

Uma Parameswaran's *Sita Promise*: A Deconstructive Reading

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Abstract

Diaspora writings have grown into the distinguished field of literature. Issues related to acculturation, immigration, alienation, and transplantation are significant aspects of such papers. Among those writers, Uma Parameswaran has carved a niche for herself. She is an eminent Indo-Canadian writer, scholar, and literary critic. Her writings include works of fiction, poetry, plays, and nonfiction. She is a retired professor of English at the University of Winnipeg. Uma Parameswaran has always been sensitive to India's cultural heritage and socio-political issues. Indian myths, music, and dance find ample space in her works. One such work is *Sita's Promise*, a dance drama that links the epic *The Ramayana* with modern Canada through myth and dance. Involving many innovative ideas, this play is peppered with few allusions. Deconstruction is an apt theory to interpret this text in a novel way. The characterization by the playwright makes to glorify her uniquely. Deconstruction involves the reconstruction of stereotypes, hierarchy, and social constraints. The study highlights that deconstructive reading of the play *Sita's Promise* is a constructive analysis, not a destructive approach. It expels the hidden

hurdles and solutions remarked by the playwright in the text. This paper highlights Uma Parameswaran's *Sita's Promise* in the view of deconstruction theory.

Keywords: Myth, Culture, Indian tradition, Deconstruction, Characterization.

Introduction

Jacques Derrida, the eminent French philosopher, sowed seeds for the form of philosophical and literary analysis named deconstruction. This Western philosophy prompted a close examination of the language, logical philosophy, and literary texts. This idea instructed us to inquire about the chosen areas' fundamental conceptual distinctions or oppositions. The innovative notion claims the dismantling of the tradition and orthodox modes of thought. Deconstruction is a radical destabilization of all earlier movements in literature. Derrida's writings are both a continuation and a critique of Structuralism. His much-anthologized paper, "Structure, Sign and play in the

Discourse of Human Sciences" (1969), inaugurated this new movement and influenced literary study worldwide.

Uma Parameswaran, a remarkable writer, shines in her way in the phase of diasporan Indian Writing in English. Her plays explore the lives and experiences of Indian immigrants as they struggle with the painful task of adjusting and claiming their new land. The writer's creation is mainly a reaction to the diaspora, particularly the South Asian Indians in Canada. In her observation, the merging of Eastern and Western traditions paves the way for reconciling her people to Canadian society to enhance its culture *Sita's Promise*, the dance drama in which the main characters Rama, Sita, Lakshmanan, are taken from the epic *The Ramayana* is depicted for observation to be viewed in the deconstructive perspective. *Sita's Promise* is purely imaginary. Its only point of coincidence with the original epic is that Rama was exiled for fourteen years. The characterization of Rama is interpretive, not traditional. It traces Rama's growth from a narrow preoccupation with codes of kingship to awareness of what it is to be human to a point where he rises to realize his divine mission.

Problem Detection

This research paper proposes to pinpoint the detected problem under the pretext of cultural, traditional, and family constraints and social norms suppression is imposed upon people immensely. Rational thinking and novelty bring out the refused rights and kindles the

marginalized and restricted nuances. A deconstructive reading of the drama *Sita's Promise* is expected to elucidate the havoc.

Research Questions

The hypothesis of this research paper aims to find responses to the arising questions. Does deconstruction involve utter destruction? Is deconstructive perspective applicable to the entire story or specific arenas? Do the findings have any values to empower society?

Review of Literature

Dr. Lidwina, E. Pereira (2019), in "Between Two Cultures: Uma Parameswaran's *Sita Promise*," stated that with the involvement of music and dance, the play refers to myths. The uniqueness lies in bringing out the evolution of the Indo-Canadian community as well as the evolution of the writer. It throws light upon universal entities like motherhood, purity, transplantation, and more on one level and defines the growth of theatre in the Indo-Canadian community on the other. Dr. Pranavkumar Ulhas Ratnaparkhi's research article "Sita's Promise in Ramayan's New Artica Kanda: Reimagining and Reimagining Sita in the Tribal Ambience" unwraps that post-colonial context at the backdrop of the play portrays the issues of migration and rootlessness by newly recreated Ramayana events. It provokes us to reconsider the foundational concepts like God and man, honesty and ideal, duty and emotions, and stereotyped myths

relevant to textuality to become the most profitable strategy to explore cultural sites.

Ravi Sankar's "Acculturation: An Analysis of Uma Parameswaran's select works in Immigration Context" claims that the experience of alienation, nostalgia, and transplantation felt by the immigrant writers are reflected in their works with expatriate sensibility ultimately paves the way to undergo the process of acculturation and acclimatization. On account of analyzing these articles, it was evident that Uma Parameswaran's *Sita's Promise* often dealt with the issue of diaspora, immigration, and mythical connotation. Convincingly an interpretation of this text from a deconstructive perspective is a novel idea to proceed further.

Theoretical Framework

According to Derrida, the initiator of deconstruction theory, language usage is mainly for communicative purposes. He uses the term "bricolage," which is the process of assembling from materials at hand. It refers to borrowing concepts from different sources and redesigning them to suit one's needs. *Sita's Promise*, the drama can be interpreted as a characterization reconstruction as per the dramatist's craving. Deconstruction involves close textual analysis and argument to reveal the rhetorical or logical contradictions in texts to demonstrate how a text's apparent and explicit logic is undermined or contradicted by the hidden text or subtext. Three stages may be located in a

deconstructive practice. Initially, deconstruction analyses the binary opposition to reveal their hierarchical nature. In the second stage, it overturns this hierarchy to divulge what appears privileged is undercut by the suppressed term of the order. Eventually, deconstruction displaces both times, thus preventing a new scale. To this end, deconstructive reading may seize upon a minor detail which is a footnote or epigraph; a marginal reference in the main text works this detail through the main text to demonstrate how even this marginal note may subvert the main text, thus reversing the main hierarchy of the text's organization. Applying these stages to the characters of the text *Sita's Promise* brings proximity to new findings.

One can symmetrically bisect the character of Lakshmana. On the one hand, he is swift in action, grit, and deference, but on the other hand, his radical and revolutionary movements are highly commendable. One such indication is during Rama's exile, his agility to rebel against his dad and Bharatha cannot be neglected easily. The next step in the deconstruction demonstrates that suppressed order of hierarchy electrifies rather than privileged hierarchy. Surprised to see Lakshmana, a person who blindly follows the words of Rama to outspell his visions, at times, seem to be contrary to the latter. When Rama instructs about duty, Lakshmana argues with him about love; no more a

person to abide by his brother's utterances.

Oh, you talk by the book Rama. Always by the book. Everything you do, you do because it is your duty- not because you enjoy it, not for itself... oh Rama, Rama, who are you to preach, you who have never felt temptation or the sorrows or separation, never felt torn between love and duty? (Parameshwaran 54-55)

By the epic Ramayana, Sita is a mother cum sister-in-law to Lakshmana. Due to the reverence and piety towards her, Lakshmana refuses to meet her face to face and instead seeks her blessings by falling at her feet. This dignified distance is sketched as a friendly relationship between them. They are both involved in diagnosing the follies of Rama moreover cracking hilarious comments at him. Such narration in characterization is in no way a destructive yet optimistic observation; such possible provisions are made by deconstructive perspective.

Deconstructive reading elaborates on the marginal footnote, which subverts the main text by reversing the main hierarchy. Such transformation happens in the characterization of Sita. She joins hands with Rama in his fourteen years of exile because of her love and adherence towards her husband but this play projects that she wishes to spend her time with nature. Further, the dramatist

decodes the fact that Sita is the daughter of mother earth.

How like you, Rama, to see only two options. Can't I be bored with our routine here and still not look forward to the duties that await us? Can't I long for something else, to see the world? We only have a little time, and there is so much to see, so many lands, so many peoples, so many skies, so many birds. (Parameshwaran 49-50)

To substantiate this deconstructive characterization of Sita, Dr. Pranavkumar's article "Sita's Promise in Ramayana's New Artica Kanda: Reimagining and Reimaging Sita in the Tribal Ambience" seems to be amicable. He describes that Sita in *Sita's Promise* is antagonistic to her conventional image. In the present adaptation, Sita is in no way subordinate or even a shadow-like figure to Rama. She could not hesitate to put forth her opinions about anything. She involves herself in dialogue with Rama on issues like knowledge, reality, and Maya.

In the epic, Rama is delineated as a person who is capable enough to convince others with his rhetorical skills. Two incidents can be understood as ample examples to emphasize his potentiality. When Rama breaks Shivadhanush, agitated saint Parashurama comes to curse him. Mesmerized by the soothing words of Rama, he leaves the

place by offering a boon to him. Hiding behind a tree, Rama shoots Vaali with his arrow. Subsequently, Rama substantiates his action to preserve Sugriva from the clutches of evilness. The ideas of Lakshmana and Sita easily persuade such nifty Rama in this play. “ Oh, Sita, all he says is so true, I am ignorant and conceited. The sages have given me so much knowledge, but the little wisdom I have received, I have received from you and him” (Parameshwaran 55). The deconstructive approach to the protagonist never nullifies the good deeds but still creates an ambiance for the significant one to sense his flaws. It also forms a pragmatic way to interact with other characters.

Summation

Barbara Johnson, a well-known American literary critic's definition can vividly answer the first interrogation in research questions.

Deconstruction is not synonymous with 'destruction'. It is much closer to the original meaning of the word 'analysis,' which etymologically means 'to undo'... The deconstruction of a text does not proceed by random doubt or arbitrary subversion but by the careful teasing out of warring forces of signification within the text. (Barry 74)

The research paper unveils the deconstructive reading of the characters and the relationship among them in the play *Sita's Promise*, yet only part of the story. This specific approach of deconstruction shines with a radiance that Uma Parameswaran's characterization is welcoming and hasn't spoiled the crux of the story in the epic. The findings in the paper have inevitably paved the way to empower society. A spotless personality Rama, who often consented to be an idol too, rankles his fellow beings. A deconstructive reading helps to dampen his follies. It also embellishes that one need not abide by all opinions of a person; instead, it is better to make realize one's idea or notion as described in the text. Predominantly deconstructive reading offers a solution to the detected problems. This paper vividly portrays a gradual shift in the hierarchal nature and local nuances. Overall, this paper elucidates the appearing havoc in relevance with the chosen text.

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