

## Unveiling the Untold: A Retelling of Sita in Modern Literature with a Special Focus on Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Feminist Rendition in *The Forest of Enchantments*

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### Abstract

Within the context of the world's mythical heritage, Indian history is a priceless find, with a rich legacy marked by the potent influence of revered goddesses and mythological women. Indian tradition has elevated its women in classical and sacred history more than any other civilization, thus enhancing the appreciation of Indian culture across the world. Indian mythology's outstanding female figures have made a lasting impression by standing for courage, tenacity, and profound understanding. These extraordinary women have stood the test of time and become symbols of female empowerment, and future generations are motivated by their incredible tales. Their traditional pursuits, which are deeply rooted in a sense of obligation, morality, and altruism, show a rich cultural tapestry of generosity. The most highly venerated character in Hindu mythology, Sita is the main character in the epic *Ramayana*. Her remarkable degree of dedication is demonstrated by her everlasting devotion to Lord Rama during the exile, as well as by her remarkable resilience and diligent work throughout her days in Ashok Vatika. From Sita's perspective, the story of *The Forest of Enchantments* is told. She communicates her happiness and sadness as a human. Nature plays an important role in Sita's journey. Both the natural environment and herself are healable. The work presents a harmonious portrayal of the symbiotic interaction between nature and the obstacles encountered by women. The story depicts Sita's life in Mithila, her love for Ram, their marriage, her life in the Ayodhya palace, her days in exile, her feelings and yearning for motherhood, her agony during her days in captivity, and, in the end, her sadness.

**Keywords:** *Sita, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, The Forest of Enchantments, King Rama, Indian culture.*

The charm of mythology is that it is boundless - in time and content. Why are thousand-year-old stories still so appealing to us today? Because we immediately relate to them. They are not old tales or legends, they extrapolate aspects of one's life, supplying symbols and analogies that carry forward and celebrate the human spirit yet bringing out the counteracting human inadequacies. It is not about godliness but humanity that mythology talks about.

(Kavita Kane)

In the realm of global mythological legacies, Indian history stands out as an unparalleled treasure, with a profound inheritance distinguished by the powerful presence of adored

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goddesses and legendary female figures. Unlike any other civilisation, Indian tradition has elevated its women in classical and religious history, contributing considerably to global admiration for Indian culture. The great female characters in Indian mythology have left a discernible impact, representing strength, perseverance, and deep insight. These legendary women have transcended time, emerging as icons of empowerment, and their astonishing stories continue to inspire generations. Their ancient endeavours, which are profoundly defined in a sense of duty, morality, and humanitarianism, reveal a rich cultural tapestry of magnanimity. Sita, the most prominently revered figure in Hindu mythology and the central character in the epic Ramayana stands at the forefront of these significant ethical models, exemplifying remarkable love and perseverance. Her unwavering devotion to Lord Rama throughout the exile, along with her extraordinary resilience and firm efforts evident during her days in Ashok Vatika, reflect an astonishing level of determination. In the domain of divine grace, Lakshmi, the goddess of riches and success, participates in a customary effort to bestow prosperity and plenty on her followers. Her relationship with Vishnu emphasises the delicate balance between moral ways and wealth accumulation. We see Parvati, a goddess revered for her undying devotion and limitless love, on a new heavenly dimension. Her story follows a customary path characterised by intense penance and meditation, all aimed at winning Lord Shiva's love. Parvati is revered as the personification of love and devotion, and her unwavering resolve and spiritual strength are shown by her firm adherence to tapasya, or severe austerities. Hindu mythological figure Ahalya undertakes a journey of penance and virtue, defeating a curse by deep remorse and returning to her former form. Ahalya's narrative resonates with timeless themes of moral reawakening and highlights the transformational power of repentance and restoration. Anasuya, the wife of the sage Atri, is revered for her custom of resisting the temptations of the Trimurti (Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva) and turning them into something else through her indomitable purity. Anasuya, with her ardent love, transcends worldly temptations and becomes a symbol of virtue. Furthermore, Draupadi is a powerful character from the epic Mahabharata who is well-known for her strength and stanch will. Even in the face of extreme hardship and public disgrace, Draupadi is untiring in her commitment to protecting her honour. Her swayamvara, in which she asserts her agency in selecting a life mate, and her subsequent involvement in the Kurukshetra conflict represent tenacity and a steadfast dedication to justice. These goddesses and legendary symbols add to the complex fabric of Hindu mythology with their opposing but potent traits. As a whole, they represent the dynamic range of feminine divinity found throughout Hindu mythology's deep and complex folds.

## **Literary Horizon and Mythical Resonance of Great Epics in Literature**

Mythology, an everlasting fabric of cultural myths, has a tremendous impact on humanities across the globe. These stories go beyond conventional narratives, embodying worldviews, beliefs, and ideologies inside the collective consciousness of many societies. From Mesopotamia to Hindu, Greek, Norse, and Native American mythology, communities have used foundational myths to shape their identities and define their essence. As says Devdutt Pattanaik "No society can exist without myth ". (Hindustan Times)

Myths are a unique prism, revealing a perception that explains existence, natural forces, and human beginnings. These myths include essential principles embodied by legendary characters, who serve as prototypes of virtue or a life narration. Certainly, these mythical figures are more than just characters in ancient tales; they emerge as architects shaping the richness and depth of literature itself. These strong and diverse women, honoured in mythology, contribute their voices to different stories that transcend time. From the brave Sita in the Ramayana to the indomitable Draupadi in the Mahabharata, these individuals reflect everlasting characteristics and provide a source of inspiration for literary endeavours. Their complexity, hardships, and achievements serve as a canvas for authors, enabling them to create tales that explore the nuances of the human experience. By delving into the tales of goddesses, heroes, and supernatural creatures, literature not only captures the essence of cultural beliefs but also enhances the conversation about femininity, resilience, and empowerment. The legacy of these female mythical characters, with their timeless storylines, continues to alter and enhance the literary landscape, providing a rich source of inspiration for writers eager to probe into the depths of the human psyche and the mysteries of life.

However, in the traditional narratives, these mythic models often emerge as statues of dedication and sacrifice, portrayed with a soft image that tends to overlook their resilience and aggression. While many literary works perpetuate this traditional portrayal of womanhood, emphasising devotion and mute submission as their revered virtues, the nuanced strength, and assertiveness of these characters often remain unexplored. Take Sita, for instance, an epitome of allegiance and resilience in the revered epic Ramayana. Despite her astonishing strength, she is often overshadowed by the larger-than-life image of her husband, King Rama. Similarly, Draupadi's fierce fight for her rights in the Mahabharata does not always receive the platform it deserves to showcase her exemplary wisdom and dauntlessness. This societal, political, and psychological imbalance has sparked the attention of contemporary writers, leading them to

reconsider and retell the grand epics, positioning female figures as eloquent mouthpieces. Undeniably, this contemporary retelling serves as a seamless bridge connecting modern women to ancient legends, providing a more nuanced and empowering perspective on these timeless tales. Numerous works in Indian literature have revisited the figures of Sita and Draupadi, providing intriguing retellings that depict them as strong, resilient, and confident women who are not hesitant to claim their rights and positions. These literary excursions go beyond traditional tales, offering varied viewpoints on legendary individuals from Indian mythology. Kavita Kane in an interview with Times of India expresses:

Retelling of mythology is not new, it is dominant in regional literature. Besides, literature and mythology have always been interwoven, where mythology is used more as a literary technique than just a retelling of old stories. It is more than that. It is revisiting, revising, and almost recreating. (Web Source)

### **Revisiting Sita in Contemporary Literary Works**

In Hindu mythology, Sita is portrayed as a heavenly being who is the earthly manifestation of Lord Vishnu's wife, the goddess Lakshmi. Through a supernatural symbol that transcends the realm of mortals, Sita becomes a representation of richness and tranquillity, a manifestation of celestial grace. Symbolically emerging from the embrace of 'Mother Earth', Sita appears in the holy verses of Valmiki's Ramayana not only as a human but also as the earthly offspring of the divine. Like a literary prologue, this unusual beginning narrative prepares the reader for Sita's exceptional traits and her predetermined place in the cosmic drama that is enacted in the epic's verses. It feels as if Sita is whispering through Valmiki's words, "From the Earth, I rose, a testament to the cosmic ballet,". Valmiki presents Sita as the model of virtue and devotion; her unshakable love for Lord Rama is like a song to heaven resonating through the ages. "In every heartbeat, I compose the verses of loyalty and devotion," asserts Valmiki's Sita, encapsulating the principles of pativrata dharma, in which fidelity to one's spouse is elevated to the status of holy lyrics recorded in Hindu history. Sita's relationships with every person in the epic are a reflection of her empathy and compassion, which are like gentle ripples on a calm pond. Her generosity to the natural world, animals, and other living things creates a picture of a caring deity. She muses, "In the embrace of empathy, I find the essence of my existence," her persona exuding a sympathetic atmosphere that transcends the mere mortal.

However, in a contemporary literary odyssey, many authors have embarked on a quest to reinterpret the timeless tale of Sita, portraying her in an entirely new light that manages to perfectly balance the traditional and the modern. In their hands, the beloved emblem of moral

excellence transforms, dispelling the constraints of conventional storytelling. In Sita's character, from the sacred verses of Valmiki to the contemporary retelling by R.K. Narayan, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, and Amish Tripathi, we witness a dynamic interplay of tradition and reinterpretation, a symphony that resonates through the ages, ensuring that the divine figure of Sita continues to inspire, challenge, and evolve. When Sita escapes from the cocoon of antiquity, Divakaruni's Sita says, "Unravelling the layers, I find a narrative reborn," a female perspective giving her a new dimension. Divakaruni's rendition, "I am not confined to the margins of tradition; I am the ink that scripts my destiny," echoes the resolute voice of Sita in this contemporary literary renaissance.

In *The Ramayana: A Shortened Modern Prose Version of the Indian Epic*, by R. K. Narayan, the everlasting moral substance of the legendary epic is profoundly connected to modern readers by a seamless integration of old knowledge into retelling. In Narayan's work, Sita challenges gender stereotypes and offers a progressive retelling of this well-known female figure. She also becomes a symbol of the strength and perseverance of women. Sita's bravery and fortitude, particularly during her trial by fire, raise her profile beyond that of the ordinary damsel in distress. This method dispels stereotypes by offering complex portraits of feminine strength and perseverance. Sita and Draupadi, two of the epic feminine figures that R.K. Narayan personifies, possess both heavenly symbolism and an intrinsic physical and intellectual beauty that may make their partners a proud better half. The very famous contemporary Indian writer Amish Tripathi's Ram Chandra Series recreates Sita in his second book. This series is a modern adaptation of the classic Ramayana. Tripathi examines Sita's life and journey in *Sita: Warrior of Mithila*, showcasing her bravery, perseverance, and military prowess. The narrative challenges preconceived notions in a novel by portraying Sita as a strong, autonomous individual as opposed to a silent sufferer. Amish Tripathi skillfully blends elements of mythology, history, and philosophy to create a compelling novel that captivates readers with its distinct viewpoint on well-known people and events. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Forest of Enchantments* brings Sita to the forefront. By making Sita the protagonist and giving her a voice to express her ideas, emotions, and experiences, Divakaruni deftly alters the plot. We see a complex and compelling portrait of Sita in this modern retelling, which examines her agency and resiliency.

Each of these writers has added to the rich literary heritage of Sita in their own manner. By redefining her role, they dispel prejudices, give a historically marginalised person agency, and provide novel viewpoints that appeal to readers in the modern day. Whether they are told in

literature, graphic novels, or motion pictures, these works add to the continuing discussion regarding the importance of Sita's tale in the ever-changing field of storytelling and literature. These writers make sure that Sita's story is a vibrant and current force in literature, even as she inspires and entralls audiences. However, this paper particularly focuses on the renditions of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Forest of Enchantments*.

### **Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Literary Cosmos Recrafting Myths and Femininity**

The present paper digs into Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's literary works, which explore mythical narratives and their modern significance. Divakaruni, a well-known Indian-American novelist, expertly reinterprets traditional stories, infusing them with fresh perspectives and significance for contemporary audiences. In her works like *The Palace of Illusions* and *The Forest of Enchantments*, she shows classic female figures like Sita and Draupadi, presenting alternate perspectives that contradict traditional narratives. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an Indian-born novelist, poet, and professor. She was born in Kolkata, India, on July 29, 1956. Renowned for her works that delve into topics like ethnic identity, immigration, and the difficulties experienced by women in many civilisations, Divakaruni expertly crafts narratives that emphasise the core of identity and speak to women's perspectives. Her storytelling not only revitalises old stories, but also stimulates contemplation on the legendary narratives' long-term importance in our ever-changing world with modern concerns and contributes to a better understanding of identity, agency, and resilience. With an emphasis on Draupadi, Sita, Urmila, and Surpanakha, Divakaruni reimagines their roles, motives, and relationships. In her works, Divakaruni often focuses on how women have been portrayed, and she openly expresses her dissatisfaction with the portrayal of women in the great epics: As she opens concerning the depiction of Draupadi in *Mahabharata*:

Like many Indian children, I grew up listening to vast, varied, and fascinating tales of the Mahabharata... listening to the stories of the Mahabharata as a young girl..., I was left unsatisfied by the portrayals of the women. It wasn't as though the epic didn't have powerful, complex women characters that affected the action in major ways... But in some way, they remained shadowy figures, their thoughts, and motives mysterious, their emotions portrayed only when they affected the lives of the male heroes, their roles ultimately subservient to those of their fathers or husbands, brothers or sons. If I ever wrote a book ... I would place the women in the forefront of the action. I would uncover the story that lay invisible between the lines of the men's exploits. (Divakaruni xiv)

Ancient epics have always been retold and reimagined; works such as the Ramayana serve as prime examples across cultures and historical eras. Retelling ancient tales in the present day is a dynamic way to address current issues and maintain the spirit of timeless wisdom, all while



fostering a deeper connection with ourselves. The fact that these stories can be reworked and recreated to better represent the complexity of today is a monument to their tenacity and shows that mythology is not limited to the past but rather changes throughout time as a living, breathing tribute to the universal elements of the human experience. The essence is retained throughout this process, showing that mythology is a dialogue that is always taking place between the ancient and the modern, improving our comprehension of both the self and the world we live in. Every retelling of the epic Ramayana offers a unique perspective that reflects the social, cultural, and ideological climate of the period in which it was told. Authors adapt characters and events to suit modern sensibilities by incorporating their own experiences, convictions, and ideals into the story. Adrienne Rich's concept of a "fresh eye" emphasises how crucial it is to view these classic tales from a fresh angle to enable rereading and investigation of the stories' many facets. According to Adrienne Rich:

Re-vision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves. And this drive to self-knowledge, for women, is more than a search for identity: it is part of our refusal of the self-destructiveness of a male-dominated society. (Adrienne Rich, *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence*)

Undoubtedly, these retellings serve as a forum for artistic expression and add to the continuing discussion over the applicability of old myths to the modern world. They can cast doubt on accepted wisdom, provide fresh perspectives that appeal to contemporary audiences, and challenge conventional wisdom. This makes the process of repeating old epics lively and ensures that these timeless tales will always have value in developing human cultures.

### **Sita's Tale through Nature's Lens in *The Forest of Enchantments***

The narrative of *The Forest of Enchantments* is recounted from Sita's point of view. As a person, she expresses her joys and sorrows. In Sita's journey, nature is significant. She can cure herself and the natural world. In the novel, the symbiotic relationship between nature and the challenges faced by women is depicted as harmonious. Sita's existence in Mithila, her love for Ram, their marriage, her life in the palace of Ayodhya, her days in exile, her emotions and longing for motherhood, her sufferings during her days in confinement, and ultimately her grief, in the end, are all shown in the novel. Sita, a heavenly creature in human endeavour, establishes a connection between her and contemporary women. This, certainly, is one of the most refined and simple renditions of the ancient epic *Ramayana*. Divakaruni interprets the epic through a modern perspective, making it a moving and approachable story that appeals to

readers of many backgrounds. This rendition pays homage to the grandeur of the original while also demonstrating the storytelling's timeless ability to transcend time and resonate with the human condition. Divakaruni, known for her feminist viewpoints, narrates both epics with a focus on their female protagonists. As she says:

I'm going to write the story of Sita, I said because I've always been fascinated by the Ramayan. Just like Panchali, my Sita (Yes, with the presumptuous intimacy of authors, I thought of her as mine) will tell her tale. She'll fill in the gaps between the adventures undertaken by the male characters in the epic, their victories, and defeats. She'll tell us what inspired the crucial choices that directed the course of her life. What she believed in. What interested and moved her? How we felt when faced with the deepest of tragedies. And what gave her the ability to overcome them. (The Forest of Enchantments, 6)

*The Forest of Enchantments* skillfully weaves a tapestry of emotions, relationships, and perseverance. This well-known tale gives voice to a female figure who is sometimes eclipsed by her husband Rama's exceptional phenomenon. The story opens with Sita demanding to write her own story that begins with her innocent days in the beautiful country of Mithila, where she, a representative of nature, can be seen charismatically radiating her femininity in her human endeavour. In her, we witness a learned therapist, a warrior, and an innocent daughter of king Janaka. As the story progresses, she enters into the whirlpool of emotion falling in love with Rama, a prince renowned for his courage and integrity:

There was an ocean, undulating gently around me, white-foamed as innocence, so beautiful that for a moment I couldn't breathe. In this world, too, Ram stood in front of me, though there was a great shining around him so I couldn't see his face. This ethereal light that filled the huge space where we seemed to float emanated from a giant gem at his neck. I took a step forward. Inexplicably, shockingly, I longed to rest my head on his bare chest. (The Forest of Enchantments,14)

A celestial celebration takes place with the marriage of these two sublime couples. Nevertheless, as time passes, the couple experiences the unavoidable hardships that eventually result in their banishment to the wilderness as the plot develops. The forest, which is portrayed as a magical location, serves as the setting for Sita's quest for self-awareness and resiliency. The tale deftly examines Sita's emotional terrain as she faces exile, being apart from Rama, and being taken captive by the powerful demon king Ravana. The central theme of the novel is Sita's unshakable confidence in Rama's love despite her troubles. The way that Divakaruni presents Sita as a complex figure is one of the story's main advantages. By highlighting Sita's intellect, bravery, and tenacity, the author defies the stereotype of Sita as a submissive and meek wife. The forest itself takes on a life of its own in the narrative, full of magical elements that test and change anybody who ventures inside. It serves as a metaphor for the trials and uncertainties of life, making Sita face her inner world magnanimously. The novel also looks at



issues of sacrifice, love, and obligation. When Sita's own identity and wants are contrasted with her unshakable dedication to her dharma (duty) as a wife, it raises important considerations about the place of women in ancient civilisations and the sacrifices they made for the sake of society. As the narrative goes on, 'Agni Pariksha', a trial by fire meant to establish Sita's purity, puts her existence to the ultimate test. Nevertheless, this legendary story is reexamined from a perspective that challenges the conventional understanding of Sita's character by highlighting her power rather than painting her as a victim. She defies the traditional interpretation of Valmiki's Sita as a patient and mute victim by embodying the essence of boldness, unflinching self-determination, and stubborn femininity. Even Ravana finds himself captivated by Sita's formidable presence:

“As you know, Sita, I captured you for the purpose of vengeance. But having watched you since the time I took you from your dwelling, I'm filled with admiration for your fiery spirit. I no longer want to keep you imprisoned in my dungeons, as I'd originally intended...” (85)

Ultimately, *The Forest of Enchantments* is a moving and uplifting story that grants Sita agency and turns her into a representation of fortitude, tenacity, and self-discovery. Readers are encouraged to reevaluate the well-known Ramayana story and recognise the richness and nuanced qualities of Sita through Divakaruni's retelling. She empowers Sita with a voice to articulate her opinions, allowing the world to resonate with her profound self-awareness. Divakaruni hopes to dispel the myths surrounding Sita and other women of the epic like Kaikeyi, Ahalya, Mandodari, and Urmila. Here, Divakaruni examines their roles and tales from a distinctively feminine viewpoint, contradicting Valmiki's patriarchal narrative:

Kaikeyi, second queen of Ayodhya, who wrested our throne out of blind devotion to her son, only to be hated by him for it, Ahalya, her beauty turned to stone by a husband's jealous fury; Surpanakha, wild enchanters of the forest, whose gravest crime was to desire the wrong man; Mandodari, the wife to the legendary demon king, forced to watch her kingdom fall into ruin and her beloved son perish because of her husband's obsession with another woman; Urmila, my sweet sister, the forgotten one, the one I left behind as I set off with blithe ignorance on my forest adventure with my husband (*The Forest of Enchantments*, 8)

The author gently purges and eliminates the preconceptions and prejudices that have long dominated Indian society. She reminds us that no one is completely right or completely wrong. Because, like Ram, Sita, and their kin, we are all human, with all of our eccentricities and misconceptions. Nobody should be utterly adored or despised. Our beliefs lead our lives, and they are only as true or false as our eyes teach them to be. Interestingly, readers grasp the narrative through the lens of their own experiences and beliefs.

### **Sita as an Incarnation of Nature**

Sita's affinity with nature is explored throughout the story. Sita's solitude in the forest allows her to reflect and find herself. Surrounded by nature's peace, she engages in reflection, grappling with her identity, purpose, and the obstacles she encounters. Sita asserts: "Because what called to me most powerfully were the forests that I could see from the palace turrets ... No one in my family felt the way I did about forests" (9-10). The forest transforms into a place for her personal development and learning. "My strange Gift with plants was a mystery to me. Perhaps it was because, like them, I was earth-born. Maybe for the same reason when I touched a plant, I knew its healing properties" (9). Sita herself feels that she thinks more clearly under the majestic trees. Sita's journey ahead is not easy, as her mother-in-law Kaikeyi's jealousy sends the pair into fourteen years of exile. Nature gives her strength and power to survive in the turbulent surroundings of Ashok Vatika. Like a mother, nature takes care of her and also guides her. When Sita is abducted by Ravana, the king of Lanka, she spends her days in Ashok Vatika, beneath the shade of the Ashoka tree. Once again, she finds herself in intimate contact with nature. It is worth noting that, despite living in the king's palace, Sita prefers to stay in the garden. Nature provides her consolation, similar to a nursing mother. The plants and animals in the garden seem to understand her grief and agony, providing a unique source of solace and empathy throughout her difficult journey. "... when I touched them, I could feel their sympathy for me. If they were ailing, my touch cured them. And thus we grew to love each other. I was particularly fond of the Ashoka tree under which I slept..." (88).

Deep in the forest, Sita becomes attuned to the quiet voices of women who have suffered silently throughout history. The fluttering leaves and aging trees appear to be speaking the unspoken stories of numerous women who have been marginalised by society's expectations. Sita experiences a strong connection and feels compelled to speak out for them. The strength and repressed grief of mothers, daughters, and queens are woven into a tapestry that is the forest. Inspired by something deep inside herself, Sita picks up a pen and starts to tell these women's unfiltered, unvarnished stories. Sita brings life to their tales in the enchanted atmosphere of the forest, upending conventional wisdom and celebrating unacknowledged accomplishments. By bringing the forest to life, Sita ensures that the voices of the unsung heroes live on in the annals of history, forever changing it into a canvas for them: "Write our story, too. For always we've been pushed into corners, trivialized, misunderstood, blamed, forgotten - or maligned and used as cautionary tales" (8).

### **Sita's Resilience**

Sita's journey takes a dramatic turn when she faces banishment not once, but twice. The second exile happens when she hears a washerman make disrespectful comments about her chastity. Sita not only finds consolation in the tranquil settings of Valmiki's ashram, a forest retreat but also draws strength and vitality from nature to nourish her kids. Sita is subjected to humiliation in the form of a fire test to prove her chastity and be welcomed back to Ayodhya from Ravan's Lanka. However, Divakaruni's Sita, unable to face such dishonour, repeatedly contends: "Rage rises in me until my whole body is scorched, for some kinds of burning don't require a fire. Not a word of love, not a word of apology for the sorrow he has caused me. Not a word about the unjust and cruel way in which he sent me away. He (Ram) hasn't even called me by my name" (161). Sita's struggles and hardships culminate when she finds herself in the magnificence of Ayodhya, reunited with her lover Rama. However, this long-awaited reunion takes an unexpected turn when Sita, having overcome the trials of exile and desertion, is confronted with an offer that undermines the very basis of her existence. The story takes an emotional turn when Sita, the pinnacle of virtue and perseverance, makes a heartbreaking decision. The invitation to return and live with Lord Rama and her children in the luxurious palace of Ayodhya is greeted with Sita's strong denial, revealing a depth of character and a persistent dedication to beliefs that will last throughout history. She boldly rejects the offer to live with Ram and her children in the palace of Ayodhya, saying: "Because if I do what you demand, society will use an 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, why not? Even Queen Sita went through it" (162). Her rejection is not an act of disobedience against her spouse, but rather a statement of self-respect and dedication to the integrity of her personality. Sita, who has faced exile, abduction, and public examination, asserts her freedom with unrivaled tenacity. Sita's explanation for refusing the royal offer reveals her unwavering sense of self. She exclaims, "I am earth's daughter," emphasising her inextricable link to the natural world and her unflinching commitment to the ideals that define her nature. This heartbreaking phrase recalls the topic of her roots, which were found in a plowed field, symbolising her earthly rootedness and perseverance. She holds her respect strongly addressing: "I call on my mother earth and my father fire- for both have shaped me into the woman I am today - to come to my aid. O Mother, O Father, all my life I've suffered and endured and been wrongly accused.

If I am indeed blameless of what the gossipmongers whispered, give me a sign” (162). It is a kind of self-discovery for a woman:

In choosing to return to the earth, she has accomplished two things: she has proven her chastity and demonstrated her independence, as well. It is both a declaration of her integrity and a powerful indictment against a culture that suspects women. It is difficult not to interpret this as Sita’s protest against the way she was treated by her people and by her husband. (Bose, 2004, p. 226).

Finally, the ground breaks with 'a tremendous sound', and Sita returns. Sita's choice to enter the earth's womb empowers both herself and future generations of women.

### **Conclusion**

Through the retelling of Sita, Divakaruni attempts to make her more human than Goddess. Sita is seen as a symbol of femininity. Sita has been portrayed as a passionate environmentalist, obedient but daring daughter, protective sister, loving but willful wife, ideal helpmate, sensual lover, brave warrior, skillful healer, knowledgeable counsellor, powerful mother, kind but firm daughter-in-law, nurturer, and explorer. She enjoys being herself, is aware of pleasure and pain, empathy and understanding, and is full of respect for herself and others. She is a pioneering feminist. When Ram states, "In my kingdom, every man will have a voice, no matter how humble he is," Sita wonders, "What about the women?" Another time, Sita thinks, "Not all women are weak and helpless like you think." Sita's distinctive individuality is shown by Divakaruni, who also subtly enhances Ram's presence. Sita claims “I’m Sita, the forest dweller, Sita, Daughter of earth. And yes, Sita daughter of fire as well.” (114). Apart from her creative flare, one of Divakaruni's main skills is her ability to reveal different facets of characters. She uses her narrative expertise to highlight the complex emotions that comprise Sita's persona. Sita, enraged at the unjust treatment of a woman, exclaims, "Why should you be made to suffer for his sin?" For being a victim? "It was unfair." This is an obvious, vital comparison with survivors of abuse and prejudice. This depiction creates a mutually enriching bond between Sita and Ram in addition to showing her as a unique person with her intricacies, wants, and concerns. By traversing the shadows to disclose a story rich in depth and complexity, Sita's subtle emotions deepen our knowledge of both characters, far from being overshadowed by Ram's heroic figure. To sum up, the bellow given lines beautifully communicate a very important lesson to the younger generation, reminding them to constantly remember to ignite their inner fire, much as those who are metaphorically exposed to the ‘Agni Pariksha’. In addition to illuminating their pathways, this inner light radiates Shakti, the embodiment of

intrinsic power and resilience, which represents the splendour of their individuality. Divakaruni asserts:

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. (Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, *The Forest of Enchantments*)

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