

Lavanya Sankaran's Sita in The Mysore Coffee of The Red Carpet. A Strong mind from Death to Life to Fight Patriarchy

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Abstract - Modern women writers try to project women characters who want to establish their own horizons as individuality with freedom and dignity. They are not succumbed by the various obstacles both societal and familial. With no complaint on their side, these women try to quest for a life with freedom and dignity. They take their own life as it comes. Contemporary women characters, be it in novels or short stories, they fight for their own share. They fight with patriarchy for their rights. They are no more inferior sex. Lavanya Sankaran joins this group of writers who depict psychological aspect of women whose hopes are stained for some reasons, but each one stands on her own to make herself strong. But it is sure no one depends on anyone for help. They create their own selves. This research article deals with Lavanya Sankaran's *The Red Carpet* (2005) especially the story *The Mysore Coffee*. Strong self-assertion is seen in the character of Sita.

Key Words: strong mind, suicidal tendency, fight patriarchy.

recovering from weak mind, no inferior to men.

Sita, the protagonist of the story *The Mysore Coffee* of RC is a young professional accountant who works in a software company called Sigmasoft. She is found in deep depression as the story opens. Sita also contemplates to commit suicide. The accountant protagonist in *Mysore Coffee*, still reeling from her father's suicide, discovers that her work has been wrongfully claimed by a charismatic, handsome, but unscrupulous colleague. She goes on searching how to die. Sita is disturbed whole day by the death of a socialite who jumped from a hotel- roof in Delhi. One may note the socialite who is referred to in this story by Lavanya Sankaran is a real story that took place in Delhi 2002.

When the researcher, B.Srihari Rao questioned the writer, Lavanya Sankaran about why the socialite topic is brought into the story *Mysore Coffee*, Lavanya explained as the following

Question: The socialite who jumped from hotel roof in Delhi seems to be a real story of a famous politician as per my research.

How do you relate this to your story?

Lavanya: As per the suicide or so it was inspired by a real life event because I want to show that relationship that, you know, someone like Sita in The Red Carpet, who comes from a background of full of integrity and ambition about her future. It is about how in the darkest moments of our lives there is that difficult moment which we can

adjust. And that is the story about the Sita as well. On the day when she wants to kill herself like her father instead she steps away to survival.

One can find the suicidal attitude of female characters in Indian Writing in English. There are some instances such as R.K. Narayan's , novel *The Dark Room* (1938) in which his female protagonist Savitri tries to end up her life like Sita of RC. Fed up with the whims and dominance of her unfaithful husband Ramani, she attempts to drown herself in the river Sarayu.

Sita, the protagonist maybe put along the character of Monisha, in *Voices in the City* (1965) who commits suicide as she finds no way out of the monotony of her life. Unlike Anitha Desai's women characters, Lavanya Sankaran makes her women protagonists fight against their sufferings and lead a life of decency, individuality, freedom with dignity. Hence the protagonist, Sita in *The Mysore Coffee* would become depressed at the thought of committing suicide and becomes aware that no one prepares destiny for her.

Sita's mind is full of thoughts of her childhood and her parents love for her. Her father was an accountant like herself, working in a small office of six people. He made a mistake, one day. It was an honest mistake, but one that unfortunately could not be corrected in time. It cost the client an additional four thousand rupees in taxes. It was such a silly, small amount of money. Four months of her father's salary, then. One may know what happens to her

mind when she reads the news that someone committed suicide because

When she was young, they told her that her father had been killed on the way home from the barber shop. This scene had played itself over and over in Sita, mind. Her father... Climbing onto his scooter and weaving his way home, behind a truck that failed to heed the squeak of the scooter horn and turned suddenly to the right. He's no choice, they told her, but to cleave right into it, killing himself instantly.
(141)

In truth her father had committed suicide by throwing himself from the new skyscraper. Hence Sita becomes interested to know why the socialist in Delhi has taken so extreme a step. The newspapers carried photographs of that party, held in a five-star luxury hotel. Six hours later, she climbed to the roof of the hotel, and jumped. One is aware that Lavanya Sankaran refers to the real incident that took place in 2002 in New Delhi. When the media investigated the issue of her suicide the treatment that she received from her husband was a pathetic one. Media wrote

Her spat with her husband Jagat Singh, son of former Union minister Natwar Singh, had appeared in a supplement of a leading newspaper in December 2001. There, Natasha said her husband drank heavily and was abusive and that she had found a friend in Vinay Kapoor, a Coca-Cola executive. There appeared to be a method to her tell-all. (April 1, 2002 Today)

These high profiled-people also have no exception to be the victims of patriarchal violence in India. Shoba De remarks with a heart of sorry for those who choose to end their lives when referring to the suicide of Jiah Khan, a young beautiful girl in Bollywood world.

The word 'suicide' has such a terrifying ring to it. And yet, any alarmingly young people are opting to end their lives rather than face the challenges reality... When all hope finally vanishes, there is just one option left. The ceiling fan whirling ceaselessly overhead sends out a tempting signal- offers an immediate exit from misery and humiliation... (Shoba De Blog. 2013)

Sita is working as an accountant in an international company. She attends to the financial spreadsheet on the computer screen honestly and sincerely. It is in-depth analysis of clients' accountants. Her friendship with Christine Miller, Associate Vice-President of an American company is so impressive that she shows interest in the company of Sita.

In the office, Ramu a young employee pretends to be behind her as if he is in love with her. Sita mistakes him because he stands by her work, helping in her work, staying overtime with her. There starts a pinch of like for him. *The men will always be men.* One comes across Mrs.

Rafter saying to Missy about the attitude of men as *Boys will be boys but the girls must be good (T F S X :57)*. The conversation reveals how important a man feels about himself in society. Given to his superiority over women Ramu *Listen, he says, I want to be able to work together with you on this, he says, Okay? (RC: 138)*

Sita had given Ramu the hard copies of the hard work done by her on the spreadsheet. The entire staff of the company gather for a dinner that night at The Tower Palace restaurant. It is located in the same building from where her father jumped to death. When all of them are busy having dinner, the boss enquires Sita about the fruitfulness of her visit to America and investment plans. Before she could swallow the stuff into her mouth. Her eyes swiveled helplessly to Ramu.

He leaned forward and addressed the table.' I personally think,' he said, 'that Sigma Soft would be a good match.' By the time she swallowed her mouthful, Ramu had explained all her idea, the business restructuring, the possible acquisition value, everything. She heard her boss say That's fantastic, Ramu. (152)

The next morning Sita finds the news about the suicide by the socialist in Delhi. Ramu throws cold water on her ideas and dreams. She feels completely cheated and realizes that Ramu is a wolf. One comes to know that Sita is a victim of Patriarchy. Sita may be compared with Aparna, Rashmi, Swathi of Shoba De's *Snapshots (1995)* who are the victims of cruel design of men. A. Sinha opines in his book, *New Dimension of Women Empowerment,*

Women in India are, by and large victim of social, economic and political exploitation (Sinha: 27)

Sita tampers with the idea of jumping to death from where her father did. The previous night, Sita stayed late at work and, ignoring the computer spreadsheets, she was supposed to be working on, started searching the Internet instead. There were seventy-eight thousand results for the phrase 'Suicide hotline'. The writer said Five minutes to explain how suicide can seem like a solution when the mental pain you feel exceeds your abilities to cope with that pain.

Pain greater than Pain-Coping Resources equals Suicide. She thought that was presumably what happened to the Delhi socialist and to her father 23 years ago. (141)

Sita leaves her coffee in the Mysore Coffee restaurant. Surely with the thought of jumping to death she stands on the edge of the 10th floor

She feels herself beginning to shake. She abandons her coffee and leaves the coffee shop. The staircase is hidden next to the elevator. She walks up to the next level; it is deserted, the restaurant is close. The balcony next to the restaurant looks out over the central atrium of

the building, who soars lavishly to the roof. Sita balances her hands on the railing and stares at the mosaic flood ten stories below. Seductive, compelling, it beckons to her. Once more, she can feel the touch of her father's hand on her shoulder. (RC 160)

Sita suddenly changes her suicidal tendency. She feels why she should become prey to the Ramu's cheating. She wants to create herself as a strong member of this men-dominating society. One finds the female character Gauri, in the novel *The Old Woman and the Cow or Gauri* (1960) who suffers first at her parental home and later in her martial house. Then later Gauri turns into a self-willed woman with clear awareness of her rights. Like Gauri, Sita too becomes conscious about her right to live as an individual with life of freedom and dignity. One also can find the female protagonist Sarojini, in Kamala Markandya's *A Silence of Desire* (1960) who suffers the male hegemony and patriarchal dominance in her domestic sphere due to her husband's attitude. Sarojini feels empowered through her interaction with the swami that uplifts her declining psyche restoring her faith and hope in life. Lavanya Sankaran's Sita falls under the influence of Sarojini and Gauri. Sita is called back to normal life by her dead father's spirit. She gets thinks of her mother before she jumps down the ten-storeyed building.

Her father flies past her, pulling her mother's life behind him. The socialite raises a bottle to her lips and drinks. Her hand tighten around the balcony rail. The conflict and loss with her suddenly begin to change form. She says out loud, words mixing with angry flecks of saliva: You whore, she says. You fucking whores. You'll do anything for money. And she can feel herself stepping back, away from the balcony. (RC 161)

She would now go back to her computer, and use her mouse to select the folder marked 'Sigma Soft'. It is all her research and all her hard work. And then, she would carefully drag that folder and all its contents straight to the Recycle bin. Trash. Gone. Deleted. There you go everybody. And then she will spit on them and laugh and make sure her tears stay well concealed. Neither the boss nor wicked Ramu would get the hard work of Sita. She realizes to teach them a lesson. One may remember Megan Bostic comments about the thought of committing suicide in her book *Never Eighteen* (2012);

What if I just want to die? Then I will be sad and is appointed that you cheated yourself out of your chance at existence. Not all of us have that opportunity, you know, to choose life. (Bostic: 57)

Lavanya Sankran falls in line with her contemporary writers like Sboha De in enlightening women to fight against the system. Like, Kamala in HF, Sita does not compromise with her situation but stands strong to prove herself as a strong and equal member of this patriarchy. She

feels why she should become prey to the Ramu's cheating. She wants to create herself as a strong members of this men-dominating society. Like Gauri, in the novel *The Old Woman and The Cow or Gauri* (1960) who suffers and later becomes self-willed woman and aware of her rights. Sita is also may be on par with, the female protagonist Sarojini of *A Silence of Desire* (1960), who suffers the male hegemony and patriarchal domination, later gets empowered.

It should be true to those women who have remained as silent sufferers in the patriarchal sphere without complaining. Women have been put behind the doors for many centuries. They have not been allowed to say a word against her man. But now the feminist writers like Lavanya Sankaran, are of the opinion that the women still need to be empowered. They should be instilled with self-confidence and self dignity.

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