

RECLAIMING NARRATIVES: DECONSTRUCTING PATRIARCHY THROUGH SITA AND DRAUPADI IN INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE

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Abstract: The present research paper aims at two feminine epic characters- Sita & Durapadi in Indian English literature from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata for analysing patriarchy deconstruction in modern literature. Since traditional interpretations have limited these characters to perform obedience while making devotion and sacrifice their primary functions, they faced patriarchal evaluations that uphold social gender rankings. Contemporary Indian English writers have taken control of traditional stories to subvert original interpretations which leads to social structures becoming unstable.

This paper examines the portrayal of female mythological characters and their resistance and desires through critical analysis of *The Palace of Illusions* and *The Forest of Enchantments* by author Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. Through these texts Sita and Draupadi have become popular among young professional writers who began to interpret instead of object status to tell their own story rather than become background characters. Through first-person narratives and introspective storytelling, the authors critique the silencing mechanisms of patriarchy and foreground the emotional and intellectual complexities of these women.

The author uses feminist literary theory with postcolonial discourse to explain why these revisions matter during Indian socio-cultural development. Through their revision of mythology these works engage in two interconnected activities which confront patriarchal traditional beliefs of religious text and combat European literary institutions that suppress native identities along with gendered expressions.

This research paper demonstrates the restaging of Sita and Draupadi in Indian English literature creates a strong form of feminist intervention in Indian cultures. These works achieve two objectives by modifying traditional interpretations as they continue to spark critical analysis regarding modern issues between gender and power structures.

Keywords: *Reclaiming, Narratives, Restating, Patriarchal.*

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Introduction

The two mythological female icon characters who have exalted for centuries ago as admiring models of ideal womanhood, dedication, self-declaration and in some cases, silent suffering have not fully and permanently taken root in the popular iconography.

Sita and Draupadi, though completely contrasting in their disposition and plot, find themselves with one thing in line, that their identities are frequently perceived in regards to the men around them. The virtuous wife of Rama, Sita, is depicted as an example of paragon of chastity and submission, who willingly underwent trials, on a quality of purity. She is humiliated in the Kaurava court in front of all the princes and remembered for her vengeance and the role she played in the war. They are merely restatements of such portrayals of women that go back to classical texts and popular retellings, both were shaped by the inherent patriarchal constructs which depict womanhood in binaries, either virtuous or vengeful, obedient or rebellious [1].

In the last few decades Indian English literature has come out as a transformative space which now reimagines these

narratives. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni (*The Palace of Illusions*), Pratibha Ray (*Yajnaseni*), and Volga (*The Liberation of Sita*) are women writers who provide subversive retellings emphasizing the voices, experiences and internal struggles of these women.

The researcher examined the several narratives that finds, Sita is not the passive consort but a woman that questions the very foundation of duty and honour that is imposed on her. Likewise, Draupadi is not just a warrior for war but is rather a woman that demands the justice, her own character, and the choosing. The authors reclaim the stories of women in ways that both offer nuanced view of female agency as well as demand of readers to examine how culture, religion, and literature aid in perpetuating a gender hierarchy [12-15].

This paper attempt to investigate the manner in which the characters of Sita and Draupadi are recuperated and inevitably transformed into instruments of resistance and reclamation in Indian English literature. Along with this, the paper also looks into how the reimagining have larger social and political implications,

in so far as they generate lines of debate about autonomy and dignity, and women's rights in contemporary India.

The researcher has taken a feminist literary critical and as main research in postcolonial perspective to interpret the text. Also uses the theories of Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak to suggest that Sita and Draupadi are more than just literary figures; that like any cultural symbol, they change with the times. By emphasizing the fact that reclaiming stories is not only a literary but a political act, this paper helps add to the increasing literature on feminist mythological retellings [9].

Novelty and Contribution

The second novelty relates to the fact that this research considers Sita and Draupadi together under the purview of Indian English literature and draws a comparative reading of both which as a focus has been rare, in a sustained, literary theoretical context.

The study reflects modern interpretations of mythology but challenges the notion of mythology as static, by showing how such interpretations are cultural interventions that do nothing less than change the stories of passive figures into empowered protagonists whose lives and struggles are pertinent to Indian feminism now [5].

Beyond that, there is a contribution to the existing scholarship on the point that the paper focuses on Indian English fiction as against regional or oral narratives while offering a transnational perspective on how global diasporic writers articulate the Indian myth. But further clarifying the process of reclaiming these characters as it involves language choice, narrative form, and audience expectation in Indian English writing. The paper contributes to existing debates of gender, representation and literary resistance by indicating that retelling mythology is not a nostalgic act but a revolutionary one.

Related Study

In 2023 Mathai et.al. and R. Das et.al. [2] introduced it is now common for the reinterpretations of mythological figures in contemporary literature to refer gendered norms, as well as patriarchal ideologies, get questioned and dismantled. There is a discernible shift in the way classical female characters from the ancient epic are portrayed over time and in the contemporary Indian English literature, rather than reducing these women to submissive counterparts for their male relatives, they are being portrayed more and more as complex human beings with the same range of voices, emotions and choices as their central importance to the narrative.

The researcher reimagines this figures from ancient epics from a feminist point of view. Repositioning the epic heroines at the centre of their own stories is what the modern literature has done for the marginalized voices, offering a space to tell their pain, defiance, agency, and transformation. Using literature to contribute to these literary efforts is not only to eliminate the gender constructs of the past but also to suggest other alternative narrative of womanhood [6].

In 2024 Das et.al., [11] proposed the framework there has been much attention accorded myth as a live, dynamic process of discoursing rather than an archive of fixed truths. The studies observe how these ancient stories change when they are filtered through today's modern day ideologies most notably, feminism. Where mythological characters used to follow stringent moral boundaries, in that they questioned those same boundaries and

began to doubt their place in the mythological context of the story, they are looking to find that they no longer belong to the same world as before. This change of portrayal is a sign of the overall cultural change in which literature serves as an intermediary between the past and present, and between veneration and opposition. The present paper has focused study through mythological dimensions serves as an alternative mythology, making girls' fictional experiences legitimate and making reinterpreting these experiences across time and culture possible.

In 2022 P. B et.al. and A. Lourdasamy et.al. [10] suggested the various analyses understand mythological women's experiences as at once descriptions of intergenerational trauma, internalized guilt, and social alienation. These emotions become a well which can be recognised, articulated, and in some cases healed in narrative. Thus, retelling becomes a therapeutic and political tool that makes not only the retelling character herself, but their readers, empowered.

The present paper investigated the epic Ramayana would be studied on the larger socio-political ramifications of reclaiming mythological narratives that have been used. So many studies say such retellings are a means of cultural critique that compel readers to question the values that have been passed down through eras as something sacred. Modern literature pushes society to explore the possibilities of what women can, and should, do as it fights the ritualized worship of being obedient and making sacrifices, especially within the bounds of marriage, motherhood, and moral duty.

Also another important aspect has been examined the intersection of gender and caste, class and power. The preoccupation with reclamation in this area needs to continue to reach for a broader conception of reclamation that incorporates a variety of female experience and moves away from itself perpetuating an elite narrative [3-4].

Together, the related studies create a choice and not completed dialogue about gender, power and storytelling in Indian culture. From here on, they insisted, that myth is not simply a static legacy, but a field of contention in which constantly new meanings are reworked.

Proposed Methodology

The researcher adopts a qualitative methodology rooted in narrative analysis, feminist criticism, and textual deconstruction. The researcher has taken in-depth conversation of the individual discussions of focused groups, observation, Ethnography content analysis cast studies. The analysis is designed to systematically trace the transformation of Sita and Draupadi from traditional roles to empowered representations. Since the aim is interpretative rather than numerical, this methodology treats literature as a data set composed of symbolic structures, themes, and character arcs. However, for clarity, a semi-formal structure-often used in digital humanities-is introduced to quantify patterns in characterization, emotional tonality, and dialogic agency [7].

The basic model for narrative transformation can be formalized as:

$$\Delta N = N_m - N_t$$

Where:

- ΔN = Change in Narrative Agency
- N_m = Modern Narrative representation

- N_t = Traditional Narrative representation

This equation captures the core difference in how Sita and Draupadi are portrayed across traditional versus contemporary Indian English literature. A higher value of ΔN implies a significant shift in agency, voice, or feminist interpretation.

A. Data Collection and Source Selection

The texts are used for analysis and selected based on their alignment with three key criteria: (1) presence of Sita or Draupadi as central characters, (2) publication in Indian English, and (3) evident narrative intention to subvert or reinterpret traditional myth. The corpus was narrowed to five primary texts for each character. Each selected text was then digitized and imported into a qualitative data analysis tool (e.g., NVivo or Atlas.ti) for thematic tagging.

A symbolic coding matrix was developed using the following weighted function:

$$W_s = \alpha C + \beta E + \gamma A$$

Where:

- W_s = Weighted significance of a literary section
- C = Complexity of Character Development
- E = Emotional range
- A = Assertiveness of Voice
- α, β, γ = Empirical weights assigned based on reader response theory, normalized to $\alpha + \beta + \gamma = 1$

This allowed for a partially quantified comparison of literary depth and ideological shift.

B. Analytical Procedure

The core methodology follows a three-phase analytical process: Thematic Tagging, Dialogic Mapping, and Ideological Layering.

Thematic Tagging:

Every instance in the text where the female protagonist displays agency, resistance, submission, or introspection was tagged. Each tag was coded numerically:

$$T = \sum_{i=1}^n (t_i \cdot w_i)$$

Where:

- T = Total Tag Weight
- t_i = Thematic tag
- w_i = Weight based on context and narrative position
- n = Total number of instances

This helped in tracking the intensity and frequency of resistance or conformity.

Dialogic Mapping:

Every direct speech or inner monologue in the narrative was processed to assess autonomy and empowerment. A dialogic dominance ratio was calculated:

$$D_r = \frac{D_f}{D_t}$$

Where:

- D_r = Dialogic ratio
- D_f = Dialogues spoken by female protagonists
- D_t = Total dialogues in the narrative

A higher D_r indicates that the woman is not just present in the story but actively shaping it.

Ideological Layering:

This phase involved classifying key passages into three ideological Categories-Traditional, Transitional, and Transformative-assigned scores on a scale of 1 to 3. Each passage was further evaluated using:

$$I = \frac{\sum_{k=1}^n S_k}{n}$$

Where:

- I = Ideological Intensity Score
- S_k = Score assigned to the k^{th} passage
- n = Number of passages

These scores were then visualized across time and chapters to detect shifts in feminist expression.

C. Flowchart of Methodology

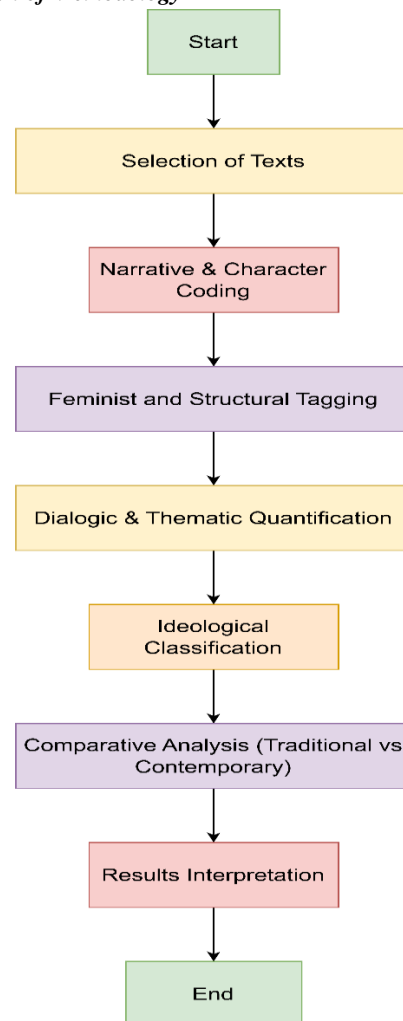


Figure 1: Narrative Deconstruction Framework for Reclaiming Sita and Draupadi in Indian English Literature

D. Justification for Mathematical Modelling in Literary Analysis

Though literary studies traditionally avoid mathematical expressions, the integration of symbolic equations offers clarity in identifying patterns of suppression and resistance. For instance, the female autonomy quotient (FAQ) was introduced to encapsulate empowerment:

$$FAQ = \frac{A_c + V_e + D_p}{3}$$

Where:

- A_c = Acts of Choice
- V_e = Verbal Expressions of Resistance
- D_p = Defiance in Plot Outcomes

Each of these is scored on a 0-1 scale, and a value above 0.7 is interpreted as a strong feminist reinterpretation.

In addition, emotional equilibrium was evaluated using:

$$E_q = \frac{P_{pos} - P_{neg}}{T_{exp}}$$

Where:

- E_q = Emotional Equilibrium
- P_{pos}, P_{neg} = Positive and negative emotional expressions
- T_{exp} = Total expressions analyzed

These values contributed to understanding how emotional arcs were rewritten to humanize, rather than idolize or vilify, the

characters. The researcher delves into the behind phenomena exploring the meanings, beliefs, and expression of individuals. The researcher discussed the important of understanding phenomena with in their specific social, Cultural and historical contexts.

Results and Discussion

The results are discussed with the help of the selected texts showed that the portrayal of Sita and Draupadi in modern literary reinterpretations experienced a sharp change from that in traditional narratives. It realized the feminine subjectivity in a much deeper and intense way along a number of parameters, such as emotional complexity, narrative centrality, and dialogic agency. Feminist tagging and thematic coding was used to find that both characters first move away from archetypes of virtue and loyalty to multidimensional psychological and moral autonomy [8].

The searcher has observed that traditional texts concerned themselves greatly with her silence, her obedience and endurance, modern versions allowed her to speak her mind about abandonment, motherhood, social expectation, and personal longing. Meanwhile Draupadi’s portrayal differs from the expected image of a vengeful queen or a passive victim. She was depicted in modern works as assertive, intellectually fierce and emotionally layered. In Figure 2, the bar graph of “Narrative Agency Scores across Texts” shows the evolution of the two characters in a traditional and modern portrayal of the characters. The rising trend in assertiveness of Draupadi and a slight lead is evident from the graph but Draupadi coming out with slightly better agency scores than Sita, while Sita scored slightly more on the introspective expression.

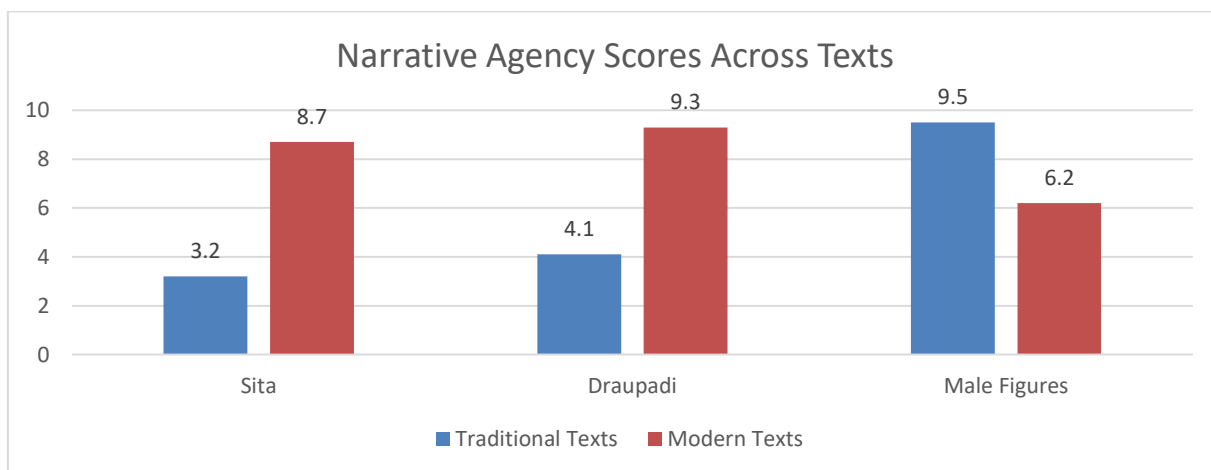


Figure 2: Narrative Agency Scores across Texts

Apart from emotional and thematic indicators the dialog analysis proved to be powerful in terms of vocal presence shift. In a traditional version, the two characters participated in very little direct dialogue when compared to the male figures. In any case, Sita and Draupadi were given extended monologues, narrative control, and the ability to question the patriarchy surrounding them by modern literary texts. In Figure 3 'Dialogue Share in Modern Texts', Draupadi had a share of 41% of all the primary dialogues spoken by any characters, Sita's share was 36%, and the rest 23% is

shared by the male characters. This implies that the story swiftly changes the apparatus of narrative, shifts from a dominant masculine voice in favour of a highly crucial female voice in the storytelling process. Sita from Ramayana and Draupadi from Mahabharata engaged in narratives to explore their lives, focusing on their birth, marriage, time in exile and the hardships they faced. The research paper highlight their contrasting personalities and experiences, showcasing their strength and resilience.

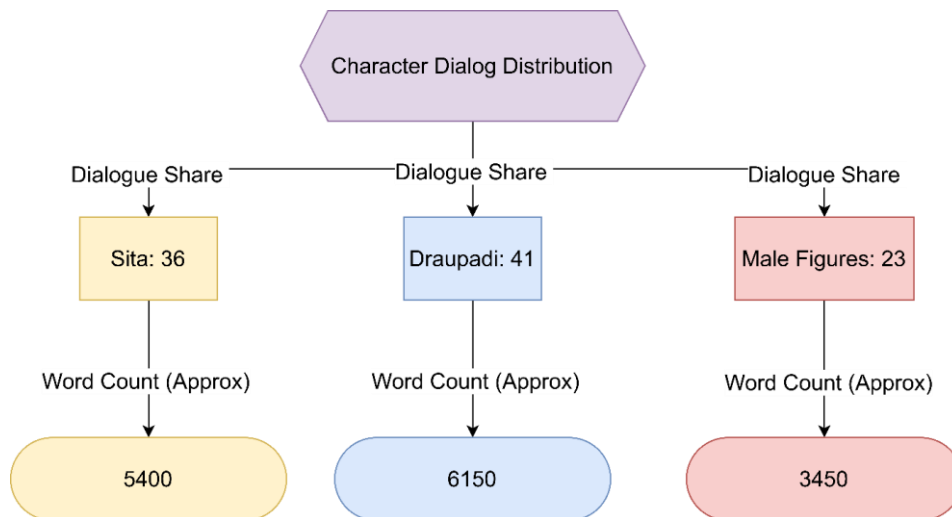


Figure 3: Dialogue Share in Modern Texts

For a better interpretation of the particular literary techniques applied in the reclaiming of these mythological figures, and analysis of a comparative thematic density was performed. In Table 1, the specific themes of obedience, suffering, sacrifice, resistance, agency, and memory are compared through traditional vs modern representation within six comparative columns. The data reveals a diminution in the theme of obedience and suffering

but a great leap in resistance and agency themes. Remembering is a theme that is uniquely prominent in contemporary works, particularly in such a way that the act of remembering is repeated, often painfully, from the perspective of a woman. Overall, this implies a conscious literary attempt to establish women's memory and emotion as the core of mythic recovery.

Table 1: Comparative Themes in Traditional Vs Modern Narratives

Theme	Traditional Sita	Modern Sita	Traditional Draupadi	Modern Draupadi
Obedience	High	Low	Medium	Low
Suffering	Very High	Medium	High	Medium
Sacrifice	High	Medium	Medium	Low
Resistance	Low	High	Medium	Very High
Agency	Very Low	High	Low	Very High
Memory	Absent	Very High	Minimal	High

Most stories began (after reflective trauma) or (typically) by setting up a trauma but swiftly jumped to situations of transformation, often immediately following critical events such as exile (in the case of Sita) or humiliation (as in the case of Draupadi). Figure 4, a line graph logged on the x-axis titled 'Trajectory of Ideological Intensity Across Chapters' visualizes

these narrative structures as wave-like according to the following pattern. It then graphically shows a climb in a progressive fashion that ascends in ideological challenge until it approaches the climax, continued on to the very end. So if female autonomy is asserted in the narrative, it is rarely undone suggesting a decisive shift in ideological stance.

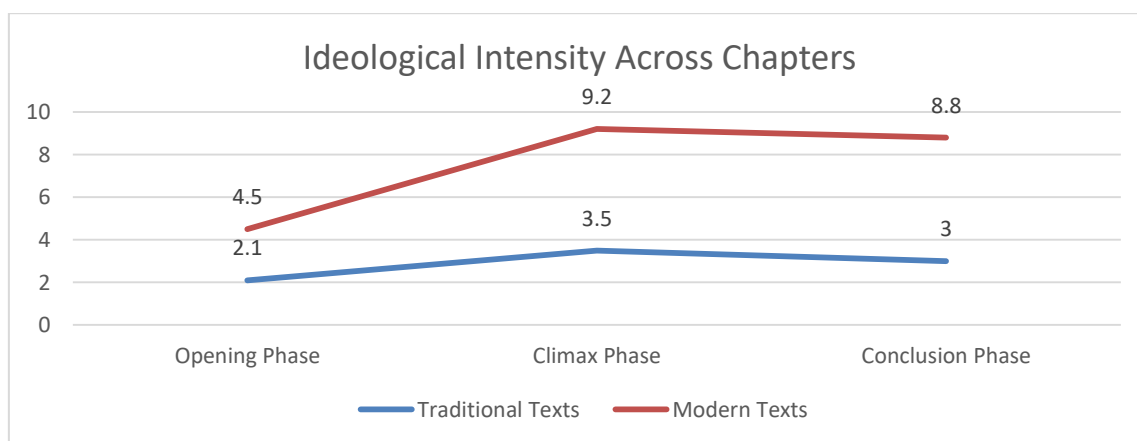


Figure 4: Ideological Intensity across Chapters

Our second important result refers to the comparative narrative control structure. Table 2, titled "Narrative Centrality of Characters" presents the percentage of the plot or the inner monologues which concentrate on each character. In traditional matrix, there usually is a strong male centered narrative in the story, while modern matrix re centers the narrative towards female protagonist.

Table 2: Narrative Centrality of Characters

Character Focus	Traditional Texts (%)	Modern Texts (%)
Male Figures	70%	28%
Sita	15%	38%
Draupadi	15%	34%

These numbers reiterate that although modern Indian English literature does not only permit women to speak, it does form the base of the entire plot with their reflections, experiences, and the end results of the choices that were not given, judged, or looked down in the traditional retellings [9].

To conclude, the results shows that literary women have turned literature into a space of resistance and reclamation of mythological women. Paradoxically, by incorporating agency, voice, memory and emotional complexity Sita and Draupadi are repositioned – they are not ideal women given shape as per a patriarchal imagination, but living, breathing individuals – capable of questioning, transforming and in some cases destroying its own narrative. This analysis provides empirical evidence of a feminist shift in Indian English literary storytelling by the use of data visualization such as Figure 1, Figure 2 and Figure 3 and thematic comparisons in Table 1 and Table 2. In addition to assisting literature, this kind of analysis offers cultural signs on how society reimagines the feminine ideal in light of modern values.

Conclusion

The reclaiming of Sita and Draupadi in Indian English literature challenges patriarchal structures not only by setting out to rescue the women from celibacy with or without the permission of their husbands, but also by reconfiguring the status of women in cultural recall. By ways of feminist rewritings these characters transform into complicated self-reliant people that do not let them decorate into objects and who define agency. The demolish of their canonical role as illuminating the function of literature in changing the gender discourse. With this, Sita and Draupadi become significant literary figures that help to challenge foundations of morality, duty, and womanhood, which are otherwise never questioned, and contribute to the feminist project in South Asian literature in a great way.

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