

Reclaiming Voice and Identity: A Feminist Reading of Volga's *The Liberation of Sita*

S. Saikripa

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Vels Institute of Science, Technology & Advanced Studies (VISTAS), Chennai.

Dr.N. Sumathi

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Vels Institute of Science, Technology & Advanced Studies (VISTAS), Chennai.

Dr. M. Sivaselvi

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Vels Institute of Science, Technology & Advanced Studies (VISTAS), Chennai.

Abstract

Volga's *The Liberation of Sita* is a significant feminist reinterpretation of the Indian epic Ramayana, presenting the voices and experiences of women who have traditionally remained marginalized in mythological narratives. This article examines how Volga reconstructs the character of Sita as a symbol of self-realization, independence, and resistance against patriarchal oppression. Through Sita's encounters with characters such as Surpanakha, Ahalya, Renuka, and Urmila, the text challenges conventional ideals of femininity, chastity, obedience, and sacrifice imposed upon women. The study explores the themes of female solidarity, identity formation, emotional liberation, and the critique of patriarchal social structures. By foregrounding women's perspectives, Volga transforms mythological discourse into a powerful feminist narrative that questions traditional gender roles and advocates for equality and selfhood. The article further highlights the contemporary relevance of the work in addressing issues related to women's autonomy and empowerment in modern society. Ultimately, *The Liberation of Sita* emerges as an important literary text that reclaims silenced female voices and redefines liberation through feminist consciousness.

Keywords: Feminism, patriarchy, mythological retelling, female liberation, self-identity, sisterhood

Introduction

Received: 12 May 2026

Revised: 15 May 2026

Accepted: 17 May 2026

Copyright ♥ authors 2026

136

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26643/ijr/60>

Indian mythological narratives have shaped social and cultural ideals for centuries. Among these epics, the *Ramayana* occupies a central position in Indian literary and cultural traditions. Traditionally, the epic celebrates ideals of duty, sacrifice, obedience, and righteousness through characters such as Rama and Sita. However, modern Indian writers have begun to reinterpret these myths from alternative perspectives, especially through feminist lenses. One of the most significant feminist retellings of the *Ramayana* is *The Liberation of Sita* by Volga, originally written in Telugu and later translated into English by T. Vijay Kumar and C. Vijayasree.

Volga's work reimagines the lives of the women in the *Ramayana* and foregrounds their experiences, emotions, and struggles against patriarchal oppression. Rather than presenting Sita merely as the obedient wife of Rama, Volga transforms her into a woman who gradually discovers selfhood, independence, and liberation. Through Sita's encounters with women such as Surpanakha, Ahalya, Renuka, and Urmila, the text critiques patriarchal systems that confine women within rigid social roles.

This article explores the feminist dimensions of *The Liberation of Sita*, focusing on themes of self-realization, sisterhood, resistance to patriarchy, and the reconstruction of female identity. It also examines how Volga's reinterpretation challenges traditional representations of women in mythology and offers a contemporary vision of liberation.

Feminist Reinterpretation of Mythology

Feminist retellings seek to recover the silenced voices of women who were marginalized in traditional narratives. In classical versions of the *Ramayana*, women are often portrayed in relation to male heroes. Their identities are defined through roles such as wife, mother, daughter, or devotee. Volga disrupts this pattern by centering the experiences of female characters who were previously ignored or misunderstood.

The book begins after Sita's exile into the forest. Abandoned by Rama because of public suspicion regarding her purity, Sita embarks on a journey that becomes symbolic of inner awakening. Instead of portraying exile as merely tragic, Volga turns it into an opportunity for transformation and self-discovery. Sita gradually learns that true freedom lies not in social approval but in understanding one's own identity.

Volga's retelling questions the patriarchal values embedded within mythological traditions. She exposes how concepts such as chastity, obedience, and sacrifice are imposed upon women while men continue to exercise power and authority. Through this reinterpretation, the text becomes a critique of gender inequality in both ancient and modern societies.

Sita's Journey Towards Self-Realization

Received: 12 May 2026

Revised: 15 May 2026

Accepted: 17 May 2026

Copyright ♥ authors 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26643/ijr/60>

The central theme of the novel is Sita's liberation from patriarchal expectations. At the beginning of the narrative, Sita still believes in Rama's righteousness and accepts suffering as part of her duty. However, her encounters with other women gradually transform her understanding of herself and the world.

Sita's liberation is not physical alone; it is emotional, intellectual, and spiritual. Each woman she meets teaches her a different lesson about freedom and identity. These interactions enable Sita to realize that women should not define themselves through male approval.

Volga portrays Sita as a woman capable of independent thought rather than passive obedience. By the end of the text, Sita rejects the limitations imposed upon her and embraces her connection with nature and the earth. Her final assertion as the "daughter of Earth" symbolizes her complete liberation from patriarchal control.

This transformation reflects a larger feminist message: women must discover their own identities rather than remain confined within socially constructed roles.

Sisterhood and Female Solidarity

One of the most remarkable aspects of *The Liberation of Sita* is its emphasis on sisterhood. In many patriarchal narratives, women are often portrayed as rivals or competitors. Volga challenges this stereotype by presenting women who support, guide, and empower one another.

Surpanakha: Redefining Beauty and Desire

In traditional versions of the *Ramayana*, Surpanakha is depicted as ugly, lustful, and dangerous. Volga humanizes her character and presents her as a woman who learns self-love after humiliation and rejection. After Lakshmana disfigures her, Surpanakha turns towards art and nature, discovering inner peace and strength.

Surpanakha teaches Sita that beauty does not define a woman's worth. Her story becomes a critique of patriarchal beauty standards that reduce women to physical appearance.

Ahalya: Questioning Chastity

Ahalya's story highlights the injustice of blaming women for acts committed against them. Though deceived by Indra, she is punished and ostracized by society. Through Ahalya, Volga questions the patriarchal obsession with female chastity and purity.

Ahalya helps Sita recognize that moral judgments are often shaped by male authority rather than truth or justice. Her story exposes the hypocrisy of social norms that punish women while excusing men.

Renuka: Liberation from Male Dependency

Renuka's experience is one of betrayal and violence. Condemned by her husband and son, she realizes the dangers of making men the center of a woman's life. She advises Sita to seek fulfillment beyond wifedom and motherhood.

Renuka's perspective becomes crucial in Sita's journey toward independence. She represents women who reclaim their individuality after suffering oppression.

Urmila: Silent Strength

Urmila, Lakshmana's wife, is another neglected figure in the traditional epic. Volga portrays her as a woman of wisdom and emotional resilience. Though abandoned for years, Urmila develops inner strength through self-awareness rather than resentment.

Together, these women form a collective of shared experiences and mutual understanding. Their solidarity becomes a source of empowerment and resistance against patriarchal oppression.

Critique of Patriarchy

Volga's text strongly critiques patriarchal systems that define women's lives through male authority. The novel demonstrates how social institutions such as marriage, family, and kingship often limit female autonomy.

Rama himself is portrayed in a complex manner. Instead of being represented solely as an ideal king, he appears as a man trapped within societal expectations and the burden of "Arya Dharma." While he loves Sita, he ultimately sacrifices her happiness to maintain his public image and royal duty.

This portrayal does not merely condemn Rama as an individual; rather, it critiques the patriarchal system that prioritizes honor and reputation over human relationships. Volga suggests that patriarchy harms both women and men by forcing them into restrictive social roles.

The text also questions traditional ideals of femininity. Women are expected to be obedient, self-sacrificing, and pure, while men are granted authority and freedom. Through Sita's transformation, Volga rejects these oppressive ideals and advocates for equality and self-respect.

Symbolism and Narrative Style

Volga uses simple yet powerful language to communicate profound feminist ideas. Nature imagery plays an important role throughout the narrative. Forests, rivers, and the earth symbolize freedom, renewal, and feminine strength.

The episodic structure of the text allows each woman's story to function as a lesson in liberation. These interconnected narratives collectively contribute to Sita's awakening.

The symbolism of the earth is especially significant. Sita's identity as the daughter of Earth reflects her connection with nature and her independence from patriarchal structures. By returning to the earth, Sita ultimately rejects societal judgment and embraces her true self.

Volga's narrative style is deeply empathetic and reflective. She humanizes mythological characters and presents them as emotionally complex individuals rather than idealized figures.

Contemporary Relevance

Although based on mythology, *The Liberation of Sita* remains highly relevant in contemporary society. Many women today continue to face discrimination, moral policing, victim-blaming, and restrictions on personal freedom. The text resonates with modern feminist movements that demand equality, dignity, and autonomy for women.

Volga's reinterpretation also encourages readers to question inherited traditions and social norms. By revisiting mythology from women's perspectives, she opens space for alternative voices and interpretations.

The novel has been widely appreciated for promoting female empowerment and challenging patriarchal narratives. Readers and critics have recognized its importance as a feminist retelling that gives voice to marginalized women.

Conclusion

The Liberation of Sita by Volga is a groundbreaking feminist reinterpretation of the *Ramayana*. Through Sita's journey of self-realization and her encounters with other marginalized women, the text challenges patriarchal notions of duty, chastity, and obedience. Volga transforms mythological women from passive sufferers into individuals capable of resistance, wisdom, and liberation.

The novel emphasizes the importance of sisterhood, self-awareness, and personal freedom. It encourages women to seek identities beyond socially imposed roles and to question structures that perpetuate inequality. By reclaiming silenced female voices, Volga not only reinterprets mythology but also redefines the meaning of liberation itself.

Ultimately, *The Liberation of Sita* is not merely a retelling of an ancient epic; it is a powerful statement about women's agency, dignity, and humanity. Its feminist vision continues to inspire readers to rethink tradition and imagine a more equal society.

Works Cited

Received: 12 May 2026

Revised: 15 May 2026

Accepted: 17 May 2026

Copyright ♥ authors 2026

Volga. *The Liberation of Sita*. Translated by T. Vijay Kumar and C. Vijayasree, Harper Perennial, 2016.

“Review Of ‘The Liberation Of Sita’: A Feminist Engagement With Ramayana.” *Feminism in India*, 25 Sept. 2018.

Rubana, M., and T. Priyankaa. “Feministic View of Sita - A Study on Volga’s *The Liberation of Women*.” *International Journal of Novel Research and Development*.

Gauriyar, Anushka, and Manjari Johri. “Exploring the Reinterpretation of Mythology Through Volga’s *The Liberation of Sita: An Intersectional Perspective*.” *Literary Herald*, 2025.

Ruchi, Kumari. “Reinventing Marginalized Voices: A Study of Volga’s *The Liberation of Sita* and *Yashodhara*.” *Journal of International Women’s Studies*, vol. 25, no. 5, 2023.

Pal, Debarati. “Feminist Analysis of Adaptations of the Ramayana.” *Integrated Journal for Research in Arts and Humanities*, 2022.