



JOURNEY FROM VICTIMIZATION TO THE VENERABLE ICONS: A STUDY OF K.R.S IYENGAR'S HEROINES IN *SITAYANA* AND *SATISAPTAKAM*

DR. LALITA JOSHI

Assistant Professor

Department of English

Govt. Girls P.G. College of Commerce

Haldwani, Nainital. (UK) INDIA

ABSTRACT

K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar's sincere effort in presenting women with all their virtues, as an ideal, not only for women, but also for the whole human race, in his major works Sitayana: Epic of the Earth Born and Saga of Seven Mothers: Satisaptakam, is really a creative venture. These two works present women with all their inborn virtues of grace, compassion, peace, purity, fidelity, endurance and firm belief in the Indian traditional family values. With these qualities they raised themselves on the pedestal of venerable position. But their journey from the ordinary women to the venerable icon is not an easy and simple one. They went through several kinds of ordeals and victimization in the male dominated society. The present paper explores their journey from victimization to the spiritually awakened icons of worship.

Key Words: *Saga, Virtue, Victimization, Family Values, Spiritual Awakening.*

INTRODUCTION

Our Itihasa, Purana, Epics like the Srimad Bhagwat, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are the evidence of the fact that India has always been a land of innumerable exemplars of glorified feminine, paragon and incarnation of the Supreme Shakti. Indian literature is also replete with compositions about such women.

K.R. S. Iyengar's epics '*Sitayana*' and '*Satisaptakam*' project a whole variegated gallery of the choicest flowers of eternal Ibeauty like Sita, Sukanya, Devahuti, Damyanti, Renuka, Draupadi, Devyani and Kannaki. These legendary women lived in this male dominated patriarchal society where rules and norms are intentionally made to bar women from the path

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of empowerment. Yet these self sacrificing women instead of adopting the way of revolt against the existing rules and norms or by being vindictive to their oppressors gets empowerment and a respectable place in the society by the way of spiritual awakening and by upholding Indian traditional values.

'Sitayana' by Iyengar is the saga of Sita - the Story of her birth, Childhood and girlhood, her marriage to Rama, their life in exile in the forest of Dandaka for thirteen years, their yearlong separation and reunion, their coronation at Ayodhya, her second separation from Rama, her crowned of motherhood and the last scene of her self-transcendence and returning to her mother earth. After getting married to Rama she faces many challenges in the form of victimization. The chain of victimization starts when, after living in the confinement of Ravana for one long year she is released. Instead of showing pity and love to her wife, Rama hurts her by asking to prove her chastity. She gets shocked completely and bursts into uncontrollable tears. At this grim movement, she feels pain not at the thought of her present insult and humiliation, but at the thought that in coming future Rama will be remembered not for his great role as savior or great king but as the most heartless husbands and will get only public disgrace:

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

She proves her chastity through the fire ordeal. Second time she is again victimized when she was pregnant. Rama banishes her on the allegation of being impure by a washer- man. She is pregnant and needs great care of her family and husband yet she is expelled. She feels badly wounded and leaves all the desire of living anymore. Even then she does not commit suicide so that the royal lineage of her husband may not end with her death:

*I could end my existence by a leap
into the Ganga waters
were it not that my husband's royal line
may terminate with my death. (577)*

She is ready to face all the pain, sufferings and humiliation for that cruel man - her husband - who does not care for her crucial and delicate condition of pregnancy and expels her from the palace. Later, when Ram comes to know about his sons Lave and Kusa, he happily accepts them but does not accept Sita. He again demands her fire ordeal:

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*I accept these twins before all the world
as my sons, Kusa, Lava
and I'll receive Vaidehi too, when she
reaffirms her purity. (645)*

She makes a silent protest by returning to her mother earth's lap so that Rama may always burn in the fire of repentance, as he knows that he has done injustice to her. Her consequent anger is not against her husband, but for the prevailing system of the society that does not care for the sentiment of a woman and leaves no chance of humiliating her

V. CH. N. K. Srinivasa Rao remarks, "Prof. Iyengar's 'Sitayana' takes Sita to the awakening of womanhood for the betterment of humanity as a woman who symbolizes the primordial Shakti is in reality the one who can move the world towards progress"(Rao,154)

In *Satisaptakam* Iyengar invokes seven satis near apocalyptic vision of maidenhood-Womanhood-Motherhood. They include Devahuti, Shukanya, Devyani, Damyanti, Renuka, Draupadi and Kannaki.

Devahuti is a real Sahdarmini of her husband Kardaman. She becomes a victim of her husband's selfishness. Before they start their grahastha ashram, Kardaman expresses his desire to explore a crucial realm of yogic consciousness. He imposes on her the responsibility of keeping constant watch over him through fair and dismal weather while he loses himself in the self's infinitudes. Devahuti completely stakes her own life by forgetting herself while serving him devotedly. When Kardaman returns with the crown of victory, he sees his wife "the great sun in eclipse"(Iyengar, 28). He feels guilty as this is because of his selfishness that she suffers so much physically as well as mentally:

*My hapless yet gloried Devahuti!
how long, O how long, has my
selfish frenzy of askesis held you
in such fanatic ransom.
Devahuti! my sin is like a sword
that stabs me in a thousand
places: I had no right to sacrifice
your youth, your beauty, your love. (29)*

Sukanya becomes a victim of cruel fate when in spite of having no fault of hers; she is trapped into misalliance with the aged and blind seer Chyavana, an invertible grouser besides.



Though she has been a princess yet she gives up all the luxuries and comforts of palace life and accepts a simple and ascetic life of a blind seer's wife. Her wholehearted devotion compensates the loss of his eyesight. She serves him like a mother, a nurse and also as a sincere wife. It is her loyalty to her husband that she finds no interest in Ashwini Kumaras' dirty proposal of marrying them. She makes them realize their impertinence by the power of her satitva and impresses them with chastity of her character. Chyavana himself admits Sukanya's strength of satitva:

*To tell you truly, Sukananya, not me
but your Shakti, behind me,
your soul's strength that's large as the universe
effected Indra's defeat. (143)*

Devyani is victimized more than ones. First she becomes a victim of her lover Kacha's cold calculation, controlled philandering and callous rejection of her love. She is an innocent motherless child who does not understand the clever trick of Kacha to learn the Art of Sanjeevani from her father Shukracharya. Kacha pretends to be in love with her, but after learning the art of sanjeevani, very rudely deserts her. It is her true and sincere love for Kacha that when her father's attendants *daityas* kill Kacha twice, she pleads her father to bring him back to life forgetting all the acts of philandering done to her. Second time she becomes victim of her own flashes of anger and pride and consequently she is humiliated by Sarmistha, her friend and later Sarmistha becomes the reason of ruining her married life. Her husband Yayati develops an illicit relationship with Sarmistha at her back and mothers her three sons. He not only deceives her, but also becomes very cruel and inhuman to her. In order to conceal his misdeed he starts giving her seductive drugs so that she may not notice his misdoing:

*By and by queen Devyani dwindled
into something undesired
and repulsive, a snake in woman's shape
an ogress untouchable. (210)*

She becomes a victim of her husband's duplicity and inhumanity. When Shukracharya comes to know the injustice and cruelty done to her, he curses him and turns him from "robust vitality and vigor"(214) to "deflated to the crabbedness of age" (214). If Devyani wants, she can sentence him to death for that unpardonable crime, but she does not go to that extent and makes him unable to enjoy his immoral desire of lust. Later on she even lessens this curse by telling an escape route to him, and becomes an ideal in the eyes of Yayati and others.



Damyanti also becomes a victim of her husband Nala's cruel deception. First, he stakes her as an unanimated thing in the game of dice and later on when she suffers all the discomforts and agonies of forest life silently with him, he forsakes her in half naked condition and at the mercy of fate:

*Nala knew he had abandoned his wife
And left her to the mercy
Of the forest's Denizens like hunters
Cobras and wildest fauna (251)*

She faces all the dangers of forest life desperately and becomes a victim of the "lascivious look" (252) of the strangers. Her courage, intelligence, optimistic attitude and power of satitva not only protect her from all the dangers and mishappenings but also help her organize her false swayamwara and find out her husband again.

Renuka becomes a victim of her husband Jamdagni's false suspicion and pride. She is accused of tempting towards the luxurious and colorful life of Gandharavas and letting her mind go stray. The only fault of Renuka is that she delays a little from bringing the water for the *Agnihotra*. During that time the fire of *Agnihotra* extinguishes. Jamadagni analyses that the reason for this delay is Renuka's infidelity to him and to her "cerebral transgression":

*My prolonged askesis has gifted me
with uncanny thought reading
and to my abasement I see writ large
your cerebral transgressions. (356)*

He becomes very angry and orders his son Parasuram to behead his mother:

*It is the woman of the race who have
long and nobly safe guarded
the good name, the purity and power;
all's lost when she fails indeed.
mine is the burdon of the duty to charge
Renuka your own mother
with thought and action disloyal to me
deserving of instant death (360)*



Here Iyengar projects Jamadagini as a true representative of traditional patriarchal society as he considered his wife his property and possession. He is the master so he can treat his wife as he wishes. Kate Millette highlights the same views of the male mentality in her work *Sexual Politics* “traditionally, patriarchy granted the father [the male] nearly total ownership over wife or wives and children, including the powers of physical abuse and often even those of murder and sale. Classically, as head of the family, the father [the male] is both begetter and owner with a system in which kinship is one’s own property” (33). Further, she explains the reason behind that “the situation between the sexes now, and throughout history, is a case of that phenomenon Max Weber defined as *a herschafta relationship* of dominance and subordination” (24-25). Simone de Beauvoir also asserts the same in her work *The Second Sex* “no one is more arrogant toward women, more aggressive or scornful than the man who is anxious about his virility.” (part-1,14)

Like Sita, Renuka is also not ready to accept false charges against her. Though she raises her voice against these allegations, but quits humbly and later on prefers death to live a so called blotted life with such a man who cannot trust his wife. She herself begs death:

*Punish me, my lord? But what
prevents you? I’ve already asserted
my complete integrity.
I married you visioning great Shiva
the Yogi of Himvant;
I’m the mother of your five Bhrigu sons;
I’m content to leave the scene.(359)*

This outburst and gesture of defiance shocks Jamadagni and wounds his ego. Parasuram who is an obedient son and also a male member of the same patriarchal society takes no time to behead her. Later, when Jamadagni realizes his guilt and restores the calm of mind confesses:

*I’ve insulted and injured you beyond
all precedent, Renuka; ...
Yea, as one who had suffered unjustly
and therefore could sympathise
with human suffering, offer solace
and alleviate distress.
you will be known in the coming ages
as Chinnamasta because
of your glowing head and healing power
in the service of the Earth. (365)*

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Draupadi is another character in *Saga of Seven Mothers* who goes through victimization more than once. At first she becomes a victim of the cruel fate by marrying five Pandavas, contrary to her own wish. Later on she becomes a victim of the pride, envy and hate between five Pandavas and hundred Kauravas. In order to take revenge and all the possessions of Pandavas, Kauravas playing a game of dice. There, they create such circumstances that Yudhistira, the eldest of them not only stakes property, kingdom and his brothers but also his wife Draupadi. She is not only insulted and abused, but also disrobed in the mass - packed hall. She cries, weeps and requests to stop all this naked dance of humanity, but nobody protests, not even her own loyal husbands. She says:

*Trapped in the pigeonholes of history,
you'll be castigated for
your culpable moral neutrality
in the war against woman. (445)*

She shows her anger and outburst for all but not speak ill words for husbands in that open assembly. It is her belief in family values that she does not let her husbands look down upon. Not only that much when Dhritrastra asks her for a boon, she demands the liberty of the enslaved Pandava. Once more she becomes a victim of the lecherous eyes of Kichaka, the brother of queen Sudeshna of Virata Kingdom, who gives them shelter when she along with her husbands disguises themselves during the exile. Queen Sudeshna feels very ashamed because she has helped her brother. She not only begs pardon to her but worships her with the most venerable words:

*Your matchless immitigable courage
in the face of the tally
of your sorrow and humiliations
makes you larger than human
this more than human manifestation
of great suffering and strength
may very well be the radical role
thay you're born on earth to play. (480)*

She calls her, Mother of the whole human race:

*But the basic role of Woman as Life,
as the Mother of the race,
as fosterer, and also redeemer,*

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these you will exemplify. (481)

Angelic Kannaki is also deserted by her husband Kovalan as Devyani is deserted by Yayati. Her husband, being trapped in the magic spell of Madhavi's beauty and art of dancing, deserts her. Kannaki being a noble, innocent and faithful wife can not even think of going contrary to her husband, she does not make any complaint and holds her destiny responsible for this betrayal:

*For my misfortune, too, a sinister
logic of past karma – mine
and Kovalan's – must be responsible,
and submission would be wise. (535)*

Her silent suffering, forbearance ruins her health and degrades her into a mere skeleton and graceless lady, "the sepulchral loneliness, the cheerless/waiting till she knew would be in vain [...] (533). Later on when Kovalan returns to her, he begs pardon for his past mistake of betraying her:

*A thousand hells must be my punishment,
and that I can still face you
and breathe this miserable life reveals
the depth of my shame and woe. (554)*

His sudden and unexpected appearance with contrition and shame melts her heart and she forgives all the bitterness of the past. They are about to restart their life from a new point when she again becomes a victim of the perfidy of Madurai goldsmith who blames Kovalan of stealing the gold anklet of the queen which by chance resembling the anklet of Kannaki. Pandyan king thoughtlessly orders to kill her husband. She proves her husband innocent by showing another anklet and makes the king realize his injustice to Kovalan. With a grief stricken heart the king asserts:

*I am no king;
swayed by the killer goldsmith,
I am alone the thief: I've criminally
failed as Ruler, let me die!. (591)*

Though she has always been a quiet, humble, and submissive woman yet her husband is killed mercilessly, she flares in fury and curses the whole city:



*Puhar my home has known a succession
of women of chastity:
if I'am one like them, I'll now unleash ruin
upon this guilty city. (591)*

She now becomes a blazing fire; a flame of vengeance, and it consumes all the evil things in Madurai:

*The general run of blameless people
saw with infinite relief
that only the flawed surplusage was gone
the essential had been spared. (595)*

The king finding himself guilty of punishing an innocent man to death, collapses on the floor saying: "I'am no king...". After the holocaust Madurapati, the deity over the city of Madurai appears before Kannaki and related to her some past event of her husband when he had done a great wrong as Barata. He was an official who killed Sangaman taking him as a spy. His wife Nili had raved and cursed the guilty killer .So in the present life Kovlana had faced the same tragic end. He also tells her that she will get her husband back after two weeks in the new celestial form:

*When fourteen days had passed after the fire,
a celestial car arrived
with her dear lord, and Kannaki joined him,
and the two rose to heaven. (598)*

This transfiguration of human into the divine, this flight from earth to heaven was witnessed by some hill – maiden of the region. They reported:

*The car rose and disappeared in the sky,
but she remains our Goddess,
the holy Sati, Pattini, Shakti
who will be with us always. (599)*

Thus we see though Iyengar's female characters are being projected as victimized either by their own spouses or by the society, he does not seem to give the impression that they are meek dumb, dolls, quite, unconscious of their self respect and destined to be exploited. On the contrary, he advocates that his female characters are worthy of emulation because they



move towards self perception, self expression and self determination slowly indeed and not entirely against tradition but within family bondings. They don't fight for their rights of equality or freedom, but concentrate on cultivating such values as grace, compassion, peace, purity and endurance, the values required for the redemption of the earth from strife and hatred. This is what they considered their mission of being sent into this world:

What is the need for this birth, this glory?

Of womanhood, motherhood,

Unless it be that she is the solvent

Of the aches of human kind. (Saga of Seven Mothers, 95)

By the way of humble submission they not only make their oppressors realize their guilt and cast down their eyes, but also raise themselves to the pedestal of *Devi*.

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