

### I. A Critical Discussion on *The Abduction of Sita*

The Indian novelist R. K. Narayan has tried to foreground the social, ethnic and cultural backwardness, conservatism and spiritualism through his works of the then Asian and Indian sub-continental society. Sita, according to the Hindu Mythology, is worshipped as a pious goddess. But her representation in R. K. Narayan's *The Abduction of Sita* is quite problematic. On the one hand, she is objectified as the goddess while, on the other hand, she is objectified as socially excluded female gender and to some extent, a sex object. This is how Sita, like any other woman in the Hindu patriarchal society, is denied her agency through her objectification.

Despite Sita's divine role, she has been thrown into the sufferings by the society, which goes beyond the general/normal concept of people. Though she possesses the divine power, she isn't allowed to demonstrate her potentiality anywhere. In all her roles, she remains an object, which gels with the notion of gaze from below and gaze from above developed by Gayatri Chackravorty Spivak. *The Abduction of Sita* focuses on the gender marginalization and domination through the character Sita. Revolving round the three chapters, the research mainly aims at probing into the elements of the relatively marginalized feminine gender in R. K. Narayan's *The Abduction of Sita* using the theoretical modality of gendered subaltern developed by Dipesh Chakrabarty and Anupama Roy. Sita from King Janak via Rama to Ravana and again returns to Rama to the earth is made the victim of patriarchal and male centric social system which are the major analytical issues of this study. The ideas behind making Sita so conventional are simply opposing the prevailing system or portraying her as the role in the form as it goes.

Sita, the protagonist of Narayan's novel, has been restricted within the bodily form without having a soul, a life inside. She is bound to remain passive and submissive with prevailing mainstream/stereotypical culture. The manish mentality and female underestimation have kept the sense of gender discrimination lively which causes her to become the victim of the contemporary society and being regarded as the object of beauty reminds her representative of the feminine gender which suffers subjugation that tempts the gender subaltern critics.

R. K. Narayan's text has received several commentaries since the time of the publication. Different critics have analyzed it from the multiple perspectives which prove the univocal feature of the novel. Critics have noted that Narayan's writings tend to be more descriptive and less analytical; the objective style, rooted in a detached spirit, providing for a more authentic and realistic narration. His attitude, coupled with his perception of life, provided a unique ability to fuse characters and actions and an ability to use ordinary events to create a connection in the mind of the reader. There are the visions for and against the character Sita. Some sees the creativity and divinity in her behind her role. On the other hand, she is also under the suspicion whether she really possesses divinity and eternity. She has been portrayed in a typical submissive womanhood beyond her reality. Even after the centuries she has remained a mysterious character. However, she has been frequently criticized as the object of male domination and patriarchy. Pankaj Mishra has analyzed the novel from the viewpoint of the structural quality. In this connection, he puts:

It is always really exciting for me to read books or stories that were written many years ago. I find the literature interesting and the themes of the stories fascinating. This book is very focused on the "gods" and higher powers all having descended or being reborn through other

royalties. These stories all have such tragic, epic endings that usually end in some sort of battle, but these stories also have a moral that can be passed on from generation to generation. That is what makes these kinds of stories famous. I really enjoyed this story. I know that this particular book is a shortened version of an actual epic poem, which I would love to read one day. (157)

Thus, it is evident that the novel is rich in the structural formation. Narayan's writing style was simple and unpretentious with a natural element of humour about it. It focused on ordinary people, reminding the reader of next-door neighbours, cousins and the like, thereby providing a greater ability to relate to the topic unlike his national contemporaries, he was able to write about the intricacies of Indian society without having to modify his characteristic simplicity to conform to trends and fashions in fiction writing. He also employed the use of nuanced dialogic prose with gentle Tamil overtones based on the nature of his writing style. In this connection, Malcolm claims:

Narayan's writing style was often compared to that of William Faulkner since both their works brought out the humour and energy of ordinary life while displaying compassionate humanism. The similarities also extended to their juxtaposing of the demands of society against the confusions of individuality. Although their approach to subjects was similar, their methods were different; Faulkner was rhetorical and illustrated his points with immense prose while Narayan was very simple and realistic, capturing the elements all the same. (71)

Thus, critics have considered Narayan to be the Indian Chekhov due to the similarities in their writings, the simplicity and the gentle beauty and humour in tragic situations.

Likewise, according to Pulitzer Prize winner, Jhumpa Lahiri:

Narayan's short stories have the same captivating feeling as his novels, with most of them less than ten pages long, and taking about as many minutes to read. She adds that between the title sentence and the end, Narayan provides the reader something novelists struggle to achieve in hundreds more pages: a complete insight to the lives of his characters. These characteristics and abilities led Lahiri to classify him as belonging to the pantheon of short-story geniuses that include O. Henry, Frank O'Connor and Flannery O'Connor. Lahiri also compares him to Guy de Maupassant for their ability to compress the narrative without losing the story, and the common themes of middle-class life written with an unyielding and un pitying vision. (11)

So, the similarities also extended to their juxtaposing of the demands of society against the confusions of individuality. Although their approach to subjects was similar, their methods were different; Faulkner was rhetorical and illustrated his points with immense prose while Narayan was very simple and realistic, capturing the elements all the same.

Different critics, in this way, have commented on *The Abduction of Sita* from multiple perspectives. Thus, from the perspective of gender subaltern, to hold Sita up as an example of the ideal woman and wife is to endorse male supremacy and female subservience and to endorse Rama as the ideal husband is to endorse misogyny. She alone is suspected of adultery by Rama and her subjects, and forced to prove her

innocence and sanctity. Rama is never asked to undergo the fire trial to prove he is faithful to her, and neither is he doubted by his subjects or by Sita. Rama banishes Sita to the forest for merely having been accused of adultery by citizens of Ayodhya. Years later, when Rama meets her again through coincidence, he hesitates to take her back, causing Sita to call up her mother Bhānī and be subsumed into the earth (which may arguably be a metaphor for suicide). These portrayals of her never change, and are more or less constant in various texts, stories, illustrations, and even movies and modern media. Male oriented societal values allowed little or no space for women to express their interests and be influential in their everyday lives. Women are traditionally expected to serve their husbands and to have no autonomous interests. Only men could be rulers and leaders in the patriarchal society where the story of *The Abduction of Sita* developed. Though Sita is worshipped as a goddess in the Hindu mythology, her representation in R. K. Narayan's *The Abduction of Sita* is quite problematic. On the one hand, she is objectified as the goddess, and on the other hand, she is objectified as a socially excluded female, to some extent, a sex object. This is how Sita, like any other woman in the Hindu patriarchal society, is denied her agency through her objectification. This causes her of being a subaltern woman.

In the early patriarchal era of *The Ramayana*, men dominated over the Indian societies. All areas of social prominence were entirely run by men in the form of warriors, priests and tribal chiefs. Women had very little or no power at all in the political and public arena. They were raised to look after their families as well as being dutiful wives. Women had the task of being loyal, faithful, loving and compassionate towards their husbands. Individual families were normally set up on a male authority basis, with the husband and father determining fundamental conditions and making the key decisions for their well-being. Women's main role in society was

that of influencing their family by providing love and affection to their husbands and children while the man was in charge of satisfying his family's needs. In the same way, the similar case that we can see in the very novel *The Abduction of Sita*. Here, Sita also plays the role of the submissive wife who is very loyal, faithful, loving and compassionate towards her husband Rama because in the time of her exile with her husband Rama and her brother-in-law Lakshmana when the rakshasas Ravana said her "only be my queen and command me what to do" (18). Then hearing this Sita, by covering her ears with her hands, says, "How dare you speak thus! I am not afraid to lose my life, but if you wish to save yours, run and hide before Rama sees you" (19). From the above quoted lines that we can see that how she is loyal, submissive and faithful towards her husband, Rama on the one hand while on the other hand, she is made to be the victim or the docile object at the hand of patriarchal society. These are the issues that this thesis goes through.

In the novel, the various facets of the role, status, character, morality and attitude of Sita are studied through the notion of gendered subaltern, which are the basic conceptual framework of this research. Although Sita is the heroine of Narayan's novel, has been restricted within the bodily form without having a soul, a life inside. The superiority complex of males and female underestimation have kept the sense of gender discrimination in it which causes the victimization of her and being regarded as the consumable object and the object of beauty reminds her representative of the feminine gender which suffers subjugation that tempts the gender subaltern critics and the framework 'gendered subaltern' is further centered on the similar theories which are grounded over the motion of discrimination and oppression.

So far as the tool 'gendered subaltern' of Narayan's novel *The Abduction of Sita* is concerned, subaltern, which means the 'inferior rank', is a term adopted by Antonio Gramsci to refer to those groups in society who are subjected to the hegemony of the ruling classes. Subaltern classes may include peasants, workers and other groups denied access to 'hegemonic power'. Since the history of the ruling classes is realized in the state, history being the history of states and dominant groups. "Subaltern Studies" started at the end of 1970s but it formally appeared in 1982 under the banner "Subaltern Studies: Writing South Asian History and Society". Until the Six volumes, it was edited by Ranjit Guha. Now it not only boats of eleven volumes but it has also undergone several transformations.

The word Subaltern in late medieval English, referred to vassals and peasants. It was Gramsci who introduced the term in social theory, using it to denote the people in the margin as opposed to those in the centre. Subaltern Studies group aims to provide a systematic discussion of oppressed groups of society through a new historiography that rewrites history from the below. They describe their project as an attempt to study:

. . . the general attribute of subordination in South Asian Society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in other way...Subaltern Studies group sketched out in wide ranging concern both with visible 'history, politics, economics, and sociology of subalternity' and with the occluded attitude, ideologies and belief system-in short, the culture informing that condition. (Guha vii)

Gramsci was interested in the historiography of the subaltern classes. In 'Notes on Italian History' (1934-35) he outlined a six point plan for studying the

history of the subaltern classes which included: their objective formation; their active or passive affiliation to the dominant political formations; the birth of new parties and dominant groups; the formations that the subaltern groups produce to press their claims; new formation within the old framework that assert the autonomy of the subaltern classes: and other points referring to trade unions and political parties.

Gramsci claims that the history of the subaltern classes was just as complex as the history of the dominant classes, although the history of the latter is usually that which is accepted as 'official' history. For him, the history of subaltern social groups is necessarily fragmented and episodic, since they are always subject to the activity of ruling groups, even when they rebel. Clearly they have less access to the means and by which they may control their own representation, and less access to cultural and social institutions. Only 'permanent' victory can break that pattern of subordination, and even that does not occur immediately.

The term has been adapted to post-colonial studies from the work of the Subaltern Studies group of historians, who aimed to promote a systematic discussion of subaltern themes in South Asian Studies. It is used in Subaltern Studies "as a name for the general attribute of subordination in south Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way" (vii). The group formed by Ranjit Guha, initially including Shahid Amin, David Arnold, Partha Chatterjee, David Hardiman, and Gyan Pandey-has produced five volumes of Subaltern Studies: essays relating to the history, politics, economics and sociology of subalternity as well as the attitudes, ideologies, and belief systems-in short, the culture informing that condition(vii).



The notion of the subaltern became an issue in post-colonial theory when Gayatri Chacravorty Spivak critiqued the assumptions of the Subaltern Studies group in the essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" This question, she claims, is one that the group must ask. Her first criticism is directed at the Gramscian claim for the autonomy of the subaltern group, which she says, no amount of qualification by Guha- who concedes the diversity, heterogeneity and overlapping nature of subaltern group- can save from its fundamentally essentialist premise. Secondly, no methodology for determining who or what might constitute this group can avoid this essentialism. The 'people' or 'subaltern' is a group defined by its difference from the elite. Besides, in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak famously elaborates some other contexts wherein contesting representational systems violently displaces/silence the figure of the 'gendered subaltern'. As she, in this connection, puts:

Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the women disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third- world woman' caught between tradition and modernization. (306)

This essay argues that the 'gendered subaltern' disappears because we never hear their speech about themselves. Those who are not the subaltern can speak for them but not the subaltern one. In the patriarchy, women are caught under the subjugation of males so that they can never get the chance to raise their voices against them. This causes them of being disappeared. In this way, She is simply the medium through which competing discourses represent their claims; a palimpsest written over with the text of other desires, other meanings.

Moreover, Spivak goes on to elaborate the problems of the category of the subaltern by looking at the situation of gendered subjects and of Indian women in particular, for "both as an object of colonialist historiography and as a subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant" (28). For if "in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (28). She examines the position of Indian women through an analysis of a particular case and concludes with the declaration that the subaltern cannot speak. This has sometimes been interpreted to mean that there is no way in which oppressed or politically marginalized groups can voice their resistance or that the subaltern only has a dominant language or a dominant voice in which to be heard.

While observing the novel the notion of gendered subaltern can vividly grasp through the character Sita who is oppressed in the patriarchal society. As we know that the story of *The Ramayan* or this great epic composed by Valmiki in Sanskrit around four century BC, but poets have countless variants across the centuries. In this account, Narayan drew his inspiration from the work of Kamban, an eleventh-century Tamil poet. Although there are eight episodes (kands) in *The Ramayan* including Luv-Kush kand which we have studied, heard and seen many times in book form, in tele-serial and by people, the writer has drawn the extract of *The Abduction of Sita*. For this, various questions may arise, why does the writer Narayan choose to write the story of The Ramayan again, told many times? What is his the main purpose behind it? Amid many episodes, why does he choose *The Abduction of Sita*, only? What causes Sita to become the victim of patriarchy? Why does Narayan consider Sita only as docile object in the hand of patriarchy? These are the issues which help to prove the notion of gendered subaltern.

The title *The Abduction of Sita* itself suggests that the character Sita is abducted and she is bound to remain as the docile object in the hand of patriarchy which causes her suffers or oppression/suppression. There are several female characters in The Ramayan like Sita, Kaushalya, Kaikeyi, Sumitra, Tara, Mandodari etc. among them the writer's main focus or the story revolves round the character Sita. Sita was born as the daughter of King Janak, was married to Rama through archery, was abducted by the demon Ravana and again was retrieved by Rama, and let her return to the earth. In doing so, the writer tries his best to portray, how the female character, Sita, in the novel *The Abduction of Sita* considered to be made the consumable goods in the orthodox society or the male dominated society especially the then Indian society.

Not only the mythical image of the idealized woman as the self-sacrificing and loyal Sita, but also the conservative construction of the woman as home-bound, stoic, chaste, and traditional can be experienced in *The Abduction of Sita*. Sita is one of the defining figures of Indian womanhood, yet there is no single version of her story. Different accounts coexist in myth, literature and folktale. Canonical texts deify Sita while regional variations humanize her. Folk songs and ballads connect her timeless predicament to the daily lives of rural women. Modern-day women continue to see themselves reflected in films, serials and soap operas based on Sita's narrative. Sacrifice, self-denial and unquestioning loyalty are some of the ideals associated with popular perceptions of Sita.

The research revisits mythology, reopening the debate on her birth, her days in exile, her abduction, chastity tested by fire, the birth of her sons and, finally, her return to the earth—offering fresh interpretations of this enigmatic figure and her indelible impact on our everyday lives in its concentration with *The Abduction of Sita*.

It is now widely recognized that gender analysis has both challenged and enriched many of the standard assumptions and concepts regarding the domination upon the females. The active involvement of women in the social and political decision-making is the need of the time to secure a better future of the human race. Gender equality and women empowerment are on the priority of almost all the democratic societies in their effort to establish a society based on justice and human rights. The direction and pace of all human progress in the next few decades will be determined by the empowerment and enablement of women. So, they need to be integrated into the mainstream of the nation. We know that gender defines and shapes our lives. The question addressed by Gender and Social Theory is exactly how this process occurs and what the social consequences, and the consequences for social theory, might be. The emergence of feminist theory has enriched our understanding of the impact of gender on our individual lives and the contemporary social sciences all recognize gender differentiation in the social world.

Although it was set to undertake empirical study on various aspects of subaltern people irrespective of caste, gender, colour, profession, space and class, subaltern study didn't take up the women issues distinctively. But along with the inclusion of Gayatri Chacravorty Spivak in *Subaltern Studies IV*, it entered a new domain: feminism. While pinpointing the vulnerable/defendless points of subaltern study, she made it clear that subaltern study, as a discourse to speak on behalf of marginalized groups, has not paid much attention to women as it should have. She is amazed at its "indifference to the subjectivity, not to mention the indispensable presence, of the women as the crucial instrument" (358).

In the same way, the subaltern women's voice as well as deed is ignored in the patriarchy. The subaltern women, despite their contributions and potentialities,

remain unheard the way the subaltern insurgents did despite their active participation in the anti-imperialist insurgencies. Spivak, therefore, thinks that "woman is the neglected system of semiosis of subalternity of insurgency" (359). In other words, she aspires "to show the complicity between subject and object of investigation: the subaltern studies group and subalternity" (359). Spivak, in her witty commentary "A Literary Representation of the Subaltern: Mahasweta Devi's *Stanadayini*", she argues "how women are denied their subjectivity, their voice. Whether the woman is looked 'from above' merely as a sexual object or 'from below' as a goddess, she is reduced into the object of the male's desire. The hegemonic males refuse to perceive women what they desire the latter to be" (33 - 4).

Moreover, Leela Gandhi, in her book *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* mentions that "Spivak's essay is posed as an attempt to uncover the repressed or forgotten history. Once again the margins reveal the mute figure of gendered subalternity: As the female individualist, not quite/ not male, articulates herself in shifting relationship to what is at stake, the 'native female' as such (within discourse, as a signifier) is excluded from a share in this emerging norm" (90). In this sense, Spivak also hypothesizes that woman in the role of the subaltern questioning the male constructed voice of women within the patriarchal. These strategies of presenting the women as subaltern clarify their position in the imperial as well as patriarchal society where women's voices and deeds always remained unheard/silenced. So, their positions appear to reflect the meaning of the subaltern at best. These are the reasons that show why the issues of subaltern females or the gendered subaltern are so brilliantly discussed in subaltern studies.

In the same way, the notion of gendered subaltern unveil the domination against females since century long and it also questions the validity of women's

inferiority through the logic that gender is a social construction shaped by patriarchal forces in society. In this connection, Maggi Humm claims:

Gender subaltern incorporates diverse ideas which shares the major perceptions; that gender is a social construction which oppresses women's more than man that patriarchy shapes this construction and that women's experimental knowledge is based for non-sexist society. These assumptions informed gender subaltern double agenda. The task of critique gender stereotypes and task of construction without this second task of something called feminine gender praxis. (19)

She further argues that through the experimental knowledge females should subvert the gender stereotype, shaped by orthodox patriarchal society or by convention and secondly, must engage with the task of construction. In this sense, gender subaltern is a political, cultural and economic movement aimed to establish equal rights and legal protection for women. Gendered subaltern includes sociological theories and philosophical concern with the issues of gender difference. It is a movement that campaigns for women rights and interests. Narayan's women characters grow strange and show that the women are not a myth or utopia. Addressing the female characters of the Narayan's novel an article, R. K. Narayan 'new women,' a gender subaltern perspective from the *The Iup journal* of English studies further writes that

. . . R. K. Narayan's New Women has certainly emerged and she has left an indelible mark on the Indian psyche. However this new women is not imported from the west. Rather she emerged from the rich treasure of Indian culture . . . Narayan's women are bold, self-reliant and assertive. She struggles for freedom, assert equality and search for

identity. In the process she empowers not only herself but also her man. (11)

In the above article extract the major highlighting point is that the new energetic women will emerge in India itself but not to be brought from the west and will subvert the hegemony of the patriarchy themselves. The female characters in the Narayan novels are bold enough, remarkable for the subversion of gendered subaltern and establish the freedom and equality and search for their identity in the patriarchal society. They do not want to depend upon their male partners/agency rather they can do their work themselves. It is the patriarchy that does not let to perform their potentialities which they possess. In spite of this they subvert the patriarchal thoughts and establish their identity.

Contrasting, the novel *The Abduction of Sita* doesn't have the female characters with such quality. Each and every female character become submissive and timid and follows the patriarchal rules and regulations. They are not bold enough to revolt against the domination upon them among Sita is not exception to them. Despite having the divine power or divinity in her, she is not let to perform the role like. Rather she is objectified as socially excluded from mainstream. She always gets the things done by her husband Rama and brother-in-law Lakshmana. She is everywhere victimized and dominated by the patriarchy from exile to return to Ayodhya. This shows that how females are treated as the docile, fragile objects or victimized in the novel and they are also compelled to remain in the narrow boundary of the domestic wall of patriarchy. Besides this, there is no other world for them and they can't even think a single pulse of time about others except their husbands as Sita does in the very novel *The Abduction of Sita* and it is the patriarchy that makes her to do so. In doing

so, the above issues are become the milestone for the notion of gendered subaltern to prove the thesis.

Accordingly to the Hindu Mythology the females are taken as goddess, they are more powerful, and worshipped by the Hindu males. Pious and submissive Hindu females such as Lakshmi, Sarshwati, Parwanti, Durga, Sita, Tara, Dropadi etc., whom we worship for the boon and to save ourselves from any kind of dangers/disasters. If we are in trouble or suffering with the difficulty, we pray and offer various things, even the domestic animals, them to escape from it. As we have seen and heard the powerful roles of the females in many tele-serials and stories respectively, they, being in the form of goddess, save the lives of disciples (Bhakta) from rakshas or the man with devil nature. In this sense, they are to be worshipped and prayed forever in the history and they are given powerful and pious position rather exploitation as well as subordination in the society whether the society is of patriarchal or not. The Hindu Mythology works as the concealment/mask that helps the Hindu males to suppress the evil subordination they impose on their female counterparts.

But, in the case of the very novel *The Abduction of Sita* the character Sita is relatively marginalized. Despite of her divine power or the divinity in her, she is not let to perform in the patriarchal or the conventional society. She is subjugated and exploited everywhere in the novel by the males in male dominated society. After a long period of getting rid of her abduction, she comes before her husband, Rama in great excitement and happiness; he does not look at her, staring directly at the ground, "He tells her that he had fought the war only to avenge the dishonour that Ravana had inflicted on Raghuvamsa and Sita" (99). At this sudden turn of events, all the vanaras, rakshasas, Sugriva, Hanuman and Lakshmana are deeply shocked and unfortunately, her chastity during her period of capture by Ravana comes under scrutiny, and she



has to go through trial by fire to prove her purity. On hearing this, Sita broke down and cried:

My trials are not ended yet, 'I thought with your victory all our troubles were at an ended . . .! So be it.' She backboned to Lakshmana and ordered, ' Light a fire at once, on this very spot' then Lakshmana, ever the most unquestioning deputy, gathered faggots and got ready a roaring pyre within a short time. The entire crowd watched the proceedings, stunned by the turn of events. She approached the fire, prostrated herself before it, and said, ' O Agani, great god of fire, be my witness, she jumped into the fire. (100)

The above extract tries to unearth how the character Sita is made scapegoat in the patriarchal society, despite her chastity as well as purity. The entire crowd watched passively Sita approaching towards the fire but no one stops her from jumping into the fire rather they let her jump into for the sake of testing her virginity. When from the heart of the flame raised the god of fire, bearing her, and presenting her to Rama with words of blessing then he satisfied that he had established his wife's integrity in the presence of the world, welcomed her back to his arms. Besides, Rama also banishes his wife Sita, even as she is pregnant, asking Lakshmana to deliver her safely to Rishi Valmiki ashram. He does so when it is reported to him that some subjects of his in Ayodhya believed that she was not fit due to her long captivity in Ravana's kingdom/Lanka. Not only these but there are many other circumstances or the situations also in which she is made the consumable object as well as rubber stamp in the hands of patriarchy. In this sense, we obviously say that the patriarchal society raises their fingers or the several questions in the characteristics of females

even though their piousness and submissiveness. So the notion of gendered subaltern is appropriate to prove the thesis.

In the same way, Hindu myth is of immense genre but so far as this thesis is concerned, the novel *The Abduction of Sita* by R. K. Narayan is an extract from the shortened modern prose version of *The Ramayan* (suggested by the Tamil version of Kamban). According to Hindu mythology related to The Ramayan, Sita is the role-model of devotee, pious and submissive wife because "when Rama orders her in his capacity as husband, Sita rejects it, asserting that it was an essential duty of a wife to be at her husband's side come good or ill" (25). And she never thought to become the wife of any other in her dream and in the real life also. Even in the time of her elopement with the devil king Ravana, she is always thinking about her husband, Rama, and her mind having no room for any object. She protects her chastity attentively and survives over a year in captivity on the strength of her love and attention to religious values and duty. She is completely freed in her resolve despite Ravana's courting, cajoling and threats. But, instead of getting praise, she is exploited and overlooked. She is examined everywhere in the society time and again, despite her piousness and submissiveness. Sita, to get freedom from the subjugation nature of society and for maintaining her height in the then society, invokes mother Earth to take her back into the earth, and the saintly Sita returns to her Mother, never to reappear again.

In the novel, the writer disputes that Ravana, the Supreme Lord, has enslaved all the gods. Although he now rules the world, he cannot resist a beautiful woman. When he catches a glimpse of the princess Sita, he falls under her spell and steals her away. Her beloved husband, Rama, will do anything to get her back. With the help of the brave monkey Hanuman, he journeys across the world to find her. But the evil

Ravana has determined not to give up Sita. This overestimation or the underestimation of the feminine gender in the text fine-tunes with the notion how the feminine gender is treated as relatively inferior beings at the hands of Patriarchy. The century long domination inflicted against females in the name of sexual injustice has remained in different styles in practice and psychology of the society. This work tries to explore those practices and attitudes of the contemporary social context and is to unleash the issues of marginalization of the females in the text. As we can see the protagonist, Sita, like any other women in the text, is subjugated, marginalized and victimized. Sita, on the one hand, is objectified as goddess, while, on the other hand, she is objectified as socially excluded, exiled as well as subjugated female. It also portrays that in the society the associate the sex with the roles, which ultimately becomes the root cause of domination.

In this way, the novel succeeds to substantiate that the character Sita as a subaltern woman because she, everywhere, is made the scape goat, docile object, dehumanized by the public and even by her husband Rama after her rescue. She is not given even a single chance to demonstrate her potentialities/strength rather she is thrown into sufferings. It also explores her pathetic and miserable situation to give the trial in the fire and to give the birth of child in the jungle in the hut of sage Valmiki in the time of her exclusion by the patriarchy without any faults evokes the notion of the subaltern gender. These aforementioned evidences are become the crucial points to prove that Sita is of a subaltern woman or her representation in the novel as a subaltern woman.

The tentative chapter division of the thesis is as follows. The first chapter provides the bird's eye view to the research. It introduces hypothesis, literature review, and theoretical tools in the light of the text in question. Moreover, it provides

an overall design of the research. The second chapter makes the textual analysis of *The Abduction of Sita* keeping the theoretical insights into consideration. The third chapter concludes the research.

## II. Sita as a Subaltern Woman in *The Abduction of Sita*

Sita is the representative of the feminine gender of the patriarchal Hindu society, which judges females as the naturally subversive beings imposing them the nasty characters, who are to be manipulated and used by the males. Sita, in Hindu mythology, is the mirror in which we can perceive the fate of the Hindu women in general. Her being used as the trope of revenge, her incapability to cope up with the problem of abduction, her compulsion to stay with the foreigner Ravana for a long time, her dehumanization by the public and even by her husband Rama after her rescue and her miserable situation to give the trial in the fire without any faults evokes the notion of the subaltern gender. It is because the patriarchal society associates the female sex as naturally inferior, subversive and incompetent in its association of the role with the biological sex; the males being naturally superior and the females being naturally inferior. This preservation of the existence associated with the character of Sita shows her status as the subaltern gender.

Generally, subaltern group is that group which is racially, economically or socio-politically marginalized. In other words, subaltern gender is relatively inferiorized gender despite the potentiality which is represented by the role given to the female character. Sita, on the one hand, receives the nasty treatment from her male counterparts, while on the other hand, she is worshipped as the Goddess. Her potentiality to cope up with the social evil, her capacity and the power of determination to remain chaste despite being abducted, her positive and moral deeds, her exceptional capacity of endurance and her position of being able to regain the identity of the Goddess are the issues that proves the relevance of gender subaltern in the text *The Abduction of Sita*.

This thesis is an attempt to explore R. K. Narayan's novel *The Abduction of Sita* (2006). It is an extract from the shortened modern prose version of the Ramayan (suggested by the Tamil version of Kamban). The original version/Sanskrit story was composed by Valmiki around the fourth century BC, but poets have produced countless variants across the centuries. In this account, Narayan has drawn his inspiration from the work of Kamban, an eleventh century Tamil poet. Here, the story begins with the heroes of the tale, Rama and his wife Sita, in exile and the attempt of Ravana, the supreme lord of this and other worlds, to steal Sita away from Rama. The novel tries to portray the character, attitude, behaviour, role, and status of the protagonist Sita. She, on the one hand, according to Hindu Mythology, is worshipped as pious goddess but her representation in the very novel is quite problematic and objectified as socially excluded female gender and to some extent, as a sex object, on the other hand. Despite Sita's divinity, she is not let to demonstrate her potentialities/strengths anywhere rather she is thrown into sufferings which are the issues of gender discrimination or marginalization to explore the research.

This text is R. K. Narayan's modern prose version of the Indian epic, *The Ramayan*. It has almost ten chapters and along with this there are epilogue and glossary also. The novel generally starts with the Grand Tormentor and ends with The Coronation and epilogue respectively. First and foremost, Sita is described as the daughter of the earth goddess Bh mi and the adopted daughter of King Janaka of Mithila. In her youth, she marries Rama, the prince of Ayodhya. Soon after her marriage, she is forced into exile with her husband and brother-in-law Lakshmana. While in exile, the trio settles in the Dandaka forest, there she is not even free from the subjugation of patriarchal consent which can be seen in the line that when Lakshamana is about to leave the very cottage to give the company of his brother

Rama then he says to Sita, "Our elder Jatayu is there to watch us and he will guard you" (16). Besides, she is also kidnapped by the Ravana, Rakshasa King of Lanka disguising himself as a brahmana mendicant, or begging holy-man, while her husband was away fetching a magnificent golden deer to please her. Jatayu, the vulture-king, who was a friend of Dasratha (Rama's father), tried to protect Sita but Ravana chopped off his wings. Jatayu survived long enough to inform Rama of what had happened.

Meanwhile, Ravana took her back to his kingdom in Lanka, and she is imprisoned in the Ashoka Vatika of Lanka. During her captivity for a year in Lanka, Ravana expressed his desire for her; however, Sita refused his advances and struggled to maintain her chastity. Hanuman was sent by Rama to seek Sita and eventually succeeded in discovering Sita's whereabouts. Sita gave Hanuman her jewelry and asked him to give it to her husband. However, Hanuman was caught by Lankan forces. Hanuman was about to be executed and burnt in a bonfire when he managed to escape and in return burned down the Lanka capital city. Sita is finally rescued by Rama in the climatic war where Rama slays Ravana. Sita proves her chastity by undergoing a trial by fire. Thereafter, Rama and Sita return to Ayodhya, where they are crowned as king and queen. However, Rama abandons a pregnant Sita, when one of his subjects casts doubt over her chastity. Sita gives birth to twins Lava and Kusha, in the refuge of Sage Valmiki's hermitage. After her sons grow up and unite with their father, Sita returns to her mother, the Earth's womb. This shows that the female character Sita bears the patriarchal subjugations but at the same time she reveals it also with her silent revolution.

As the word Subaltern refers to those groups in society who are subject to the hegemony of the ruling classes. Subaltern classes may include peasants, workers

and other groups denied access to 'hegemonic' power. Moreover, in the patriarchal society females are bound to become the hegemony of the ruling classes and so are the cases of other groups who are weak physically as well as mentally. Since the history of the ruling classes is realized in the state, history being the history of states and dominant groups. Similar case that we can find in the novel because Sita, being the female, is made escape goat or the victim of the social evil, she is always compelled to turn into the object of males and her voices are not given priority rather kept under shadow. In this sense, subaltern critic Spivak views, "Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject constitution and object formation the figure of women disappears . . ." (102). She analyzes the problems of the category by examining the position of gendered subjects. Women are denied the position from which they can speak on their own as both spaces are patriarchies, in which they are always turned into the object of males' desire. Women are always underestimated by the males. They think as if they are the puppets or the useful materials so that they can use them wherever and whenever they want. They never provide the chance to them rather they kept them as docile object. This is how, the position of women in the society are subjugated. She comes up with an interesting conclusion that "both as an object of colonialist historiography and as a subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keep the dominant" (82).

Besides, this condition of the females in the novel proves the relevance of the gender subaltern because the females in the realm of the patriarchy are subjugated which is evident from the character of Sita. Sita is abducted by Ravana without any fault. Only to avenge the humiliation of Suparnakha, his sister, Ravana commits the abduction of Sita, which proves how the females are the revenge tropes in the realm of patriarchy. It is evident from the following lines:



At this Ravana, remembering an ancient curse that if he touched any women without her consent, he would die that instant, dug the ground under Sita's feet, lifted it off with her, placed it in his chariot, and sped away. Sita fainted, revived, desperately tried to jump off the chariot, cried, lamented, called upon the trees, birds and animals and the fairies of the woods to be her witness and report her plight to Rama, and finally cursed Ravana as the coward and a trickster, who had adopted treacherous means only because he was afraid of Rama; otherwise would he not have faced Rama and fought him? Ravana only treated her words as a great joke and laughed at her. (19)

The above mentioned lines present that the females are nothing except the revenge trope between and among the males. The feminine gender in the lines is presented as submissive and liquid whose identity has been shaped by the males. If Sita were powerful, she would have been able to counter Ravana but she could not. This presents how the feminine gender is presented as the subaltern. She becomes unable to raise her voice which matches with Gyatri Chakravorty Spivak's claim that "the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (83). Moreover, Sita expects the arrival of Rama to rescue her from the grip of Ravana which further clarifies the relatively marginalised gender's fact associated with the character of Sita. According to Spivak the subaltern becomes unable to raise the voice despite being in the position of raising the voice; in the above lines the female character is unable to raise the voice against the male rather she is longing the presence of another male to solve the problem. This clarifies two facets of identity associated with the females: on the one hand they are the inferior beings in comparison to the patriarchy, while on the other hand the females are the

revenge tropes in the hands of the males only to be the escape goat, that proves the notion of gender subaltern associated with the identity of the female characters in the novel.

Sita, in the novel, is portrayed very good, easy going, tolerant, ideal, pious and submissive. Her attitude and behavior towards others are very positive and never hurt anyone knowingly though she faces many challenges. Her status in the society as pious and devoted towards her husband but she is objectified as an excluded female by the society from the time of her abduction in spite of her purity/chastity. Besides, being a female gender she is in problematic situation. Her voices are not given priority; many questions are raised regarding her character; and are always underdogs by the patriarchal society when she is abducted but the society remains silent for her husband, Rama, and brother-in-law, Lakshmana because of being male genders and male superiority was in practice in the very society. That is why; Sita is presented as a subaltern woman.

The very flexibility of Sita's representation from a pawn to a figure of agency calls for a serious re-evaluation of her signifying potential. For young girls performing and viewing these plays, the figure of Sita as an emblem of sexual and cultural purity may be deployed as a role model to guard against sexual activity outside of marriage, seen as an assimilative sign of domination. Sita's tests of marital loyalty and there is no entry of another male in her life even after being abducted by demon Ravana may function as prescriptions against pre as well as ex-marital sexual conduct for young girls which can be substantiated from the following lines of the novel:

Eventually Ravana went off in a great rage, ordering the fierce women to be unrelenting and break her will. After he left, the women become

so menacing that Sita cried, 'O Rama! Have you forgotten me?'

Presently the women retired and Sita made preparations to end her life by hanging herself from a nearby tree. (66)

The above mentioned lines from the text illustrate that the character Sita becomes the role model for the females gender in the entire history because of her purity/virginity before and after marriage. Though demon Ravana tried a lot to make her his own after abducting her, she defies him never accepting his desire rather being devoted with her husband. Sita despite being dominated and avenge of the males, she remains chaste with her revolutionary acts. She bears the domination a lot. She is everywhere victimized because it is the patriarchal thoughts that associate the females naturally incompetent, subversive. Though she possesses the strength she is not let to demonstrate. This shows how a female in patriarchal discourse leads her life carrying potentialities with unbearable hurdles and her resistance, which helps to prove the notion of subaltern gender.

Accordingly, the text represents the voice of that location of the society which is marginalised relatively in the name of the gender, culture and the ideology. The relative domination on the particular race in the society in the present world has been presented by the relative subjugation upon the female protagonist despite her capacity of endurance, toiling, and the capacity to take the bold decisions. Sita, the protagonist of the novel, is the embodiment of the so called relatively inferiorised gender to be underdogged in the society without any significant faults. The aim of the thesis is to balance the imbalanced relation in the name of the male and the female, superior and inferior, ruler and ruled, high and low in the form of the equality between the male and the female characters, which are the issues addressed by the subaltern studies.

For the Ramayana, Sita's refusal to be tested speaks to these issues. Rama puts Sita through three tests of fire. In the final test, she refuses to be subjected to constant tests of purity, and she asks mother earth to swallow her and attest to her purity of conscience. While popular ideologies portray Sita as a figure of undying love and loyalty to Rama, many critics see her as capable of questioning Rama and his policies of rule, and focus on Sita's own qualities of nurturance in appropriate contexts, as in her ability to raise her sons. Revising the epic in an immigrant context, thus, involves recasting ideas of sexuality outside the confines of traditional patriarchal notions that seek to confine women's sexuality for procreative purposes within family honour. How Rama compels Sita to undergo the fire test can be observed in the following lines:

Sita approached the fire, prostrated herself before it, and said, 'O Agni, great god of fire, be my witness'. She jumped into the fire. From the heart of the flame rose the god of the fire, bearing Sita, and presented her to Rama with words of blessings. Ram now satisfied that he had established his wife's integrity in the presence of the world, welcomed Sita back in his arms. (100)

Here, from the above lines we can understand that how the female protagonist Sita in front of patriarchal rules and regulation becomes fragile, docile, meek or escape goat despite of her being chastity. Her husband, Rama, does not accept her as a legal wife when she is abducted because he is the product of the very society but when Sita gives the fire-trial then he accepts. This shows that how the males with patriarchal thoughts count the females and also create the roles with sex. This also portrays that in male dominated society females are always victimized instead of letting her chance to demonstrate her potentiality. Moreover, Ferguson's statement reminds us to

consider how those who may be considered odd bedfellows may also turn out to be productive and unimagined allies. A politicized use of *The Abduction of Sita* would position Sita's sexuality as regulated by male immigrant honour. Her refusal to be tested speaks to her understanding that testing is a regulative function of patriarchy and that she accepts an alternative understanding of her sexuality in identification with a gendered understanding of affiliation. The portrayal of Sita has generally been an endeavor loaded with cultural freight since she is often identified as the quintessential exemplar of the self-sacrificing wife.

Fresh aspects of Sita's life also emerge through short stories focusing upon her female foils, Surpanakha and Ahalya. Use of a foil, that which sets off or enhances another by contrast, enables the author to juxtapose Sita with another woman who shares some of Sita's qualities or experiences. On the one hand, Soopernakha's independence and bold comportment throw Sita's modesty and self-sacrifice into relief. On the other hand, both women love Rama but are rejected and mistreated by him. He orders to mutilate Soopernakha and banishes Sita. In the similar vein, Ahalya and Sita suffer greatly due to their husbands' suspicions of their chastity. Ahalya who is cursed by her husband to become a stone after Indra seduces her, impure Ahalya, receives grace from Rama's feet. In contrast, Rama banishes his faithful wife Sita, which is mentioned in the Ramayan in the *Uttara Kanda*, even as she is pregnant "asking Lakshmana to deliver her safely to Rishi Valmiki's ashram. He does so when it is reported to him that some subjects of his in Ayodhya believed that Sita was not fit due to her long captivity in Ravana's city" (78). As a king he is expected to uphold moral principles and also to hold his status as a male superiority in the very society Rama reluctantly banished Sita in order to uphold his duty as a king.

When a writer portrays Sita as subjected to the same social pressures experienced by her intended readers, Sita's trials resonate particularly strongly with the audience when an author imagines Sita during a part of her life not treated in other narratives; the story presents a fuller view of her character than previously available. When an author gives Sita words that enable her to get the upper hand in an argument with Rama, readers encounter Sita's perseverance and intelligence in terms not dependent upon shastraic definitions of proper behavior.

Furthermore, Sita is portrayed in relationship rather than in isolation. Modern Tamil and Telgu writers have astutely analyzed Sita's relationship to Soopernakha and Ahalya. They take the notion of women's experience seriously, suggesting bonds of sympathy between Sita and Soopernakha, a woman usually demonized and scorned, as well as between Sita and Ahalya, a woman cursed and stigmatized. Soopernakha has been dehumanized by the male characters. When Soopernakha desires Lakshmana, she has to face humiliation when "He [Lakshmana] chopped (nose, ears, or breasts) them off when she approached his miserable hut" (8). This clarifies that not only Sita but also there are other women who are made the victim of patriarchy without having any faults. Soopernakha, despite of her natural infatuation with Lakshmana, she is punished. This proves that being a female is curse or stigma in the society where male superiority is in practice.

In the same way, the entire *The Abduction of Sita* on the other hand, is in praise of an ideal man. Whatever was good in the world was embodied in Rama, and it was to present this ideal to the world that Narayan wrote *The Abduction of Sita*. As Rama is the ideal man, so is Sita the ideal woman but the novel everywhere presents her as the subaltern woman because of being submissive and loyalty to the society. In fact, the whole Ramayana is filled with idealized characters; the ideal brother, the

ideal servant ideal subjects, even ideal villains. It is not that the Mahabharata has no extraordinary characters. But even while depicting the extraordinary person, the writer does not let us forget the ordinary in him.

*The Ramayana* is principally the story of one man, with the other characters serving as a background to set the hero in relief. Beside Rama stands Sita. She has parents as well as in-laws, but her parents' home is a home in name only. Of her relations with her in-laws we hear a little more, but in this context too the characters remain sketchy. Sita goes into the forest with Rama, returns, is later cast off during pregnancy by Rama, and is finally swallowed up by the earth, but we do not hear a single protest from her father or mother. It is as if Sita were an orphan. There is a description of the greatness of her father, a ruler of the Janakas, but this greatness of his is of no help to Sita in her times of need. This shows how a female in the patriarchal society is victimized despite of being in the middle of her relatives.

However, there is no escaping the fact that in north India the Sita of popular imagination has been deeply influenced by the Sita of *Ramcharit Manas* by Tulsi. In most other versions of *The Ramayan*, close companionship and joyful togetherness of the couple are the most prominent features of the Ram-Sita relationship rather than her self-effacing devotion and loyalty which have become the hallmark of the modern day stereotype of Sita. The medieval *Ramayan* of Tulsi marks the transition from Ram and Sita being presented as an ideal couple to projecting each of them as an ideal man and woman respectively. As a maryada purushottam, Ram's conjugal life has to be sacrificed at the altar of higher duties. Sita is now portrayed in a highly focused manner as an ideal wife who acts as the moral anchor in a marriage, and stays unswerving in her loyalty and righteousness no matter how ill-matched be her husband's response. The power of the ideal wife archetype in Tulsi's *Ramayan*

overshadows the happy conjugal life of the couple prior to Ram's rejection of Sita. Sita, however, continues to command similar reverence even today, even among modern educated people in India.

In the early patriarchal era of *The Ramayana*, men dominated over the Indian societies. All areas of social prominence were entirely run by men in the form of warriors, priests and tribal chiefs. Women had very little or no power at all in the political and public arena. They were raised to look after their families as well as being dutiful wives. Women had the task of being loyal, faithful, loving and compassionate towards their husbands. In the novel when demon Ravana in the time of abducting her and says, "Only be my queen and command me what to do" (18). Then Sita, being faithful and loyal towards her husband Rama, replies, "I am not afraid to lose my life, but you wish to save yours, run and hide before Rama sees you" (19). The Individual families were normally set up on a male authority basis, with the husband and father determining fundamental conditions and making the key decisions for their well being. Women's main role in society was that of influencing their family by providing love and affection to their husbands and children while the man was in charge of satisfying his family's needs. As Rama fulfills the desire of his wife Sita going in the search of golden deer, proved by the lines: "Rama came out of the cottage, saw it, and said, it's a wonderful creature. Stay here. I will get it for you" (12).

Male oriented societal values allowed little or no space for women to express their interests and be influential in their everyday lives. Women were traditionally expected to serve their husbands and to have no autonomous interests. In this sense, Mack says, "Only men could be rulers and leaders in the patriarchal society where the story of *The Ramayana* developed. Rama once said on his designation as prince



regent: Mother, my father has appointed me to the task of protecting the people" (584). This passage clearly illustrates how power was transferred from father to son in order to provide for the people's needs and for the community as a whole. Rama then as a leader of society must enforce values among others and express his desire to bring remarkable attributes to the people that surround him. He says, "Sovereignty falls to your share, too, for you are my second self" (585). The need for a sovereign ruler is thus expressed among the community and desired for all individuals in the society. Soopernakha is a sexually assertive woman. She approaches the two men, informs them bluntly of her sexual desires, and is not just mocked for it, but is punished. The immediate reason for her mutilation might appear to be her threatened attack on Sita, but the actual reason is more intimately connected with her gender sexuality, and communal identity. Had the idea been just to subdue Soopernakha, her mutilation would not have been necessary. Mutilation of a woman in the specific way described in the epic can symbolically be interpreted as a gendered punishment for sexual transgression. These are the evidences in the novel that proves how females are dehumanized and ill-treated in the patriarchal society and the protagonist Sita is not the exception.

In the novel, Rama's wife Sita is abducted by Ravana, the demon king, and taken away to Lanka. Rama grieves heartily at this loss and gathers forces in order to battle Ravana. Eventually Rama does defeat and kill Ravana, regaining his wife. But when the two (they) meet again, Rama rejects her with the following words:

After all this, I must tell you that it is not customary to admit back to the normal married fold a woman who has resided all alone in a stranger's house. There can be no question of our living together again.

I leave you free to go where you please and choose any place to live in.

I do not restrict you in any manner. (99-100)

Thus, hearing this Sita swears her faithfulness to Rama and enters into a fire ordeal to prove it. The god of fire recognizes Sita's purity and refuses to consume her, hence Rama accepts her, stating that he did not doubt her purity, but he being the king, it had to be proved to the people. Rama, depicted as such a loving husband, could reject his wife and watched her immolate herself. This also portrays that males can do whatever they like; they can walk with anyone, can make partners freely. However, no one dares to question regarding the character of males but which is not applicable for the females even if they belong to the same community. Because females in male dominated society, are always turned into the object of males desires which gels with the notion of Spivak in which she says, "There is no space from which the sexed subaltern can speak" (103). So is the case of Sita in the novel because when she is abducted many questions are raised in regard to her character by the society and trial by fire to prove her purity and piety and again but not of her male partner, Rama and brother-in-law Lakshmana, who are also separated from her. This shows how the then society was biased and females are underestimated or subjugated to maintain males' superiority in comparison to females.

Similarly, Ranjit Guha also contributed his moving essay "Chandra's Death", which attempts to demonstrate the notion of women's subordination within patriarchy. In the same manner, Kamala Visweswaran has carried on woman issues in the subsequent volumes. In this regard, she says, "Women are not accepted as proper subjects, but it does register and seek to contain their agency and that it is at the point of erasure where the emergence of the subaltern is possible" (124). These

lines explore that women in patriarchy are always taken as subordination of males. In the society, females are not accepted as proper subjects; their voices are underdogged and are compelled to wait for the things done. So they seek for their agency through which they can explore their voices and that is possible which counters also Spivak's notion. This is the evident from the following lines from the novel:

Sita was seated in their midst. He studied her closely: She answered all points of the description given by Rama. Now Hanuman's doubts were gone; but it rent his heart to see her in her present state, unkempt, undecorated, with a single piece of sari covering her body, and with the dust of many days on her. Suddenly the rakshasa women got up from her sleep, closed in on Sita, and menaced and frightened her. Sita shrank away from them, but challenged them to do their worst. (65)

Thus, it is proved that the novel *The Abduction of Sita* presents the issue of gender subaltern in which the character Sita is dehumanized by the public and even by her husband Rama after her rescue and her miserable situation to give the trial in the fire without any faults on the one hand and while on the other hand she is portrayed as strong, bold, determinant and the capable character.

In the same way, in the novel *The Abduction of Sita* in every situation, Sita is left to protect herself, usually calling on her husband to help her. However, it is through these situations that her behaviour is justified. When the husband will not provide protection a woman must take matters into her own hands. However, the message is still embedded in the literature that a woman should remain faithful to her husband(s).

It is important to consider the novel from the perspective of the time in which it was created. However, this does not mean that its teaching's have not permeated modern Hindu culture. Modern Hindu thought still attests to patriarchal virtues in which women are considered inferior and subject to their passionate nature (Sharma 41). This indicates that the dynamics between men and women are still evolving in a male dominated system. Nevertheless, Sita's behaviour identifies with a woman who is articulate and forceful and certainly has an influence with men. This suggests that women were not completely a rubber stamp, desired desire and submissive servants but also had a right to their protection and dignity as Sita did in the novel in the time of her abduction and Agnipariksha (tested by fire), which can be substantiated from the lines in the novel: "Ah, yes, your class are ashamed to contend with humans, but you may covet and treacherously attack a helpless woman. This is a novel achievement, I suppose! Stony-hearted rakshasas like you do not know what is wrong and what is right. If you have the courage to face my husband, stop your chariot immediately; don't drive it farther" (19).

Besides, there is another critic Sutton, who also says that females are not only the blind submissive to the patriarchy but also the strong and determine character who can resist/fight against the domination upon them as Sita did in the novel. Those who treat women well are admirable in the eyes of god/goddess and vice-versa and also will be like the devastated condition of demon Ravana. In this connection, he puts:

The gods are always pleased with those who treat women well and curse those houses where they are mistreated. Manu has instructed that women should be cared for by men, for them they are mostly weak, easily seduced, soft-hearted and lovers of honesty. Some women are

harsh, stupid, and malevolent, but still men should honour them for when the women are satisfied society is peaceful. (428)

Thus, while patriarchy may still dominate, reverence to the gods suggests a respect and consideration for women. Their inferiority is nevertheless suggested and as such Sita and her bold behaviour is a significant role model. This proves the notion of gender subaltern in the sense that Sita, the protagonist of the novel, despite being excluded, subjugated, she resists the patriarchy being bold, strong, determinant and the capable character. Throughout the novel, Sita's statements about her duty as a wife are an indication of resistance against patriarchal values and traditions without being blind submissive and loyalty where she has got no strong status as like a male possess because she sometimes treated as pious goddess and sometimes as a subaltern female without having any authentic reason. This also proves how Sita resists the social evils despite being victimized and her exceptional capacity of endurance to regain the identity of goddess are become the milestone to prove the notion of gendered subaltern in the text *The Abduction of Sita*.

In this way, in the novel, Sita, like any other woman is marginalized, ignored and objectified. Sita, according to the Hindu Mythology, is pious, submissive and worshipped as goddess but her representation in R. K. Narayan's *The Abduction of Sita* is quite problematic. On the one hand, she is objectified as the goddess, while, on the other hand, she is objectified as socially excluded female gender and to some extent, a sex object. This is how Sita, like any other woman in the Hindu patriarchal society, is denied her agency through her objectification. Moreover, her being used as escape goat, her incapability to cope up with the problem of abduction, her compulsion to stay with the foreigner Ravana for a long time, her dehumanization by the public and even by her husband Rama after her rescue and her miserable and

pathetic situation to give the trial in the fire and to give the birth of the child in the jungle being with the sage Valmiki in the time of her exclusion by the society without any faults. These are the crucial issues to substantiate that how she is not let to perform her strength rather she is kept as docile object. It is because the patriarchal society that associates the female sex as naturally inferior, subversive and incompetent in its association of the role with the biological sex; the males being naturally superior and the females being naturally inferior. This type of outmoded thoughts causes her of being in the position of margin.

### III. Sita as a Prototype of Feminine Gender

Borrowing the subject matter of the *Ramayana*, R. K. Narayan reconstructs the character of the female deity, Sita, who, like other women, undergoes the experience of the evils of patriarchy.

The research brings in theoretical insights from the scholars like Spivak, Guha and Chakravorty for the analysis of the chosen text. These insights help us see how Sita is subjugated in the patriarchal society that associates the sex with the roles to be performed in the society: the males are powerful and the females are docile objects of the patriarchal subjugation. Her representation as a scapegoat, her incapability to cope up with the problem of abduction, her compulsion to stay with the foreigner, Ravana, for a long time, her dehumanization by the public and even by her husband Rama after her rescue and her miserable and pathetic situation to give the trial in the fire and give the birth to the child in the jungle in the hut of the sage Valmiki in the time of her exclusion by the society without any faults evokes the notion of gender subaltern in terms of Sita. As the subaltern gender is the gender that is relatively marginalized, here, the feminine gender is represented by Sita, in particular, and all the females, in general.

Sita undergoes a series of domination, subjugation and marginalization. She is judged as the passive, meek, docile, fragile and as an immature being which is the fashion of the patriarchy that associates the sex with the roles in the society. The domination upon the females begins when Soopernakha is humiliated and punished for her natural infatuation with Lakshmana. It escalates with the abduction of Sita, when she becomes the scapegoat of the game of revenge between the males, and culminates to the apex when Sita is used and abused by Rama due to his complicity to the patriarchal society that associates the sex with the roles.

Thus, *The Abduction of Sita* presents Sita as the prototype of marginalized female at the hand of patriarchy. On the one hand, she is objectified as the goddess while, on the other hand, she is objectified as socially excluded female gender and to some extent, a sex object. This is how Sita, like any other women in the Hindu patriarchal society, is denied her agency through her objectification. This kind of representation of the Sita shows her status as the subaltern gender.



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