

## Revisiting Indian Epics From A Postmodern and Feminist Perspective

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Literary Criticism As Such Perhaps Be Called "The Art of Re-Reading."

\_\_\_\_ **Barbara Johnson**

By mid-fifties the modernist tendency in literature has run its course, as it were. Modernism in the hands of Eliot, Joyce, Faulkner and their imitators had practically turned the pursuit of literature into a 'criticism industry' for the enlightened academics. With Modernist text like *The Wasteland* or *Ulysses*, with its invitation to enormous textual exegesis and New Criticism, for all its rejection of biographical and historical criticism, literature and criticism were increasingly becoming something especially meant for academic consumption and it intended to entertain less. Hence is the postwar artist's frustration with regard to Modernist art. The passing away of Modernism was mourned / celebrated by W.B. Yeats in 1919 in the following lines.

Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world...  
The best lack all convictions, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.

Leslie Fiedler (1982) would be a good representative who first coined the term Postmodernism. And his essay *Cross the border – close that gap: Post modernism* is still a good introduction to the subject. Edward Arnold (1992) argues that Modernism and Postmodernism give great prominence to fragmentation as a feature of 20<sup>th</sup> century art. The modernist laments fragmentation while the Postmodernist celebrates it. The current use of the term Postmodernism was used in 1930's by Jean Francois Lyotard in his essay the *postmodern condition: A Report on knowledge*. Lyotard's essay 'What is Postmodernism?' (1982) breaks the meta-narratives that purport to explain and reassure are really illusions, fostered in order to smother difference, opposition and plurality. Derridian Deconstruction, Lacanian Psychoanalytical Criticism and the Feminist Literary Criticism of the 1960s and later are the Postmodern journey of Lyotardian petite-narratives.

Decline of faith in the key-stone ideals and ideas of the Enlightenment like liberty, truth, subjectivity, humanity, progress etc are the Postmodern out look which completely believes in fragmentation and plurality. Feminism is a woman's out look at everything. It is a political ideology that challenges the roles of male dominated society. Feminism seeks to expose the mechanism of patriarchy in works of art. The representations of women in the literary texts stress and justify sociopolitical oppression of women as natural. The Feminist movement aims at overthrowing social practices that lead to the oppression and victimization of women. Woman's quest for self – knowledge and self-realization, which can in turn lead to the relationships, based on mutual respect and understanding is the crux of Feminism.

The International Women's day celebrated since 1982 has awakened many women across the world, and so in India. Women in India started realizing their respective position in the society, subjugation, and lack of freedom, slavery and various binding chains of custom, culture, and religion and ascertained their love for freedom. Feministic notions, movements have

dominated ever since. They tried to understand the social structure and thought a number of solutions and tried to rewrite history. Women writing literature on women became an important postmodern phenomenon along with a new meaning given from the feminine consciousness to the old and established renowned epics and texts. The present paper aims at re-reading the Indian epics from the postmodern and feminist perspective, for which the following texts are considered.

1. Chitra Divakaruni's *The Place of Illusions* (2008) for *Mahabharatha* and
2. Volga's *Mrinmayanadam* (2006) (Telugu) translated into English for *Ramayana*.

Chitra Divakaruni's *The Place of Illusions* (2008) is highly relevant to today's war-torn world as it takes one back to a time that is half history, half myth and wholly magical. It is an attempt to reimagining of the world famous Indian epic, The *Mahabharata*, told from the point of view of an amazing woman, Paanchaali, the wife of the legendary Paandavas. At the core of the epic lies the fierce rivalry between two branches of the Kaurava dynasty, the Paandavas and the Kauravas. The life long struggle between the cousins for the throne of Hastinapur culminates in the bloody battle of Kurukshetra, in which most kings of the period participated and perished. Apart from Vyasa, the sage, at once the composer of the epic and a participant at crucial moments in the actions; Krishna, beloved and inscrutable, an incarnation of Vishnu and mentor to the Paandavas; Bheeshma the patriarch who bound by his promise to protect the karu throne, must fight against his beloved grandsons; Drona, the Brahmin-warrior who becomes teacher to both Kaurava and Pandava princes; Drupad, the king of Panchaal, whose desire for vengeance against Drona activates the wheel of destiny; and Karna, the great warrior, there are these larger-than-life heroes epitomizing and inspiring virtues and deadly vices, the writer's childhood dissatisfaction by the portrayals of the women in the epic completed her to retell the story from a woman's point of view. Definitely the epic has powerful, complex women characters that effected the action in major ways. For instance, the widowed Kunti, mother of Paandavas, who dedicates her life to making sure her sons become kings; Gandhari, wife of the sightless Kaurava king, who chooses to blindfold herself at marriage, thus relinquishing her power as queen and mother; and most of all, Paanchaali also known as Draupadi, king Drupad's beautiful daughter, who has the unique distinction of being married to five men at the same time—the five Pandava brothers, the greatest heroes of their time. Paanchaali, who some might argue, by her headstrong actions helps to bring about the destruction of the third age of man. But in some way, they remained shadowy figures, their thoughts and motives mysterious, their emotions portrayed only when they affected the lives of the male heroes, their role ultimately subservient to those of their fathers or husbands, brothers or sons.

*The Place of Illusions* is an attempt to place the women in the forefront of the action. It is to uncover the story that lay invisible between the lines of the men's exploits. Hence the entire story is said by Paanchaali with all her joys and doubts, her struggles and her triumph, her heartbreaks, her achievements. It is a unique female way in which she sees her world and her place in it. The novel traces the princess Paanchaali's life, beginning with her birth in fire along with her brother to king Drupad in the fire ceremony.

The voices said, "Here is the son you asked for he'll bring you the vengeance you desire, but it will break your life in two..." (4)

"Behold we give you this girl, a gift beyond what you asked for. Take good care of her, for she will change the course of history." (5)

But strangely enough king Drupad held out his arms only for the brother.

“We clung together so stubbornly that my father was forced to pick us both up together...” (6)

“I didn’t forget that hesitations...” (6)

“I never forget the feel of his hand clutching mine, his refusal to abandon me.” (7)

From then onwards the girl child, named Draupadi didn’t forget that hesitation throughout her life. In future also she tries to ascertain herself by being equal to her brother in learning. In spite of a number question that she faced, she continued to be strong.

“A girl being taught what a boy was supposed to?” (23)

That the education “was making me too hardheaded and argumentative, too man like in my speech”(23)

And so the tutor discouraged her from being educated by calling such ways of women as the path to ruin. She was even discouraged by her own brother by the following words.

“Boys are different from girls... When will you accept this?”(24)

The typical patriarchal laws existed in the society with the view that a Kshatriya woman’s highest purpose in life is to support the warriors in her life; her brother, father, husband and sons. But Draupadi had long decided to be different from these notions.

“Myself, I plan on doing other things with my life.” (26)

Vyasa warns her in the forest.

“Three dangerous moments will come to you. The first will be just before your wedding, at that time, hold back your questions. The second will be when your husbands are at the height of their power, at that time, hold back your laughter. The third will be when you’re shamed, as you’d never imagined possible: at that time hold back your curse.” (40)

The entire epic progresses only because of these three important situations in Draupadi’s life. The introduction of Sikhandi, the royal father’s (Drupad’s) eldest daughter who has turned in to a great and dangerous warrior determined to avenge Bheeshma is another inspiring character to Draupadi.

“... A women’s life is tougher than a banyan root, which exists without soil or water...” (48)

“... Wait for a man to avenge your honor, and you’ll wait forever.”(49)

Actually it is Krishna who is Draupadi’s soul mate through out. They were both dark skinned. She was fascinated by Krishna because in a palace where king Drupad was obsessed by pride and the dream of getting even; Dhri was the noblest of all people she knew who had a sincere love, of virtue, but with no sense of humor, Krishna was a chameleon who chastised every one with his genuine smile and artistry of speech. Even though Krishna suggested ‘Arjun, the third Pandava prince, my dearest friend’ (56) as suitable husband for Draupadi, on the day of swayamwar, she immediately fell in love with Karna, the ruler of Anga. When she looked at the portrait of Karna with admiration, Krishna discouraged her by saying that he’s no longer a prince (70). It is again Krishna who assures her that—

“I’ll be there—to keep you from choosing wrongly.” (75)

Still her inclination was for Karna and on knowing from Daima that Karna came into this world in a strange way, Draupadi wonders---

“Doesn’t anyone have normal births any more?” (77)

This statement exactly substantiates all the major characters in Mahabharata.

In the swayamwar, all the great kings including Jarasandha, Salya, Sisupal and Duryodhan missed the arrow at the rotating fish by some width. At last it was Karna who was left. Dhristadyumna said,

“Karna, my sister cannot have as her suitor a man of a low caste.” (94)

But it is Draupadi's voice that stopped Karna from stepping forward---

“Before you attempt to win my hand, king of Anga, tell me your father's name for surely a wife –to- be, who must sever herself from her family and attach herself to her husband's line has the right to know this.” (95)

Defeated, head bowed with shame, he left the marriage hall. But he never forgot the humiliation of that moment in full sight, of all the kings of Bharat. Even Draupadi knew that she had hurt Karna the most with her only question but she also could not come out of her desire, admirations or the wistful beginnings of love on Karna. It is this hidden emotion of love for Karna that the entire Mahabharata had become eventful. Arjuna hits the fish in the Swayamwar with his arrow and surprisingly follows the order of his mother---

“Son, I can't come right now or the food will burn. But as always, whatever you brought should be shared equally amongst all my sons.” (107)

That's how Draupadi became the wife of all five Pandava brothers. Chitra Banerjee's post modern out look of Mahabharata is the tussle between Paanchaali and Kunti as daughter-in- law and mother-in- law, both of whom aim at a hold on the Paandavas. Whether it is the burning of brinjal or moving into a new Palace of Illusions from Hastinapur, it is the silent rounds of battle between the ladies, in which obviously Draupadi won. In fact, it is the dream of Paanchaali to have a palace of her own.

“Often I imagined my own palace.... but I knew mine would have to be different. It would have to be uniquely mine.” (113)

The stance of mutual distrust between Kunti and Paanchaali is the major reason of all the events in the epic. After Paanchaali was to be married to all five of the Paandavas, it is she who feels---

“Ah! Karna! Was this my punishment for having treated you so cruelly?” (118)

It was Vyasa's verdict that Paanchaali should marry all the five Paandavas compelled her to agree to such a strange relationship. Though she craves for the gift of forgetting, so that when she goes to each brother she would be free of the memory of the previous one, Vyasa gives her a boon to balance the one that landed her with five spouses that each time she goes to a new brother; she would be a virgin again. Even though she is married, she made vows each day to forget Karna, to be a better wife to the Paandavas but still longed to see Karna again. Paanchaali could never have the feeling of peace, as she would be passed from hand to hand whether she wanted it or not and there by put her in a helpless situation. She blamed Kunti for all this development because she knew her son's psychology.

“If he (Arjuna) couldn't have me all to himself, he didn't want me at all. He would go through the notions of marriage, but he would keep his heart from me. And wasn't that exactly what she (Kunti) intended?”(122)

When Paandavas are at Hastinapur, even though Paanchaali got adjusted, still she confesses-

“In spite of the vows I made each day to forget Karna, to be a better wife to the Paandavas, I longed to see him again.” (130)

To stay at Hastinapur makes Paanchaali uneasy- and so she feels, “...too many people there hate my husbands. It'll never be home to me.”(36)

Paanchaali longed for her own palace and when the Paandavas went to the Khandav forest, the Viswakarma built them a palace, like no one has ever seen; Paanchaali is very happy with the palace and says—

“This creation of yours that's going to be the envy of every king in Bharat—we'll call it the Palace of Illusions.” (146)

Krishna advises them to live in the palace and enjoy but never to invite anyone to come and see because people will be envious and envy is dangerous.

Slowly Paanchaali's strengths are appreciated by Paandavas. She has a good eye for matters of governance, and Yudhishtir began to ask her advise when a tricky judgment had to be delivered. Dhri, her brother appreciated her

"... Now you're truly a queen." (149)

Kunti stayed back in Hastinapur because she was a wise woman—wiser than Paanchaali.

"She (Kunti) saw that in this place, I was the mistress. Where my husbands had once relied on her, they now depended on me... The Palace of Illusions was my domain, and she accepted this." (150)

The climax happened when the Kaurava eldest, Duryodhan, Karna and others fell in splash of water. They must have stopped on to an illusory bridge but when Duryodhan fell in the pool, Paanchaali and her attendants burst into peals of laughter with a note "It seems the blind king's son is also blind". (173)

Kunti wanted Paanchaali to inform this insulting incident to Yudhishtir so that he could have pacified the vindictive Duryodhan but Paanchaali doesn't tell Yudhishtir. ISSN 0976-9714

Kauravas went back and called the Paandavas and Draupadi to see their just-constructed palace and meet the newly wed wife of Duryodhan, Bhanumati. This was unexpected. Wives did not usually accompany kings on their journeys. Kunti snorted at the impropriety of the idea, but Paanchaali wanted to go, and may be she knew it is not Duryodhan's effort to put an end to old enmities but to meet her heart ache once more. That was the last time they bid farewell to their beautiful palace.

At Indraprastha, Paandavas listened to Paanchaali every time but at Hastinapur they became more free and indulged in gambling. Even though she knew, "A wife who holds in her heart spiteful thoughts of a man who is not her husband is as unfaithful as a woman who sleeps with such a man" (185), still she longed to be with Karna. In the gambling Yudhishtir lost his kingdom, palace, brothers and Paanchaali to Shakuni and Duryodhan. "I am a queen; Daughter of Drupad; sister of Dhristadyumna and Mistress of the greatest palace on the earth. I can't be gambled away like a bag of coins, or summoned to court like a dancing girl" (90).

Still she is dragged into the court and was put to shame and insult by removing her clothes. Krishna comes for her rescue, "No one can shame you, if you don't allow it." (193). He offers her clothes and prevents her from shame. She thought at least Karna would come to her rescue. He was her last hope, the only one who had the ability to stop Duryodhan. He had the reputation of helping the destitute but he wanted her to fall on his feet and beg him for mercy. She decided never to lower herself and so hated him for being Duryodhan's friend; in fact it is he who shouted to Dusshasan to--

"Remove the Paandavas' fancy clothes and jewelry. All that belongs to us now... why Draupadi should be treated any differently take her clothes, too." (192).

After the incident Draupadi thought that Karna had taught her, and in fact to every one like her, a lesson. The desire for vengeance is stronger than the desire for love. And then comes the curse from Draupadi's mouth---

"All of you will die in the battle that will be spawned from this day's work... not one Kaurava heir will be left to offer prayers for the dead. All that will remain is the shameful memory of today, what you tried to do a defenseless woman." (194). The long hair of Draupadi touched by Dusshasan is never to be combed till the day she bathes it in Kaurava blood.

Thus the entire story of Kurukshetra is because of Paanchaali's vow. She is almost dead from that day. Half of her died the day when everyone she had loved and counted on to save her sat without protest and watched her being shamed. The other half perished with the loss of her beloved home. Nevertheless, she followed Paandavas to the forest and supported them through good times and bad. She provided them with comforts of the body and the mind but in the heart of hearts, she avenged against Kauravas, though Krishna consoled them every now and then by urging them to allow the past to go and be at ease, she could not. In the forest, at every right moment, she reminded the past and her words of vengeance reminded all the Paandavas of their revenge.

After twelve years in the forest, it was one year in disguise according to the agreement. They all had been to the kingdom of Viraat and occupied different places according to their interests. Yudhishtir became the gambling mate to the king; Bheem took over the kitchen, Arjuna as eunuch became the dance teacher to the princess Uttara; Nakul, Sahadev were working in the king's barns and Paanchaali became an assistant to queen Sudeshna. After the Keechaka's killing by Bheem, the one-year was over.

On their return to Hastinapur when their Pandava kingdom was not returned, the Kurukshetra battle was obvious. She would have stopped the war; but "I didn't want to heed anything that might keep me from the revenge I'd waited for it so long." (239). All the petty resentments that Draupadi felt for Subhadra and Hidimba (the others wives of Paandavas) and the animosity she had harbored towards Kunti are kept aside and from then on, they all would be united in their anxiety, and prayers for the safety of all during the great war.

Vyasa's intervention at this time completely brings in the Hindu philosophy.

"The life that you're living today is only a bubble in the cosmic stream, shaped by the Karma of other life times." (253)

But these words did not change Draupadi who wanted the satisfaction of vengeance. It is Vyasa who gives boon to Sanjaya and Paanchaali, a special vision so that they may see the most important parts of the battle from afar. Draupadi was very afraid for the first time. She introspects---

"Was I not, in my own way, as responsible for this war as he (Dhritarashtra)?" (254)

For 18 days, she had been the witness to the war with a mental trauma of "I had pushed my husbands and perhaps an entire kingdom—into calamity for my own petty satisfactions?" (258)

This boon of Vyasa allowed her to penetrate the masks of men and look into their core. On the ninth day—the war had reached its mid mark—which was the worst. Sikhandi was stationed in the front of Arjuna's chariot and as result Bheeshma laid down his bow and fell on his bed of arrows. At night Paanchaali goes to visit Bheeshma and found Kunti already there. Paanchaali hid behind and listened. Soon after Kunti left, it was Karna who came there and addressed Bheeshma as 'grand father'. He asked with agony, "You knew? You knew that the Paandavas are my brothers? Did Kunti tell you, too, when she told me?" (273).

This really shocked Paanchaali. She became startled when she came to know that Bheeshma knew of the secret long back. It is because of Bheeshma's promise to protect the royal throne that he didn't reveal and it is because of the promise to Kunti that Karna didn't reveal this secret to anyone. Karna feels bad and cries before Bheeshma by saying that Kunti should have told him the secret long before and all these unpleasant situations including the war could have been avoided. He also feels bad for humiliating and insulting Draupadi, who is his younger brother's wife. Bheeshma advices Karna to join his brother's but he denies. Karna says—

“Even knowing what I know, I desire her! I can’t forget her shining, haughty face at the Swayamwar...” (276).

When Karna says that Kunti had come to him to convince him to join his brothers by the words----

“If I joined her sons, I’d be king instead of Yudhishtir, I wasn’t tempted. But when she used her final weapon, when she said that as her son I, too, would become Paanchaali’s husband—I was ready to give up my reputation, my honor, everything! I had to use my will power to remain silent.” (277).

Draupadi, who was listening to all this was stunned and though this was what she had secretly wanted all her life, to know that he was attracted to her, even against his will, she became furious at Kunti.

“How dare she offer me to Karna as though I were no more than a slave girl?” (277)

Bheeshma consoles Karna and advises him to put Draupadi out of his mind and concentrate on the war.

Divakaruni has presented Kunti to be the mastermind behind Kurukshetra and Draupadi to be the executor of it. But ultimately because of Karna’s own curses when he died, Vyasa comments, “Despite the brutality of his death, his face held an enigmatic smile.” (297)

Draupadi who was visualizing the battle could see, Karna’s soul paused for a moment over the weeping woman and before it soared into the sky and disappeared, it grew in to a great radiance around her. Freed of its mortal bondage, Karna’s spirit knew what Draupadi hadn’t ever been able to tell him.

Paandavas win the battle and Kauravas, including Sikhandi and the five Upapandavas are dead. Paanchaali realized, “She who sows vengeance must reap its bloody fruit.” (306) But the war ended with the last words of Duryodhan—

“I am going to heaven to enjoy all its pleasure with my friends. You’ll rule a kingdom peopled with widows and orphans and wake each morning to the grief of lob. Who’s the real winner, then and who the loser?”

These words really portray the pathetic situations of the post-war scenario which horrifies the Paandavas and Paanchaali. Still on the day of the coronation of Yudhishtir, Paanchaali wanted to enter the throne room again. Hastinapur after the war was largely a city of women, widows and Paanchaali did form a separate court for women to resolve their sorrows and support them.

Vyasa discloses the future secret about Parikshit, the son of Uttara, the lineage of Paandavas, to only Paanchaali, advising her to perform his marriage soon to continue their family name, with a complement-

“I have always known you to be stronger than your husbands” (329)

-thus proving Paanchaali to be the doer of all actions in Hastinapur. Slowly Dhritarashtra, Gandhari and Kunti retire to the forest; followed by years later the Paandavas and Paanchaali. The woman around whom history would gather it self, left Hastinapur along with her husbands, even though Parikshit and people try to stop her.

“Perhaps that has always been my problem, to rebel against the boundaries that society has prescribed for women.” (343) these words completely epitomize her nature.

At the Mahaprasthan, the path of the great departure, still her love to Karna could not be abandoned by her and so she had fallen down. It is Yudhishtir, walking ahead who says to Bheem—

“She married all of us. But she loved one man more than everyone else” (347)

Though Yudhishtir says that, it was ‘Arjuna whom she loved more’, she and Yudhishtir knew that it was actually ‘Karna’. It is Krishna who comes to her rescue with his philosophy “try to remember that you are the instrument and I the doer. If you can hold on to this, no sin can touch you.” (357)

And thereafter it is as if day- dreaming- walking- waking- forming- dissolving.

The writer in a postmodern sense retells the same old epic of *Mahabharata* with a feministic over tone. Truly the text is an attempt to examine the representation of women in literature by men and challenge the representation of women as the ‘other’, as ‘lack’ or as part of ‘nature’. The text also examines power relationships, as observed in the epic and in life, with a view to breaking them down. It is a remarkable text perceiving the society and people as a political act, and reveals the extent of patriarchy. Through the characters of Kunti and Draupadi, Chitra Banerjee compels the reader to re-read psychoanalysis to further explore the issue of female and male identity and the ruthless employment of man’s social power over a woman. Paandavas and Kauravas are the embodiments of the patriarchal principle. The marriage locks Kunti, Gandhari and Draupadi into a social system which denies their feminine autonomy. Thus the text is a wonderful example of feminine consciousness reflected in this epic. Such a challenge to the existing patriarchal set up gives a post modern touch to the epic of *Mahabharata*.

Volga is a modern Marxist-Feminist Telugu writer in the contemporary age. Settled in Hyderabad, she has 6 novels, 4 anthologies of short stories, and many poems to her credit. She is a creative as well critical artist with an upper hand on translation. “*Mrinmayanadam*” is one of her short stories published in 2006. The text is a postmodern, feminist interpretation of *Ramayana*, the epic by Valmiki. The thoughts, the understanding and the analysis of man made society and the position of ‘woman’ in it is well stated through the characters of ‘Ahalya’ and ‘Sita’ in the story. The discussion continues to present *Ramayana* from postmodern and feminist concerns as reflected in Volga’s short story *Mrinmayanadam*.

The story begins with the happy occasion of the wedding of Rama with Sita and a note of celebration at Mithila Nagar and Ayodhya. Sita hears the name of Ahalya from the mouth of Rama, when he tells her that Ahalya had divine beauty but never had good character. Sita could not understand his words ‘Characterless’. When asked, the way Rama tries to pass it off by saying,

‘You are too young and innocent to understand these complex words.’

is a way to keep a girl / woman in darkness. However, Sita comes to know of Ahalya through her mother-in-law, Kausalya. That Ahalya is an incarnation of beauty, chastity and intelligence and maharishi Gouthama, immediately accepted her as his wife; that they lived happily after till Indra, the god of gods, fell a victim to her beauty and in his lust filled mental stature, enjoyed her physically by coming to her in the guise of her husband, Gouthama- is narrated by Kausalya to Sita. The entire plot is revealed when maharishi Gowthama faces Indira, who is in the guise of Gowthama himself, sitting with Ahalya. Angered with pain and deception, Gowthama deserts Ahalya and curses her to become a stone. It is with the pious touch of Rama, that she turns into human again. Kausalya adds that still Ahalya is virtuous and pious. The innocent Sita could not understand how Ahalya is virtuous to Kausalya and characterless to Rama.

These thoughts come true when Sita meets Ahalya at a waterfall during their Aranyavasa. Sita becomes happy but could not understand her words.

Ahalya: Don’t you want to know whether I knew the vicious plan of Indira?

Ahalya: It is the society that has given right to Gowthama to desert me after what has happened. I neither choose him as my husband nor gave him the right.

Ahalya: It is the people who think that I became a rock, but in fact, I was meditating, sitting like a rock. I was thinking as to 'Who I am?'

After much contemplation, I could realize that I merely don't belong to a man and a family. But I am a part of the creation in this world. I have my own existence, independent of being a daughter or a wife. My existence should bring peace and harmony in the world, in however small way possible. Thus I grew global in my existence.

Ahalya: It is Gowthama's bad luck that he left me and thereby he has missed my acquaintance. I don't think I am unlucky; on the contrary, it is his bad luck.

All these words were beyond the comprehension of Sita. Sita then argues that Rama was different from other men. He completely believes in her and he loves her most.

Ahalya: All men are a like and Rama is no exception.

This is an attack to the patriarchal set up. The blessing of Ahalya showered on Sita was even more un-comprehend able to Sita.

Ahalya: Never allow any body else to dominate you. Let your freedom to make decisions be with you. Never be victimized.

Sita returns with a perplexed mind and observes that Rama is ready to neither listen to any thing of Ahalya nor try to understand Sita's disturbed status.

Years later, Rama kills Ravana and now is the moment of happiness and union for Sita and Rama. Sita is overjoyed but gets confused to look at Laxmana's fearful face. The first thunderbolt comes when Laxmana says that Rama has full confidence and belief in her but for the sake of people, he wants Sita to enter the fire in order to prove her virtuosity. Though stunned and reminded of Ahalya's words, she feels that Rama completely believes her and it is only for the sake of the world that she has to take the test and make Rama strong. She has to support Rama who has become weak. He is weeping for her and is waiting for her. It becomes her moral responsibility to support her husband and so willingly, she enters the fire and evolves as a virtuous woman.

But ever since, she neither could be as in the past with Rama or with anybody else at Ayodhya. This remorse feeling deepens when Kausalya blesses her and says that her daughter-in-law could never be wronged and the fire god is the witness, which would automatically mean that she had some element of doubt about Sita and her character.

Sita could slowly understand the words of Ahalya after this trauma.

*Never allow anybody to Judge you.*

*You decide on your matters.*

*Take decisions by yourself.*

Sita desperately wanted to meet Ahalya.

After a few days, she was pregnant and Rama wanted to fulfill the wish in the mind of Sita so that the delivery would become easier. Sita expresses her wish to visit the woods that they have gone to during Vanavasa. While Sita wanted to meet Ahalya in the forest, Rama felt relaxed to listen to the small wish of Sita.

Sita is stunned to see Laxmana on the chariot instead of Rama but felt relaxed because she need not make any pretext to meet Ahalya. But Laxmana looked very sad and depressed, still he insisted to accompany her into the woods. Sita exactly explained the spot where she could meet Ahalya but Laxmana left her near Valmiki's ashram telling that Rama has ordered him to

leave her there. She was again stunned. Due to the criticism of a drunkard washer-man, Rama decided to desert Sita. Now she could understand Ahalya's words completely. She started sitting lifelessly in Valmiki's ashram, desperately desiring to meet Ahalya.

As the delivery date of Sita approaches, Valmiki becomes tense because of Sita's status. He tried his level best to keep her happy and ultimately asks her wish to be fulfilled. Listening to Sita's wish to meet Ahalya, he readily consents and sends her to the forest. Sita cries to her heart full in the lap of Ahalya.

Sita: Till when should I give such tests to prove my virtuosity?

Ahalya: Till you learn to live for yourself. Man in this society restricts a woman as a daughter, sister, wife, mother in the domestic chunks in such a way that she accepts all subjugation and considers it to be her prime duty and ultimate reality of her life. She is so bound in the circle that neither religion, nor society, nor customs, nor cultures give her a chance to go beyond. Hardly does she know that she is dominated.

Ahalya: Learn to come out of it. Apart from these patriarchal ties, a woman has an independent existence firstly as a human being – man or woman belongs to Nature. Learn to experience such a sense of universal belonging. That is what I learnt after Gouthama left me. Once this is realized, you never feel bad. You tend to live for yourself to make your life better and there by beautify Nature.

Ahalya: Enjoy this state of pregnancy and mother hood, which is the highest gift of nature to a woman. Be happy and keep the child also happy. Realise your existence, relevance and importance in nature; make your children realise the same. We are all part of nature with natural laws to abide by, not man made laws.

These words filled Sita like melodious music-*mrinmayanadam*. Sita felt relaxed after listening to Ahalya. With contentment in mind and satisfaction at heart, Sita returns to Valmiki's ashram and delivers twins- Lava and Kusha. The words of Ahalya fills Sita's mind with courage, confidence and gives her an independent existence in this world to take care of her self and her children.

After Ashwamedha Yaaga, when Rama confronts with Lava and Kusha and comes to know of the fact that they are his children, he is filled with happiness. His eyes hunt for Sita and he is overjoyed to see her. Rama requests her to come to Ayodhya as his wife and the queen. But the stoic Sita refuses to accompany the children. She says,

Sita: The children are of the world to establish peace in this world by following natural laws. If you feel that these children are yours and they belong to your family that is your perception. You can take them along with you. But as for me, I shall not come. Let me be with myself. I am '*Bhooputri*'. So the people of the world are mine and I shall be with them and hence I cannot come with you.

So saying, Sita goes in to the earth and the *bhooputri* reaches her birthplace. She lies there according to her own wish.

