist numerous versions of the Ramayana within the Indian subcontinent and neighboring countries such as Sri Lanka and Indonesia. Most of these *Ramayanas* reflected the mainstream societies of their respective times and revered Rama as the embodiment of the ideal man, known as the 'Maryadha Purushothaman' (the perfect gentleman).

In essence, examining *The Ramayana* from a postmodern perspective allows us to delve into the dynamic nature of the epic, as it continues to evolve and resonate with different cultures and contexts. The postmodern analysis of the *Ramayana* illuminates the fluidity of its meanings, challenges traditional notions of authority and truth, and emphasizes the importance of individual interpretation in shaping our understanding of this timeless epic. Postmodernism places a major emphasis on challenging established norms and power structures, including those pertaining to gender and identity. With its depictions of characters such as Sita, Rama, and Hanuman, the *Ramayana* provides opportunities for examining gender roles, agency, and the formation of identity. Sita has been highlighted by feminist interpretations of the epic as a symbol of empowerment and resistance against patriarchal norms.

The chapter known as 'Uttarakhanda' in most versions of *The Ramayana* functions as an epilogue. Most prominent versions of *The Ramayana*, such as *Kamba Ramayanam* in Tamil, conclude with the 'Yudha Kanda' and Rama's ascension to the throne. 'Uttarakhand,' the subsequent chapter in the *Valmiki Ramayana* in Sanskrit and *Adhyatma Ramayanam Kilipattu* in Malayalam, is considered an addition to the original version. Valmiki's *Ramayana*, written in seven *kaandas*, narrates Rama's valor, heroic deeds, and his concept of dharma. Valmiki's final Kanda, "Uttarakhand," concludes with the separation of Rama and Sita, as Sita voluntarily retires to the womb of Mother Earth. Many later versions of *The Ramayana* offer different conclusions about the ending. Some even believe that "the abandonment episode is inauthentic, a later addition to the text" (Hess 3).

The shift of focus from Rama to Sita has been a favoured source of inspiration for twentieth-century writers. According to Verma, K R Srinivasa Iyengar's *Sitayana*, published in 1987, brought about a significant change "from the rational-linear masculine to the psychic integral feminine worldview" (Verma 904). Chitra Banerjee, Devdutt Pattanaik, Amit Majmudar, among others, have also found inspiration in Sita for their literary endeavours. Banerji remarks that these works have contributed to shedding light on the "general subaltern historiographical theoretical project" (Verma 904). In retellings of *The Ramayana*, the decision to emphasize Sita represents a deliberate departure from traditional patriarchal interpretations that often marginalized her character. The intention of the authors is to delve into Sita's emotions, struggles, and agency in shaping the events of the epic, thereby providing a more profound understanding of her character. Placing Sita at the centre allows for a reimagining of her as a strong and multidimensional figure, challenging the norms and structures that historically silenced women's voices. This approach not only facilitates a nuanced exploration of Sita's character but also prompts readers to question prevailing power dynamics and explore alternative perspectives on ethical conduct. Through this shift in perspective, we gain a deeper comprehension of the intricacies of history and how dominant narratives have shaped our understanding of it.

3. Historiographic Metafiction: Questioning Historical Facts and Dharma

The theorists of Historiographic metafiction advocate that the past remains unapproachable; the historical narration is an act of the writer's imagination, and the development of its plot will be decided by the writer who works

on it. In historiographic metafiction, authors incorporate historical figures, events, and documents into their narratives, frequently reimagining or reinterpreting them in an inventive or unconventional manner. They investigate the subjectivity of historical accounts and emphasize the significance of narrative in influencing our understanding of the past. Through the long soliloquy of Sita, *Uttarakaanda* revives the past, re-lives it, and challenges the heroic stature of Rama. Bhyrappa thus questions “the ontological and epistemological status of historical ‘fact’ or the distrust of seeming neutrality and objectivity of recounting” (Hutcheon 88). When confronting the armies of rakshasas, Sita exhibited remarkable resilience and unwavering determination, which are prominently absent from the story. Instead, we observe Ravana’s frequent appearances, during which he consistently offers appealing temptations as opposed to posing direct threats. Surama, the virtuous wife of Vibheeshana, covertly encounters Sita and offers her much-needed moral support and solace. Sita endures a year of solitary confinement in Ashokavana, during which she experiences intense emotional turmoil. One cannot help but contemplate the thoughts that occupied her mind throughout those extended weeks and months. Sharaph poses a series of questions through his review: “What kind of emotional turmoil did she go through? What were her thoughts? How did she think of Rama in those weeks and months? Wherefrom did she find the fortitude and strength of will to resist a demon like Ravana?”. The act of banishing Sita from the kingdom by Rama is executed with the purported intention of upholding the dharma, which refers to the moral obligations of a ruler. Abandoning a woman during her pregnancy by her husband is justified here as an act of alignment with dharma. The rationale underlying this narrative has consistently faced scrutiny from scholars and academics.

In the epic, Sita is petite, rootless, orphaned the moment she is born. Bhyrappa’s Rama is an ordinary man with unlimited human desires who loses his sense of dharma as a husband after regaining power. As Bhyrappa argued that “power was the sole factor behind the change in Rama’s attitude and mindset. When Rama becomes part of the establishment, he loses his independence of thought” (Churumuri). He is a failure as a husband and father whose attitude towards Sita has gone skewed. “Rama can become angry and act the role of an avenger” (Kishwar 22). Rama, in many instances, could not adhere to the *dharma*. The injustice to Sita begins after the war. Rama questions her chastity after the release from confinement instead of showing affection and care, leaving with a shock and a tint of pain. Angered,

Sita decided to prove her chastity by setting her ablaze and stopped by Lakshmana, who grabs her and pulls her out, saying “she has lost her reason and thinks that Agni, as mentioned in our *Puranas* (Sacred Scriptures), will not burn those who are pure in thought and deed” (Bhyrappa 289). Here the work turns metafictional, where the author does the intermingling “the real and artificial self-consciously” (Bakhsh). Every writer who re-wrote *Ramayana* hailed Rama and forgot Sita's sacrifice and bravery. As Iyengar in his *Sitayana* points out, the coming future will not consider Rama's role as a great King who is the staunch follower of dharma; instead, they remember how cruel and heartless a husband he is:

And Aryaputra, at this grim moment
when I'm perched near the abyss,
 It's not my present shame and suffering
that I take to heart so much,
but rather the certainty that by this
 one squeak of aberrations
you will be held up to opprobrium
 For all the ages to come. (Iyengar, *Sitayana* 492-93)

Historiographic metafiction challenges conventional ideas of *dharma* by questioning the reliability of historical narratives that shape moral principles. By promoting alternative perspectives and critical analysis of historical texts, it promotes a re-evaluation of traditional notions of ethical conduct. This self-reflexive approach encourages readers to consider their own relationship to history and its impact on their worldview, resulting in novel ways of conceptualizing righteousness. The concept of *dharma* is a tremendously broader one that is not a fixed or unvarying set of ideologies. *Dharma* has upheld harmony and social solidity for a long time and helps the upliftment of living beings. Different people have their own “obligations and duties according to their age, gender, and social position” (Agarwal). *Dharma* has different meanings depending on the place, and time cannot be used for other contexts. Through this, one can understand that the words can be altered and the definition can be reformed according to the hegemonies of power: here *dharma* can be seen changed accordingly to one's convention “*dharma* is rooted differently for different characters in the story- in justice for Lakshman, in truth for Rama, in one's own actions and promises for Dasharatha, in the constancy of love for Sita” (Urmi). Rama, who resolves the issues between Gautama and Ahalya, turns out to be a failure in his

personal life. Compared to Ahalya, Sita is very loyal to Rama, endures the torture from Ravana and his Rakshasis (demons), and maintains her self-respect throughout. It is believed that *dharma* led Rama. However, Sita was banished, isolated, and her chastity was questioned.

Sita asks if the title “Maryadha Purushan ” suits Rama even after banishing his pregnant wife. In *Dharma Sabha*, Sita slashes out at Rama’s dharma and walks out with dignity. Valmiki, the author of the epic himself, provides a platform to his otherwise muted characters. Sita and Urmila and Maandavi, and Shrutakeerti muster up their courage when Valmiki asks them to speak. In *dharma sabha*, when Sita narrates the incident, and abusive words are thrown on Lakshman, Urmila stood up and spoke in a loud voice

...he has nursed a grudge against you for twenty long years only reflects his immaturity and insensitivity towards women. Men who don’t grow up with sisters and female relatives from a young age tend to be like this. Such boors don’t understand the sensibilities of women. This applies to all four brothers of Ayodhya, including Maharaja Rama (Bhyrappa 334).

When Rama decided to anoint Lava and Kusha, Sita makes a bold statement: “When your maharaja abandoned me, these children were in my womb, which means that along with me, he abandoned the children too. So he lost his right to fatherhood. He is no longer my Husband, so he is not the father of my children” (Bhyrappa 327). At one point, Sita says, “O Rama, I loved the pure person you were as a young man, not the man you have become- not the man who is shackled by the royal throne. My love for you died Sixteen years ago” (Bhyrappa 313). This novel “appears contemporary and timeless at once as Bhyrappa divests the Sanskrit epics of their mystical and divine aura and gets realistic” (Sitas With a Voice).

In the epic the lust, vengeance, jealousy of a few characters was mentioned but their thoughts have been never mentioned. Some good intentioned characters became the victims of the fate of Ahalya Devi, Mandodari, Tara Devi, they were included in a group called “*panchakanya*” who were idolized and taken as role models who accepted their sins without any hesitation. Except Ahalya, other women were materially fed and taken care of but unable to influence and impact their husbands and failed to direct them in the path of righteousness. In the epic the voice of these characters was unheard but Bhyrappa tore apart the mythical or historical relevant event and created

these characters raising their emotional voice when it is relevant for them to do so. The historical context for the readers includes all the incidents and events of *The Ramayana* written by Valmiki, “even time has not resolved the doubts and questions” (Hutcheon 138) that still surround this epic.

Bhyrappa depicts Tara Devi with a magnetic personality who controlled the administration when Sugreeva was in Lanka and who adroitly took control of the kingdom and Ruma with lack of wisdom. After Vaali's death Tara Devi seduced Sugreeva and had him under her thumb, also controlling Ruma. But both characters were seen seducing both Sugreeva and Vaali. Her cleverness can be seen when she stopped Vaali from going out when Sugreeva challenged him. She says: “Maharaja, sugreeva's sudden appearance and his new confidence is strange. I suspect he has found an ally. So, don't rush out” (Bhyrappa 296) Mandodari is one of the important characters in Valmiki's *Ramayana* but Bhyrappa brings her only in one section where she laments the death of her husband Ravana. In Bhyrappa's *Uttarakaanda* it is Sarama Vibeeshana's wife who helped Sita, giving her moral support throughout her captivation in Lanka. The scenario with Ahalya Devi can be interpreted in different ways, “she was believed to be a unique creation in the entire world” (Prakash). Having gotten the opportunity of wearing Diamonds and golds Ahalya was triggered by the king's offer forgetting about her marital vow “a total fall to the very abyss” (Prakash). Bhyrappa shows something that a normal human would feel and fall for, Ahalya later repents for her sin and it was Rama who helped Ahalya to get back with Gautama.

In myths, women are almost cursed, blamed, mutilated, and often killed. As in the rest the world has to accept that the offenders too have the rights to overcome their sin if they are already repenting and feeling guilty for their deeds. History is also filled with tales of kings who seduce every woman and think every object in their kingdom is their property. Bhyrappa raises the question as to why Rama's success in resolving the conflict between Gautama and Ahalya did not extend to his handling of the situation involving Sita. Comparing Ahalya and Sita, Sita was very loyal to Rama, she doesn't sway by the offerings and carries herself in very to the end enduring the torture from Ravana and his Rakshasis to wed him. Righteousness was the sole force behind Rama's every action, nothing mattered to him except righteousness. But what happened to Sita she was banished, isolated and questioned about her chastity by the people and by her husband whom she was very loyal and dedicated to. Bhyrappa breaks all the stereotypical traditions where moral idealisms were unquestioned.

4. Deconstructing and Recreating the Myth

By analysing a myth's fundamental values and beliefs, we can obtain a deeper understanding of its significance and its relevance to our own lives. Deconstructing a myth also enables us to contest detrimental or outmoded beliefs that may be perpetuated by the story. Through this process, we can construct new versions of the myth that better reflect our values and are more inclusive and diverse. Ultimately, reimagining mythology can assist us in creating new narratives that inspire and empower us to effect positive change in the world. Bhyrappa's fictional work, *Uttarakaanda*, published in 2017, is equipped with solid research. The author uses the liberty offered by the genre to deconstruct and recreate the myth. *Uttarakaanda* Serves as a treatise on the inner realms of the world of Devi Sita. Following the postmodern style of writing, Bhyrappa has set Sita's character in a fictional present where she, as the first-person narrator, narrates the incidents, embraces the past, and "frequently reflects on their activities and the epistemological problems they face" (Butter 1). She is portrayed as a formidable and rebellious woman who survived many hurdles as a single mother, and in the finale, Sita refuses to go with Rama. She is no more passive and voices her thoughts on the injustice subjected to her. Bhyrappa examines the inner complicity and the problems faced by Sita during her exile and after returning from the eviction. Through flashbacks and inner soliloquy of Sita, the *dharmā* in the course of actions of Rama is put into question.

The epics or *itihāsas* in the Indian subcontinent have been the treasure house of myths, erstwhile customs, and the nation's historiography. The Indian subcontinent's epics are an important cultural and historical resource. They serve as a repository of knowledge, preserving ancient customs, rituals, and moral values. Additionally, these stories provide a sense of identity and continuity that links contemporary generations to their ancestors. The epics also function as a form of history, revealing the social structures and political dynamics of the era in which they were written. Despite not adhering to modern historiographic conventions, they contain valuable information that contributes to our understanding of past societies and civilizations.

On the other hand, the country was not bound by the concept of grand narratives that there were numerous versions of the same tales that varied according to the regional customs and culture. The advocates of modern critical theories too put these texts into scrutiny under the lens of power structures and patriarchal hegemonies, "to be favoring men, the superior gender in the hierarchy" (Tiwari 1). In the postmodern era of little narratives

where local practices and events were brought to the study's core, these epics retained their popularity. Incorporating stories into cultural life is a normal process of human development, and "narratives itself needs no Legitimation" (Sim 173). Narratives are one of the fundamental ways which help to figure out reality. According to Joy "at the postmodern center, there is only a void, which is the same as saying that there is no center to the postmodern worldview. History has neither beginning nor an end, neither a creative origin nor an ultimate goal. Life is nothing more than a decentered, narrative less course of waiting for death or for a non-existent God who never comes" (Joy 34).

5. Sita's Voice

In the original *Ramayana*, Sita is a passive character where her voice is unheard, her thoughts are suppressed and her pain is invisible. If her character is analysed and studied deeper, she is the sole reason behind the existence of this very great epic. Her character is always portrayed as a stereotype of Indian women and a best example of *Naari dharma*, an ideal wife who seems powerless and submissive. Throughout the epic "*Naari Dharma* is taught, preached, glorified, evaluated and practiced by all the female characters. *Naari dharma* entails endless loyalty and servitude towards her husband, who is an epitome of God in her eyes, abiding to all the rules designed by the patriarchs, devotion to household work, sacrificing herself for the larger good etc." (Tiwari). The examination of patriarchal norms and the subjugation of women within such norms necessitates an analysis of the socio-cultural factors that are involved. The concept of patriarchy refers to a societal structure in which men possess predominant authority and control, a phenomenon that has been observed in various civilizations over the course of time. The genesis of patriarchal norms can be traced back to multifaceted historical, cultural, and societal factors, rather than being exclusively shaped by external spiritual entities.

Bhyrappa in his novel examines the inner complicity and the problem faced by Sita during her exile and after returning from the exile. Bhyrappa uses flashback techniques in some excerpts where one can witness Sita's reminiscence of her days during the exile and her inner soliloquy can be heard. Sita's character is set in a fictional present where at least one person, especially first-person narrator narrates the incidents and embraces the past and "frequently reflects on their activities and the epistemological problems they face" (Butter 1).

Bhyrappa's Sita offers valuable insights into the societal expectations and constraints imposed on women, as well as their struggle to assert autonomy within a patriarchal structure. In the epic, Sita is portrayed as the ideal wife and devoted companion of Lord Rama, embodying the traditional values and roles expected of women in that era. Bhyrappa narrows the narratives to portray the episode of Sita's suffering in the face of unrelenting physical, mental, and emotional torment. The mental breakdown she suffered when Rama abandoned her is clearly seen in the beginning of the novel when Sukeshi triggers it. Her past life rushed back at once she says

I had also weighed other options, such as drowning, hanging by a tree branch or walking into the jaws of a wild beast like a tiger, hyena, leopard or wolf. Why, I knew not, but my mind was drawn to more violent ways to end my life, such as self-immolation or being torn to piece by ravaging animals, than easier and less traumatic ways, like drowning and hanging (Bhyrappa 3)

Sita's internal dilemma raises concerns about the societal norms and expectations imposed on women in such circumstances. Sita, feeling abandoned and alone, queries "why should a woman deserted by her husband be obliged to keep her pregnancy?" (Bhyrappa 3). Despite her reservations and doubts, Sita finds solace and strength in the life growing within her. This juxtaposition reveals the complexity of Sita's character and the conflicting emotions she experiences. While she questions societal norms, she also finds resilience and determination in her connection to her unborn child.

Nonetheless, as the story progresses, Sita's character challenges these traditional gender roles and raises critical issues about the constraints and expectations placed on women by society. Sita's voyage is not without obstacles, despite her being a loyal and obedient wife. The demon king, Ravana, kidnaps her and subjected her to captivity and suffering. This experience tests her resilience, fortitude, and resolve to maintain her integrity. Sita's perseverance in the face of adversity exemplifies her agency and resistance against oppressive structures. She demonstrates a remarkable ability to navigate difficult situations while maintaining her dignity, as opposed to succumbing to despair or giving in to the circumstances. Her actions and decisions throughout the drama demonstrate her inner fortitude and determination to assert her autonomy and challenge societal expectations. By investigating Sita's viewpoint, we gain a deeper comprehension of the struggle's women face in patriarchal societies. When confronted with

societal expectations, her character illuminates the intricate power, control, and agency dynamics that women face. Sita's narrative poses concerns about the constraints imposed on women and how they navigate within these constraints. Sita's voyage is also a source of inspiration for women who find themselves in comparable situations. Her resiliency and ability to surmount adversity offer hope and encouragement to those who encounter societal pressures and strive for independence. The story of Sita becomes a potent symbol of fortitude and resistance, challenging the notion that women are passive victims of circumstance.

When examining the instance of Rama's estrangement of Sita in the Hindu epic Ramayana, it is imperative to take into account the cultural milieu within which the narrative was composed. The portrayal of Rama's actions towards Sita in the epic can be perceived as oppressive when viewed through a contemporary lens. However, it is important to recognize that these actions are presented as a moral quandary and a means to assess Rama's character. The intention behind this statement is not to assert a universally applicable truth regarding all men or patriarchal norms. The Ramayana encompasses a multitude of versions and interpretations, which contribute to a diverse range of perspectives regarding the characters and their underlying motivations. Upon examining the persona of Ravana, his actions can be interpreted as a manifestation of his inherent nature rather than being exclusively shaped by external mythological entities. Ravana is portrayed as a multifaceted character, exhibiting a combination of virtuous and malevolent attributes. Although Ravana is commonly depicted as an antagonist owing to his deeds, it is crucial to acknowledge that the Ramayana constitutes a moral allegory replete with symbolic components, wherein characters such as Ravana fulfil distinct roles and functions within the narrative.

The oversimplification of the multifaceted dynamics of gender inequality and the historical evolution of patriarchal norms occurs when the oppression of women is solely attributed to external spiritual entities or mythological figures. Although mythologies and religious texts have the potential to influence cultural attitudes and norms, it is important to note that they are not the exclusive determinant of women's oppression. The examination of gender inequality necessitates a comprehensive analysis of the intricate dynamics between historical, societal, and cultural elements that collectively sustain its existence. The pursuit of gender equality and the eradication of women's oppression necessitate the implementation of comprehensive and multifaceted strategies. This encompasses the promotion of education, the

questioning of conventional gender roles and stereotypes, the support for equal rights and opportunities, and the cultivation of inclusive and egalitarian societies. The dismantling of patriarchal structures and the promotion of gender equity necessitate concerted efforts at the individual, societal, and systemic levels.

It is important to adopt a critical perspective when interpreting mythological narratives, despite their potential for conveying moral values and dichotomies. The complexities surrounding patriarchal norms and the oppression of women are intricately shaped by historical, cultural, and societal influences. Although mythologies have the potential to influence cultural attitudes and beliefs, it is important to note that they do not possess exclusive authority in determining the nature of gender relations. The resolution of women's oppression necessitates a comprehensive approach that encompasses a range of initiatives aimed at advancing gender equality and contesting patriarchal norms across multiple domains of existence.

Uttarakaanda deconstructed the entire manuscript of the epic by incorporating philosophical thoughts and fundamental human emotions. The deconstruction of *The Ramayana* by Bhyrappa challenges the binary notions of good and evil, heroism and villainy, and traditional notions of pious behaviour. He explores the hues of gray within the characters, highlighting the inherent complexities and contradictions of human nature. Thus, Bhyrappa encourages readers to query and analyse critically the values and ideals depicted in the original epic. Bhyrappa delves into the Indian epic and reconstructs it to make it feasible for the present era. According to Hutcheon, "Postmodern fiction suggests that to re-write or to represent the past in fiction and history is, in both cases, to open it up to the present, to prevent it from being conclusive and teleological" (Hutcheon 110). Valmiki's *Ramayana* is the first Ramayana written in a poetic form, and later came the interpretation and re-interpretation by various writers. Gundappa, in his *Essays on the Ramayana: An Introduction, points out*, "The Ramayana is not a work of Sastra or history. It is poetry. However, it is poetry that includes both Sastra and history" (Gundappa). In an interview with S. Suryaprakash Pandit, Bhyrappa confessed, "he was underwhelmed by Valmiki's Ramayana, even on re-reading it, and that he could not go beyond Ayodhyakanda. However, the raging debates on Rama in the Kannada discourse propelled him into essaying *Uttarakaanda*" (Churumuri).

Bhyrappa adapts the framework of the popular version of *The Ramayana* written by Valmiki. Through the fragmented narrations, Sita's experience, the quest for home, and the sense of belonging in a patriarchate-dominated

society are brought under scrutiny. Sita is abandoned in the furrow and found by King Janaka while leveling the ground for a sacrifice. Though she was brought up as a princess, Sita's character is marked by a deep sense of isolation. Sita's seclusion ended after marrying Rama. Rama was a perfect brother, son, king, and even an ideal husband till destiny turned awry. Bhyrappa's novel set-in a past where the real event took place, the version of the past depicted in the novel is the reconstruction of Valmiki's *Ramayana*. The novel knit together the fictional past of the story "alongside the historical narrative with both being related by a more or less covert narrator" (Butter 1). The author deals with Sita's experience and her quest for home, a sense of belonging in a patriarchate dominated society.

According to Hess, Sita's raw deal turned into three episodes:

i) first one is where Sita has to go through agnipariksha to prove her chastity after her release from Ravana ii) the second one is despite Sita's progressive state of pregnancy, she was banished into the forest by Lakshmana as per Rama's order because of the suspicion on her chastity is going around the town iii) third one is rejection, a reprise of agnipariksha to bring Sita back to Ayodhya but she rejects Rama's offer and calls upon mother earth to take her to where she belongs (Hess 2-3).

The author used his creative genius to employ human emotions into the divine characters and turn them into ordinary human beings who undergo hardships, walk, suffer, talk and die. Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana of the novel are confused about the dress code during their exile. They took ten years to reach Dandakaranya forest from Kosala. Sita was kidnapped by rakshasas in a bier and not in the *pushpaka vimana*. Rama reached Lanka by boat and not by the famous Rama Sethu / bridge as in the epic. Sita returned to earth from where King Janaka took her; she shaped a furrow like a cradle and lay there, ready to depart from her body - 'a self-willed death.'

6. Conclusion

The postmodern analysis of The *Ramayana* offers valuable insights into the dynamic nature of this ancient Hindu epic and its relevance in contemporary culture. Bhyrappa's personal beliefs and commitments can be seen in this novel, but that does not change the historical values. The primary role of a historian is "to narrate a story based on their understanding of other

narratives and their pre-existing interpretations” (Munslow 26). The events of *Ramayana* are not factually authenticated and are part of oral tradition. The characters appearing in the epic are not restricted to the epochs or societies to which they originally belonged. Regardless of Rama’s godly and heroic stature, Bhyrappa in *Uttarakaanda*, put his actions in question. *Uttarakaanda* qualifies itself to be a best seller and a subject of intense academic deliberation. Unlike traditional historical novels, Bhyrappa questions the facts and the base on which attributes are constructed. He unravels the problematization of the past, where history and fiction are scrupulously interconnected. The stereotypical conventions of a patriarchal society and the hegemonic structure are deconstructed through Sita, providing the readers with a rich reading experience along with thoughts to savour.

Uttarakaanda portrays the epic as revolutionary one where the voiceless can be seen as boldly questioning the traditional ideologies. In history women were suppressed and silenced by the patriarchal ideologies in order to show their hegemonies over women they were oppressed from their activities and experience “a view of the masculine as a natural source of power and authority, and of the feminine as naturally subject to this” (Hawthorne 215). Through postmodern theory Bhyrappa breaks the stereotype conventions in a patriarchal society. Unlike traditional historical novels Bhyrappa questions not only the facts but also the base in which facts are constructed. He unravels the problematization of the past which is concerned with history and fiction. The selected book and the reconstruction of the epic can be evidently seen in the characters, this paper helps one to understand the dilemma faced by the women characters in the epic *The Ramayana* and Bhyrappa has used his genius in a successful way depicting the society where these women are oppressed from their thoughts. Bhyrappa strongly feels “that creative litterateurs should not indulge in reacting and expressing on anything and everything” (Iyengar, Activism detrimental).

The *Ramayana* presents a fertile ground for postmodern examination, particularly when approached from the perspective of historiographic metafiction. Through the exploration of historical truths and the philosophical concept of dharma, this ancient epic prompts a scholarly analysis of established narratives and offers avenues for the deconstruction and reconstruction of mythological frameworks. The examination of Sita’s vocalization illuminates the viewpoints and autonomy of female figures in the *Ramayana*, a subject that is frequently disregarded. By employing various analytic frameworks, the *Ramayana* serves as a medium for illuminating its

intricate themes and narratives, facilitating a deeper understanding of the cultural, social, and gender dynamics inherent in the text. The examination of the Ramayana as a topic for postmodern scrutiny serves as a testament to its enduring significance and the fluid nature of mythological narratives within contemporary research.

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Notas

1. *The Ramayana* is a significant work in Hindu mythology and literature; it is an ancient epic poem. Along with the Mahabharata, it is one of the two most important Sanskrit epics of ancient India. Around 500 BCE, the Ramayana is believed to have been composed by the sage Valmiki.
2. “Maryada” translates to “code of conduct” or “ethical boundaries,” while “Purus-hottam” translates to “supreme being” or “the finest among men.” Therefore, “Maryada Purushottam” is the embodiment of virtue, righteousness, and adherence to moral principles.
3. Valmiki’s *Uttarakhanda* is the concluding chapter or volume of the ancient Hindu epic *Ramayana*. It functions as a continuation of the primary narrative and details the events that transpire after the return of Lord Rama to Ayodhya. *Uttarakanda* examines the difficulties Rama encountered during his reign as monarch, including the exile of Sita due to his subjects’ misgivings. The book also depicts Rama’s sorrow over Sita’s exile, the birth and nurturing of their identical twin sons Lava and Kusha, and the family’s eventual reunion.
4. The *Kamba Ramayana*, also known as the *Ramavataram*, is a Ramayana-inspired Tamil epic poem. It was written in the 12th century by the Tamil poet Kambar. The *Kamba Ramayana* is highly esteemed in Tamil literature and is regarded as one of the foremost works written in Tamil. *The Ramayana* as retold by Kambar follows the primary plot of Valmiki’s *Ramayana*, but also integrates regional and cultural elements from Tamil Nadu. It depicts the characters, their emotions, and the events of the epic while incorporating regional flavors and subtleties.
5. *Kamba Ramayana* ends with ‘Yuda Kaanda’ as its final chapter. It recounts the epic conflict between Lord Rama and the demon ruler Ravana, culminating in Rama’s victory and Sita’s rescue.
6. The *Adhyatma Ramayanam Kilippattu* is a devotional rendition of the Adhyatma Ramayana in Malayalam. Kilippattu refers to the form of accompanied recitation. It is believed to have been written by the poet and devotee Thunchaththu Ramanujan Ezhuthachan in the 17th century.
7. *Kaanda* is a common Sanskrit term for a section or chapter within a larger text or epic. In Hindu scriptures such as the *Ramayana* or *Mahabharata*, “kaanda” refers

to a significant division or volume that concentrates on a particular phase or theme of the story.

8. *Rakshasa* is a Sanskrit term that is commonly used in Hindu mythology and folklore. In English, “rakshasa” is often translated as “demon” or “monster.” Rakshasas are supernatural beings or malevolent creatures in Hindu mythology known for their wickedness and supernatural powers. They are often depicted as shape-shifters, capable of taking on different forms and causing harm to humans and gods.
9. *Dharma* (Righteousness) refers to the moral and ethical principles that govern and guide individuals in their thoughts, actions, and behaviors. It represents righteousness, duty, and the proper way of living. Dharma is considered to be the foundation of a just and harmonious society. Dharma can also refer to one’s duty or responsibility based on their social and familial roles. It emphasizes fulfilling one’s obligations and responsibilities in a righteous and honorable manner.
10. *Dharma Sabha* refers to a group of people or a religious organization devoted to the promotion and preservation of *dharma*. *Dharma Sabha* can be translated as “Dharma Assembly” or “Righteousness Council.”
11. *Panchakanya* is a term from Hindu mythology that refers to a group of five exemplary women figures who are revered for their devotion and exemplary character. The Sanskrit term “panchakanya” means “five virgins” or “five maidens.” The *Panchakanya* are mentioned in numerous Hindu scriptures and are regarded as female role models and inspiration for all devotees. The five *Panchakanya* are Ahalya, Draupadi, Sita, Tara, and Mandodari.
12. In Hindu culture and society, *Naari Dharma* refers to the concept of womanhood and the principles or responsibilities associated with being a woman. “Naari” translates to “woman” or “female,” and “Dharma” refers to the moral and ethical principles that govern one’s conduct. *Naari Dharma* incorporates the duties, responsibilities, and virtues expected of women in family, society, and spirituality. It highlights the ideals of femininity, motherhood, compassion, and altruism.
13. *Agnipariksha* is a Hindu mythological term that alludes to the fire trial. It is frequently associated with Sita, the wife of Lord Rama, as described in *the Ramayana* epic.
14. According to Hindu mythology, the *Pushpaka Vimana* is a legendary aerial vehicle. According to ancient texts such as *the Ramayana*, the *Pushpaka Vimana* was the mythical king Ravana’s majestic aerial chariot. It is frequently described as a luxurious and celestial aircraft capable of traversing immense distances in a brief period of time.