

Reimagining Sita: A Feminist Transmutation in the Works of Devdutt Pattanaik and Amish Tripathi

Anju¹, Dr. Deepika Mishra²

¹Raffles University, Neemrana

nehanju2012@gmail.com

²Assistant Professor, Raffles University, Neemrana

deepa0813@gmail.com

Abstract

This study explores the feminist reinterpretations of the character of Sita in the works of contemporary Indian authors Devdutt Pattanaik and Amish Tripathi. Traditionally depicted as the epitome of virtue, purity, and obedience in the Ramayana, Sita has often been portrayed as a passive figure. However, Pattanaik and Tripathi challenge this conventional portrayal by reimagining her character as one of strength, resilience, and agency. Through a comparative analysis of Pattanaik's *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana* and Tripathi's *Sita: Warrior of Mithila*, this research examines how both authors present a more dynamic, empowered version of Sita. While Pattanaik emphasizes introspection and emotional depth, portraying Sita as a woman of silent strength navigating societal constraints, Tripathi presents her as a fierce warrior and leader, actively shaping her own destiny. The study highlights the authors' efforts to break away from traditional gender roles and empower female characters within mythology, offering new perspectives on Sita's identity. This feminist transmutation provides a space for a rethinking of female agency, resilience, and autonomy in ancient texts, suggesting a broader discourse on the role of women in mythology. By reinterpreting Sita, Pattanaik and Tripathi not only transform her character but also contribute to the larger conversation about gender and power in literature and mythology.

Keywords: Female Agency, Mythology, Gender Roles, Empowerment, Strength, Autonomy.

Citation: Anju, Dr. Deepika Mishra. 2025. Reimagining Sita: A Feminist Transmutation in the Works of Devdutt Pattanaik and Amish Tripathi. *FishTaxa* 36(1s): 480-484

Introduction

The representation of women in mythology has long been a subject of intense scrutiny and reinterpretation (Parvathy, 2021). The character of Sita, one of the central figures in the Hindu epic Ramayana, has undergone several transformations over centuries. Traditionally, Sita is depicted as the epitome of virtue, purity, and obedience (Herman, 2022). However, contemporary writers, such as Devdutt Pattanaik and Amish Tripathi, have sought to reimagine Sita, offering feminist reinterpretations that challenge conventional portrayals of her character. Through their works, these authors engage in a radical transmutation of Sita, emphasizing her agency, resilience, and complexity.

Feminist lens in mythology

In recent years, the feminist critique of mythology has gained momentum, with scholars and authors seeking to uncover the hidden narratives and marginalization of female characters in traditional texts. A feminist lens offers a refreshing perspective on myths, providing a platform to explore how women are often confined to stereotypical roles within these ancient stories (Spacciante, 2024). The character of Sita has been particularly scrutinized for her role as a dutiful wife who silently endures suffering. Feminist scholars argue that her passivity reinforces patriarchal ideals, sidelining her strength and autonomy. By reimagining Sita, authors like Pattanaik and Tripathi aim to present a more dynamic and multifaceted version of the character.

Devdutt Pattanaik's reinterpretation

Devdutt Pattanaik, in his various works such as *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana* and *The Pregnant King*, challenges the traditional depiction of Sita. Pattanaik does not just recount the well-known mythological tale but re-contextualizes it, presenting a Sita who is more than just a suffering woman. His narrative foregrounds the internal struggles Sita faces, particularly with her role in the patriarchal structure that governs her life. In his retelling, Sita is portrayed as an intelligent, powerful figure who makes conscious choices despite the overwhelming challenges imposed upon her. Pattanaik emphasizes her emotional depth and intellectual prowess, showcasing her as a woman who reclaims her identity in the face of societal constraints.

Amish Tripathi's bold new Sita

Amish Tripathi, best known for his Shiva Trilogy and Ram Chandra Series, also provides a transformative reimagining of Sita. In his book *Sita: Warrior of Mithila*, Tripathi introduces Sita not as a mere passive character but as a warrior in her own right. He challenges the notion of Sita as solely a symbol of marital fidelity and instead presents her as an independent, fierce individual with her own ambitions and strengths. Tripathi's Sita is highly skilled, courageous, and not afraid to make difficult decisions. Through this portrayal, he injects a new feminist dimension into her character, emphasizing her agency and role as a leader rather than just a figure defined by her relationships with men.

A feminist transmutation

The works of Pattanaik and Tripathi represent a feminist transmutation of the character of Sita, one that reinterprets her from a patriarchal icon to a complex, multifaceted character. By doing so, they not only give voice to the untold aspects of her character but also provide a platform for women's experiences that have often been relegated to the margins in traditional retellings. This research will explore how both authors reimagine Sita, breaking away from conventional patriarchal narratives and creating a space for feminist interpretations that highlight her strength, autonomy, and self-determination.

In doing so, Pattanaik and Tripathi contribute to a larger conversation on the role of women in mythology, providing a contemporary lens through which we can reconsider not only Sita but other mythological figures as well.

Methodology

This study explores the feminist reimaginings of the character of Sita as presented by Devdutt Pattanaik and Amish Tripathi in their literary works. The research methodology for this paper involves a detailed literary analysis of the novels by both authors where Sita is a central or significant character. The methodology is divided into the following stages:

Selection of literary works

The first step in this study is the selection of relevant literary works authored by Devdutt Pattanaik and Amish Tripathi. The focus will be on the books where Sita is either the protagonist or a pivotal character in the narrative. These works will serve as the primary texts for analysis.

Devdutt Pattanaik's works

1. Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana (2013)

Pattanaik's *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana* is a contemporary retelling of the Ramayana, where he presents a reinterpreted, multifaceted version of Sita. In this book, Pattanaik emphasizes Sita's emotional depth, her relationship with other characters, and her ability to navigate the patriarchal norms imposed on her. This book forms the core of our analysis of Pattanaik's portrayal of Sita.

2. The Pregnant King (2009)

Although not directly focused on Sita, this novel by Pattanaik explores themes of gender and power within mythological contexts. By examining the roles of female characters in a patriarchal society, this book offers a broader perspective on Pattanaik's approach to reinterpreting traditional gender roles in mythology.

Amish Tripathi's works

1. Sita: Warrior of Mithila (2017)

Tripathi's *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* is a retelling of Sita's life, where she is portrayed as a warrior, leader, and independent figure. This book is crucial for understanding Tripathi's feminist transmutation of Sita, where she is presented as more than just the dutiful wife, but a strong, capable woman with her own identity and ambitions.

2. Ram: Scion of Ikshvaku (2015)

While this novel primarily focuses on Lord Rama, Sita's role is integral to the story. Her portrayal here, alongside her relationship with Rama, contributes to understanding Tripathi's broader vision of Sita, which includes her inner strength and resilience in the face of trials.

Literary analysis framework

The analysis will be conducted using a comparative literary framework that focuses on the following elements:

Character development

The study will examine how the character of Sita evolves in both authors' works. Particular attention will be paid to the aspects of Sita's personality that emphasize her agency, intelligence, and leadership, rather than portraying her merely as a passive character defined by her relationship with Rama. This will involve close reading of the text to identify passages where Sita makes independent

choices, challenges societal norms, and exercises power in her own right.

Feminist perspective

The study will apply feminist literary criticism to assess how both authors challenge traditional patriarchal portrayals of Sita. Key questions will include: How do the authors reframe Sita's role within the Ramayana? What elements of her character are highlighted to showcase her strength and independence? How do the authors address themes of gender, power, and societal expectations in their retellings of Sita's story?

Symbolism and imagery

The visual and symbolic representations of Sita in both authors' works will also be analyzed. Pattanaik, known for his illustrations, incorporates visual elements that reflect Sita's inner strength, intelligence, and resilience. Tripathi, through his writing, creates a vivid portrayal of Sita as a warrior, emphasizing her physical strength and combat skills. The study will explore how both authors use symbolism and imagery to craft a more dynamic, multi-dimensional Sita.

Narrative structure and point of view

The narrative style and point of view used by Pattanaik and Tripathi will also be assessed. Pattanaik often employs a reflective, introspective narrative, offering insights into Sita's internal struggles and her responses to the world around her. Tripathi, on the other hand, adopts a more action-oriented narrative, highlighting Sita's abilities as a strategist and leader. This comparison will help elucidate how each author's narrative choices contribute to the feminist transmutation of Sita's character.

Data collection

Data collection for this study will involve a close reading of the texts selected, with particular attention to passages where Sita is central to the plot. The analysis will focus on the dialogue, actions, and inner monologues of Sita, identifying key moments where her character challenges traditional gender norms or displays autonomy.

Comparative analysis

The final stage of the methodology involves a comparative analysis of how both authors portray Sita in their respective works. The comparative approach will highlight similarities and differences in the feminist reimaginations of Sita, providing a nuanced understanding of how contemporary Indian authors reinterpret classical mythological figures to align with modern feminist ideals.

Results and discussion

The works of Devdutt Pattanaik and Amish Tripathi offer refreshing reinterpretations of the character of Sita, shifting her representation from a passive, obedient figure to one who embodies strength, resilience, and agency. This section discusses the results derived from the comparative analysis of their respective portrayals of Sita in *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana* by Pattanaik and *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* by Tripathi, focusing on their feminist transmutations of Sita.

Devdutt Pattanaik's feminist reinterpretation of Sita

In *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana*, Pattanaik offers a nuanced portrayal of Sita, whose character is far from the submissive archetype traditionally associated with her. Sita is depicted not merely as a symbol of virtue and purity, but as a woman of considerable inner strength and emotional intelligence. Pattanaik's Sita is deeply introspective, with moments of reflection that reveal her internal struggles against societal constraints. For example, in the retelling, Sita's decision to walk into the fire (the Agni Pariksha) is not portrayed as a passive act of submission to her husband's doubts, but as an assertion of her identity and moral integrity in the face of public scrutiny. This representation challenges the traditional view of Sita as a figure whose life revolves around her relationships with men, shifting the focus to her personal strength and ability to rise above societal expectations.

Pattanaik's use of illustrations further enhances this portrayal of Sita. Through his artwork, he captures her complexity, portraying her not just as a demure figure but as one who possesses a silent, yet formidable, power. His illustrations also emphasize Sita's connection to nature, framing her as a figure in harmony with the earth, yet powerful enough to survive its many challenges. These visual representations highlight her agency and autonomy, reinforcing the feminist undercurrent of the narrative.

Amish Tripathi's reimaged Sita as a warrior

In contrast, Amish Tripathi's *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* provides a more overtly feminist portrayal of Sita, positioning her as a warrior in her own right. Tripathi reimagines Sita not just as the devoted wife of Rama, but as a fierce and capable individual who actively shapes her destiny. Throughout the book, Sita's physical and mental strength is emphasized—she is not merely a symbol of patience and endurance, but an assertive figure with combat skills, leadership qualities, and a keen intellect. This portrayal is a marked departure from traditional depictions of Sita, where her role was largely confined to the domestic sphere.

One of the most striking aspects of Tripathi's depiction of Sita is her role as a military strategist. In the Ram Chandra Series, Sita is shown to be a key player in the defense of her kingdom, Mithila. She is involved in strategic planning and martial training, skills that were traditionally reserved for male characters in mythological narratives. This shift in her role from a passive recipient of male heroism to an active participant in her own fate underscores the feminist dimension of Tripathi's reimagining. Sita's strength is not limited to physical prowess; she is also portrayed as a leader, capable of making difficult decisions and taking charge of situations that were traditionally handled by male characters.

Furthermore, Tripathi emphasizes Sita's emotional resilience, highlighting her ability to cope with challenges on her own terms. Her personal journey, including her exile to the forest, is presented not as an unfortunate twist of fate but as an opportunity for self-discovery and empowerment. Tripathi's Sita is far from the traditional victim of circumstance; she embraces her challenges and rises to meet them head-on, transforming her life through her own actions.

Comparative analysis: the evolution of Sita's character

The comparative analysis of Pattanaik's and Tripathi's portrayals of Sita reveals several key differences in how both authors handle her character. While Pattanaik's Sita is deeply introspective and often framed as a symbol of strength through passive endurance, Tripathi's Sita is overtly active and powerful, embodying both physical and emotional strength. This contrast speaks to the different ways the authors interpret feminism in the context of mythology.

Pattanaik's portrayal of Sita is subtle in its feminist tone, focusing on emotional depth and resilience rather than overt action. His Sita's strength is seen in her ability to endure and navigate the constraints placed upon her by society, family, and duty. This highlights a form of strength that is often overlooked in traditional narratives—one that thrives in silence, wisdom, and the power of choice. For example, in Pattanaik's retelling, Sita's decision to leave the palace and retreat to the forest is not one of defeat but of reclaiming her independence and making a decision for her own peace of mind.

In contrast, Tripathi's Sita embodies a more active form of feminism. Her character is empowered by action, leadership, and personal agency. Unlike Pattanaik's portrayal, which leans more into the emotional resilience of Sita, Tripathi's Sita is directly involved in physical battles, not just metaphorical ones. She leads armies, strategizes warfare, and displays intellectual acumen traits that were traditionally associated with male heroes. This active form of empowerment in Tripathi's Sita challenges the conventional gendered expectations of women in mythology, encouraging a reinterpretation of their roles in historical and cultural narratives.

The symbolism of Sita in both works

The symbolism of Sita in both works further reinforces the feminist transmutation of her character. In Pattanaik's retelling, Sita's connection to nature is used as a metaphor for her strength and resilience. She is portrayed as one with the land, embodying a quiet but unwavering strength. The symbolism of fire, particularly the Agni Pariksha, is also reinterpreted. Instead of portraying Sita's fire test as a trial of her chastity, Pattanaik presents it as a moment of spiritual transcendence and self-assertion. This reframing allows Sita to reclaim her narrative, turning her moment of vulnerability into one of empowerment.

In Tripathi's Sita: Warrior of Mithila, the warrior symbolism takes center stage. Sita is frequently depicted as a protector and leader, with weapons and armor becoming part of her identity. The symbolism of the warrior woman in Tripathi's narrative is essential in reshaping Sita's character from a passive wife to an active, formidable figure in her own right. This reimagining serves as a critique of the passive roles women have traditionally been given in mythological stories and offers a new interpretation of power and heroism for women in ancient texts.

Implications for feminist reinterpretations in mythology

The feminist transmutation of Sita in these works has far-reaching implications for how we understand gender roles in mythology and literature. Both Pattanaik and Tripathi challenge traditional gender norms, offering alternative portrayals of a character who has long been a symbol of feminine virtue and obedience. Through their reimaginings, they contribute to a broader feminist movement in literature, where women are not defined by their relationships to men but by their own identities, choices, and actions.

This reimagining is not just about reinterpreting Sita's role in the Ramayana but about questioning the broader cultural norms that shape women's lives. The feminist retellings by Pattanaik and Tripathi offer a space for women to be seen as multi-dimensional, capable of both nurturing and fighting, leading and learning. By giving Sita a more active role, these authors offer a powerful critique of the patriarchal constraints placed on women in traditional narratives and provide a vision for a more inclusive and empowering future.

Both Devdutt Pattanaik and Amish Tripathi offer profound feminist reinterpretations of the character of Sita, each in their distinct narrative styles. Pattanaik focuses on introspection and passive strength, while Tripathi portrays an active and resilient warrior.

Through their feminist transmutations, both authors contribute to a reimagined vision of Sita, one that reflects contemporary understandings of female empowerment, autonomy, and agency. These reinterpretations challenge traditional narratives and provide a platform for rethinking the role of women in mythology, offering a more inclusive and dynamic representation of female characters in ancient texts.

Conclusion

The reimagining of Sita in the works of Devdutt Pattanaik and Amish Tripathi provides a refreshing and empowering perspective on a character traditionally seen as the embodiment of virtue and passive endurance. Through their feminist reinterpretations, both authors challenge the conventional portrayal of Sita as a mere symbol of suffering and obedience, instead highlighting her strength, agency, and resilience. Pattanaik's introspective approach focuses on Sita's emotional depth and her ability to navigate societal constraints, portraying her as a woman of silent strength. In contrast, Tripathi offers a more active depiction of Sita, positioning her as a warrior and a leader, actively shaping her own destiny through physical strength, intelligence, and leadership.

Both authors contribute to a broader feminist discourse in mythology, breaking away from the patriarchal limitations imposed on women in traditional texts. By reinterpreting Sita, Pattanaik and Tripathi not only breathe new life into a centuries-old character but also create space for a more inclusive representation of women in literature. Their works empower readers to reconsider gender roles within ancient myths and challenge the traditional, often restrictive, narratives that have defined female characters for centuries. In doing so, they offer a compelling vision of female empowerment, making Sita not just a symbol of passive virtue but a figure of strength, resilience, and autonomy in her own right.

References

1. Herman, P. K. (2022). Sita. In *Hinduism and Tribal Religions* (pp. 1486-1490). Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands.
2. Parvathy, B. M. (2021). Myth Revisionism and the Reclamation of Lost Voices: A Critique of Recontextualization of Stereotypes in Selected Literary Texts. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Review (IJHSSR)* ISSN 2582-9106, 1(2), 73-80.
3. Pattanaik, Devdutt (2013). *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana*. Penguin Books India.
4. Pattanaik, Devdutt(2008). *The Pregnant King*. Penguin Books India.
5. Spacciante, V. (2024). Circe, the female hero. First-person narrative and power in Madeline Miller's *Circe*. *Classical Receptions Journal*, 16(4), 405-418.
6. Tripathi, Amish (2015). *Ram: Scion of Ikshvaku*. Westland Publications.
7. Tripathi, Amish (2017). *Sita: Warrior of Mithila*. HarperCollins India.