

## **TRAJECTORIES OF HOME AND STEREOTYPING: SITUATING MARRIAGE MIGRATION IN THE CONTEXT OF INDIAN MYTHOLOGY – *MAHABHARATA AND RAMAYANA***

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### Abstract

The term 'home' becomes connotative with respect to women as it operates at various levels: the first home is the womb of their mother, second the maternal home by extension, then the home she is married into, and further any place her husband calls home. Thus, women can be said to make multiple transits across physical and mental space to achieve the idea of home both virtual and real that is a space of familiarity and comfort. Along this normative and compulsive trajectory designed for her by a patriarchal society, she undergoes repetitive cycles of relocation, adaptation and assimilation with the view of recreating a sense of home, yet never actualizes it. This peculiar dimension of women's migration and its concerns demand adequate understanding. This paper therefore attempts to locate this gender specific movement in the context of Indian Mythology, specifically Ramayana and Mahabharata to prove that women's migration can also be viewed along her trajectories of home through birth, marriage, exile and others, and that a pattern of gender stereotyping lies latent in them.

**Keywords:** Trajectories Home Stereotyping Situating Marriage Migration Indian Mythology Mahabharata, Ramayana

Recent research in Migration Studies identifies Marriage Migration as an area of investigation with respect to the cause of women's migration. Marriage mandates spatial relocation which may translate into migration (O. Stark 1988). Therefore, research understands Marriage Migration as a ritualistic occurrence in a virilocal society whereby women relocate to places across regional and international borders owing to marriage. Further, it also postulates an onward movement of women post marriage, according to which

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they repeatedly relocate as many times as the situation demands due to a variety of reasons, indicating that her trajectory has multiple destinations beyond just a host nation or region where her marital home may lie. However, such studies focus largely on the economic concerns of this dimension of migration, rendering them inadequate. In order to examine the issue of Marriage Migration in its totality, research also ought to bring the socio-cultural factors pertaining to it under scrutiny. And considering that mythology plays an important role in informing and explaining the institutions and ways of life in a society, an enquiry into the socio-cultural concerns of Marriage Migration through the mythological lens is apt and recommended for exploring the cause and effects of such migration by women.

This paper, thus, concentrates on the socio-cultural aspects of Marriage Migration by situating it in the context of Indian Mythology specifically the epics *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, to evidence the patterns of Marriage Migration in ancient times. It elucidates how the phenomenon of Marriage Migration in the mythological framework underlines the idea that migration is essential to women. Within this context, it problematizes home as that end for women which, in the course of Marriage Migration, is postponed due to the workings of patriarchy. Accordingly, through the case studies on Draupadi and Sita from Indian Mythological epics *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* respectively, it realizes the hypothesis that in a virilocal society, the trajectories of women's home in Marriage Migration are also those of gender stereotyping. Conclusively, it suggests that mythology is a significant cultural tool perpetuating such patterns of gender specific migration even in present times.

Every human activity or experience to some degree affects the delineation of a home context (Terkenli 1995), especially one like migration. A migratory act poignantly challenges the notion of home for the subject, provably for married female migrants. This is because women in patrilocal societies are convinced right from an early age that the marital home is her original home, the place where she truly belongs and must inevitably take course to. Hence, any claim or attachment to the maternal home is denied to her with the consolation that the same may be allowed in the marital home. Accordingly, owing to marriage she prepares to relocate envisioning the notion of home in a new unfamiliar space.

However, the marital home turns out to be a malevolent concept; the home destined for her at marriage may be any space that her spouse occupies or calls home - the physical residence, or just any familiar, comfortable environment of living of one's own choice along with or without his family, or all of it at the same time. Thus as per the dictates of the normative society, women make attempts to adapt and assimilate not just once, but each time the husband moves or changes his notion of home. It thus becomes obvious that in such societies patriarchy designs the trajectories of home for women through marriage.

Indian Mythology in discussing the question of marriage hints at the practice of Marriage Migration, and the epics *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* are illustrative of a patrilocal society.

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Therefore, the female protagonists of these mythological epics Draupadi and Sita respectively, as representatives of married female migrants, can be considered for a case study in realizing the objectives of this paper.

The Indian epic *Mahabharata* originally written in Sanskrit by Sage Vyasa – a Vedic scholar and one of the characters of the epic- and translated to English by C. Rajagopalachari, is the great tale of the Bharata dynasty. It relates in eighteen books the tale of the struggle between two collateral branches of the Kuru clan – the Pandavas and the Kauravas, for the throne of Hastinapura ruled by the family, and the consequent colossal war of Kurukshetra in which the Pandavas emerge victorious. It projects Draupadi, the wife of the Pandavas, as the female protagonist, who triggers the long impending war between the two antagonistic cousins. However, the epic hails Draupadi as an ideal woman who follows her husband's through various terrains in life and in preserving the dignity of her husband's in every possible way fulfills her duties as a wife, thereby adhering to the roles assigned to her by a patriarchal society.

In the *Mahabharata*, one finds Draupadi's condition in marriage depicting the issue of Marriage Migration. Draupadi, daughter of King Drupada of Panchaal is won at the swayamvara by Arjuna, one of the Padavas. As the Pandavas, treacherously expelled from Hastinapura by the hostile Kauravas, are in the guise of brahmans in a forest during that time, Draupadi as a newlywed bride relocates to a hut in a forest at marriage instead of the palace of Hastinapur. Here, her conception of home is challenged and her exercise of adaptation and assimilation to a very unfamiliar environment of a forest and a life of frugal means begins. Further, she follows the Pandavas to Hastinapur and then again to Indraprastha where Draupadi reigns as the queen in all glory and luxury. It seems that Indraprastha is the final destination of her journey – the promised home. But when the Pandavas lose everything to the Kauravas in the dice game and are sentenced to thirteen years of exile, she follows them to the forest once again wherein she creates a home for twelve years. As the last year of exile is to be served in anonymity, Draupadi resituates again in the kindgom of King Virata with the Pandavas as Sairindhri. In this segment of her relocation, Draupadi as Sairindhri-hairstylist to Sudeshna the Queen of King Virata- is restricted to the women's quarters of the palace. After the colossal war that follows the period of exile and the enthronement of Yudhishtira, Draupadi situates herself in Hastinapura as a queen and a dutiful daughter-in-law for the next fifteen years. And yet again, at old age she leaves Hastinapura to embark on a pilgrimage with the Pandavas following them through unacquainted paths unto death.

The *Ramayana* ascribed to Sage Valmiki (translated to English by C.Rajagopalachari) in seven books and five hundred cantos narrates the various occurrences in the life of Rama (considered as an incarnation of Lord Vishnu) as a son, brother, husband, and king. It depicts King Dasharatha, ruler of Kosala residing in the capital of Ayodhya with the royal family including his three wives – Kausalya, Sumitra and Kaikeyi, and four sons – Rama being the

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eldest and his three stepbrothers- Lakshmana, Bharata and Shatrugna. It presents Sita as the central female character whom Rama wins at herswayamvara and marries. Though disputes about her birth and parentage exist amongst scholars, the *Ramayana* in most of its extant versions, describes Sita as the offspring of mother Earth adopted by King Janaka of Mithila. It projects her as the epitome of womanhood - the personification of chastity and tolerance, the ideal wife and mother. It is Sita's abduction by Ravana the king of Lanka - scholar of the Vedas and a staunch devotee of Lord Shiva - that leads to the epic war between Rama and him, wherein Rama with the aid of Hanumana, his loyal devotee, kills Ravana, and achieves the objective of his birth. The *Ramayana*, thereby, illustrates the most ideal of characters-roles (son, brother, wife, king, devotee, husband) and relationships (father-son, siblings, husband -wife, friendship, master-servant), distinguishes the good from the evil, hails the virtuous and condemns the vice.

Akin to Draupadi, the above mentioned conventional image of Sita is resultant of her conduct along her trajectory as a wife and mother which begins with her first move to Ayodhya as the bride of Rama. Long before she has acquainted herself with the new place, owing to Queen Kaikeyi's very opportunistic expulsion of Rama from the kingdom to make way for her own son Bharata's enthronement, Sita is estranged from the home in the palace of Ayodhya. At this juncture she embarks on yet another phase of relocation to the Dandhaka forest following her husband into exile for fourteen long years. Relinquishing the comforts of a royal life and the prospective status of a queen, being the wife of the eldest son Rama entitled to the throne following King Dasharatha, Sita engages in the ritual of adaptation and assimilation in the forest especially in making the space conducive to living. It is almost towards the end of the period of exile, while she is hoping to return to Ayodhya, that Sita is deceitfully abducted by Raavana. Here, Sita crosses the sea to reach a completely different land of Lanka populated by demons living a primitive way of life, and during the year-long captivation she braves the unaccustomed situations of the alien land and most importantly guards her chastity. However, when she is rescued by Rama after slaying Ravana and returns to Ayodhya, the subjects are dubious about Sita's purity for she had lived in the abode of another man for a year. Being the just king that he is, Rama ordains Sita to take the fire ordeal to prove herself and the righteousness of Rama the king and husband. Though Sita comes through the trial unharmed, she is banished from the kingdom at the behest of the masses by Rama and this marks yet another phase of displacement for Sita while she is pregnant. This abandoned Sita takes refuge in the hermitage of Sage Valmiki and bears twin boys Lava and Kusha. Sita as a single mother thrives until her children are united with their father Rama, after which she is willingly said to have made her last journey back to the womb of the earth.

In contextualizing both Draupadi and Sita in the framework of Marriage Migration, it may be pointed out that their constant and repeated relocation posits them as dependent selves whose mobility is controlled by patriarchy. Further, considering that the idea of home is a malevolent concept, in such a migratory act they are relegated to the position of homemakers

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and expected to domesticate any given space to suit the needs of the man. Both Draupadi and Sita are seen to do this especially during the years of exile. The work of assigning a homeplace, of producing domesticity, may well be a 'conventional role' (Hooks, 1991) assigned by sexism (Gedalof, 2009). This convention may be considered as an outcome of Marriage Migration, whereby ironically enough they make home for others. In addition, if home is conceived on the extent of actual or expressed power, control, or personal investment in a space as Terkenli (1995) puts it, then Marriage Migration problematizes home for such women. For, with every act of migration owing to marriage their conception of home is perpetually altered, and its actualization postponed forever. However, as Kuan-Hsing Chen puts it, they know both the places intimately, but are not wholly of either place; they are the diasporic subjects far away enough to experience the sense of exile and loss, close enough to understand the enigma of an always postponed "arrival". Neither Vyasa nor Valmiki sensitize one to this constant appropriation of the expectations of either of these women from marriage. The institution of marriage evidently puts them through insult, abduction, exile and abandonment and yet never the comfort of a home in marriage. Instead they are celebrated as the ideal and heroic faces of womanhood especially because they adhere to the dictates of the society. Even today, these epic women are referred to as examples to be internalized by every married woman.

On the basis of the attempted study on the socio-cultural aspects of Marriage Migration in the context of mythology, it may be said that the practice of Marriage Migration is a visible patriarchal design which carries undercurrents of gender stereotyping. The mythological framework of Marriage Migration explicates how along the trajectories of home owing to Marriage Migration women assume the conventional roles of a wife, mother, and homemaker contributing to her own suppressed situation in the society. Further, through the representative figures like Draupadi and Sita, it argues that mythology as a cultural instrument of any given society necessitates women to migrate and accept it as a part of their life. Thereby, it arrives at the conclusion that most female migrants experience frustration, alienation, disillusionment and isolation in the act of Marriage Migration possibly because they compel themselves to befit the norm perpetuated by mythology and fall short in the process.

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