

Unbinding the Sacred Feminine and Resistance in Contemporary Indian Retelling, *Sita: Warrior of Mithila*

Radhika S¹ & Dr. Nagamani K²

¹Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of English and Foreign Languages

Faculty of Engineering and Technology, SRM Institute of Science and Technology, Ramapuram, Chennai

²Assistant Professor, Department of English and Foreign Languages

Faculty of Engineering and Technology, SRM Institute of Science and Technology, Ramapuram, Chennai

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.64938/RIJ.v12i4.26.May003>

Abstract

Mythological stories, especially those involving women who have traditionally been bound inside patriarchal structures, are increasingly being revisited and reconstructed in contemporary Indian fiction. By challenging the ideological frameworks found in canonical literature, these retellings serve as counter-discourses. This essay explores how female agency is reconfigured in contemporary Indian literature, specifically focusing on Amish Tripathi's Sita: Warrior of Mithila. The paper examines how Sita is changed from a passive symbol into an active subject of power and resistance by drawing on feminist theory, Simone de Beauvoir's notion of woman as the "Other," Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, and myth critique. According to the article, these narratives release the "sacred feminine" from conventional limitations, providing a reinvented language of identity, autonomy, and empowerment.

Keywords: Female Agency, Myth Retellings, Gender Performativity, Patriarchy, Narrative Resistance



Manuscript ID:
RIJ-2026-May-04-003

Subject: English Studies

Article History:
Received : 06.05.2026
Accepted : 21.05.2026
Published : 30.05.2026

Recommended Citation:
Radhika, S., and K. Nagamani.
“Unbinding the Sacred Feminine and Resistance in Contemporary Indian Retelling, Sita: Warrior of Mithila.” *Roots International Journal of Multidisciplinary Researches*, vol. 12, no. 4, 2026, pp. 16–20.



Copy Right: This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Share A like 4.0 International License.

Introduction

In India, mythology has been utilized for a very long time as a fundamental framework for cultural standards. It frequently serves to reinforce gender hierarchies, which are characterized by the placement of women in jobs that require them to submit to authority and make sacrifices. For a very long time, the character of Sita, who is widely regarded as one of the most cherished persons from the Ramayana, has been portrayed as the embodiment of the virtues of honesty, obedience, and perseverance. However, contemporary Indian novelists have begun to challenge these conventional images by reinterpreting legendary themes through the prism of contemporary perspectives. This is a significant development. This change is depicted in the novel *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* written by Amish Tripathi.

In this work, Sita is shown not as a passive figure but rather as a dynamic individual who is equipped with political intelligence, physical power, and moral autonomy. This transformation is in agreement with the idea that was presented by Simone de Beauvoir, which asserts that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman," so highlighting the fact that gender roles are produced (Beauvoir 283). At the same time that Tripathi is in the process of rebuilding Sita's identity, she is challenging the conventional conception of femininity and making room for alternative interpretations that place an emphasis on agency and empowerment.

Myth, Power, and Counter-Narrative

Texts that are considered to be mythological serve as cultural devices that are responsible for perpetuating dominant views, notably about gender. In traditional tales, women are frequently portrayed as the "Other," which is a

phrase that was developed by Beauvoir to explain the marginalization of women within patriarchal systems (Beauvoir 16). This dynamic is reflected in the customary representation of Sita, as her identity is largely established in connection to Rama and her conformity to the norms of society.

Contemporary retellings, on the other hand, pose a challenge to this framework by reclaiming myth as a site of resistance. According to Ponnarasi and Sindhu, feminist critics say that narratives like these destabilize hegemonic discourses and create alternative places for female expression. In addition, the theory of gender performativity developed by Judith Butler sheds more light on this transition. However, Butler argues that gender is not a trait that is innate to a person but rather a series of repeated performances that are sculpted by societal standards (Butler 25). When viewed in this light, the traditional portrayal of Sita might be interpreted as a performance of idealized femininity that is forced by patriarchal norms. This performance is subverted by Tripathi's reinterpretation, which depicts Sita as an active constructor of her identity through the use of action and decision-making. The possibilities of female depiction within legendary narratives are reimagined as a result of this transition, which not only challenges the gender norms that have been established till now.

Reimagining Sita: Agency and Identity Formation

Tripathi reimagines Sita as a character of agency who symbolizes both intellectual and physical strength in the novel *Sita: Warrior of Mithila*. Sita is a warrior of Mithila. They are both represented by Sita. The conventional narrative depicts Sita as playing a role that is mostly passive, whereas this version presents

Sita as an active participant in the government and statecraft of the kingdom. This is in contrast to the usual account, which portrays Sita as playing a rather passive role. The idea that men are inextricably tied with leadership is called into question by her reputation as a strategic thinker who makes contributions to the process of political decision-making. This is due to the fact that she questions the notion that men are intrinsically connected with leadership roles. It is consistent with this reframe, which is consistent with the feminist worldview, that the feminist perspective, which places an emphasis on the powers of women to wield autonomy and authority, is consistent with this reframe.

The portrayal of Sita as a warrior created by Tripathi, on the other hand, poses a challenge to the dualistic dichotomy that exists between masculinity and femininity throughout the whole of the story. The narrative reclaims physical power as a legitimate feature of female identity by teaching her martial arts abilities during the course of the novel. This is done from the perspective of the protagonist. This takes place within the framework of the story you are reading. Because of this shift, the norms of performance that largely identify power and strength with men are being destabilized (Butler 45).

This is a consequence of the transformation. It is possible to get an understanding of this transition by making use of Butler's theory. Consequently, the depiction of Sita becomes a site of struggle against the gendered expectations that are imposed upon her as a consequence of this. Sita is shown as a person who is morally responsible and who cultivates a crucial relationship with the concept of dharma because of her actions. In addition to the fact that she possesses physically attractive and political characteristics, she also possesses

abilities in this particular domain. On the contrary, she does not just accept the rules that have been assigned to her automatically; rather, she interprets and redefines the norms that have been assigned to her based on her own conception of what constitutes justice. That this facet of her personality is congruent with these concepts is consistent with poststructuralist conceptions of subjectivity, which imply that individuals actively make meaning rather than conforming to established identities. This component of her personality suggests that individuals actively make meaning. There are a lot of points that Sodha makes, and one of them is that depictions like these "reposition Sita as an autonomous agent of change" (Sodha). As a consequence of the use of this reconstruction, Tripathi raises problems regarding the cultural standards that have, throughout the course of history, helped to reduce the amount of agency that women have possessed.

Contemporary Retellings and Feminist Discourse

There is a larger movement in contemporary Indian literature that attempts to highlight the voices of women and question patriarchal narratives. Sita's transformation is a part of this larger movement. In a same manner, authors like as Volga and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni have recreated mythological women as multifaceted persons who have their own ambitions, problems, and identities. At the same time that they highlight the significance of self-definition and autonomy, these tales are in agreement with Beauvoir's critique of traditional gender identities. In addition to this, these works provide a contribution to the formation of an indigenous feminist discourse that negotiates between modernity and tradition. Contemporary

authors, rather than outright discarding cultural legacy, reinterpret it in ways that are reflective of the changing social ideals of societies.

This approach is consistent with Butler's conceptualization of identity, which is that it is malleable and is continuously remade through speech (Butler 179). When viewed in this light, Sita emerges as a symbol of metamorphosis, since she embodies both continuity and change. Basfore makes the observation that contemporary retellings "restore narrative authority to iconic women," which enables these women to voice their experiences and challenge the conventions that have been established (Basfore). A substantial change from previous narratives, in which women were frequently excluded or silenced, this move also constitutes a significant departure. Novels written in contemporary Indian literature make space for a variety of voices and points of view by putting an emphasis on the subjectivity of women.

Narrative as Resistance and Reconstruction

The act of telling a story can be a potent instrument for challenging and modifying the cultural assumptions that people hold. Authors call into doubt the authority of canonical texts and bring attention to the diversity of voices that exist within cultural traditions by recounting myths from different points of view. Tripathi uses narrative techniques like as psychological depth and different perspectives to humanize mythological characters and make them accessible to current audiences. He does this by employing these particular narrative strategies. When seen from a theoretical perspective, this process can be interpreted as a type of resistance that makes use of discourse. Meaning is not something that is fixed, but rather something

that is constantly negotiated through language and representation, according to poststructuralist philosophy.

The mainstream discourse is disrupted and new options for understanding gender and identity are created as a result of Tripathi's reconstruction of Sita's story. Retellings of this kind "transform mythological narratives into spaces of empowerment and resistance," as Macwan is quoted as saying (Macwan). Throughout the course of the book, Sita's journey serves as a metaphor for a larger transition moving from silence to voice and from objectification to subjectivity. The continual battle of women to assert their identity and agency within patriarchal systems is reflected in her transformation—a struggle that continues to this day. When viewed through this particular lens, the story transforms into not just a different interpretation of myth but also a commentary on the socioeconomic reality of the present day.

Conclusion

There is a significant contribution that contemporary Indian retellings of mythology make to the process of changing gender narratives and opposing patriarchal norms. Sita created by Amish Tripathi: The film "Warrior of Mithila" is a prime example of this transition because it portrays Sita as a figure who possesses strengths, intelligence, and independence. This study has proven, through the incorporation of feminist theory and myth criticism, how narratives of this nature liberate the "sacred feminine" from the confines of traditional gender roles and open up new avenues for portrayal. Tripathi makes a contribution to a more comprehensive discourse on empowerment by redefining Sita as an active

person rather than a passive symbol. This reinvention reflects the shifting dynamics of Indian society. It is ultimately important to note that these voices that shatter chains are not only literary constructions; rather, they are potent representations of resistance and transformation.

References

1. Basfore, Mousumi. "Reimagining Mythological Femininity in Contemporary Indian Literature." *International Journal of Advanced Research in Multidisciplinary Trends*, 2022.
2. Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. Translated by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier, Vintage, 2011.
3. Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge, 1990.
4. Macwan, Princy. "Transforming Sita: A Reconstructed Narrative in Modern Retellings." *Bharatiya Pragya: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 2023.
5. Ponnarasi, S., and K. Sindhu. "Voice and Agency: Subversive Feminist Narratives in Contemporary Indian Retellings." *ResearchGate*, 2023.
6. Sodha, Dhananjaya. "Rescripting Womanhood through Myth in Contemporary Indian Fiction." *International Journal of Fictional Multidisciplinary Research*, 2024.
7. Tripathi, Amish. *Sita: Warrior of Mithila*. Westland Publications, 2017.