



# Gangadhar Meher's Tapasvinee Poem: A Comparative Study Of The Unique And Peaceful Presentation Of Exiled Sita

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## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

This paper delves into Gangadhar Meher's poetic masterpiece Tapasvinee, exploring its unique portrayal of Sita the exiled wife of Rama from the epic Ramayana. In stark contrast to traditional narratives that depict Sita as damsel in distress, Meher's poem presents Sita imbued with remarkable peace and resilience. This study will analyze how Meher deviates from conventional portrayals. It will highlight the distinctive characteristics of his exiled protagonist. Through textual analysis this research will unveil the inner strength Sita possesses. How she endures her exile in the forest. It will examine Meher's use of imagery and symbolism to depict Sita's unwavering faith and acceptance of her circumstances. Comparison will be drawn between Meher's portrayal and the more conventional presentations of Sita. This comparison will emphasize the poet's transformative approach. Furthermore, the paper will explore the significance of Meher's peaceful portrayal of Sita in the larger context of societal perceptions of women. It will investigate how his work challenges traditional narratives. These narratives often portray exiled women as suffering and helpless. By highlighting Sita's inner strength and spiritual fortitude, Meher potentially offers more empowering image of womanhood. We will establish that Meher's Tapasvinee provides a refreshing and thought-provoking perspective on Sita's exile. It emphasizes her peace and resilience. The poem challenges conventional narratives. Additionally, it offers a more nuanced understanding of this iconic character. This comparative study will not only illuminate the unique qualities of Meher's work but also contribute to broader discussions about the portrayal of women in literature and society.

**Keywords:** Exiled woman, narrative, peaceful presentation, Odia poem

## I. Introduction

Gangadhar Meher was an Odia poet with national repute and international fame potential. he has craved a special place for himself through his great contributions to Odia literature. he is one of the pioneers of modern Odia literature. there is a university in Odisha named after him and in his honour a national award for poetry named as Gangadhar Meher National Poetry award has been founded to honour his contribution and excellent works. He has introduced a new style which is till now unique and impressive. He has written many poems, short stories, and his autobiography. He has mostly written narrative poems and the poem we will be analysing here is one of these narrative poems. "Tapasvinee" is the most popular poem among his poems. This poem is influenced and inspired by Kalidasa's Raghuvansam but has its originality in terms of narration, creativity and character portrayal. The poet's craftsmanship is incredible and is proven as the poem in Odia got translated to Sanskrit for its beauty and aesthetic qualities. Sita is the protagonist here and her exiled life is being depicted in a very uniquely beautiful way. "Tapasvinee" is an excellent example of a regional poet's interpretation of

Sita's character during her exile. Gangadhar Meher (1862-1924) was a renowned Odia poet, and "Tapasvinee" is one of his most celebrated works.

## II. Method

Gangadhar Meher has been famous for his epic narrative poem "Tapasvinee" for so many novel and unique features. Here "Tapasvinee" poem is taken for analysis while comparing the depiction of Sita in various other poems and qualitative research approach is applied to prove Meher's unique character portrayal of exiled Sita.

## III. Observations and Findings:

The post-exiled Sita character from the epic narrated by different poets on the same episode depicts the perspectives of the society through the lenses of various poets as well as variety of creative vision. Here's an overview of some interpretations: Here's an overview of some interpretations:

### Traditional view:

A majority of the classical poets depicted Sita as the model wife, and the paragon of wifely sacrifices. In this regard, Sita is considered a faithful wife who undergoes the trial of exile and successfully endures the troubles as proof of her loyalty to Rama.

### Feminist perspective:

Some of the present poets had given a new twist to the exile of Sita that characterizes the oppression of women folks. Sita is also painted as a woman who is free from the bonds of the society and who even experiences freedom when she is thrown out of her home.

### Psychological exploration:

In more detailed manner some poets attempt to portray Sita's mind set during her vanvas or exile, her character-building process, self-realization phase. This interpretation is centred on the heroine's feelings and her psychological evolution.

### Mythological deconstruction:

Some have chosen to complicate things even further and even challenge the concept of storytelling on the grounds of postmodernism: several poets turn the whole story topsy-turvy and explain Sita's exile as some sort of social or philosophical allegory.

### Environmental symbolism:

Some of these link Sita's exile to the earth so that she is portrayed as the earth goddess who returns to the forest for solace.

This topic can be addressed by poets coming from different regions of the world and different epochs, presenting different views on the hero's personality and fate.

Rabindranath Tagore (Bengali poet, 1861-1941): In his poem "Sita" which is included in the collection "Manasi", Tagore paints the image of Sita as divine sacrifice. Thus, in his interpretation, Sita's exile is symbolic of strength and purity of women.

Example (translated):

"In the depth of the forest, in the silence of nature,  
Sita sat alone, her heart filled with Rama's love."

Savitribai Phule (Marathi poet, 1831-1897): As one of India's first female poets and a social reformer, Phule's interpretation of Sita was more critical of patriarchal norms. In her poem "Sita's Complaint," she gives voice to Sita's grievances.

Example (translated):

"Why did you doubt my purity, O Rama?  
Was not my lifelong devotion enough proof?"

Jayanta Mahapatra (Odia and English poet, born 1928): Mahapatra's poem "Sita" offers a more modernist take on the character, exploring her psychological state during exile.

### Example:

"The forest closes in on her like a fist  
Squeezing out memories, drop by slow drop."

Vaidehi (Kannada poet, born 1945): In her poem "Sita Speaks," Vaidehi reimagines Sita as a strong, defiant character who questions societal norms.

Example (translated):

"I am not just Rama's wife,

I am Sita, a woman in my own right."

Arun Kolatkar (Marathi and English poet, 1932-2004): In his collection "Sarpa Satra," Kolatkar offers a more unconventional interpretation of the Ramayana, including Sita's exile.

**Example:**

"Sita, earth's daughter, returns to her mother's embrace,  
Leaving behind the world of men and their judgments."

Prithish Nandy (Bengali and English poet, born 1951): Nandy's poem "Sita" in his collection "Again" presents a more contemporary view of Sita, blending mythology with modern sensibilities.

**Example:**

"In the silence of her exile, Sita found her voice,  
A voice that echoes through the ages."

These poets belong to different generations, language backgrounds, and attitudes or positions, hence showing how the character of Sita in exile has been constructed and reconstructed in Indian poetry. Both can be seen as providing different portrayals of Sita's life and the world which they inhabited which might be interpreted as following alterations in cultural and creative paradigms.

Sita's exile:

Rabindranath Tagore: From one perspective, it is possible to state that the depiction of Sita in the play is also influenced by the bhakti tradition with its focus on devotion. To this he does not bring the common depictions of Sita during the exile but the spiritual transformation in her. They seem to view the period of exile as Sita, specifically as an opportunity to come to terms with the natural world and the divine.

In a longer work Valmiki-Pratibha, Tagore retells the entire Ramayana and Sita's banishment. Here he describes Sita as the goddess shakti, the energy that holds the cosmos together. That is why her solitude becomes the image of the earth that endures and recreates itself.

Savitribai Phule: Thus, the interpretation of Sita by Phule, who can be unquestionably credited for being one of the earliest practicing feminists and social reformist in India is highly pertinent. Thus in "Sita's Complaint" unlike some writers/artist who present issues and let a character act as a vessel, Roy not only gives Sita a mouthpiece through which she can speak her indignation at the way she was treated but also uses the storyline as a way of commenting on other social ills.

Conversely, through Phule's Sita, the figure subverts the authority of not being simply Rama, but the entire system which tried to subordinate womanhood in the first place. Her poem follows this doctrine, draped in the narrative of Sita and her appeal is a plea for women's rights and respect within the society of her 19th-century audience.

Jayanta Mahapatra: It would be rather interesting to note that Mahapatra who has composed 'Sita' has adopted highly modernist approach. Instead of living in the realms of mythology, he shifts the emphasis on the psychological portrayal of the theme of exile and loneliness. So the social structure in this play creates a confinement and constriction around Sita mimed in the physical aspect by the forest where she is left alone by Rama. Thus, Mahapatra's Sita is not only mythological character, but every woman, who experienced society's rejection and isolation.

Vaidehi: Vaidehi (pen name of Janaki Srinivasa Murthy) is known for her feminist reinterpretations of mythological characters. In "Sita Speaks," she gives Sita agency and a strong voice.

Vaidehi's Sita is not defined by her relationship to Rama or her role as a wife. Instead, she asserts her individual identity. The exile, in this interpretation, becomes a journey of self-discovery and empowerment. Vaidehi uses Sita's story to comment on contemporary issues of women's identity and autonomy.

Arun Kolatkar: Kolatkar's work is known for its subversive take on mythology. In "Sarpa Satra," he doesn't just retell the story of Sita's exile, but reimagines the entire mythological framework.

His Sita is closely associated with the earth, and her return to the earth at the end of her exile is portrayed as a triumphant homecoming rather than a tragic end. Kolatkar's interpretation challenges traditional narratives and invites readers to question established interpretations of mythology.

The poem Tapasvinee is a narrative poem in style. In Tapasvinee, the poet refers to our mythological epic The Ramayana's Uttarakhand or Uttara parv and the protagonist is none other than devi Sita. It is an addition to Balmiki's Ramayana and the authenticity has been questioned since long. We are analysing and treating this poem as as a fictional narrative poem. Here the poem is divided into ten cantos and each canto deals with one aspect of the character portrayal and development. The first canto deals with a beautiful invocation to Devi Saraswati, the goddess of wisdom and muse and then proceeds to narrate the utterly pathetic situation of devi

Sita after her separation from lord Rama and realisation of exile. Lakhman has already left Sita all by herself in the dense forest with the exile and separation message of lord Rama. Sita took time to realise the fact and started crying relentlessly as a first reaction. She did not blame a single person to bring upon this situation to her. She blamed herself and recounted her wrong deeds. She wept more thinking about the difficulty she caused lord Rama by putting the kindest man in such an utterly difficult spot to take this painful decision of separation. She recounts the beautiful and blessed moments that she has lived with lord Rama. His kindness, care, love and support constantly plays in her mind through different memories. She relived her life through memory starting from seeing lord Rama from the first time to this last meeting. She contemplates the wrong deeds of her life, like once being very rude to Lakhman and forcibly sending him to help and save Rama. This also confirmed her doubt on the capability of lord Rama and to her this is also a sin. she did not blame anyone for the ultimate misfortune she was or is in. because she has the realisation of karma and wisdom of the accountability associated with it. with the progress of cantos, the character developed and progressed too. Sita did not stay in the same state of helplessness and utter sadness. Just like a courageous fighter she fought through all these odds and emotionally and psychologically tried to stabilise herself with shifting her focus from her predicaments to the wellbeing of her unborn child. Sita got the protection and shelter from Valmiki, the great sage. Valmiki came to her as a fatherly figure with assurance and protective shield. In the then patriarchal society, a woman who is abandoned by her husband in a pregnant state, her life and fate are doomed. This was valid for Sita too and it was more pathetic in particular as she was a princess and a queen. She could have chosen to mourn over her pathetic condition and continue crying, but instead she moved on accepting the truth and not blaming anyone for the same. She took life in a different light in the peaceful abode of Valmiki's ashram. She changed her focus from a wife to a mother and it takes huge courage to do so. In a short course of time acceptance of an unbelievable fate and moving on with a deep sense of responsibility is like a paradigm shift that Sita did it and she could do it with all possible grace and dignity that is the beauty of character portrayal of Sita in Tapasvinee. As of the typical speciality of Meher of depiction, personification and narration of Nature is evident and predominant so this poem is no exception. As human beings we receive solace, peace and get amazed by the beauty of mother nature, but the virtue, grace and beauty far surpassed by that of devi Sita. So it is a very unique presentation where the amazing Nature is being defeated and mesmerised with the virtue and beauty of a human form. Meher narrated the beauty of nature as a master and narrated the character of Sita using this beauty adding a sense of aesthetic approach.

In "Tapasvinee," which translates to "The Ascetic Woman," Meher presents a nuanced and peaceful portrayal of Sita during her exile. Here are the key aspects of Sita's character as depicted in this poem:

#### **Inner Strength:**

Meher portrays Sita as a woman of immense inner strength. Despite the hardships of exile, she maintains her dignity and composure. The poet emphasizes her mental fortitude in facing adversity.

#### **Devotion to Rama:**

While the poem critiques Rama's decision to exile Sita, it still shows Sita's unwavering devotion to her husband. This devotion is not blind, however, but is presented as a conscious choice made by a strong woman.

#### **Connection to Nature:**

Meher depicts Sita finding solace in nature during her exile. Her connection to the forest and its creatures is portrayed as a source of comfort and spiritual growth.

#### **Maternal Love:**

A significant portion of the poem focuses on Sita's role as a mother to Lava and Kusha. Meher portrays her maternal love as a powerful force that gives her purpose and joy during her difficult times.

#### **Philosophical Outlook:**

Sita is shown as developing a deep, philosophical understanding of life through her experiences. She reflects on the nature of fate, duty, and human relationships.

#### **Quiet Resistance:**

While Sita accepts her fate, Meher subtly portrays her quiet resistance. She doesn't openly rebel, but her silent dignity is presented as a form of protest against injustice.

#### **Symbol of Purity:**

Meher reinforces the traditional view of Sita as a symbol of purity, but he does so by emphasizing her inner purity of thought and intention rather than just physical chastity.

#### **Transformation:**

The poem shows Sita's transformation from a queen to an ascetic, highlighting her adaptability and spiritual growth.

These varied interpretations demonstrate how the character of Sita, particularly during her exile, has become a powerful symbol in Indian poetry. Poets have used her story to explore themes ranging from devotion and sacrifice to feminism and social critique, reflecting evolving societal values and literary trends. But somehow the focus of narration is not sad in Meher's poem, rather beauty takes more prominence in depiction. For example,

"With eyes of a full-blown lotus came Dawn, heralding peace,<sup>1</sup>  
For a sight of Janaki, thirst afire in her soul.  
Offering pearls of dew in her foliage-hands  
She waited in the courtyard of Sita's cottage,  
And with the koel's voice, pleaded:  
'Appear before me, Noble One, for now the night is ended.' " (Pati, p-32)

Here the beauty of nature is in focus till the last line where the blooming morning is awaiting to have a glimpse of Sita which directly vouches the prominence and nobility of Sita. Here beauty overpowers everything else.

"The one to whose shore-feet rushed the waves of beauty,  
With a surf-crown of flowers on the head,  
In the sea of royal gardens kissing her nails of pearl;  
The ashram's plants, creepers, and blooms entire  
Thrilled with joy at her auspicious visit." (Pati, p-38)

Here again we can see a different representation of Sita. Her beauty and virtues are glorified much more than the fate she is having for the painful journey. The nature is amused by the magic of her personality and is grateful for her presence.

"When the daughter of Janaka  
Came near with her companions,  
In raptures they scattered flowers  
On the chaste Sita in the soft breeze; A few kissed her head,  
Some shook her hand, some embraced her,  
While some others adored her feet." (Pati, p-39)

The epitome of all the beauty and virtue is Sita. The nature wants to have a glimpse, a touch, and companionship of Sita. We can take a note how beautiful and glorified is the poet's stance of Sita. This is something very different from other narratives and depictions of Sita.

"In rivers-boats, ocean-vessels, over all the hills,  
Through the night, at dusk and dawn,  
In joys and sorrows, in the beings of the rich and poor,  
Shouts of 'Victory to Sita -Rama' went up;  
The most virtuous among women all, watched, entranced." (Pati, p-97)

The poem ends with such an optimistic thought and washes away all the traces of sadness and gloom mentioned earlier. These lines justify the positive tone of the poet and his intension to highlight the positive aspects of Sita. It also says that the pathos is less noteworthy and powerful than the godliness and nobleness present in the protagonist Sita. This makes the narrative special and the narration uniquely peaceful.

#### IV. Conclusion:

Gangadhar Meher's portrayal in "Tapasvinee" is notable for its balance between traditional and progressive elements. While respecting the classical image of Sita, he infuses her character with depth, agency, and philosophical insight. This interpretation resonated strongly with Odia readers and contributed significantly to the evolving literary depictions of Sita in Indian poetry. It is expressed in the poem that not a fight or war makes someone courageous, sometimes it is in the stoicism and patience and unwavering faith of a person. And such practice through one's conduct is no way less than any penance. As an underlined intended meaning of the poet the character is into a penance to cleanse her past karmas and be liberated of it all. She is hence called as Tapasvinee: a woman in practice of penance. The title of the poem is justified with the depiction of the attributes of the protagonist. The narrativity and portrayal of the protagonist is very well aligned with that of the title given to the poem. The title and the conduct of the protagonist are justified throughout the poem. The beauty that is well weaved throughout the poem has all the right elements of aesthetic appeal and aesthetic experience. Thus, the beauty in the poem is most justified as the aesthetics presence is so obvious. Further research and study can be done in this regard with some specific or one specific component of aesthetics.

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