

The SPL Journal of Literary Hermeneutics

A Biannual International Journal of Independent Critical Thinking
Double-blind, Peer-reviewed and Open Access Journal in English



Vol. 5 Issue 1 Winter Edition 2025 e-ISSN 2583-1674 Page no. 211-228

www.literaryherm.org
www.cavemarkpublications.com



Exploring the Reinterpretation of Mythology Through Volga's *The Liberation of Sita: An Intersectional Perspective*

Anushka Gauriyar
Manjari Johri

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-4878-6915>

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9770-7261>

Corresponding Author: Anushka Gauriyar, Student of English Studies, Amity School of Languages, Amity University, Lucknow, anushka1sept@gmail.com

Co-author: Manjari Johri Assistant Professor, Amity School of Languages, Amity University, Lucknow, mjohri@amity.edu

Research Article

Keywords: Rewriting, Intersectionality, Narrative technique, Feminist studies, Sisterhood

Article History

Received:
January 14, 2025
Revised:
January 22, 2025
Accepted:
January 31, 2025



ISSN 2583-1674 (SPLJLH)



Abstract

Aim: This paper is an intersectional study of *The Liberation of Sita* which highlights women's solidarity and examines how the bond of sisterhood helps them find their true selves. It evaluates Volga's narrative style through the framework of feminist studies to establish how re-writing a cultural text is an act of resistance that challenges the patriarchal social order to empower the marginalized and ignored sections of society.

Methodology and Approaches: This study applies the intersectional approach as well as feminist analysis to examine Volga's *The liberation of Sita*. Her "gynocentric retelling" of the epic places the female characters in the centre and gives a voice to the female perspective.

Outcome: The paper highlights Volga's re-visioning of the grand narratives. Re-telling of the cultural narratives establishes a co-relation between the ancient cultural history and the present socio-political reality. *The Liberation of Sita* is a re-working of the Indian epic Ramayana written by the legendary poet and ancient sage Valmiki.

Conclusion and Suggestions: Re-interpreting mythological texts from a feminist perspective not only challenges the prevalent patriarchal beliefs but also gives voice to the marginalised literary figures. In order to comprehend how cultural reinterpretation can encourage social change, it recommends more research into feminist retellings in regional Indian literatures, as well as literatures across the world.

***Correspondence:** Anushka Gauriyar, anushka1sept@gmail.com © (2025) All rights are reserved with the author(s) published by CaveMark Publications. This is an Open Access Article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any form or medium, provided that the original work is appropriately cited or acknowledged. This paper is available online at www.literaryherm.org, and CaveMark Publications, India, published it.

Popuri Lalitha Singh, who writes under the name Volga, is a prominent feminist writer in Telugu literature. She is recognized for her notable works, such as *Svechcha (Freedom)*, 1987), *Yashodhara* (2019), and the award-winning short story collection *Vimukta Kadha Samputi*, also known as *The Liberation of Sita*, which received the Sahitya Akademi award. She gained popularity for re-writing mythical tales from a feminist perspective. She is renowned for her “feisty writing and bold remarks”. (Ruchi and Jha 3) As a social activist, she contributed to the Revolutionary Writers Association and the Civil Liberties Movement, “making her work effective as both literary fiction and political discourse.” Volga has written over fifty works, which include short stories, novels, essays, poems, plays and criticism. In one of her interviews, she said, “Analyzing a book I liked from a feminist perspective gives me a lot of satisfaction”. (Volga 114) Volga frequently challenges gender norms in her writings and emphasizes the concept of intersectionality and inclusiveness. She has contributed extensively to the field of Dalit literature and claims that she “realised the broad scope of feminism which includes not just caste, but also several other factors- religion, race, gender (LGBT).” (Volga 117) Her works, such as *Aakasamlo Sangam*, *Manavi*, and *Swecha* highlight the issue of gender studies and challenge rigid social and political norms.

Volga is most recognised for her feminist retellings of Indian mythological tales. Her works, such as *Yashodhara* and *The Liberation of Sita* stand as her most celebrated ones. *Yashodhara* is a feminist retelling of Gautama Buddha’s wife’s story, whereas *The Liberation of Sita* is a reworking of one of the greatest Indian epics, *The Ramayana*, for which she was awarded the Sahitya Akademi award in the year 2015. Originally published in Telugu, as *Vimukta Kadha Samputi*, it is a collection of five short stories in which Volga presents the journey of Sita’s liberation through four other female characters- Surpanakha, Ahalya, Renuka Devi and Urmila. “Volga’s central thesis in this intervention is that liberation is more of a collective exercise than the individual” (Kumar 147). The idea of women’s solidarity is central to the concept of feminism which Volga portrays vividly in this text. She does not only give voice to the voiceless but also emphasises the idea of sisterhood. As aptly remarked by Arshia Sattar on the cover page of the book, “Volga’s voice- strong, clear and fearless- pierces through

these translations and reminds us that women have always read the Ramayana differently from men, finding their own friends, their own truths and their inspirations in the story.” (Volga) Such re-interpretations of the epics and other cultural narratives invite a fresh perspective and often subvert the patriarchal hegemonic projection of female, disabled, transgender and other marginalised characters.

Mythological tales serve as a cultural rule book that shapes various ideologies and belief systems. “Myths are the treasure house for storytelling; it work as a boon for literary creations and enable us to acquire wisdom.” (Kumar and Ranjan 341). Mythological tales are an integral part of cultures across the world. These stories have travelled down centuries through the oral tradition, long before writing and printing had been discovered. It becomes a part of the people’s cultural consciousness. “Every Indian has grown up since their childhood while listening these archetypal stories of our ancient origin.” (Kumar and Ranjan 342) With the changing times and socio-political scenario, there have been various revisions and retellings of the great Indian epics. Feminist re-visioning of mythological texts provides a missing link from the lives of marginalised women in the established narratives. Epics evolve with us; they reflect the era in which they are produced. These retellings help portray the ongoing societal scenario by challenging the established narratives.

Feminist writers advocated for the importance of female-authored narratives. For example, Simone de Beauvoir highlighted the need “to develop a woman-centric notion of reading and education” (Nayar 123). Virginia Woolf argued that most of the texts were “male-centric” and “that the patriarchal education systems and reading practices prevent women readers from reading as women. They are constantly trained to read from the men's point of view.” (ibid) The need for rewriting an established text arise from this argument. Similarly, Annette Kolodny argued that patriarchal “encoding” is embedded in male-authored texts. According to her, “Feminist literary criticism is marked by an ‘attentiveness to the ways in which primarily male structures of power are inscribed (or encoded) within our literary inheritance: the consequences of that encoding for women – as characters, as readers, and as writers’” (Nayar 133). The

feminist re-telling of grand narratives such as *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*, provides a new perspective where women are given a voice.

Numerous feminist retellings of *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* have been done in recent times. One such retelling is *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* (2017). It is the second book of the Ram Chandra Series by Amish Tripathi. The author has presented Sita as a strong character who is a skilled warrior. She fights against the wrong and takes a stand for herself in the story as opposed to the traditional image of Sita. She is also made the prime minister of Mithila whom Tripathi portrayed as a strategic and astute leader. Another such feminist retelling is *Lanka's Princess* by Kavita Kane, published in 2017. It retells the story of Surpankha, Ravana's sister. In Valmiki's *Ramayana*, Surpanakha is portrayed as ugly, untamed and evil but this story delves deep into the actions that led to her state. It depicts "how she enroutes her journey from 'form' to 'formlessness'" (Arekar and Doibale 132). *The Mahabharata* has also been rewritten as *The Palace of Illusions* (2008) by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. It gives a fresh perspective to Draupadi's story, who was marginalised and used as a pawn in the Ved Vyasa's epic. Divakaruni's Draupadi challenges the social-political norms and rebels against the strict patriarchal notions instead of silently accepting them. Written in the first, the novel projects the psychological and emotional aspects of Draupadi's character. Volga's *The Liberation of Sita* throws light on the thoughts and emotions of five female characters from the *Ramayana*, in which they are presented as secondary characters without any agency or autonomy.

In Volga's retelling, Sita stands out as a recurring figure in all the short stories, and she attains her liberation with the help of the wisdom shared by the other women in the story. Volga "attempts to catch those missing links from Sita's life and re (presents) them as lived experiences rather than mere speculations, as happens in the "original" *Ramayana* narrative" (Kumar 146). The story depicts Sita's search for identity and her place in the world after being abandoned by Rama. She lives with her sons, Lava and Kusa, in the hermitage of sage Valmiki in a significant part of the book. The narrative travels back and forth, each story revealing different settings. This technique helps to situate Sita in the centre, she is both the focal point and the agent through whom the reader revisits the situations in which women remained shielded by male presence and

dominance. The story is told from a third-person perspective, where the narrator focuses majorly on the internal turmoil in Sita's mind. Volga also uses organic, interactive dialogues, as opposed to a structured, traditional narrative, to make it like an experience-sharing and consciousness-raising exercise, helping to unravel the recesses of female consciousness.

Valmiki's original tale was written in Sanskrit; however, over the years, it has been revised multiple times. Moreover, there have been endless interpretations and additions to the text that still continue. The *Ramayana* was probably first told orally like a lot of other Indian texts, and it was written down somewhere around 300 BC. "In its present form, the *Ramayana* consists of some 24,000 couplets divided into seven books called *kandas* ("happenings")" ("Ramayana"). The seven *Kandas* are as follows: "Balakanda: The Beginning", "Ayodhya Kanda: In Ayodhya", "Aranya Kanda: In the Forest", Kishkinda Kanda: in Kishkinda", "Sundara Kanda: Hanuman's adventure", Yuddha *Kanda*: War", and "Uttara Kanda: The book of the north" (Menan).

In Valmiki's *Ramayana*, Rama stands as the central protagonist. All the said *Kandas* revolves around Rama and tells the story of the different phases of his life. Sita is the secondary character; she is his wife. Similarly, other female characters such as Surpanakha, Ahalya, Renuka Devi and Urmila have been given little to no voice and agency in the main narrative. They are shown as the victims of patriarchy, and their stories and sacrifices are often forgotten. Volga challenges this secondary position given to these women in her book *The Liberation of Sita*.

The first of five short stories in the book is titled "The Reunion" which is about Sita and Surpanakha, who was Ravana's sister. In popular narrative, Surpanakha is portrayed as evil and monstrous. She was mutilated by Lakshmana for confessing her love for Rama that led to her losing her nose and ears. Volga presents her as an admirer of nature who embraces herself uncomplainingly. She lives in the middle of the forest and is married to a man named Sudhir, who loves her for the person she has become. Surpanakha shows a deep appreciation for nature, which is also evident in her gardening skills, "The joy you get from wandering in a forest, you don't get anywhere else" (Volga 14), she claims. Volga depicts the bond of solidarity between the two women who have been rejected by strict patriarchal norms. Surpanakha asks Sita the inevitable question

about her life after her Sons decide to live with their father, to which Sita answers- “I will become the daughter of Mother Earth. Resting under these cool trees, I shall create a new meaning for my life” (Volga 15).

The second story, titled “Music of Earth”, is about Sita and Ahalya. Right after Sita’s wedding with Rama, Sita is made aware of Ahalya’s “lack of character” (Volga 19) by Rama, but when she asks Kaushalya about it, she describes her as “an exceptional beauty with a noble character befitting her beauty” (Volga 21). “Through Kausalya, Sita realizes that the way women understand fellow women could be drastically different from the way men understand them” (Kumar 149). Ahalya was the wife of Maharishi Gautama, who was wrongly accused of infidelity. She was disowned by her husband and now lived in the forest away from the societal constructs in Volga’s reimagination. During a conversation between Sita and Ahalya when she was on exile along with Rama and Lakshmana, she tells her, “Never agree to a trial, Sita. Don’t bow down to authority.” (Volga 29). Sita recalls her words when she was asked for the *agnipariksha*, “Conquering the ego becomes the goal of spirituality for men. For women, to nourish that ego and to burn themselves to ashes in it becomes the goal” (Volga 39). At the end of this section, Sita decides that she will no longer be living in the kingdom after the humiliation that was brought on her by Rama. She announces to him, “I am the daughter of Earth, Rama. I have realized who I am. The whole universe belongs to me. I don’t lack anything. I am the daughter of Earth.” (Volga 41) She projects self-authority and finally asserts her identity.

The third short story in this compilation by Volga is titled, “The Sand Pot”. This part revolves around Sita and Renuka Devi. Renuka Devi was Parasurama’s mother. Her husband ordered their son, Parasurama to kill her because he doubted her loyalty. “With a running metaphor of the sand pot, which she sculpts, Renuka argues about the fluid nature of just mentioned three associations in a woman’s life” (Kumar 150). With this story, Volga critiques the nature of justice and injustice. Through Renuka Devi, the author brings forward the strict codes of Arya Dharma, which often puts multiple restrictions on women. Renuka Devi explains the reason why her husband ordered such a punishment, to Sita. She says, “He believed that my *paativratyam* was violated by the mere act of looking at that man.” (Volga 51) Renuka Devi, after being injured by her own

son, came to live in the forest and found solace in art; she made beautiful pots along with the women of the forest. They helped each other and built a bond of sisterhood. She explains to Sita, “No matter how much wisdom they earn through penance, they continue to have a dogmatic view on the *paativratyam* of their wives” (Volga 51). Sita recalls the conversation she had with Renuka Devi when she finds herself in a situation where she realises that she has no control over her own sons because, in the end, they are the heirs of their father’s kingdom, and they will eventually go back to him. “She had given birth to them, brought them up to surpass their father in heroism. But she had to let them go” (Volga 61).

The fourth story, “The Liberated” is about Urmila, Lakshmana’s wife and Sita. While Rama, along with Lakshmana and Sita, went on for fourteen years-long exile, Urmila was left behind in the palace to take care of her in-laws. Upon their return from the exile, Urmila was the only one who did not greet them at the door. Sita found out about “Urmila’s self-imposed exile” (Volga 73). She was locked in her palace without meeting or talking to anyone for fourteen years. Sita was concerned for her sister, and she wanted to apologise to her. Through this story, Volga represents the unspoken battles a woman faces for being dutiful. In the conversation between the two sisters, Urmila tells Sita that she wanted revenge because nobody acknowledged her sacrifices, everyone was grieving for only Sita. But as the time passed on Urmila tried finding and connecting with herself. She says, “But the war I waged with these questions has brought me peace and joy” (Volga 76). She was now content with herself, with or without Lakshman. Volga challenges the established narrative through a rhetorical question that Urmila asks in this story. She challenges, ‘Will those who consider my fourteen-year-long mediation in search of truth mere sleep understand my words?’ (Volga 77) In Valmiki’s *Ramayana*, it is believed that Urmila was sleeping so that Lakshman’s sleep could be completed because he had never slept in those fourteen years to protect Rama. Sita comes back to this conversation when she leaves the kingdom after she was asked to prove her fidelity, “now she had to wage a war against herself.” (Volga 79) “Protest or penance, whatever it was, Urmila had saved herself.” (Volga 79) Now it was Sita’s turn to break her dilemma of whether to believe in Rama’s love for her or take his agreement to trial as an answer and save herself. During a visit to Sita in the forest, Urmila tells

her, “You must liberate yourself from Rama” (Volga 81). At the end of the story, “gradually peace pervaded Sita” (Volga 82), and she truly felt liberated from her husband and her children.

The last story, “The Shackled” is about Rama’s isolation. Volga does not present him as a villain; rather, she portrays him as a victim of patriarchy. He had been trained since childhood to be a certain way to uphold the Arya Dharma, his responsibilities as an heir to the Raghu Vamsa and later its king. After facing all the trials and tribulations and then his “permanent separation from Sita” (Volga 87), he confesses to Lakshmana, “I know I am bound in chains, but tears can’t be shackled” (Volga 87). Rama was thankful to Kaikeyi, for he could spend thirteen years in the forest with Sita, away from all the responsibilities and restrictions because of her. He grieved saying, “With this political power, I have lost power over myself. I have lost my Sita. I have lost my son” (Volga 88). This story explains the actions that led Sita to leave Rama: “The burden of protecting Arya Dharma finally robbed him of all the happiness in his life. There was no liberation for him” (Volga 94). Volga represents a flicker of hope for Rama’s liberation from the shackles of Arya Dharma in this story. When Rama finally meets his sons, Lava and Kusa, he realises that “by giving him his sons, Sita had cleared the way his liberation (Volga 97) as they are the heirs of Raghu Vamsa and Rama could pass his kingdom to them and be with Sita.

All the five stories predominantly trace the profound journey of Sita’s liberation with the help of other female characters. However, it also outlines the experiences of Surpanakha, Ahalya, Renuka Devi, Urmila and Rama separately, giving a new perspective to their characters. Volga helps these characters in asserting agency through this retelling. She also highlights the bond of sisterhood between the female characters, which helped them challenge patriarchy and reclaim their identity. Sita could pave her journey of liberation only because of the wisdom that was imparted to her by the other female characters.

An American radical feminist, Kathie Sarachild used the phrase “Sisterhood is powerful” in 1968 during a speech. Later in 1970, this phrase was adopted as a title of an anthology- *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women’s Liberation Movement*, which was edited by Robin Morgan, an American writer and feminist. Sisterhood became a key feature of

second-wave feminism as it advocated for women's solidarity. Robin Morgan endorsed the idea of "Sisterhood". She emphasised on the conviction that women's shared experiences help build a bond of sisterhood amongst them. "Sisterhood celebrates the close-knit bond that was in evidence in sections of the Women's Liberation Movement whilst simultaneously conveying a commonality amongst women" (Evans 112). However, Bell Hooks in 1984 claimed that "Some feminists now seem to feel that unity between women is impossible given the differences" (Hooks 44). She further explained in the same essay that "the shift away from an emphasis on Sisterhood has occurred because many women, angered by the insistence on "common oppression," shared identity, sameness, criticised or dismissed feminist movement altogether" (ibid). However, in *The Liberation of Sita*, we can trace the bond of sisterhood and its influence amongst the female characters quite vividly. In an interview, Volga states her opinion on the concept of sisterhood she says, "I wanted to show the kind of strength Sita got through others. It is not possible to achieve liberation all by ourselves, we need fellow groups- women or other exploited groups. Likewise, the experiences of these women help Sita. Sisterhood is an important concept in feminism. I have been able to grasp that concept through these stories. The other women are all Sita's sisters" (Volga 126).

Volga has explicitly portrayed that Sita's liberation was possible only because of what she learned from the experiences of all the other four female characters. The author illustrates the bond of sisterhood through the dialogues between the characters. In "The Reunion", Surpanakha explains to Sita how she had to "wage a huge battle" (Volga 11) herself after Lakshmana disfigured her. She confesses, "I've realized that the meaning of success for a woman does not lie in her relationship with a man" (Volga 13) which encouraged Sita to look at her position in Rama's life. Sita could own her decision of going back to the Mother Earth and to "create a new meaning" (Volga 15) for her life only after learning from Surpanakha's story. She made Sita understand that she was not obligated to anyone and that a woman's identity is not limited to being a wife or a mother. Through Surpanakha's story of finding Sudhira's companionship, Volga portrays the importance of having a companion rather than merely a husband. After her interaction with Surpanakha, Sita's "heart swelled with joy at Surpanakha's

unsolicited affection” and she truly “felt a bond of sisterhood with her” (Volga 15). It is important to note that these two women were made to despise each other in the main narrative, and Volga’s retelling gives a new dimension to their bond and relationship.

Additionally, in “The Liberated”, Volga remarkably portrays the understanding that both Urmila and Sita had for each other’s circumstances. Sita felt guilty for what all Urmila endured in those fourteen years, while she, Rama and Lakshmana were in the forest. Urmila accepts that she felt left out, she confesses: “Everyone was grieving for you all. No one even looked at me” (Volga 75). She admits to Sita that, “I loved you as my elder sister. But when you went away with your husband, abandoning me, something changed in our relationship” (Volga 75). However, she now understood Sita’s predicament after she attained her own liberation. She explains to her the importance of not submitting to anyone else’s power. She advises Sita: “if you ever have to face the kind of trial I did, do not respond in a predictable manner. Do not allow the situation to force you into mundaneness, into nastiness. Do not let it burn you up in anger, hatred. Save yourself. Assert your right over yourself. Give up your power over things. Then you will belong to yourself. You will be yourself. It’s not easy to remain ourselves-trust me, Akka” (Volga 78). Sita felt like she could confide in Urmila and when at last she was asked to go for a trial, she was reminded of Urmila’s words which ultimately helped her attain her own liberation. Urmila stated to Sita: “Each of those trials is meant to liberate you from Rama. To secure you for yourself. Fight, meditate, look within until you find the truth that is you” (Volga 81). Volga conveys how Urmila’s wisdom and experiences paved a way for Sita’s liberation and finally: “Liberated from her children too, Sita, with a peaceful smile on her face, set out to return to where she had come from” (Volga 83).

Similarly, Renuka Devi, in “The Sand Pot”, who was attacked by her son because her husband doubted her loyalty, makes Sita understand the challenges of being a wife. She emphasises the kind of restrictions that society puts on a woman. She explains the fragile nature of the concepts of motherhood and *paativratyam*. Sita learns the power of art and creation through Renuka Devi as she makes sand pots with other women in the forest. Renuka Devi tells Sita that every woman should have a sand pot, she says “If they understand that their

paativratyam and fidelity are like these sand pots, they will be able to live in peace” (Volga 50).

The theme of sisterhood is depicted in “Music of the Earth” as well. Ahalya makes Sita understand the concept of truth and untruth. She helps her understand that, “You are not just the wife of Rama. There is something more in you, something that is your own. No one counsels women to find out what that something more is” (Volga 38). She narrates her story to Sita and confesses that the question of whether she saw through Indra’s disguise was irrelevant to her husband. She says, “It was same to him either way. His property, even if temporarily, had fallen into the hands of another. It was polluted” (Volga 26). Sita recalls her words when she was abandoned by her husband. When Ahalya met Sita again, she told her: “Don’t grieve over what has already happened. It is all for your own good, and is part of the process of self-realization” (Volga 39). She finally tells her, “You belong to this whole world, not just to Rama” (ibid), helping her gain authority over herself and her life.

The concept of sisterhood is predominant in *The Liberation of Sita*. Volga has used Surpanakha, Ahalya, Renuka Devi and Urmila to get Sita the liberation she deserved. “Sita had learnt what she could from their experiences. At first, she felt only disdain and anger for them. Later, when she understood that the anguish in their lives was similar, she felt camaraderie and companionship with them. When Sita saw the sufferings of others, she realised that she was not alone. The awareness that she was one of them gave her strength” (Volga 63). The experiences of these characters gave Sita a new perspective on her life and on her role as a wife and a mother. She found her true self with the help of these women.

Volga highlights the idea of women's solidarity and the importance of individuality. Sita understood that “Her path, her way, was hers alone” (Volga 63). Even though sisterhood serves as a crucial theme in this retelling, it is also important to understand how the experiences of these women were still unique based on their different social identities. Bell Hooks emphasises this idea in her essay; she writes: “Women do not need to eradicate difference to feel solidarity. We do need to share oppression to fight equally to end oppression. We do not need anti-male sentiments to bond us together, so great is the wealth of experience, culture, and ideas we have to share with one another. We can be sisters united by

shared interests and beliefs, united in our appreciation for diversity, united in our struggle to end sexist oppression, united in political solidarity” (65).

Intersectionality was first coined by Kimberle Crenshaw, an American feminist critic, in 1989. Crenshaw introduced this term in her essay *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics*. She used it in context of Black women and to emphasise on how their experience varies from that of white women. She argued that “Black women are sometimes excluded from feminist theory and antiracist policy discourse because both are predicated on a discrete set of experiences that often does not accurately reflect the interaction of race and gender” (Crenshaw 140). Nevertheless, the term ‘intersectionality’ developed to cover a wider scope of human experiences. “Intersectionality is the acknowledgement that everyone has their own unique experiences of discrimination and oppression, and we must consider everything and anything that can marginalise people – gender, race, class, sexual orientation, physical ability, etc” (Taylor).

This approach is significant to feminism as it accentuates the point that every experience is distinctive, but it is also important to note that intersectionality is not only limited to the experiences of women and that it covers a broader spectrum. Nevertheless, this paper fundamentally focuses on the unique experiences of the female characters in Volga’s *The Liberation of Sita*. In that context we find that female oppression may be universal; however, the experience of each female is not. “The postcolonial critics have argued that women are not homogeneous” (Nayar 119) and therefore their experiences are not the same.

In *The Liberation of Sita*, Volga showcases the experiences of five women. All of them could be put under the category of ‘patriarchal victims’, but their experiences vary because of their race, caste, geography, etc. It is therefore important to analyse the text from an intersectional approach. For instance, both Surpankha and Sita may have been used merely as pawns, but their experiences differed because of their race and caste. Surpankha was a demoness, and a non-Aryan. In Menon’s modern translation of Valmiki’s *Ramayana*, she has been described as- “Surpanaka was as ugly a rakshasi as ever lived. She was old with sin and years of devouring human flesh. She was bloated and misshapen; her

voice was a harsh croak; her hair was a dirty copper; her eyes were tiny, cunning and cruel. She was fanged and altogether hideous, but she was a mistress of maya. She could change her form as she liked, though she could not change the evil in her soul” (217). However, Volga reshapes her narrative and shows her as a nurturer of the forest, living away from all the evils. In “The Reunion”, Surpanakha confesses her pain and the consequences she had to face, she confesses “I want beauty. I want love. I can’t live without them. But I, who was such a worshipper of beauty was turned into an ugly figure. Looking at my ugliness, all the handsome men I desired- used to abhor me. Those days were hellish” (Volga 10). In contrast to Surpanakha, Sita was a Kshatriya, Mithila’s princess and Rama’s queen. She belonged to the upper strata of the society and even though she met the same fate of being abandoned by the one she loved, she was still portrayed as a dignified woman, even in the main epic. The experiences of both these women are contrasting because of the race and caste they belonged to.

Furthermore, another female character Ahalya was a sage’s wife. She has been described as the most beautiful woman in Indian Mythology, despite which she was subordinated because of patriarchal angst and unfairness. She was turned into a stone by her husband because he doubted her fidelity. Similarly, Urmila and Renuka Devi were put through patriarchal oppression. Lakshmana’s wife Urmila symbolizes a royal woman, but her aristocratic background did not prevent her from being marginalised. Renuka Devi’s experience differs from that of Urmila and Ahalya because she was both a wife and a mother. Her husband ordered to kill her because he thought she was disloyal. She despised Brahmin because of their strict codes of conduct, which had ultimately led her husband to abandon her.

In the context of intersectionality, Volga highlights that “Surpanakha, Ahalya Renuka, Urmila- each one had a story of their own. Each one had followed a path of her own” (Volga 63), and so did Sita. In that relation, Karen Offen, a historian and scholar, in her essay *Defining Feminism*, emphasises the fact that feminism is subjective. She highlights the diversity of women’s experience and states that, “...to solidarity among women to combat their common subordination, must also accommodate their actual range of diversity

and differing needs” (Offen 157). She explains the need to acknowledge the differing needs of women by highlighting that:

Such a vision must be capacious enough to include the concerns of women who are married as well as women who are single, women who are mothers as well as women who do not choose motherhood, and women whose most important relationships are with other women. It must speak to poor women as well as wealthy women and to women of various ethnic back grounds and religious persuasions” (157).

This argument explains how an intersectional approach to the novel can help to understand and appreciate the concerns of the five female characters chosen by Volga. Despite being women in the same story, each has her own tale and perspective worth being given attention to.

French Philosopher, Jean-François Lyotard, in his book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* defined postmodern “as incredulity toward metanarratives” (Lyotard xxiv). He argued “against totalizing systems of thought” (Nayar 78) and suggested that the focus should be on the “marginal, the liminal and the fragmented” (ibid). Lyotard’s main argument was that the grand narrative is just an umbrella term and that “events unassimilable to grand narratives are what tell us about the necessarily incomplete nature of all narrative” (Nayar 78). He rejects the idea of universality, which is fundamental to the concept of intersectionality as well. In Valmiki’s *Ramayana*, the stories and sacrifices of female characters like Urmila, Renuka Devi, Surpanakha and Ahalya are often forgotten. Volga’s *The Liberation of Sita* addresses this limitation of metanarratives by giving each of these characters a voice without which they had been consigned to oblivion.

T. Vijay Kumar and C. Vijayasree, the translators of *The Liberation of Sita*, state: “Volga’s re-visionist myth-making thus opens new spaces within the old discourse, enabling women to view their life and experiences from gynocentric perspectives. They recreate a world of freedom in which they not only willingly bear the responsibility of their own survival but also have a sense of joy and complete freedom”.(Volga 112) This paper highlighted how Volga employed the theme of sisterhood to underscore female solidarity amongst the female characters by rejecting the secondary position given to female characters

in Valmiki's rendition of the epic. "Volga does not treat any of her characters as heroes or villains. She merely describes the events and circumstances that resulted in the suffering of the women characters and also turned into routes through which they could visualize their liberation" (Kumar 151). Her treatment is a scathing criticism of patriarchy, which is detrimental not only to women but also men. She even presents Rama as a victim of patriarchy rather than merely its propagator.

The concept of intersectionality helps explain how the female characters' experiences were unique based on their caste, race, geography, etc. It focuses on the micro-narratives of each of these characters, thereby rejecting the monolithic construct of masculinity and femininity in favour of individual lived experiences, which are all unique and subjective. This paper explains the purpose behind feminist retellings of metanarratives, which is to give voice to those who were silenced due to the socio-political patriarchal structure. Volga's reimagination of Valmiki's *The Ramayana* gives its female characters agency, autonomy, and liberation which they could achieve through solidarity, compassion and empathy.

Works Cited and Consulted

- Arekar, Madhavi, and Kranti Doibale. "Shurpanaka: The Subversive Journey of a Woman Unheard in Kavita Kane's *Lanka's Princess*." *Ajanta*, vol. 7, no. 3, July–Sept. 2018, pp. 131–135. VPM Thane, <https://vpmthane.org/jbcapp/upload/m6/28.pdf>.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, vol. 1989, no. 1, article 8, pp. 139–167. *Chicago Unbound*, <http://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8>.
- Evans, Elizabeth. "The Sisterhood: Inclusivity and Spaces." *The Politics of Third Wave Feminisms*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, pp. 109–132. *Gender and Politics Series*, https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137295279_6.
- hooks, bell. "Sisterhood: Political Solidarity Between Women." *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, South End Press, 1984, pp. 43–65. *Solidarity US*, <https://solidarity-us.org/pdfs/cadreschool/hooks1.pdf>.
- Kumar, Ashok, and Piyush Ranjan. "Indian Mythology: A Revisionist Approach in Contemporary Retellings." *The Academic International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, vol. 2, no. 12, Dec. 2024, pp. 340–350. www.theacademic.in.
- Kumar, Umesh. "Rewriting Mythology: Some Lessons from Volga's *The Liberation of Sita*." *Indian Literature*, vol. 67, no. 2 (334), Sahitya Akademi, Mar.–Apr. 2023, pp. 146–151. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/27291754>.
- Lyotard, Jean-François. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, foreword by Fredric Jameson, Manchester University Press, 1979.
- Menon, Ramesh. *The Ramayana: A Modern Translation*. HarperCollins India, 2010.
- Nayar, Pramod K. *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory: From Structuralism to Ecocriticism*. PDF ed., Pearson, 2010. Mahitosh Nandy Mahavidyalaya,

[www.mahitoshnm.ac.in/studyMaterial/134355CONTEMPORARY_LITERARY AND CULTURAL THEOR.pdf](http://www.mahitoshnm.ac.in/studyMaterial/134355CONTEMPORARY_LITERARY_AND_CULTURAL_THEOR.pdf).

Offen, Karen. "Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach."

Signs, vol. 14, no. 1, Autumn 1988, pp. 119–157. *The University of Chicago Press*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3174664>.

1 "Ramayana." *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc.,

www.britannica.com/topic/Ramayana-Indian-epic.

Ruchi, Kumari, and Smita Jha. "Reinventing Marginalized Voices: A Study of

Volga's *The Liberation of Sita*." *International Journal of English Language, Literature in Humanities (IJELLH)*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2023, pp. 1–8. <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol25/iss5/2>.

Sattar, Arshia. Review of *The Liberation of Sita*, by Volga, HarperCollins, 2016.

Shiva, Vandana. *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development*. 1st ed.,

Zed Books, 1988. *Internet Archive*, <https://ia800301.us.archive.org/7/items/StayingAlive-English-VandanaShiva/Vandana-shiva-stayingAlive.pdf>.

Taylor, Bridie. "Intersectionality 101: What Is It and Why Is It Important?"

Womankind Worldwide, 24 Nov. 2019, www.womankind.org.uk/intersectionality-101-what-is-it-and-why-is-it-important/.

Volga. *The Liberation of Sita*. Translated by T. Vijay Kumar and C.

Vijayasree, HarperCollins, 2016.

Anushka Gauriyar

Anushka Gauriyar is a passionate scholar currently pursuing her Master of Arts in English Literature at Amity University. With a strong commitment to academic inquiry and critical engagement, she delves into various literary traditions and theoretical frameworks. Her research interests include feminist literature, postcolonial narratives, cultural studies, and the re-interpretation of mythology. She has published a paper titled: "Attia Hosain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column*: Mirroring the Cultural Transition in Post-Independence India". Anushka is dedicated to producing research that reflects both analytical depth and scholarly precision. She aims to contribute meaningfully to contemporary literary discourse through thoughtful analysis and original perspectives.

Manjari Johri

Dr. Manjari Johri is an Assistant Professor at Amity School of Languages, Amity University Lucknow. She has twenty-five years of teaching experience. Dr Johri earned her PhD from the University of Lucknow in 2009. She is keenly interested in teaching drama and poetry and is inclined towards feminist writing and theory. She has published papers in renowned journals and edited volumes, including, Literature, Language and Communication: An Essential Trident, The Mind of the Director for Ministry of Culture, Government of India, a major project undertaken by Late Prof. Raj Bisaria, Padmashree. She worked with Late Prof. Bisaria as a Research Assistant for Tagore National Fellowship on the title Shakespeare's Indian Summer. Other areas of interest include world drama and its theatrical adaptations, Gender Studies, and Women's Studies, Masculinities and Cultural Studies.