

Why Mythological Women Matter? Critiquing the Centering of Sita and Draupadi in Select Retellings

Khem Raj Sharma and Shikha Pawar

¹ Assistant Professor, Dharamshala, India

² PhD Scholar, Dharamshala, India

Emails: drrajsharma162@gmail.com; Chikupawar70@gmail.com

Abstract

Literature in varied genres explicates infinite meanings in a text thereby opening numerous possibilities for their re-writing, re-visioning, reinterpretation, and retellings. This attempt is then “a process of recovery and reformation” to revitalize old myths by a new interpretation. Derrida’s notion of opening up the weave of writing to enable other meanings to come to the fore offers feminists a “looking back” (Rich 35), “a revolutionary potential to counter the phallogocentric system” (Sellers 26). The holy trinity of the second wave of feminism introduced and emphasized *Écriture Feminine* to recover the suppressed feminine voices in the multitude of masculine voices; and questioned and explained patriarchy’s subjugation techniques in mythology and other literatures. “Retelling” is “the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction” (Rich 35). What Diana Purkiss identifies as three modes of re-writing poetry can be safely applied to the feminist re-vision of myths: The shifting of focus from male to female; transposing the terms from negative to positive; and allowing a minor character to tell the tale. This paper critiques the centering of Sita and Draupadi in some retellings, thereby ascertaining them as epitomes of timeless ideal of the influential femininity. Further, researchers will try to tackle the subtle nuances of politics of representation and misrepresentation on which the modern-day theory of ‘feminism’ rests.

Keywords: Mythology; Feminism; Patriarchy; Retellings; Mis/representations

The feminist re-writing of myths subverts “the dominant ideology’s hidden male bias” (Ostriker 214) and makes “corrections” to the constructed “images of what women have collectively and historically suffered” (Ostriker 73). Several women writers have revised the old myths including Anne Sexton, Anne Rich, Barbara Walker, Marina Warner, Angela Carter, Margaret Atwood in the west; while in India, notable writers include Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Pratibha Ray, Mahasweta Devi, Githa Hariharan, Kavita Kane, and Devdutt Pattanaik. Their writings are not “pleasurable reversals or ingenious tinkering but new embroideries, adding fresh images and colours to radically alter the picture” (Sellers 29). The most popular Indian epics are Ramayana and Mahabharata; mostly, every person is well aware with the central plot lines of these two mythological texts. Above mentioned writers have meticulously tried to re-write these texts, and somewhere tried to tackle the imbedded faults. But the question still remains; wouldn’t it be extremely tricky to refix the angle from which these epics have been seen from the longest of time? Therefore, it indeed is the question of our times ‘why the mythological women, like Sita and Draupadi, matters’?

Hindu mythology is bereft of a feminist lens. Stories like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are being passed down for centuries as the literal words of gods, teaching men how to lead a good life. But what about women? This way down the lane, our forthcoming generations would wonder about where is the idea of inclusivity of women in them. They have turned out to be misogynistic narratives. So, this study is centered on the position of women as seen in the two epics and attempts to evaluate and critique the presence of Sita and Draupadi in the texts. It will certainly be a relooking, rereading and even retelling of all the women in these mythological texts. The main quest would be the reason of such expeditious urgency to re-examine these texts through varied creative practices. It eventually comes to the ‘politics’ that is still retained in the texts viz. the politics of writing, the politics of framing, the politics of narrating, and the politics of faith. Further, there are traces of politics in the most recent retellings of these texts. In *Cultural Politics*, Jordan and Weedon claim that “everything in social and cultural life is fundamentally to do with power. Power is at the center of cultural politics. It is integral to culture” (11). The vigor of the term politics substantially retains its power through manipulation. The women are credited with the responsibility of being the holy reasons for the happenings of greatest wars, for further fashioning of religious and morally refined world order. In a way, it is a manipulative strike on the ‘identity’ of an individual or on the gender, to which they identify themselves.

Sita and Draupadi have been hailed as two iconic figures in the annals of Indian mythological history. Contemporary Indian and even some of the western authors have tried to deconstruct the inherent rigidity in the original mythological texts by retelling the Ramayana and Mahabharata in different generic forms and with a change in perspective. The Indian literary archive has been completely flooded with the remarkable retellings of both the epics: *Bhisham Pitamah* (1988) by Suryakant Tripathi Nirala; *Shudra Tapasvi* (1946) by K. V. Puttapa; *Andha Yug* (1954) by Dharamvir Bharati; *Mahaprasthan* (1981) by Naresh Mehta; *Rashmirathi* (1952) by Ramdhari Singh Dinkar; *Pandavpuram* (1995) by A. Sethumadhavam ; *The Great Indian Novel* (1989) by Shashi Tharoor; *The Outcast's Queen* (2013) by Kavita Kane; *The Indian Epics Retold* (1995) by R. K. Narayan; *Draupadi* (1997) by Mahasweta Devi; *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi* (1984) by Pratibha Ray; *The Palace of Illusions* (2008) and *The Forest of Enchantments* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni; *Karna's Wife: Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of the Mahabharata* (2010), *The Book of Ram* (2012), *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of Ramayana* (2013); and *Shikhandi and other Tales They Don't Tell You* (2014) by Devdutt Pattanaik , and positively many more.

The series of adaptations of these epics in continuing TV serials too have related the anguish of Sita and Draupadi in varied ways. The first broadcast of the show *Ramayana* took place between 1987 and 1988 on DD National. It was written and directed by Ramanand Sagar, and narrated by Ashok Kumar. It was created for the fulfilment of religious and emotional state of vulnerable humans of those times. Sita was shown as a true archetype of loving, pious, soft and patient women. The later version of Ramayana was the re- rendition of old one, with a more natural set-ups and genuineness in it. Sita was beautiful and calm, but with a touch of awareness of her situation; her eyes has somewhere shown the sparks of anger. It was directed by Anand Sagar and got broadcast in the year 2008. Similarly, the well-known original Mahabharat's series was broadcasted between 1988 and 1990, on Doordarshan. It was produced by B. R. Chopra and directed by Ravi Chopra. It was a mere dramatic version of Mahabharat, focusing on the celebrated heroes and ignoring the emotions of significant female characters of the epic. But Mahabharata that we saw in 2013, has somewhere handled the nuances and discrepancies of the epic in a true sense. It was created by Siddharth Kumar Tewary. It was adapted and directed in such a way that every eye was forced to get glued to the character of Draupadi only. She was beautiful, fierce, feminine, out-spoken, sharp-minded; she was everything at once.

Draupadi and Sita are two of the most charismatic women protagonists of the two great epics, Mahabharata and Ramayana respectively. We can compare and see the contrast between their personality. They have been thought to be of contrasting personalities which have lasting

impact on their individual lives. Sita's serenity was thought to be like a calm and still river on a full moon day, but Draupadi's passion and anger was intense like a roaring flame; these could be a mere speculation as well. But the thing that will amaze an individual with a mind of no biases, that what would be the reason which must kept Sita from blazing like a fire in anger after being doubted for her morals and chastity? Or if Draupadi wouldn't have calmness in her character, would she had she forgiven her perfidious husbands?

Both were born quite unusually. While Sita was a blessing from earth's womb; Draupadi was born out of the holy fire of yagna. Both the heroines were "wed in svayamvara, and each was given to a man who proved himself the best archer of his time." In Sita's Svayamvara, Ram comes and succeeds in winning her hand by breaking Shiva's bow; while in the case of Draupadi, Arjun triumphs by piercing the eye of a fish with an arrow. Sita is abducted by Ravana in solitude, while Draupadi's disrobing by Dushasana occurs in public. Sita religiously followed her husband and did live in forest for straight 14-year, while Draupadi and her husbands were cast out for 12 years with an additional year that they had to spent in hiding. Eventually, the circle of Sita's life ended in the lap of Earth, whereas Draupadi escapades into the Himalayas with her husbands. Their fates were relatively similar but still, their uniqueness stands out for sure.

One woman in the Indian cultural tradition, Sita, is revered for her unquestioning submission and sacrifices. When we hear her name, certain adjectives reluctantly crop up in our minds and become attributes of all women. However, the contemporary woman is determined to upset the apple cart of patriarchy and the retellings of Ramayanas in varied genres and texts are a step in this direction. Sita, in these retellings defies the female stereotype of an ideal Indian wife and hold the rein in her hand. But in *Sita: Warrior of Mithila*, Amish Tripathi has beautifully shown the new side of Sita's personality which had been mostly concealed in other telling of epic. She was a warrior born out of mother earth itself; she has the skills of an administrator, strategist and warrior. She took such amazing marksmanship after her mother, a female, who take care of the state when its king was immersed in the philosophy out from the bounds of actual problems.

Foregrounding the bitter truth that female voices seldom find place in the pages of history, these retellings make these women aware of the masked oppression that is dug deep in their psychology and is paralyzing them. An obliviousness leads to the submission; submission before the fear, disrespect and inequity. But our mythological heroines never felt at ease even after being designated as the holy and pious goddesses. Amish Tripathi has well said in his

work *Sita: Warrior of Mithila*, “Freedom of speech was curtailed so that verbal violence could also be controlled. Disagreement was discouraged. This is how the Bharatas felt that heaven could be created on earth; by making strength powerless, and weakness powerful” (62).

Despite all nuances in the story leading it to varied directions, it could be asserted that Sita’s existence is a must for the continuance of the tale of Ram. When Ram is determined to follow the advice of his father, Dashrath, Sita immediately join her hand with him. Further, when she was abducted, and was sitting in the Ashoka Grove, waiting for Ram, Hanuman’s arrival perplexes her. She deliberates that her earlier return with Hanuman could have kept the war at bay and the consequent massacre and bloodshed. Hanuman rectifies her and tells her about the codes, values and honor of the Kshatriya race. A husband must save his wife. Rama should come, fight, kill the evil abductor and win Sita as “the prize of victory” (Reddy 3). Anne Cranny- Francis in *Feminist Fiction* aptly points out that “female characters, encoded with the ideological positioning of women are accordingly passive, objectified, positioned as prize or reward for consumption by an active, aggressive male subject” (87). Commodification of women is an utterly bad thing, but patriarchy has been able to manipulate women and maintain this through its shrewd falsification of the idea of ideal womanhood.

When Ram dejects Sita by thrusting the fire test on her to prove her purity and to savor his duties as a kshatriya king, she gets perturbed. She rebukes Rama for abusing her love and for being blind to what she has “endured and suffered.” Here, the use of writerly prerogative places the discourse of an involuntary comparison between Ram and Ravana in many retellings. Deconstructing the traditional ideal wife perspective, Sita finds Ravana’s actions more justifiable. While inside the chamber for the fire test, Sita realizes that in this androcentric world, ‘scribes and Valmiki’s will rewrite history as ... they like it’ and she will be thrown into the dustbin of history. She asks people to remember her not as a goddess of virtue but as a defenceless woman” (8). Later, she chooses to get buried into the mother earth, when for the second time an opportunity for living happily with her beloved husband and family reaches her. It is the display of her empowerment against the domiciliary emotional abuse. Sita of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s *The Forest of Enchantments* says:

O king of Ayodhya, you know I’m innocent, and yet, unfairly, you’re asking me to step into the fire. You offer me a tempting prize indeed—to live in happiness with you and my children. But I must refuse. Because if I do what you demand, society will use my action forever after to judge other women. Even when they aren’t guilty, the burden of proving their innocence will fall on them. And society will say. (Divakaruni 54)

With her audacious resisting spirit, Sita breaks the stamped shell of passivity and deconstructs the mythical tradition of male chauvinism that find its basis in these ideological and cultural texts blindly followed as the source of moral and cultural ethics. In the graphic novel *Sita's Ramayana*, written by Samhita Arni and illustrated by the Patua artist Moyna Chitrakar, Sita rejects the passionate and tender proposal of coming back to Ayodhya as a queen, but after proving her virtuousness once again. It will never be acceptable for a woman to prove herself again and again, when in similar situation, the rules for male counter-part would be different.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's in *The Forest of Enchantments* outlines the contours of several shadowy female figures in the myth through Sita's interactions with them—Kaikai, Ahalya, Surpanakha's and Mandodari are all reconstructed. It is a very human story of these women who have often been misunderstood and relegated to the margins. A powerful comment on duty, betrayal, infidelity and honor, it is also about women's struggle to retain autonomy in a world that privileges men, as Chitra makes it more relevant than ever, in the underlying questions in the novel: How should women be treated by their loved ones? What are their rights in a relationship? When does a woman need to stand up and say, 'Enough!' However, Banerjee's Sita protests largely internally and sometimes feebly externally. She mostly yields to Ram's implacability and while she raises questions, she ends up swallowing her own answers. Her reminiscing remains largely personal, an internal dialogue which supposedly fuels her anger at the injustices women have to face—where does this anger dissipate then?

Wouldn't it be uninspiring for showcasing such dull hold of a female over the autonomy of own life? Furthermore, it is going to motivate a female to be feeble, accepting and patient towards the abuse in a patriarchal community. Divakaruni's Sita is not silent! She is not keeping her head down when her mind needed to protest; her mouth is not sealed out of love for her husband. Most important, she is not a simp, rejecting her own feelings, emotions, respect, dignity or any other valid response towards the foul play. In this text, Sita interrogates the obvious dichotomy between good and bad. One's dharma could be an abuse towards someone other as it is a mere understanding of an individual towards the dharma and duty of conduct. We all can have different perspectives toward our understanding of right and wrong. Divakaruni's Sita is also hopeful for her husband's love but she understands when to mark the line and to cut all the threads leading towards the wrecking of self-respect and dignity. She is persuasive and mature; she speaks with a thunder in her tone, "You aren't some weak-willed

wenches. You can control your emotions. Remember all that you've survived. Behave like the queen you are. No one can take your dignity away from you. You lose it only by your own actions" (32).

Devdutt Patnaik's *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana* retells the Ramayana, drawing attention to the many oral, visual and written retellings composed in different times, in different places, by different poets, each one trying to solve the puzzle in its own unique way. In this, Sita is not a victim. Undoubtedly, her childhood has been all confined in reading and understanding Upanishads. She is wise and strong. A single mother to her sons, she is independent, not abandoned. It is Ram who is seen struggling to come to terms with what he must do as king. He remains devoted to Sita, and walks into the river Sarayu chanting her name. Many people have created their own retellings and versions of Sita's story with different opinions and visions but Devdutt's story intermixes the story as Ram's Sita and Sita's Ram. Through Sita's voice, he has tried to depict the issues of modern women. She is speaking modern words in a historic setup, and dealing with the difficulties of a woman as an individual in temporal timeline. Her dialogues with the other characters, could be seen as the short-speeches and moral lectures on the empowerment. When Lakshman emotionally said to Sita, "But you are innocent" (42). She replied, "And if I was not? Would it then be socially appropriate and legally justified for a husband to throw his woman out of his house? A jungle is preferable to such an intolerant society" (42). She is smart, strong-minded and decision maker. She had chosen to accompany her husband in the forest. She did fight back when Ravana attacked her and acted smartly leaving the marks that could lead to her during her abduction. She is hopeful for Rama's love because of their bond and affection; she is not worried about the social structures and her superior position in it. She is immaculate rendition of modern and strong women; and it is depicted well by Devdutt, "He had liberated her long ago from the burden of being Ram's wife. But he would always be Sita's husband" (76).

Do mythological Indian women lack empowerment? Or there is an immediate need of unaltered depiction of their lives and actions candidly! It is debatable; the politics of writing has perhaps encouraged the fallacious portrayal of every notion. Namita Gokhale's text *In search of Sita: Revisiting Mythology*, deals with an argument that mythological women were never feeble and weak. In contrast, they were unapologetically bold and authoritative. This misrepresentation presumably suited with the nature of the society; no one was trying to uphold the significance a female's worth. Gokhale has stated in her book:

The story of Sita lifting the Shiva dhanushya, which it takes 5000 servants to fetch for Rama to break (Bala Kanda, sarg 66), signifies the onset of puberty. Yet, if we are to

take this literally, we have to ask what happened to this strong woman after marriage that she let herself be abducted by Ravana without a fight. (Gokhale 38)

The central argument of Vayu Naidu's *Sita's Ascent* was about the Sita's strength and intelligence, just like many other writers. But the most recurrent impressions that we witness in our mythological texts are an act of assigning the halo of holiness to anything or everyone; it makes actions justifiable. One has to be more 'accepting,' 'patient,' 'loving,' 'forgiving' etc., in order to setting an example for religious or spiritual subjects. If Sita would have argued with Rama on the event of fire-test, it will somewhat harm their holy pious bond. Similarly, if Draupadi would have started blaming her husband, the title of being a loyal and dutiful wife would be shattered. Our ancient heroines will get justice for their emotional and character damages, only if we will treat them like an ordinary woman. Vaya Naidu also talks about the matter of women to be 'perfect,' before-hyphen of any role. A woman should be a perfect-wife, perfect- mother, perfect daughter-in-law and so on. Sita was sent off to the ashram because she was not a chaste woman as per the societal rules; she couldn't be a 'perfect' wife to Rama. So, she devoted her life for the well-being of her sons.

It is a popular phrase, 'ignorance is a bliss'. It is a bliss if one aspires to do nothing in his or her life. Ignorance leads us towards the passivity, extraneous idea of acceptance and hardships. Volga's Sita is well aware about her own strengths, capabilities and potential. In Volga's book *The Liberation of Sita*, Sita states "I am the daughter of Earth, Rama. I have realised who I am. The whole universe belongs to me. I don't lack anything. I am the daughter of Earth" (54). The most contemporary angle to look at these epics have been used by Sini Panicker. Sini Panicker got inspired from #MeToo movement for writing *Sita: Now You Know Me*. This title should be reframed as 'Now You Know Me Too'. The retellings have helped readers to know Sita in a more personal and raw space. It is an astounding example portraying the bigotries that women had to face in mythological epics. There is one more extremely interesting stance taken by the author in the book regarding the manner in which Sita survived in Lanka during her captivity; it was her will-power and strength that helped to stay strong in the situation of isolation, troubles and distress. We have seen the similar situations full of isolation and distress during the times of Covid pandemic quarantines. So, it doesn't matter how uncanny this comparison is; now, most of the people could understand the troubles that Sita had faced. Amish Tripathi in his book *Sita: Warrior of Mithila*, has fantastically jotted down a retelling in his hyperlink style of narration, which can entirely be dedicated to Sita; it's Sita's Ramayana in a true sense. He tried to showcase a distinction that we all can easily point

out in our individual social atmospheres as well. It is remarkable, how anything commanding, efficient and dutiful is regarded as one of the masculine traits; whereas anything creative, caring, loving and passionate is automatically a feminine trait.

Another female archetype in mythological texts and in history is Draupadi, who has been accredited as the archetype of a virtuous woman, very loyal to her husbands and enormously patient. Draupadi is the most beautiful, brave and controversial heroine among all mythological female characters and she has carved her name forever in the annals of history. Carl Jung has said that “All the most powerful ideas in history go back to archetypes” (153). Many contemporary authors have retold her story from different perspectives so as to counter certain misrepresentations in Mahabharata.

In *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi*, Pratibha Ray makes an admirable attempt to present a balanced portrait of Draupadi and in doing so, skilfully brings to the forefront the deeper aspects of the character and mind of the remarkable Pandava Queen. The undoubted heroine of the Mahabharata, one of the honored 'pancha sati', one of the five most virtuous women in Hindu mythology, Draupadi is still seen by many as the woman responsible for the greatest war of all time. Simon de Beauvoir wrote in her book *Second Sex*, “Women have gained only what men have been willing to grant” (64). Undoubtedly, men have played major role in restricting the choices and roles of women. But we can never look over other affecting factors; multiple agencies played different roles in limiting the binding boundary of a female's dreams. We couldn't get sure of the fact that whether mythological women were veritably passive or this notion got constructed fallaciously over the period of time. Thus, for counteracting on the prevalent idea of women's passivity and emotional timidness, the campaign of writing 'retellings' started. And writing do liberate unquestionably. It unshackled a thick chain from Draupadi's feet by the end of her life, when she manages to write her woes to her Sakha Krishna. She was a strong and fierce woman, but still there is a stigma attached with her name. She did nothing objectionable and wrong; it was everyone else who did wrong to her. But still her name is burdened with the heaviness of social disparities and patriarchy.

Mahasweta Devi's "Draupadi" focuses on a young Santhal woman, Dopdi Mehjen, a feared Naxalite, along with her husband, Dulna Majhi and their comrades. It follows the efforts of the local police and army officers, led by the Senanayak to capture Dopdi, after having hunted down; and killed her husband. It is this process of dehumanization that is continued when Dopdi is captured. Once captured, she must be 'countered', degraded and dehumanized, “where your hands are tied behind you...all your bones are crushed, your sex is a terrible wound” (65). In an effort to get her to speak and betray her comrades, Dopdi is raped multiple times by the local officers. Prior to her capture, Dopdi, aware of the torture she is likely to put

be through, steels herself to silence. As she is raped, Dopdi refuses to speak, ashamed when a 'tear trickles out of the corner of her eye'.

Later, after the men have left, Devi shifts the gaze to that of Dopdi's, as she surveys the site of violence – her own body. No language can come close to communicating the horror of what Dopdi has been subjected to. Mahasweta Devi invests Dopdi's body with the history, the narrative, that is being denied by the gaze of the officers. Dopdi's act of refusing to respond or react to the violence being inflicted on her body is an act of rebellion. Through a language that is visceral, Devi captures the violence the State inflicts on Dopdi's body in its efforts to turn her from a rebellious body to a pliant and submissive one. And, it is through the same language that Devi captures Dopdi's defiance and subversion as a woman, specifically, a tribal woman who is part of the Naxalite movement.

After her rape, the officers ask Dopdi to get dressed before they can take her to the Senanayak. She walks out, naked, bruised and wounded, refusing to hide the evidence of brutality and unwilling to be shamed. This disturbs the officers and the Senanayak who are unsure of what to do with this woman who forces them to confront their own depravity. Her disrobing stands in stark contrast to that of her namesake in the Mahabharata. She stands, without a savior, disrobed and brutalized, but unwilling to bear the shame for a violation committed upon her. Her challenge inverts the dynamic of power and renders the Senanayak powerless.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusion* is a novel about a royal queen who offered her entire life to master love, anger, and desires. It deals with the multifaceted realities and provides us with a space to conceptualize our individualistic responses or judgments for them. Her novel is the amalgamation of varied narratives but has not been constructed for showcasing the victory of virtue over vices, and doesn't deal with the moral instructions of society. Draupadi is the most acclaimed mythological character, whose disrobing by the Kauravas has been considered as the root cause of the great war of Mahabharata. But Devakaruni's characterization of Draupadi is entirely different. Just like any other woman of her age, Draupadi has been a demanding woman with desires, judgments and perspectives of her own. She has never been a princess only but has much more to her personality, which gets reflected by the depth of her psyche, social relations and cultural positioning. Her response to gender discrimination has never been passive, and she actively rejects being submissive and polite to get accepted by society. Gender discrimination is the unequal or disadvantageous treatment of an individual based on gender.

Evidently, she knows that her life has been overburdened with the important role of sequencing the order of actions and being a root cause of war, which will remain in history persistently. Devakurni's Draupadi is rebellious, devoid of love and acceptance, and has forced to live life in an unconventional setup. Others have been treating her as a puppet in a drama since she is born whose strings are in the hands of everyone else but have no control of her own. King Drupad is a better king but never an idealized father. In a similar manner, Dhri loves his sister, but never supports her desires and choices. Draupadi is a high-born princess, even though she does not liberate herself from the coarser social, cultural and religious confines. She wants to live utmost instead of just breathing. Panchali retaliated on every level but has never succeeded. In *The Palace of Illusions* Banerjee has tried to shatter the frameworks with which society has been categorizing women from the start of the time. She is questioning the core of our cultural and religious codes that mark the distinction between being sinful or promiscuous.

Whenever we talk about Mahabharata, there are few selected terms that automatically come into our minds. The 'dharam' and 'revenge' is the sole essence of Mahabharata. And the definition of dharam is also laid openly in front of us; it leaves us with no choice to grapple or ponder on the variability of its sense. Its definition could be different for everyone; ones 'dharam' could be 'adharam' for another. Saiswaroopaa Iyer's *Draupadi: The Tale of an Empress* deals with this lack of space attributed to above mentioned terms. Iyer's Draupadi has her own sense of dharma and duty, and she is fiercely clear minded about her choices. Draupadi said in the book, "When we lay claim to what is rightfully ours, we shall stop at nothing. We shall go to any lengths in undoing the damage done till now" (43). Vamshi Krishna's *Draupadi: India's First Daughter* talks about the strengths and hardships of Draupadi from the time she took birth out of raging fire, till the end of her life. Every stage of her life was her practice ground that later helped her to tackle new trouble. She was the true example of a human with unlimited wits, courage and intelligence. Her every step was towards the reconstruction of her self-respect and dignity; yet, she never gave up on her family as well. Vamshi's outspoken Draupadi questions, "If a man finds her beautiful, it's her fault. If she exudes self-confidence in her life, it is her fault. If she fights for her dignity, it is her fault. If she craves the freedom of expression, it is her fault. What action of woman is not faulty" (76)?

Ira Mukhoty talked about popular idea that it was indeed a woman who became cause of the monstrous and destructive wars. But she did so in a completely new manner. She hasn't written her book with the purpose of blaming women. She was completely wowed by the idea that a female 'was' always in the center of historical happenings and chronicles. And as true as this fact is, the worth and role of a woman would never be questionable? Ira's *The Songs of*

Draupadi: A Novel completely revolves around Draupadi, being a soul and heart of Mahabharata.

Conclusions

Ultimately, it is drawn that women have never been powerless. Going back to the genesis of time, it is from the Aadi Shakti, whose literal meaning itself is perpetual power, out of which the godly and human race originated. The ultimate trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh and their female counterparts, Saraswati, Laxmi and Mahakali too get originated from that Adi Jagdamba. When the male gods of those times were in distress, these *Shakti* used to come forward to rescue them. Indian mythological tales are replete with such narratives. Considering the mythological tales of Ramayana and Mahabharat, it can be reiterated that Sita and Draupadi are not only the epitome of women but are the protagonist of these epics. This claim stands validated in the ancient form of these epics which we cannot imagine without these two female characters. They are indispensable for the furtherance of the narratives. However, they stand already centered within the original narratives, but somehow the consequent renderings in the form of reinterpretations, rewritings, revisioning and retellings of these stories in different time periods have tried to place a patriarchal set up in them. It is because of such misrepresentations that the modern expositions of these epic fables in their retellings have tried to re-center the subjugated and subaltern females in them. As Divakaruni's Sita has stunningly said, "And finally, I bless my daughters, who are yet unborn. I pray that, if life tests them—as sooner or later life is bound to do—they'll be able to stand steadfast and think carefully, using their hearts as well as their heads, understanding when they need to compromise, and knowing when they must not." (187) Such feminist re-writings, re-visioning's, and retellings of the ancient mythological texts both by male and female authors rescues what is suppressed and releases energies which can be directed towards female empowerment.

Works Cited

- Beauvoir, Simone De. *Second Sex*. Everyman, 1993.
- Devi, Mahasweta. "Draupadi." *Breast Stories*, Seagull Books, 2014.
- Divakaruni, Chitra Banerjee. *The Palace of Illusions*. Doubleday, 2008.
- Divakaruni, Chitra Banerjee. *The Forest of Enchantments*. HarperCollins India, 2019.
- Gokhale, Namita. *In Search of Sita: Revisiting Mythology*. Penguin India, 2009.
- Iyer, Saiswaroopa. *Draupadi: The Tale of an Empress*. Rupa Publications India, 2019.
- Jordan, Glenn, and Chris Weedon. *Cultural Politics: Class, Gender, Race And The Postmodern World*. Wiley-Blackwell, 1994.
- Krishna, Vamshi. *Draupadi - India's First Daughter*. Paper Towns Publishers, 2020.
- Mukhoty, Ira. *Songs of Draupadi: A Novel*. Aleph Book Company, 2021.
- Naidu, Vayu. *Sita's Ascent*. Penguin India, 2012.
- Panicker, Sini. *Sita: Now You Know Me*. Rupa Publications India, 2021.
- Pattanaik, Devdutt. *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of Ramayana*. Penguin India, 2013.
- Ray, Pratibha. *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi*. Rupa, 1995.
- Tripathi, Amish. *Sita: Warrior of Mithila*. HarperCollins India, 2022.
- Volga. *The Liberation of Sita*. Translated by T. Vijay Kumar and C. Vijayasree, Harper Perennial, 2018.

Author's bio-note

1. **Khem Raj Sharma** teaches English Literature in the Department of English, Central University of Himachal Pradesh, Dharamshala. As a researcher, his areas of interest include Postcolonial Literatures, Indian Writing in English, Folk Literature, Diasporic Literature, Comparative Literature and Translation Studies. He has published 50 research papers in national and international journals of repute, including two co-edited book, *Critical Voices on Toni Morrison* (2015) and *Cats Talk* (2018).

2. **Shikha Pawar** is a PhD Research Scholar in the Department of English, Central University of Himachal Pradesh, Dharamshala, Himachal Pradesh.
