



# RETELLINGS OF THE RAMAYANA: COUNTERNARRATIVES, HERMENEUTICS AND PROLIFERATION OF THE EPIC

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## ABSTRACT

To create narratives that address the concerns in mythical narratives and give them a modern spin, each retelling reinterprets texts from mythology. Using Sita's perspective, Devdutt Pattanaik thoroughly retells the epic Ramayana in *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of Ramayana*. The storytelling tactics give these retellings a fresh spin, yet the story's essential elements are consistent throughout. Mythical and historical narratives continue to be necessary in India due to the country's cultural variety. Even though we have come a long way, men still hold most of the power in our society. To tackle social challenges, writers frequently look to mythology and history. There is a robust patriarchal undercurrent in our mythology. Female characters play supporting roles in every story. Modern retellings of tales traditionally told by men frequently offer a fresh viewpoint, amplifying the experiences of underrepresented groups. The story of *Sita, the Warrior of Mithila*, stands out. It gives an entirely new portrayal of Sita. According to Amish, Sita exemplifies all that is good about Vishnu: she is a skilled fighter, an unbiased ruler, a perfect wife, and an uplifting figure. The unorthodox portrayal of Sita as a strong, independent, and logical woman has led many to call her a modern woman. One interpretation of *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* by Amish is that it delves into the Indian feminine psyche. Women look up to Sita as a symbol of empowerment and wisdom. Sita had to wind her way through a maze of winding streets and lanes before she reached her objective. On the other hand, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's retelling of *The Forest of Enchantment* takes a fresh feminist perspective to retelling the Ramayana. The paper looks at Amish Tripathi's *Sita, the Warrior of Mithila*, Devdutt Pattanaik's *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of Ramayana* and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Forest of Enchantments* to understand how the modern retellings of the Ramayana have kept the essence of the epic intact and yet provided counter-narratives to fit the mythological story into its modern-day rendition.

**Keywords:** *The Ramayana*, Retellings, Counter-narrative, Sita, Devdutt Pattanaik, Amish Tripathi, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni.

## INTRODUCTION

The Indian literary market has consistently received an exceptional response to the retellings of mythical stories, especially recently, when stories from The Ramayana are retold from different perspectives. The stories have cultivated a dedicated readership, serve as a legacy of Indian culture, and have been conserved through each narration. Authors in Indian fantasy fiction are utilising epics such as Ramayana and Mahabharata as foundational storylines and prioritising them over popular Western fantasies. Authors such as Devdutt Pattanaik, Amish Tripathi, Ashwin Sanghi, Ashok Banker, and others have dedicated themselves to unravelling the endless puzzles and enigmas surrounding mythical stories. These authors have reinterpreted and altered the epics in their writings, such as Amish Tripathi's Meluha trilogy with Human Shiva and Sati and Devdutt Pattanaik's characters Sita and Jaya.

### *The Ramayana in Mythology*

The number of Ramayanas and their extensive impact in South and Southeast Asia for over 2500 years is remarkable. It is believed that there are over 300 adaptations of the Ramayana in literature. The Ramayana is a renowned Hindu epic that narrates Rama's life and exploits. This renowned hero is revered as a deity in India. The Ramayana, most likely composed in the 200s B.C., is credited to Valmiki, a sagacious figure. As per many legends, the Ramayana includes sacred content from the Vedas, a collection of ancient Hindu religious scriptures. The characters Rama, Sita, Lakshmana, Bharata, Hanuman, Shatrughna, and Ravana are essential figures in the cultural awareness of India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Southeast Asian nations, including Thailand, Cambodia, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Various versions of the Ramayana exist in Indian languages, as well as in Buddhist, Sikh, and Jain adaptations, as well as in Southeast Asian countries.

*The Ramayana* is an extensive narrative of great religious and spiritual importance. Ram's journey is one of the most often altered texts in Indian history. Valmiki's Sanskrit original, *The Ramayana*, has been transformed into other forms by authors, including Kamban's Ramayana and the Ramakien in Thailand. Tulsidas' Ramacharitmanas is an adaptation that inspires modern readers and authors. The primary themes of the original Ramayana are reflected in various regional cultures and artistic forms, extending beyond linguistic differences.

The Ramayana is an extensively analysed epic in which Sita is often seen as a typical ideal Indian bride. In Valmiki's Ramayana, Sita is shown as passive, subservient, docile, selfsacrificing, and intensely loyal to her husband. She unhesitatingly accompanies her husband into exile and steadfastly supports him despite the challenges she faces. Because of these attributes, which helped patriarchy shape their perception of women's morality, Sita in Valmiki's Ramayana was frequently praised and portrayed as an exemplary role model deserving of admiration.

In Indian mythology and its connection to Indian literature, myth serves as a potent tool for preserving history and culture in a country like India, which lacks a solid historical tradition compared to the Western world. (Jhanjhnodia, 2015) Writers aim to capitalise on the wealth of Indian mythology and showcase the magnificence of contemporary times. Raja Rao wrote *Kanthapura* (1938), in which the characters raised an anti-colonial awareness. *Kanthapura* tells

the story of the freedom struggle from the perspective of an elderly rural woman. Still, the novel can be read as a fabled tale of Ram's triumph over Ravana to emphasise the enduring faith in the triumph of good over evil. (Jhanjhnodia, 2015). Every village in India has a rich Sthala-Purana or mythical heritage (Kanthapura, 5). So, each story from India, somewhere or the other, connects to the mythical stories. Numerous stories from ancient legends involve deified humans. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Palace of Illusions* (2008) explores Draupadi's friendship with Krishna, a relationship often overlooked in mainstream cultural representations. The author views Draupadi as a woman rather than a princess bound to five husbands (Sawai 2015).

### **Amish Tripathi's *Sita: Warrior of Mithila***

Indian mythology plays a significant role in illustrating the deep-rooted tradition, culture, and societal standing of Indian forebears. The Ramayana is a significant Indian epic that narrates the tale of Rama, who is believed to be an avatar of Vishnu. Various interpretations of different versions of the Ramayana present Rama as the people's saviour and depict Sita as meek and obedient, following her husband in all aspects of life. Amish Tripathi is renowned for depicting deities in human guises. Similar to his Shiva trilogy, Amish approaches the character of Rama with a critical tone in the second novel, *Sita, Warrior of Mithila*, narrating the story of Sita. Amish has critiqued the current Indian patriarchal society for its continued suppression and oppression of women in several situations. Amish shows Sita as a young, skilled, courageous warrior with exceptional intelligence capable of ruling her kingdom, reflecting a modern perspective. Sita's exceptional attributes make her the protector of India.

The narrative of Sita begins with the discovery of an abandoned infant girl in a field by Janak and his wife, who are the rulers of Mithila. The king and his wife take in a little girl and raise her as their own. Mother Sunaina was always there to lend a hand to her daughter. When she was fourteen, her family sent her to live in the ashram of Rishi Shevthaketu. She had several chances to hone her martial arts skills and other areas there. At the ashram, she befriended Radhika and, via Radhika, communicated with Hanuman, Radhika's cousin.

One day, Maharishi Vishwamitra, the leader of the Malayaputhra tribe, visits Shvetaketu's ashram. He encounters Sita at that location and is impressed by her skills. Consequently, he selects her as the next Vishnu to serve the kingdom and directs her to maintain confidentiality. Sita also forms a friendship with Jatayu. Sita returns to Mithila when her mother is ailing. She passes away, and Sita is responsible for governing the land.

That led to her being named Mithila's prime minister. She persisted in her efforts to become Vishnu all the while. Rishi Vashishta chose Ram, the prince of Ayodhya, to succeed Vishnu, and she learned all about him. This leads her to devise a scheme to marry Ram through Swayamvar. The presence of Ravan and Kumbhakarn in Swayamvar annoys Sita. First, she called out Ram's name with Viswamitra's help. Her efforts pay off, and Ram comes out on top, which sets the stage for their Swayamvar. After the Swayamvar, Ravan and his army launch an assault on Mithila. With the loss of the Lankan army, Ravan is free to flee. Ram chooses to defy Lord Rudra's decree and goes into exile for fourteen years. Accompanying him are Sita and Lakshman.

Ravan and his army attacked Ram and Lakshman's camp as they were hunting. Sita came to help the injured Jatayu. They kidnap her while she is unconscious after she loses the struggle.

She gets back to her senses and tries to harm Ravan. A woman named Samichi, whom she claims to be her acquaintance, stops her. Accompanying him are Sita and Lakshman. Ravan and his army attacked Ram and Lakshman's camp as they were hunting. Helping the injured Jatayu, Sita came. They kidnap her while she is unconscious after she loses the struggle. She tries to attack Ravan as soon as she comes awake. A woman named Samichi, whom she claims to be her acquaintance, stops her.

The traditional Ramayana is narrated from Ram's point of view. The plot centres around Ram, who is the protagonist. Other characters, such as Sita, are inconsequential. Sita is depicted solely as Ram's wife. She lacks a sense of self. The portrayal of Sita in the Ramayana is often marginalised and oppressed by other characters. She received acclaim for her efforts, although no one dared to speak up against the unfairness towards women. Amish's portrayal of Sita differs significantly from the usual depiction.

Amish's portrayal of Sita is more beautiful, resilient, and intelligent than the traditional representation. She is not oppressed. The novel's plot revolves around a daughter found by the Sunaina. Sita is the incarnation of the goddess Lakshmi, who married Lord Rama and supported him in his noble mission. She defeats the Lankan army in Mithila with Ram. She is the saviour, the leader, and an excellent administrator. Since childhood, Sita has displayed aggression towards things she disliked. She expresses her disagreement without any hesitation.

Sunaina, the queen of Mithila, served as a mentor to her daughter, consistently striving to empower her and foster her independence. As a child, she sought her mother's permission to visit the slums. However, she does not permit it. At the age of eight, she ventures into the slums without her mother's consent. She displays bravery by visiting the slums while pretending to be a maid's child. She does not discriminate based on social status when forming friendships. Her closest companion in Mithila is Samichi, a resident of the slums who assists the slum community. They have a unique connection.

Sita has a keen interest in adventures. Receiving an Arabian horse as a present from her uncle Kushadhvaj piques her curiosity about riding it. She is pretty direct and reacts immediately to occurrences she dislikes. Similarly, her uncle attempts to incorporate Mithila into Sankshya with similar results. He created a replica seal to assert his entitlements. Sita disapproves of his conduct. She promptly ruptures the seal, sparking a conflict between them. She was later enrolled in Shvetaketu's Gurukul. Tripathi also refers to Sunaina as a formidable woman. She attempts to inspire Sita when she feels discouraged: "Escaping is never the answer ... That is the way of the warrior" (Tripathi 99). Sita learned combat and martial arts at Sunaina's behest.

Rishi Vishwamitra was amazed at Sita's abilities during his visit to Shvetaketu's ashram. Vishwamitra leads the Malayaputhra tribe and is in charge of choosing the next Vishnu. Vishnu is a title bestowed upon someone who is believed to promote virtue and guide others towards a different lifestyle. He closely watched her behaviour and recognised the flame within her. Vishwamitra noticed that Sita, who was thirteen years old, was tall and starting to develop muscle. Vishwamitra selected Sita as the next Vishnu after recognising her potential. Sunaina's abrupt illness and death affected her, yet she nevertheless carried out her obligations and responsibilities. After her mother's death, she assumed the role of Prime Minister of Mithila and cared for her younger sister. She implemented reforms in her realm with the assistance of Samichi, the chief of the Police force in Mithila. Mithila has regained a stable posture, similar

to prior days. She persevered in preparing to become the next Vishnu despite her other commitments, demonstrating tenacity. She visited several locations, including Agasthyakoodam, where people regarded her presence as heavenly and reminded her of her responsibilities as a Vishnu.

When she learns that Ram is the prince of Ayodhya, she understands that the chief of the Vayuputhra tribe, Vashishshtha, has chosen him to succeed Vishnu. With Vishwamitra's help, she sets up a marriage with Ram and quickly plans a Swayamvar. Based on their plans, Vishwamitra transports Ram and his brother Lakshman to Mithila. To discuss and share ideas, they meet behind closed doors. Sita took pleasure in revealing her heavenly essence to him while she hatched the plan. The union of Ram and Sita instigates anger in Ravan. Sita and Ram fight side by side the day following Ravan's assault on Mithila. She defeated Ravan and his army by standing before Ram. After Vishwamitra's enticing words moved Ram to anger, he used the Asurastra to defeat the Lankans. For leading Ram astray, Sita is irate at Vishwamitra. It shows how courageous Sita was in confronting an unfair act.

Sita's prowess in martial arts is emphasised in multiple scenes. She defends the camp from Sri Lankan attackers using her blurry vision and acute hearing. Skilled archers were able to shoot arrows using auditory cues. However, only a few people have the skill to throw knives accurately at the origin of the noise. Sita was among a select few individuals (Tripathi 4). The most distinctive feature of the text is that Sita's physical beauty is rarely emphasised or recognised except in a few paragraphs. Mythological characters or protagonists are often portrayed as flawless and highly appealing in stories, with their positive qualities emphasised and imperfections not seen. Amish genuinely portrays Sita. Ram is captivated by Sita's flawed beauty. Upon their initial encounter, he was captivated by her beauty, marred by scars. Ram decides to go into exile, and she accompanies him due to their shared responsibility. Sita seeks Jatayu for protection and organises samaras, known for their anti-ageing properties. Ram's brothers are amazed by Sita's skills. Ram desired to marry a woman who would evoke his admiration. Ram's brothers believed that his brother would not find ladies who matched his attributes. Sita demonstrated that their ideas were incorrect.

Sita found solace in the challenges of woodland life, viewing their exile as a valuable opportunity for personal growth. She quickly acclimated to the jungle conditions. Sita defended her camp against Ravan's attack in the absence of Ram and Lakshman by retaliating against the assailants. However, she failed at one point and was abducted by Ravan. She was an extraordinary woman, distinguished from others by her abilities, courage, and life motivations. They are not intended to be victims but must elevate themselves to warrior status. Will she gain the respect and recognition she deserves only then?

Lueg et al. discuss counter-narratives importance in their work "Introduction: What counternarratives are: Dimensions and levels of a theory of middle range" (2021) -

“Counter-narratives resist another narrative, this one often being or being perceived as being more assertive. ... Counter-narratives cannot be reduced to emancipatory, liberating or constructive stories. Instead, they can be hostile and destabilising: phenomena such as the loosely organised misogynist “manosphere” (4).

The power dynamics in the Ramayana are influenced by the principles outlined in the Manu Smriti, which advocate for the exclusion of women from engaging in socio-political activities. *ManuSmriti* enforced traditional gender roles on women, restricting them to

household duties. While initially intended as a guide, some later Hindus elevated it to a sacred legal text. Amish's *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* reimagines and questions the dominant story in The Ramayana by confronting the patriarchal worldview it contains rather than simply being emancipatory, liberating, and constructive.

From this perspective, it is relevant to remember Serpil Oppermann's thesis about the historical and textual aspects of narratives and postmodern narratives. She discusses the New Historicist dispute, which argues that history is essentially a "verbal construct" and that texts, whether literal or historical, serve as evidence of the past. She references Jonathan Culler's idea that history is evident in narrative constructs, which are stories created to convey meaning through narrative organisation. (Quoted in Oppermann 14)

Daniel Taylor claims that a tale is the narration of the essential activities of characters throughout time. Taylor (15) identifies four elements of the story. The primary element is the narrative quality of the story that characterises its human essence, projecting it into the world as an expression of belief. The second part involves sharing important information for the speaker and the audience. The third feature is character, which Taylor describes as "a collection of values in motion." Character is the fundamental nature and essence of who we are, the enduring quality that remains in memory long after a narrative has faded. Taylor's fourth aspect is narrating the essential activities of characters as they unfold across time (Bennet 2)

Valmiki's epic has been significant to Indian culture for millennia, with its characters becoming social emblems of morality and immorality. The stories in this grand narrative promote patriarchal ideology by centring on males who are in control. At the same time, females are depicted as secondary, according to the patriarchal gender role of being virtuous and subservient. Prince Rama embodies patriarchal qualities idealised in Indian legends for generations. Sita has exemplified a different set of values representing the submissive female ideal. The origin of Sita's birth remains enigmatic. It is designed to support the belief that a regular human girl cannot be the partner of the divine Prince Rama due to patriarchal beliefs. Feminist rhetoric in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries has frequently contested the patriarchal system of male dominance and female subjugation. Authors employ many techniques to undermine patriarchal narrative structures.

Amish Tripathi's *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* exemplifies this. He practices counterstorytelling to disrupt and question the patriarchal mindset cherished by Hindu society. He highlights the marginalised characters by empowering them and emphasising their ability to perform. Amish has reinterpreted the passive portrayal of Sita as a kind of rebellion against patriarchal ideology.

Sita recounts her birth tale to Anasuya, the wife of Saint Atri, in Section CXVIII of the Ayodyakandam. She states:

“Mithila’s lord, the heroic Janaka, justly ruleth the earth, engaged in observing the duties of Khsatriyas. As he ploughed a plain intended for a sacrifice, I rose from under the earth... Tending me with my body covered with dust, Janaka threw handfuls of dust (to level hollow spots) and was amazed. Being childless, he took me up on his lap from affection, said, ‘This is my daughter, ’ and conceived an affection for me” (500).

King Janaka promptly receives an oracle declaring, "O King, this daughter belongs to you in all righteousness." He brings the child to his oldest wife for nurturing and raising. Sita is raised in luxury and affection, fitting for a princess of that era. Like all girls, she is instructed

in the stree-dharma, which outlines the virtuous behaviour expected of a woman in both her parental home and her husband's family. Amish Tripathi has significantly reimagined the traditional narrative of Sita's birth, her upbringing as a princess in her father's home, and her subsequent roles as a dutiful wife and daughter-in-law in her husband's household.

Amish Tripathi incorporates contemporary female experiences, including women who must undergo martial arts and self-defence training, in his portrayal of Sita. He introduces an additional plotline to illustrate the origin of Sita and make her more relatable. He employs fantasy to provide the story with a fresh viewpoint. He supports and encourages the feminine while fostering an empathetic connection between humans and non-humans. His account of finding the abandoned child Sita is even more dramatic than it was previously. Baby Sita is not discovered in a furrow during field ploughing but is saved by Queen Sunaina from the forest. On their way back from a pilgrimage, the king and queen observe a vulture being attacked by a group of wolves. The courageous and empathetic queen, not the king, rescues the vulture and discovers it is safeguarding a baby at the cost of its own life.

Historical writing is not solely reliant on factual information. It is more accurately described as a "poetic process." The "historical narratives" are language artefacts, and the representation of history is transitory. Historically, Indian women adhered to the rules of behaviour dictated by the Manusmriti. They were prohibited from engaging in pursuits traditionally reserved for men, such as education, martial arts, statecraft, or being in the company of unfamiliar male individuals.

This breaks down the patriarchal power of the original tale and presents it in a more realistic and humanistic way. Janaka and Sunaina have the royal doctor examine the baby, and they decide to keep her as a blessing and name her Sita. The story is now intertwined with the original storyline as the baby is born to Janaka's wife, Sunaina. Amish Tripathi's tale portrays Sunaina and Sita as strong girls skilled in military actions and statecraft, while King Janaka is shown as a passive philosophical individual.

Amish Tripathi's narrative develops a new collection of "verbal artefacts" that align more closely with the modern concept of the empowered female. In the novel's first chapter, he portrays Sita as a courageous, intelligent, mighty, and skilled warrior who bravely fights against Raavan's ruthless army on her alone. Amish depicts her as a skilled archer. Great archers were able to shoot arrows by using sound. However, only a few people possess the skill to throw knives accurately towards the origin of a noise. Sita was one of the very few individuals

(4).

The current narrative challenges and undermines the dominant storyline by deviating from the Manusmriti's guidelines on women's education. Amish's Sita is provided equal opportunities in all aspects of life, which aligns with women's rights. In Chapter Four, Sita's parents, Janak and Sunaina, determine that she is mature enough to attend Gurukul, a residential school providing education in Philosophy, Mathematics, Science, and Sanskrit. Sita will also be educated in specialised courses like geography, history, economics, and royal administration. She was also instructed in combat and martial arts. Shvetaketu, her guru, commends her for her intelligence, practicality, and battling spirit. In the patriarchal post-Vedic tradition, Sita is not granted the authority or opportunity to partake in religious ceremonies. Here, her guru, Shvetaketu and the great sage, Vishwamitra, are conducting secret rituals with her to empower her to battle evil and play a crucial role in sustaining peace in the world.

Additionally, providing housing for the slum residents would improve their happiness and reduce their disruptive behaviour. She prioritises two prospective initiatives that require investment. The road connected Mithila to Sankashya. The second option was affordable, enduring, and habitable housing for those living in slums (109). Sita demonstrated her competence and socialist values by digging a deep lake in the city to ensure a consistent supply of uncontaminated drinking water that enemies could not tamper with. Amish deconstructs the submissive Sita character from traditional stories and presents a modern, educated, powerful woman who confidently expresses her abilities and strength in the new story.

Amish Tripathi retells the story of Sita in a way that challenges and opposes the prevailing narratives and values found in the ancient text of the Ramayana. Empowering women is crucial in contemporary Indian politics, where leaders and intellectuals promote women's rights, autonomy, and equitable involvement in societal, political, and religious affairs. Women empowerment seeks to offer women equal possibilities. It involves assisting women in recognising and asserting their power. The laws are created to empower women by giving them political power and assisting them in gaining economic control and authority through education and social advancement (Dev 70).

Master narratives, with their nuanced socio-psychological influence, nevertheless overpower women and restrict their autonomy. Contemporary writers such as Amish Tripathi recognise the importance of creating narratives that are alternative to traditional books. Amish's reinterpretation of The Ramayana demonstrates how writers can challenge and reshape the original tale to reinvent their identities, contest meanings, and assert political influence. We can concur with John Keene that every story requires counter-narratives with fresh viewpoints, voices, and versions to restore agency, complexity, and dignity to characters like Sita, who were previously not fully represented in these narratives.

Amish Tripathi's work *Sita* reflects the alignment between contemporary writers' and readers' expectations regarding women's empowerment and gender equality. Time, space, politics, and media influence the reader's expectations. Amish has contested the patriarchal dominance of the original text. He maintains the people and settings in the novel to resemble the original text closely, but he offers a contrasting narrative and creates a new system of symbols.

### **Devdutt Pattanaik's *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana***

The narrative *Sita* explores the relationship between Ram and Sita by delving into various aspects of Sita's life, such as her upbringing with her father Janaka, her time in the forest with Ram, her interactions in Lanka, her connection to nature, and her transformation of Ram into a deity. Pattanaik meticulously portrays several views and portrayals of the Ramayana in this contemporary retelling, focusing solely on Sita, Rama's wife. There is ongoing feminist debate regarding the righteousness of Ram's actions in adhering to his dharma and leaving his wife, Sita. Devdutt Pattanaik attempts to unravel the situation's complexity by emphasising that the story is not about morality but rather exists in a morally ambiguous space devoid of apparent distinctions between good and evil. The plot revolves around two lovers who cannot fully engage in their relationship due to the constraints of certain norms and ideas.

This narrative uncovers lesser-known narratives about characters such as Kaikeyi, who acted as the king's charioteer and saved his life; Manthara, Kaikeyi's wet nurse; and Sita, depicted as a curious and clever young girl. The author guides us through the intricate



developments of the ageless story, enriched by various regional adaptations throughout millennia. He presents his perspective together with interpretations from previous authors, spanning from Valmiki's Ramayana to Sanskrit dramas, Puranas, and variants in different Indian languages, as well as Jain and Buddhist traditions and Southeast Asia.

Pattanaik's Ramayana is not a mere recapitulation of Valmiki's narrative. The author contrasts culture, which imposes laws on society, with nature, which has no limitations. The author contrasts Ram, a monarch who upholds rules, with Krishna, a kingmaker who bends rules. He highlights symbols, metaphors, motifs, and patterns. The writing is potent and concise. The Ramayana is a story that explores a range of emotions, including affection, loyalty, love, greed, passion, and malice. Pattanaik's expressive writing vividly conveys these emotions with great force. The reader experiences a profound sense of empathy towards the characters.

Pattanaik also enlightens readers about the modifications that occurred over the years. He encourages readers to scrutinise the characters' actions, ideas, and behaviours. He presents several analyses by researchers and poets and inquires about their accuracy. He ultimately incorporates Western analyses of the narrative. He notes that these interpretations have been intentionally manipulated to support British domination in India. He also accuses oppressors and politicians of using the stories to support their agendas.

Devdutt Pattanaik provides a distinct contrast between truth and science. He constantly titles his works *My Gita* and *My Hanuman Chalisa* to indicate that they reflect his personal opinions. This notion pertains to the examination of this research. The retellings and reinterpretations represent the subjective perspectives and beliefs of the authors and writers who created them. It is their narrative.

They claim that Valmiki's Ramayana is the sole authentic version that must be revised. Ashok Banker, Amish Tripathi, and Devdutt Pattanaik's retellings are subjectively faithful in their form. Marshall McLuhan's thesis in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* discusses how text solidifies in its printed format. Mythological stories passed down through generations from oral storytelling traditions are not fixed. However, the stories change with each author's retelling, reflecting their subjective interpretation of the truth.

Mythology is contentious in many countries and regions, particularly Hindu traditions and cultures. They believe in just one absolute truth, which is God. Many cultures still resist accepting the scientific and logical explanations behind the mythological Gods. Social, cultural, and political prejudices that emerge in a rigid and conservative society illustrate this phenomenon. Yet these authors, through their narrative mode and renditions of the newness of the myths through their personal opinions, justify that they are revitalising the myths in today's youth to connect them to the glorious past richness of Indian mythology and thereby educate them.

The study highlights the significance of Pattanaik's reevaluation of *the Ramayana*, specifically examining Sita's depiction and its influence on Indian narrative traditions, norms, and culture. Pattanaik's version of the Ramayana emphasises Sita's humanity and compassion, diverging from the conventional portrayal of her as a deity. Arundhati Venkatesh states in her book review that the author reveals hidden intricacies and lesser-known histories. The inquiring Sita transforms into the understanding and unquestioning Sita. She has matured by attentively listening to the knowledgeable folks discuss the Upanishads. She effortlessly wields Shiva's formidable bow and overcomes Ravana's counterpart in a fierce battle... She is a self-reliant

single mother to her sons, not deserted. Reconnect with the Ramayana and with yourself (Venkatesh, 1).

This book's powerful story reveals obscure aspects of the Ramayana that should be emphasised in Valmiki or Tulsidas's renditions, which primarily exalt King Rama and the Ikshvaku dynasty while overlooking the smaller events involving female characters. At the start of the planting season, the farmers of Videha requested their King Janaka to inaugurate the farming activities by using a golden hoe to plough the soil. As he started, the furrow revealed a little golden hand, making him stop. He dug up the ground and discovered a baby! The farmers thought the baby was a gift from the soil goddess for their childless ruler rather than an abandoned child.

Nevertheless, this outcome was not due to his descendants. How can she be his daughter? Janaka asserted that fatherhood is derived from the heart rather than biological reproduction. He embraced her closely, stating, "She is Bhumaija, daughter of the earth; you may call her Maithili, the princess of Mithila, or Janaki, who married Janaka." I will call her Sita, the one found in a furrow, who chose me as her father...The harvest was outstanding" (Pattanaik 9 - 10).

This event focuses on the sociological aspects of fatherhood, highlighting its social dimensions rather than solely its biological elements. Janaka's reply is noteworthy: "Janaka gets what he merits from the earth, and Dashratha gets what he craves from the fire." I control the destiny of my daughters. He complies with the lads' wishes (Pattanaik 17). This episode discusses two strategies: adopting a female child and choosing her as a political successor.

The need to alter the cultural representation of female children in India is evident due to their low adoption rate, lack of enthusiasm upon arrival, and poor involvement in politics. Devdutt's depiction of Sita questions conventional norms and challenges us to contemplate historical truths. King Janaka, inspired by Sulabha, a visionary and remarkable woman, endeavoured to explore the human mind, body, the universe encompassing the body, and all facets of Veda (knowledge). He convened a meeting of all the learned scholars from Aryavrata so that they might impart their wisdom on the Vedas. At Janaka's court, people gathered worldwide, from forests to mountaintops, riverbanks to kingdoms and beaches, to discuss and debate various worldviews. An early global gathering of intellectuals, held in Sita's domain, helped to widen the human perspective.

Along with her father, Sita spent four years at a global conference where she studied under gurus like Ashtavakra, Gargi, and Yagnavalkya. She made history as the first and youngest female Indian to decipher and contribute to compiling the revered sacred text known as *The Upanishads*. As the conference's moderator, Gargi probed topics including existentialism, Dashratha's desire for sons, and governance standards. People were so frightened by her composed demeanour and incessant probing that they threatened to have her beheaded. The rational mind felt at ease, confident she would develop a new and better viewpoint.

Devdutt's Sita highlights the crucial role of women's education in Indian culture and their substantial contribution to assembling the Upanishads. The present generation, which analyses mythical texts through traditional performances, observes a need for women to engage in advanced intellectual studies in Videha. There were fewer female philosopher-writers compared to a more significant number of male sages. Individuals who had the opportunity to

read and acquire knowledge were much esteemed and perceived as nearly divine, becoming disconnected from their human nature. According to Micheal Witzel from Harvard University, certain female R̥ṣis are regarded as goddesses, such as “Aditi, Indrāṇī, Urvaśī, Yamī, Yamī Vaivasvatī, Saramā Devaśunī, Sārparājñī, Sūryā Sāvitrī”(Witzel, 2).

John Stuart Mill claims that Hindus have a strong contempt for women, as they are not included in religious writings and are deprived of education (Sangari, 46)—Pattanaik's depiction of Sita questions conventional gender norms. Sita's inquiry concerning providing food for the visiting sages led her to her mother, Sunaina's kitchen. Sita rapidly acquired proficiency in many culinary activities. She likes exploring various textures, aromas, flavours, and the nutritional benefits plants and animals provide. Sita's father needed to learn about the cooking. Sita's mother was ignorant of the courtly world. Sita saw that she had both attributes, demonstrating the broadening of the intellect and the transition from Brahama to Brahman (Pattanaik 22). She acknowledged that she was both seeking and imparting wisdom.

Sita argues that women's education is an investment since the primary role model was educated, proficient, and accomplished in multiple fields. Pattanaik's illustrated Ramayana emphasises women's academic achievements. A similar occasion also serves to record women's participation in sports. Shiva's bow Pinaki was a perfect combination of ritual sacrifice and meditation. Each year, the kingdom of Videha showcased a large object in Mithila's armoury to draw warriors and scholars from far and wide because of its considerable weight, requiring twelve men to lift it. Sita quickly cleaned the area and lifted it with one hand, prompting the word to spread throughout Videha's court. This triggered an instant alert, leading everyone to safeguard the narrative carefully. Why was her physical strength viewed as a sign of weakness, but the same characteristic was perceived as courage in men?

Rishi Vishwamitra instructed the four sons of Raghukula in archery and society laws, while the young princesses learned about world politics, culinary skills, and martial arts. The sisters received direct training from the King and developed personal skills. The Videha sisters raised inquiries concerning the process of Tadaka's funeral rites following her death at the hands of the crown prince, discussing topics such as birth, death, nature, balance, and rebirth. While the boys of Dashratha were more likely to follow orders, Vishwamitra noticed that the daughters of Janaka asked questions reminiscent of Gargi from the Upanishad. Farmers plant seeds in various fields for various crops. (Pattanaik, 41).

Valmiki's Ramayana depicts women as delicate, portraying Sita as docile and Urmila as sleeping for fourteen years while awaiting her husband. Mandavi and Shukriti are not referred to as post-marriage. They play a crucial role in Devdutt's Sita as bright ladies who relish engaging in talks. Ahilya, a princess from Mithila named Mandavi, faced a societal dilemma when she was freed by Lord Rama, causing the younger princess to have doubts.

Vishwamitra helped Ahilya and Gautama reconcile by performing a ritual involving pouring water over their joined hands, which led Sita's curious and knowledgeable relative to ask about the significance of marital fidelity. Pattanaik's depiction of the incident in "Sita" is considered an intellectual exercise. Mandavi considers that the Rakshasa women, as she had heard, were not faithful to their husbands and vice versa. She substantiates this assertion by citing examples of many forms of natural unions, including monogamous swans, male monkeys with a harem of females that they protect vigorously, and queen bees mating with multiple partners. Why was fidelity so essential to the Rishis? (Pattanaik 43).

The study argues that erudite women possess greater insight and prudence in managing their social surroundings, drawing on cultural and familial wisdom. The sophisticated information was not used to the nation's advantage because it would have promoted a multipartner society, which was seen as a threat to the societal standards maintained by the Maryada Purushottams. Divorce is still considered socially unacceptable, and following sexual norms remains crucial in partnerships both before and after marriage.

Pattanaik's narrative questions the conventional view of women as dependents fulfilling roles like daughters, wives, and mothers. Throughout the banishment, Sita did not display dependence in his narration. Sita is depicted differently in the ancient chronicle than in the current portrayal. In this rendition, she is shown as someone who regularly imparts her knowledge and wisdom to her less privileged siblings. Her conversations about Dharma, nature, charity, exploitation, selflessness, and other societal issues make her an excellent company.

Such discourse brought back to Sita memories of the wisdom she had absorbed from the sages when she was a kid. By the fire, they frequently discovered themselves alone. Knowledgeable individuals occasionally joined them as they recounted tales involving heroes, villains, victims, and martyrs. Even though Sita liked the stories, she saw they all followed the same pattern of having one hero and one victim. Measuring sticks are arbitrary human creations that boost egos. Instead of heroes and villains, according to Pattanaik, there are predators and prey in the natural world. The story revolves around the cycle of being eaten and being eaten. Someone with this extraordinary intellect could be an excellent philosopher, visionary, leader, or caretaker of a nation's needs.

Sita stood next to Rama while a thousand-headed monster from Pushkara island attacked, resembling the Agni-pariksha incident that led to many arguments. She metamorphosed into Kaali and promptly defeated the demon before the formidable warriors could even grasp their weapons. There was no verbal communication. Everyone was surprised to discover that Sita embodied both the characteristics of Gauri and Kaali. She had been abducted willingly. She had permitted herself to be reduced in importance or size. The Goddess operated independently, but Ram was considered the dependable God (Pattanaik 254).

Both women and indigenous people have demonstrated their power and willingness to assist, which have been inaccurately perceived as submission. If Rama were taken instead of Sita, Devdutt portrays Sita as having advanced military expertise and resource management skills, suggesting she could have organised an army to rescue him. This deviates from the typical portrayal of a helpless woman being held captive in a tower by a dragon, a common cliché in folklore. The Agni-pariksha was a crucial event that considerably impacted the definition and limitation of women's roles in India. Pattanaik's depiction of Sita enables a deep conversation between Sita and Lakshman after the Agni-pariksha and her abandonment.

Historically, women were linked to nature (Prakriti). Influenced by the feminine principle, women tend to be more attuned to nature, resources, and global dynamics than men, who typically focus more on material aspects of life. Shiva (40) states that women participate in forestry, agriculture, water resource management, and traditional natural sciences, while nature is a continuous experiment. The dialogue in Sita indicates that the woman is naturally inclined towards scientific investigation. It involves cultivating one's distinctive individuality to achieve more excellent social equilibrium. She can represent a well-maintained garden or a

wild forest as required, indicating that this new version of the famous story supports feminist principles.

Devdutt's depiction of Sita is the first piece of literature to commend the robust connection between women in the ancient story. The interaction between Sita and Surpanakha in the forest explains the idea of communal womanhood based on egalitarianism. The incident exemplifies the establishment of amicable relations with adversarial positions and serves as a compelling demonstration of redemption conveyed through a dialogue between two women.

Thus, the book reexamines the Ramayana, emphasising critical elements including narrative, norms, and nation, as analysed by Pattanaik utilising the character of Sita. This notion strives to achieve equilibrium in political engagement, create a contemporary socio-cultural atmosphere for all genders, and offer fresh viewpoints on social comprehension.

### **Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Forest of Enchantments***

*The Forest of Enchantments* is a remarkable modern-day retelling of the classic *The Ramayana*, examining the character of Sita from another viewpoint. The text is written in the first person, specifically from Sita's perspective. The text introduces the reader to the unexplored aspect of her time in Lanka beneath the sadness tree. The story includes Sita and lesser-known female characters like Sunayna, Urmila, Kaikeyi, Shanta, Mandodari, Surpankha, and Sarama, who are frequently underestimated in mainstream narratives. Sita animates all the characters in the narrative, feeling it is her responsibility as her thoughts are filled with the voices of these marginalised characters urging, "Write our tale, too." These women have been consistently marginalised, underestimated, misinterpreted, criticised, neglected, and exploited as examples of what not to do (Banerjee, 4). The modern-day rendition of their perspective through Sita's first-person narrative provides the story with the credential that immediately appeals to twenty-first-century readers.

One must remember the novel is a retelling, so the grandeur and sublimity of the characters and their greatness can never be questioned. Therefore, the novel tries to render the other characters, especially Ram and Laxman, have the grandeur in their language. Feminist reinterpretation did not let the author take a stance to portray the mythological figures in a derogatory way. Therefore, the author remembered that the language suits such grand characters and their glory.

Divakaruni's intention is not to portray male characters as tormented. She has shown the character of Ram with grandeur and Laxman as respectful. She portrays Sita as a nature lover and healer, skilled in martial arts, courageous, and self-confident, shedding the image of a passive and submissive woman. She depicts her characters' various moods and nuances using uncomplicated language. The authentic portrayal of Sita establishes a connection with every woman, depicting her as a devoted daughter, faithful wife, and nurturing sister. The story depicts Sita's hardships while residing in Ashoka Vatika, a detail that the average reader frequently overlooks.

The writer has given a voice to marginalised individuals to share their perspectives. She has displayed grace, royalty, and caution in her presentation to Queen Sunaina. She monitors the kingdom and helps her husband with his court affairs. She is aware of the unwavering trust the people of her country, Mithila, have in their Leader and King, Janak. Therefore, she refrains from trying to surpass him. She is portrayed as a visionary and begins clandestine martial arts

instruction with Sita. She is insightful and proactive in guiding her girls to ensure they are not vulnerable to exploitation as they approach marriage. She informs them about the masculine ego, royal politics, and other kingdom regulations. She imparted the concept of endurance to them -

“Draw on your inner strength. Remember, you can be your worst enemy or best friend. It’s up to you. And also this: what you can’t change, you must endure” (Divakaruni 54). She commissions the building of a healing facility for Sita to harness her healing abilities and improve the well-being of the people of Mithila. She encourages her girls that enduring challenges is the key to a joyful and content existence, a practice passed down through generations of women. Here, she portrays her maternal worries.

Queen Kaushalya, the less favoured queen of King Dashrath and the true mother-in-law of Sita, is shown as a very submissive figure. Sita keenly experienced the grief and suffering resulting from being disregarded by her husband. Being less favoured, she needed more abundance. She warmly greets Sita with enthusiasm and gives her heirloom jewellery and clothing that have been handed down through generations. She is reluctant to offer them to Sita. Chitra Banerjee portrays Sita's psychology with maturity and skillfully navigates through challenging situations. Ram understood his mother's difficult situation when he commented that specific individuals are born unfortunate, appearing to have abundance on the outside but lacking internally.

The tale also introduces Ahalya, who is misunderstood and cursed by her husband, Sage Gautam. Due to the curse's negative impact, she transforms into stone. Indra is captivated by Ahalya's exceptional beauty and deceives her by appearing in her husband's attire to entice her. Ahlaya's sorrow must be reinterpreted to cleanse her of the shame she has endured for a long time while being blameless. Ahlaya's vow of silence, known as Maunvrata, is disrupted when Indra victimises her. Sita is questioning the reason for her suffering and draws a parallel by asking if one should not be burned while knowingly or unknowingly putting one's hand in the fire. This is the old law of the cosmos: Karma and its consequences. Motive is deemed immaterial to it (Divakaruni 134). The writer aims to depict the plight of a woman's powerlessness in the story of Ahalya, emphasising her obligation to comply with her husband's desires. Sita determines that love is ineffective in repairing a relationship when mistrust is dominant.

Surpanakha has been provided with adequate opportunity to express her situation from Sita's point of view. She was the sister of King Ravana and was seeking a partner. Kaamarupini approached Ram and Laxmana to seek affection. Nevertheless, she disliked Sita's presence and intended to harm her. She was mutilated while seeking love. Laxmana mutilated her by severing her ears and nose after she attempted to harm Sita and made unwanted attempts towards Ram and Laxmana. At this point, Sita also feels enormous pity for her. She ponders how one might be impolite to someone seeking love. She believed that life with a disfigured face was not preferable to death, especially for a woman who desired a partner (Divakaruni 151).

Surpankha receives harsh comments from people; however, she has human emotions and seeks a partner. Her feelings and desires need to be more understood. During the following phase, Surpanakha deceives Sita at Ayodhya by attempting to sow doubt between Ram and Sita using a photo of Ravana stuck to the floor. The episode of Surpankha portrays Sita's compassionate nature and challenges traditional gender norms.

Queen Mandodari of Lanka is shown as a profoundly sorrowful woman who could not protect her husband, son, and realm from a tragic fate. She was aware that the kidnapping of Sita would result in disaster for her realm, yet she was unable to prevent the impending catastrophe. As the narrative progresses, it is revealed that Mandodari is Sita's mother. Sita is her estranged daughter. She demonstrates unconditional affection towards her and discloses the secret of her birth. She asks about the fabric that was used to wrap her.

She continues to provide sanctuary to Sita in Ashoka Vatika. She convinces the guards by giving them precious presents and instructs them to treat Sita with humility and kindness. Sita refuses the insincere affection and informs the person that she has no connection to her detestable spouse. She specifically advises her that she cannot diminish her guilt through her delusional thoughts. As the stately queen of Lanka, she has never interacted with Sita. She has been depicted as a strong woman who is crying over her husband's death and blaming Sita for it. The writer has provided an opportunity for Mandodari to articulate her sadness and distress, integrating her into the central narrative.

Another figure who needs to be addressed is Sita's sister, Urmila. All the characters feel utmost pity towards her. She is Laxmana's consort and is renowned for her patience, dedication, sacrifice, and love. She falls victim to her husband's loyalty to his brother, who deserted her throughout her adolescence for fourteen years. She patiently waited fourteen years to reunite with her spouse and devoted her entire life to the cause. She negotiated with Nidra Devi and entered a prolonged state of deep sleep to prevent her husband from having to compensate for it and to avoid any negative impact on her marital fertility. Sita was surprised to see her still body and regretted her solitude while living with her husband. She poses a thought-provoking inquiry to Sita: "Did Ram take you with him?" Why did Lakshman decline to accompany me? Was I deemed so undeserving? (Divakaruni 281). Sita and Urmila share a special relationship. They begin the story by sharing their sentiments and emotions of love. Being with her reliable friend Sita puts her at peace. Later in the story, she tricks Laxman and meets Sita at Valmiki's ashram, where her servant is also present. Valmiki's Ramayana must do justice to Urmila's character, but Divakaruni has established why she is vital in her work. Through the work, the author has immortalised her unacknowledged sacrifice.

*The Ramayana* by Valmiki portrays Kaikeyi as a villain. People make derogatory comments about her. According to Chitra Banerjee's portrayal, she is the most powerful woman in the palace and a skilful charioteer, advisor, and supporter of the monarch. She gains universal adoration as the beloved consort after rescuing King Dashrath. The fact that Sita's mother raves about Kaikeyi's healing abilities initially piques her interest in her. Her essence is one of grace, wit, bravery, and deceit. Ram, Sita, and Laxman face challenges due to her cunning personality. The author has treated her with dignity and included her in the popular narrative about patriarchy, power dynamics, and political affairs. The princes of the northern Indian kingdom of Ayodhya are the heroes of the Ramayana, which details pivotal events in their lives and praises their great virtue and bravery. It shows a culture that follows a patriarchal family tree quite strictly.

Everyone looks up to Prince Rama, son of King Dasaratha as if he were a model citizen. He obeys his father without question and is fair, respectful, and brave. As his father had ordered, he stepped down as crown prince and was exiled in the Dandaka bush for fourteen years. The fact that he could win the hand of Princess Sita of Mithila—a Hindu trinity deity—by skillfully

stringing the enormous bow of Lord Shiva—the terrible Shiva Dhanu—demonstrates his masculine valour. This form of matrimony, known as "swayamvara," highlights the patriarchal Hindu view that a woman is a commodity that a man can obtain by will, purchase, or arrangement.

Gender roles are typically seen as intrinsic and autocratic in patriarchal societies, which depict women as less courageous and obedient than men. As a result, their opinions and desires should be more frequently considered. Some have speculated that Sita from the Ramayana may be the physical manifestation of Vedavati, the goddess of wealth. *The Forest of Enchantments* retells and reimagines the old epic. Because she falls prey to the patriarchal narrative, Sita experiences oppression and marginalisation in Ramayana by Valmiki. Divakaruni's Sita defies the conventional wisdom that has always portrayed her as submissive.

Divakaruni's account differs from the original by rejecting the notion that Sita sprang miraculously from the ground. This glorifies Sita and obscures the details of her original narrative, hindering her ability to understand and interpret it. King Janaka recounts the incident to his wife and daughters as a part of their family history in Divakaruni's narrative. The scene and circumstances of the finding are unchanged. Janaka was cultivating a patch of land for religious reasons when he discovered the deserted infant Sita. Sita recounts the anecdote shared by her father, interspersing it with her commentary.

“A baby lay in his path, naked and newborn, glistening in the young sun like a mirage. He was amazed that I didn't cry, regarding him instead with unblinking eyes. I had kicked off the cloth that swaddled me, a gold fabric finer than anything our Mithila weavers could produce ... Sceptics wondered which cunning person had placed me there at just the right moment to be discovered by Janaka. It must have been someone who knew my unworldly father well ... Other kings would have had the child removed without considering her fate. At best, they would have ordered her to be brought up in a servant's home. But my saintly father picked me up and held me to his chest” (Divakaruni 6).

Queen Sunaina, Janaka's wife, does not have children but raises the child and educates her in feminine activities and combat skills. She recruits ladies from the hills to instruct Sita in defence. She is taught to utilise her body in a way that it can function as a weapon itself. Sita learned to move stealthily like a panther, run, leap, climb quietly, fall without harm, and endure pain. Divakaruni's narrative breaks down the notion of the perfect Sita portrayed as obedient, submissive, and domestic, as depicted in the Ramayana. While granting Sita autonomy and involving her in her connection with Rama, Devakaruni has maintained Sita's seclusion inside the realm of women, making the narrative more reasonable and slightly romantic. The plot closely resembles the original text. To effectively address the gender norms ingrained in India's socio-cultural code, it is necessary to rewrite canonical texts and critically analyse India's intricate history and cultural heritage. This process involves creating a new narrative about women in India by challenging the traditional cultural texts. Silenced, forgotten, or marginalised tales frequently resurface, and the humanities focus on these narratives' conventional nature and structural patterns.

Scholars occasionally sought to demonstrate how individuals consistently recount the identical narrative, although with little differences. According to historian Hayden White, who emphasised storytelling and moral interpretation, historical narrative organised numerous



occurrences. The narratives have apparent ideological and political connotations, which may have beneficial and adverse outcomes (White 1-2). While formulating theoretical viewpoints, Marita Svane stresses the importance of considering counter-narratives' nature. She contends that the theory of master narratives has been most affected by François Lyotard's conception of the breakdown of the grand narratives like the Enlightenment and Marxism. Some have drawn attention to the normative impact of particular story models on people's behaviours by utilising the ideas of scripts, culturally dominant narrative models, or hegemonic cultural narratives (36). "counternarrative" refers to stories that challenge and contradict dominant narratives. Stories and narratives can have excellent and harmful effects on audiences, depending on the storyteller and the society in which she lives.

## CONCLUSION

Each retelling reinterprets mythological texts to form narratives that contemporaneously address the issues in mythological narratives and simultaneously give them a modern twist. In *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of Ramayana*, Devdutt Pattanaik provides a comprehensive reinterpretation of the epic Ramayana from Sita's point of view, incorporating several interpretations. Even though the narrative techniques make these retellings attain some newness, the core story remains the same despite the alterations in stories and retellings. Considering India's cultural diversity, there is a consistent need for mythical and historical narratives.

Today's youth is increasingly interested in exploring their cultural roots, leading to a rise in the popularity of mythology content. New audiences who have heard the stories told their whole lives are now reading them in their language, economic prosperity has given Indians a renewed sense of pride in their heritage, and talented writers have found new ways to update old myths to appeal to contemporary audiences. These factors have contributed to a surge in interest in this genre.

Furthermore, the stories' global appeal lies in how they are narrated. Shifting the narrative perspective to particular and humanising the Gods has altered how readers and viewers perceive them. The characters exhibit a full range of human emotions, engage in combat, experience injury, and are not motivated by a more significant cause. These are some everyday experiences that regular individuals might identify with.

Despite considerable progress, our culture remains predominantly male-dominated. Fiction writers often draw upon mythology and history to address societal issues. At their core, our mythologies perpetuate patriarchy. In every story, the female protagonists play a supporting role. Modern retellings of tales traditionally told by men frequently offer a fresh viewpoint, amplifying the experiences of underrepresented groups. Tales like *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* are rare and unique. It shows Sita in an entirely new light. The Amish portray Sita positively as a Vishnu-like character skilled in battle, fair in her leadership, a wonderful wife, and an inspiration to all. The unorthodox portrayal of Sita as a strong, independent, and logical woman has led many to call her a modern woman. One interpretation of *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* by Amish is that it delves into the Indian feminine psyche. For many women, Sita represents the possibility of empowerment and enlightenment. Sita had to find her way through a maze of winding streets and lanes before she arrived at her goal. She demonstrates a growing maturity with each new critical study of the Ramayana or commentary on the Ramayana. Valmiki's Ramayana raises questions, while Amish's *Sita* provides the answer: *Mithila's Warrior*.

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