



## CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE PLOT IN MYTHOLOGY: SITA: Daughter of Earth

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**Abstract:** Plot plays a very important role in a story. The contemporary mythological literatures have started trending with the renewed perspectives of characters in the story. In this paper, we will compare the selected contemporary mythological fiction with the original epic and trace the changes and similarity in the plot of both the literatures. Thus, we will compare the epic the *Ramayana*, written from a male character's perspective with the selected fiction *Sita: Daughter of Earth* by Saraswati Nagpal, written from a female character's perspective to find the diversions or convergence in the plot lines.

**Keywords:** Sita, Mythology, Fiction, Plot, Contemporary

### I. INTRODUCTION:

Plot refers to the occurrences that constitute a story. It is the groundwork of a novel based on which the characters of the novel are created. As per Aristotle's Poetics plot or 'mythos' has the primary importance in any work. In this paper, we are going to discuss the idea and the structure of plot and its development according to two influential literary theorists: Gustav Freytag and Vladimir Propp. Along with each discussion, we are going to examine the points of departure with regard to plot, in our chosen texts.

Plot also depends on the narrative perspective. The story might remain same when we change the perspective but the plot is bound to change. In the *Ramayana*, the stories are told from a male perspective. But the retellings selected for this dissertation focus on the perspective of the female characters. As we, the readers, watch the action from a female perspective, we see the plot change according to the actions undertaken by the female characters.

### II. DISCUSSION:

The plot generally is divided into five parts based on Freytag's Pyramid<sup>1</sup>. The first part is known as the **Introduction** where characters get introduced and we get insights about their relation, intentions, motives and their nature. This part of the Introduction is known as the **Exposition**. The second part of the Introduction is known as **Exciting Force**. It is during this part that the protagonist gets to know about his/her aims as well as what things are on stake. The second part is known as the **Rise** or the Rising Action where the conflict begins. Conflict can be external as well as internal. The protagonist realizes his aims and his actions sets into motion. He faces certain obstructions and overcomes these. The third part is the **Climax**. It is the critical part in a story. During this part, the protagonist decides things that changes the course of narrative as well as the future result of the story. In this part the protagonist and the antagonist struggle and the decision reflects on the moral nature of the protagonist's character. The fourth part is called the **Return or the Fall**. The problems get resolved and it leads to the final part of the narrative. The last part called **Catastrophe** shows the end of the conflict and sometimes shows the future events that are to happen.

In the *Ramayana*, the epic that focuses on the journey of Rama and his wife Sita. The epic can be divided into the above parts. The **Introduction** includes Ravana being the reason of destruction of Dharma and how Vishnu takes rebirth as a mortal to defeat him. He took his avatar as Rama. Rama is the son of king Dasaratha of Ayodhya. Sita, the daughter of Earth, is adopted by King Janaka of Mithila. Other characters

<sup>1</sup>Gustav Freytag, a German, had developed the idea of a pyramid structure of the most important elements of the Plot in his book *Freytag's Technique of the Drama*.

are also introduced thus forming the **Exposition**. Rama reached Mithila, won the swayamvar challenge and married Sita. Dasaratha decides to make Rama the King. Queen Kaikeyi asks for her two boons to Dasaratha and Rama, instead of being the King, gets exiled to the forest so that Kaikeyi's son Bharat can become the king. This forms the **Exciting Force**. Next comes the **Rise**, Sita and Lakshman follow Rama in his exile. Rama and Lakshman meet Surpanakha and in the course of action, Lakshman chops off her nose and ears and to exact her revenge, Sita is kidnapped by Surpanakha's brother Ravana. In the **Climax** part, Rama decides to fight against Ravana and for that he takes help of Hanuman and the army of monkeys under King Sugriva. The fight continues for days where soldiers from both the sides got injured and died. The **Fall** part includes Rama defeating Ravana, Sita's trial of fire and their return to Ayodhya. Rama becomes the King. The people in his kingdom questions Sita's purity and to avoid the condemnation from people, he decides to forsake Sita. A pregnant Sita is again exiled but this alone. She gives birth and raises he twins alone in an ashram in the forest. In the **Catastrophe**, Sita returns to Ayodhya and returns her sons to Rama. When Rama said in the court that he had left Sita due to fear of condemnation from people but now wants to reconcile with her, Sita asks her mother Earth to take her into her lap if she was pure and devoted only to her husband. And it happened leaving Rama in distraught and despair. Rama banishes Lakshman, who ends his life at the bank of river Sarayu. Rama with his other brothers and all the monkeys and bears in his army descended into the waters of Sarayu river and all of them returned to their celestial self.

Saraswati Nagpal's *Sita: Daughter of the Earth* focuses on the Ramayana from Sita's perspective. In the Exposition here, the readers are introduced to King Janaka and Queen Sunaina of Videha. We also get an idea of the circumstances under which they found a baby and adopted her, naming her Sita. We are also introduced to Sita's younger sister Urmila and her cousins Mandavi and Shrutakirti. We are also introduced to the four princes of Ayodhya- Rama, Lakshmana, Bharata and Shatrughana and their father King Dasharatha. Rama wins Sita's swayamvar and Sita's suggestion of the marriage of the four sisters with the four brothers gets approved and results in a happy union. We also get a glimpse of the three queens of Ayodhya- Kaushalya, Kaikeyi and Sumitra. In the absence of Bharata, Dasharatha announces the coronation of Rama giving Manthara an opportunity to poison Kaikeyi's mind and Kaikeyi asks for her two boons from Dasharatha, leading to Rama's exile for fourteen years. Sita and Lakshman decides to accompany him. This forms the **Exciting Force** that sets the actions into motion. In the **Rising action**, Rama and Lakshman meet Surpanakha and in the course of action, Lakshman chops off her nose and ears, leading to the abduction of Sita by Surpanakha's brother Ravana. In the **Climax** part, Rama decides to fight against Ravana and for that he takes help of Hanuman and the army of monkeys under King Sugriva. The fight continues for days and finally Rama defeats Ravana. The **Fall** part includes Rama's denial to accept Sita, Sita's trial of fire and their return to Ayodhya. Rama becomes the King. The people in his kingdom questions Sita's purity and to handle the situation Rama and Sita decides that Sita will go to the forest. She gives birth and raises he twins alone in an ashram in the forest. In the **Catastrophe**, Sita and her sons return to Ayodhya and Sita hopes to get her love back. But when Rama asks her to take the oath of purity in the court, Sita asks her mother Earth to take her into her lap if she was pure and devoted only to her husband. And it happened leaving Rama in distraught and despair.

Another tool that appears to be useful in analysing the plot, is Vladimir Propp's theory of Narratemes. Narratemes are basic structural elements found in any narrative, also known as 'functions'. Propp based his theory on the study of Russian folktales where these 31 Narratemes are typically found to occur. However, they can be applied to other folkloric or mythological material as well.

The paper does not go into details and possible inversions of the Narratemes and keeping in mind that in Indian mythology the Narratemes may be somewhat different, may not perform the functions, and usually do not appear in the above-mentioned order. However, if we analyse the selected fictions using Propp's 31 Narratemes, we will find several of the Narratemes scattered through the fictions.

The epic Ramayana begins by explaining the Initial situation where Rama is announced to be made the King but Kaikeyi asks for the two boons King Dasaratha had promised her and asks for Bharat to be made King and Rama to be sent for fourteen years long exile. Lakshman and Sita accompanies Rama in his exile and it accounts for the 1<sup>st</sup> narrateme: **Absentation** (Someone goes missing or leaves home). When Rama goes to catch the golden deer and sounds of him shouting for help is heard, Sita asks Lakshman to go and help Rama. After trying a lot to convince Sita that Rama would not need anyone's help, Lakshman is forced to leave. Before leaving he draws a Lakshmanrekha in front of their residing place and requests Sita not to cross that line at any cost. Hence it can be considered as the 2<sup>nd</sup> narrateme: **Interdiction** (warning issued forbidding something). After this, there is a change in the order of the narratemes as 4<sup>th</sup>,

5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> narratemes come before the 3<sup>rd</sup> narrateme. In the 4<sup>th</sup> narrateme, i.e. **Reconnaissance** (the villain enters in the plot and tries to fulfil their intention), the villain Ravana tries to capture Sita to exact the revenge of his sister Surpanakha whose nose and ears were chopped off by Lakshmana. Next comes the 5<sup>th</sup> narrateme: **Delivery** (the villain gains a lead on their intended victim) where Ravana sees Sita and her beauty allures him. Seeing the beauty of Sita he disguises himself as a sage and went to Sita, and hence the 6<sup>th</sup> narrateme, i.e. **Trickery** (the villain deceives the victim to gain something), is fulfilled. Sita offers hospitality staying inside the line but Ravana tricks her to cross the line and kidnaps her. It becomes the 3<sup>rd</sup> narrateme: **Violation of Interdiction** (the set rule is not followed). Ravana abducts Sita and takes her in his flying chariot. Sita cried for help but no one was there to help her. It accounts for the 7<sup>th</sup> narrateme: **Complicity** (The villain forces the victim to surrender willingly or unwillingly). When Rama and Lakshman returned back to the hermitage, Sita was nowhere to be found. In Lanka, Ravana asks Sita to marry him. When she denies, he asks the titan women to torment her to break her will so that she will agree to marry him. Thus, accounting for the 8<sup>th</sup> narrateme: **Villainy** or **Lacking** (the hero finds something is missing and the villain hurts a member of hero's family through kidnaping, murder, torture or by warning of a forced marriage). Rama and Lakshman leaves the hermitage and start a new adventurous journey in search of Sita and hence forms the 10<sup>th</sup> narrateme: **Departure** (the hero leaves the residing place with a new purpose or for a new adventure). Rama and Lakshman met Hanuman and Sugriva as they got information that Sugriva can help in finding Sita. Sugriva tells his plight and Rama decides to vanquish Sugriva's brother Bali so that Sugriva can be reinstated on the Kishkindha throne. Thus, it accounts for the 12<sup>th</sup> narrateme: **First Function of the Donor** (the hero comes across a 'helper' and is tested in some way to prove his prowess). Rama helps Sugriva to defeat Bali and reinstalls Sugriva on the Kishkindha's throne. Thus, completing 13<sup>th</sup> narrateme: **Hero's Reaction** (the hero accepts the challenge by the donor). With the help of Sugriva and Hanuman, Rama reaches Lanka and battle starts between Rama and Ravana. It accounts for the 16<sup>th</sup> narrateme: **Struggle** (Hero and villain engage in conflict or war). Finally, Rama defeats Ravana and kills him, fulfilling the 18<sup>th</sup> narrateme: **Victory**. Sita is freed from Ravana's captivity. Hence 19<sup>th</sup> narrateme, **Liquidation**, is achieved. Sita gives a trial of fire to prove her purity as Rama was not ready to accept her. Then Rama, Sita and Lakshman returns to Ayodhya. Hence, it accounts for 20<sup>th</sup> narrateme: **Return**. Rama becomes the King. But the people of Ayodhya questions Sita's character. In the fear of condemnation, Rama forsakes his pregnant wife. Hence, accounts for the 21<sup>th</sup> narrateme: **Pursuit**.

In Saraswati Nagpal's *Sita: Daughter of the Earth*, that focuses on the story of the Ramayana from Sita's perspective, the protagonist Sita is female, so the 1<sup>st</sup> narrateme of **Absentation** is found when Sita marries Rama and leaves Videha, together with her sister Urmila, married to Lakshmana, and her cousins, Mandavi and Shrutakirti, married to Bharata and Shatrughna respectively. In Ayodhya, Kaikeyi's maid Manthara poisons the mind of Queen Kaikeyi when Dasharatha announces Rama's coronation in Bharata's absence, making up the 4<sup>th</sup> narrateme: **Reconnaissance**. Manthara successfully plants the idea in Kaikeyi's mind and Kaikeyi asked for her two boons from her husband, thus forming the 5<sup>th</sup> narrateme: **Delivery**. To honour his father's oath, Rama decides to accept the fourteen years exile, Sita and Lakshmana also accompanies him to the forest where they meet Surpanakha and Lakshman chops off her nose and ears and it accounts for the 7<sup>th</sup> narrateme: **Complicity**. To take Surpanakha's revenge, Ravana abducts Sita and takes her to Lanka. In Lanka, Ravana asks Sita to marry him. When she denies, he asks the Rakshasa women to break her will so that she agrees to marry him later. This accounts for the 8<sup>th</sup> narrateme: **Villainy**. Sita fights all obstacles and waits for Rama in the faith that he will rescue her and also denies to go with Hanuman, accounting for the 16<sup>th</sup> narrateme: **Struggle**. Finally, Rama defeats Ravana and kills him and Sita is freed from Ravana's captivity, fulfilling the 18<sup>th</sup> narrateme: **Victory**. But Sita is stunned by Rama's cold behaviour and his denial to accept her and hence, decides to undergo a trial by fire to prove the purity of her character. Hence 19<sup>th</sup> narrateme, **Liquidation**, is achieved. Then, Sita, Rama and Lakshman returns to Ayodhya, which accounts for 20<sup>th</sup> narrateme: **Return**. Rama becomes the king. But the people of Ayodhya question Sita's character, and to handle the situation, Sita and Rama decides that the pregnant Sita will go back to the forest. This event may be considered as the 21<sup>st</sup> narrateme: **Pursuit**. She gives birth to her twin sons and brings them up by herself in the forest, accounting for the 25<sup>th</sup> narrateme: **The Difficult Task**. When Rama asks her to take the oath of purity again in the court, Sita decides to go back to the lap of her mother Earth, accounting for the 26<sup>th</sup> narrateme: **Solution**.

### III. CONCLUSION:

Thus, after comparing the contemporary fiction with the original epic, we find that at a few points the plot lines match while in most points they differ to a great extent. Thus, we can conclude that with the change in perspective, the plot varies to a great extent.

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