Quest Journals
Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Science
Volume 13 ~ Issue 9 (September 2025) pp: 153-158
ISSN(Online):2321-9467
www.questjournals.org

Research Paper

Margins Retold: Agency, Subalternity, and Subversion in Indian Narratives

Archita Roy
Graduate Student, Department of English
The Assam Royal Global University

Dr. Prabuddha Ghosh
Assistant Professor, Department of English
The Assam Royal Global University
Corresponding Author: Dr. Prabuddha Ghosh

Abstract: *This paper critically examines the manifold and layered representations of women in Indian mythological traditions, with a special focus on the Ramayana, its retellings, and selected comparative texts from Indian and feminist scholarship. Drawing from Nabaneeta Dev Sen's Sita Theke Shuru, Sudha Murty's The Daughter from a Wishing Tree, Sukumari Bhattacharji's analysis of ancient Indian texts, and core classical sources, this work interrogates the ideology that underwrites mythic narratives about the feminine: how women's oppression, erased voices, and glorified sacrifices serve the needs of patriarchal society; how Brahmanical patriarchy structures caste and gender roles; and how retellings and feminist readings challenge or subvert these tropes. Through close reading, intertextual analysis, and contemporary critique, the paper exposes the mechanisms of women's containment and marginalization in epic and associated texts, while also tracing historical and emerging strategies of resistance, identity formation, and transformation. In doing so, it not only calls for a critical re-reading of the "ideal woman" but also proposes new possibilities for feminist engagement with mythological tradition in India.*

Keywords: *Mahakavya, Mythology, Gender, Caste, Retellings, Subversion, Subaltern*

*Received 03 Sep., 2025; **R**evised 10 Sep., 2025; **A**ccepted 12 Sep., 2025 © The author(s) 2025.*
P**ublished with open access at **www.questjournas.org

I. Introduction

Mythological texts in Indian literature serve as living blueprints for cultural values, historical beliefs, and gender roles, operating as both formative and reflective instruments of society. Among these, the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, described by Sukumari Bhattacharji as core carriers of familial relations and ethical instruction, have cast the blueprint for the so-called Indian "ideal woman" across millennia (Bhattacharji 249). Despite their narrative richness and historical depth, these epics also encode and legitimize models of feminine obedience, domesticity, and suffering, often framing women primarily as self-sacrificing, subordinate, and custodians of patriarchal honor. In contemporary times, a host of writers, scholars, and artists have returned to these stories with fresh perspectives, deconstructing the received wisdom and interrogating the entrenched norms about women that these canonical texts propagate. Nabaneeta Dev Sen, Sudha Murty, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Sukumari Bhattacharji, and Uma Chakravarti stand out as major voices who read and rewrite the epic traditions through a feminist and intersectional lens, examining how myth, caste, and gender intersect to produce and perpetuate hierarchical power structures. This paper undertakes a sustained academic investigation, grounded in close textual analysis, intertextual reference, and feminist theory, of the figure of Sita, other mythic women such as Surpanakha and Urmila, and the construction of womanhood in ancient texts and their modern retellings. It explores both the mechanisms through which patriarchal, Brahmanical values are universalized, and the strategies women use to assert voice, agency, and resistance, moving from subordination to subjectivity.

Epic Roots: The *Ramayana* and the Formation of the "Ideal Woman"

The figure of Sita in the *Ramayana* has been immortalized as the apotheosis of the ideal wife and mother- enduring, loyal, and self-effacing. Yet such glorification, as noted by G.R.K. Murty and other scholars, produces a model that facilitates and even encourages oppression and domestic violence in contemporary society (Murty 67). The singular virtues of devotion, sexual fidelity, and self-sacrifice, lauded in Sita, have often served to bind women within domestic and social confines, discouraging dissent and self-assertion. However, Sita's own story, if read with attention to nuance, reveals undercurrents of resistance and complexity. The episode where she insists on accompanying Rama to exile, a space of peril rather than the safety of Ayodhya, challenges accepted female roles. She invokes wifely duty, certainly, but in doing so, she appropriates the very patriarchal discourse designed to subordinate her and repurposes it as a tool for asserting presence and agency. In a shloka Sita affirms the traditional dharma of wifely devotion: "The wife alone, whate'er await, / Must share on earth her husband's fate" reflecting the deeply ingrained expectation of female loyalty and sacrifice (Griffith 2008) Her argument is laced with logic, feeling, and a reversal of expectations: to be a true wife, she must actively share her husband's fate and meet danger at his side, illustrating how adaptation and subtle resistance can flourish even within constrained circumstances. In the 'Yuddhakanda' of the Ramayana, when Lakshman was hurt by the Raksasas, Rama even accused Sita for the ill fate of Lakshman. He says that Sita has enjoyed Lakshman's selfless service in the forest (Dev Sen 40). A woman was considered as the "other" among her in-laws. She is considered less important and subordinate. It was also believed that a 'wrong woman' might also bring misfortune to the family.

While Sita occupies centre stage, the voices of other women are often silenced or lost in the epic narrative. Urmila, for instance, Lakshmana's wife who stays behind in Ayodhya during his exile with Rama, provides a deeply moving counterpart to Sita's suffering. Her emotional labor, silent endurance, and loyal vigil remain largely unrecognized, both by her husband and the broader narrative community. (Banerjee pp.) Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel *The Forest of Enchantment* gives new voice to Urmila, indicating the importance of attentive reimagining and historical recuperation in feminist engagement with myth. Nabanita Dev Sen's research also underlines the paucity of female-centred texts in the mythological canon, with only twenty-two out of over four-hundred hymns in the Rig Veda dedicated to goddesses, reinforcing the overwhelming precedence of male divinity and male-centred experience (Chakravarti 41). The mythic and ritualistic relegation of women to the margins is, thus, not incidental but a core design element of the patriarchal order.

Perhaps no aspect of Sita's story is more discussed, or more revealing of the patriarchal foundations of epic society, than the scrutiny and ordeal of her chastity. The Agnipariksha represents the peak of this theme- a ritual that outwardly claims to restore Sita's place in society but, in truth, exposes how women's suffering is used to justify male authority over their sexuality and choices. Even before this, Sita's chastity and character are questioned by Hanuman, who, upon searching for her in Lanka, wrongly suspects a woman near Ravana's bed could be Sita and instantly doubts her virtue. Dev Sen asserts that, "It is only because Hanuman is a loyal devotee of Ramchandra and a righteous person; therefore, he did not become a follower of Ravanaa. But Hanuman constantly kept thinking, will Sita ever want to return back?" (Dev Sen 16). Even R.K. Narayan, in his book The Ramayana, wrote about the part where Hanuman got angry at Sita for seeing her adorned in gold and luxury while Rama was weeping for Sita and suffering to bring her back. (Narayana 219) Though Valmiki's Hanuman quickly regrets his doubts, later retellings amplify his concern and suspicion, demonstrating how the mythology itself is reshaped over time, always in ways that accentuate and reinforce gender anxieties around women's virtue. Dev Sen argues that Hanuman's doubts mirror a patriarchal mindset where women's purity is harshly judged, tied to anxieties about lineage and social order. (Dev Sen 18) Madhav Kandali translated the Ramayana in Assamese where he presented Hanuman as a political strategist disguised as a Brahmin. In this text Hanuman demonstrated his sharp intellect and patriarchal ethical values to find Sita in Ravana's inner chambers. (Kandali 319) The narrative is bound by patriarchal assumptions of purity as an identifying mark where Hanuman sniffed the breath of each sleeping woman, reasoning that the one who bore no trace of intoxicating wine could only be Sita. Dev Sen's authorial interventions question why even avatars of devotion like Hanuman should internalize suspicion of the feminine, highlighting a deeper, sociological reality: the constant threat to the female reputation in a male-dominated social order. (Dev Sen 17) The Satapatha Brahmana, among other ancient texts, openly expresses the fear of female sexuality and the dangers of adulterous relationships- fears that are primarily concerned with lineage and property, rather than actual virtue or agency (Chakravarti 43). Sita's own resistance is both powerful and poignant. When accused by Valmiki of impurity, she asserts that touching a monkey who is like a son is not a sin, yet she is overruled because the narrative, penned and controlled by men, cannot accommodate such a defense: "The one who holds the pen holds the future" (Dev Sen 22). In this pithy summation, Dev Sen exposes the patriarchal mechanism by which women's lives and reputations are shaped, judged, and enclosed.

Myth, Marriage, and the Social Order: Women's Labor, Control, and Dependence

Marriage in the epic and mythical tradition is constructed not as a partnership but as a system of service and hierarchy. Sukumari Bhattacharji chronicles wedding rituals in which the groom's response to his mother is not "to wed an equal" but "to bring home a servant,"[i] highlighting the explicit connection between marital ritual and women's labour for their in-laws and husbands (Bhattacharji 351). Dev Sen's reading of such domestic labour exposes how cultural practices require women to serve first and eat last, a system replicated down the generations as tradition but rooted in ideas of female inferiority and subordination. Her refiguration of Sita's exile, where she is served food by Lakshman, presents an alternative, if brief, space exempt from such rules, illustrating the potential for resistance even within patriarchal structures (Dev Sen 23). Sita's devotion to her in-laws, even after abandonment by Rama, exemplifies both the depth of her love and the tragic power of socialization; it also mirrors the legal denial of property, agency, and rights to women in Brahmanical society. (Bhattacherji 350) Manu, in his codes, dictated a woman would be dependent on her father in childhood, on her husband in youth and on her son in old age. (Rout 42) Chakravarti, extensively documents how codes of '*stri-dharma* and *pativrata-dharma'* institutionalized women's dependence and powerlessness, reinforcing intergenerational cycles of control. (Chakravarti 70) It is traditionally believed and practiced that a dutiful woman is accepted to eat after the whole families are done having their food. In the forest Sita was served food by Lakshman, whereas if it had been in the palace, the role would have been reversed. (Dev Sen 23). The palace acts as the society that follows the patriarchal norms, whereas the forest is an escape for her where the patriarchal norms don't apply.

Motherhood is both exalted and instrumentalized in epical and mythological constructions. Sita, as Bhattacharji and Chakravarti show, is lauded not for herself but for her ability to perpetuate the line- her "empty lap," or infertility, is a source of shame rather than personal tragedy. (Bhattacharji 340) The pressure to procreate is compounded by anxieties about paternity and property: purity is enforced because the transmission of lineage and inheritance depends upon the certainty of legitimacy. Sita's questioning of her own mother's identity in Dev Sen's retelling opens the possibility of interrogating these assumptions- how legitimacy, purity, and bloodline are gendered mechanisms for the control and violation of women's bodily integrity. Patriarchal societies, as seen in Manu's quotes and practices, treat women as vessels created solely for childbearing and the continuation of male legacy (Chakravarti 66). After giving birth to Lav and Kush, in the 'Uttarakanda' of the *Ramayna*, Sita was once more forced to prove her purity. Unable to endure repeated humiliation, she chose to return to Mother Earth. Though Valmiki urged her to rejoin Rama as a wife's duty, she resisted. Ultimately, societal obsession with women's chastity drove her tragic end. Dev Sen also writes that Sita resisted going back to Rama after being abandoned by him. (Dev Sen 25) Mallika Sengupta added a line where Kaushalya was celebrating for her unborn grandson. Even before the birth, they knew it would be a son Property, like sexuality, becomes another site of gendered contest. In both classical and later traditions, women are systematically denied resources, legal rights, and material independence, reinforcing their need for male protection and, by extension, subordination. Even 'stridhan', theoretically meant to be a woman's property, is frequently co-opted or controlled by her marital family. (Bhattacherji 340)

The intersection of caste and gender produces a layered and particularly brutal set of hierarchies in Indian mythic and historical context. Sita is variously interpreted as belonging to or rejected by oppressed-caste origin in certain local and folk versions, a device often used to emphasize her resultant suffering and subordination. Oppressed-caste women, as Chakravarti documents, are doubly disadvantaged: they are accessible as sexual labour for upper-caste men and are denied full participation in rituals, rights, and family legacy. The sexual double standard persists: upper-caste women are strictly monitored to prevent any crossing of caste boundaries[ii], while upper-caste men exercise sexual privilege over oppressed-caste women. (Chakravarti 81) Similarly, traditional property law prioritizes sons and male inheritors, denying the daughter not just property but ritual status- *Mukhagni*, or the right to perform parental last rites, is denied to her, undergirding a system that privileges the boy child, as shown in Kaushalya's elation over her "grandson" (Sengupta 12). Notably, the societal preference for the boy child permeates epic as well as modern contexts. The *Aitareya Brahmana* and other sources describe girls as a curse, and the birth of a son as a blessing. (Bhattacharji 106) Ritual practices at birth, marriage, and death perpetuate this system, systematically relegating women to an inferior status in both religious and material terms. Mallika Sengupta, in *Sitayan*, juxtaposes the love stories of Rama-Sita and Shambuka-Mitra to question women's place in patriarchy. In both, women are blamed, their purity doubted, while men remain unquestioned. Both Shambuka and Mitra belonged to the oppressed class but Mitra was doubly marginalized due to her caste-identity and gender-identity.

Mythological archetypes, legacies and the diversity of female experience

The normative ideal of womanhood in epic literature is achieved by contrast: angels are positioned against monsters. Sita is the "angel in the house", the symbol of silent suffering and patient devotion, whereas Surpanakha typifies the monstrous female, unashamedly expressing sexual desire, and for this, experiencing public mutilation and humiliation. Dev Sen and Sudha Murty's readings highlight that the boundaries of

propriety were maintained not just by religious story but by social violence. Surpanakha's narrative reveals a spectrum of attitudes towards women's sexuality, autonomy, and capacity for subversion. Her punishment is not simply a response to personal transgression but a performance of caste, gender, and cultural order. The story points to a larger reality: the policing of female desire is fundamentally about discipline of women who threaten or refuse to be contained by the patriarchal script. (Sen 146-59) Dev Sen narrated Surpanakha's story from a different perspective, suited to critical retelling. According to the text, Rama briefly converses with her but withdraws, leaving Lakshman to reject her cruelly. Calling Surpanakha "shameless," he dismisses her wishes and equates female desire with dishonour, unlike men's. Dev Sen powerfully critiques this double standard, showing how women are degraded simply for expressing their desires (Dev Sen 32). Purobi Sen's highlights the contrast between human women and rakshasis (demon-women). While figures like Sita are portrayed as submissive and virtuous, rakshasis such as Tadaka and Surpanakha embody strength and autonomy. Sen critiques this gendered polarity, arguing that rakshasis subvert patriarchal norms and represent feminist resistance, whereas human women are constrained by male-defined roles and limited agency. (Sen 150-2) This analysis redefines feminist readings of the Ramayana by showing how the epic simultaneously suppresses and empowers female voices, revealing cracks within its patriarchal structure. Marriages in epic are polygynous for men but polygamy for women is stigmatized or demonized- demonstrating that social order is premised on the suppression, not the expression, of female autonomy. (Bhattacharji 9) Murty's book supplies further such stories: Vasavadatta[iii] and Padmavati must share their husband for reasons of state. King Udayana, despite loving his first wife Vasavadatta, had to marry Padmavati for political reasons. Padmavati was deprived of the emotional fulfilment typically expected in marriage. She was forced to accept that her fate that her marriage was based on political advantage rather than genuine affection. Their sacrifices are glorified as pure, but their happiness and consent are immaterial. (Murty 175) Bhamati's sacrifice, serving her philosopher-husband through years of devotion, cements her legacy as an ideal wife, but it also reveals the near-total erasure of her individuality except as it is recognized by a patriarchal enabling. When he finally names his work after her, it is her hands, not her face or voice, that he recalls.

Not even the divine or semi-divine are free from patriarchal codes. Urvashi, the celestial nymph, is punished for the inadvertent public avowal of her desire (for Pururava) with exile to earth, an event precipitated not by any intrinsic fault but by male dissatisfaction and anger. Her story, and those of the other Apsaras, embodies the contradictory position of women as both objects of desire and targets for discipline. Glory, beauty, and love are instrumentalized by male gods, sages, and kings: female agency or longing, when asserted, is subject to ridicule, curse, or erasure. Sukumari Bhattachaerji highlights how ancient texts and rituals institutionalized women's subordination, reinforcing social systems where their autonomy over property, body, and will was denied. (Bhattacharji 355) Sudha Murty's text laments the paucity of literature focused on female heroes, locating the blame with a male-centric tradition and a field of mythology largely written and preserved by men. She points out that even when women are the focus of stories, it is usually their sacrifice, not their joy, ambition, or intelligence, that is foregrounded.

The existing literature often portrays women as subordinate or minor characters compared to men. Perhaps this is because our society has traditionally been a male-dominated one, or because mythology has been written mostly by men, but most likely, it is a combination of these two reasons (Murty ix)

Freedom, when granted, is often attached to non-Aryan or non-upper-caste women such as Surpanakha, who, being a rakshasi, is permitted a degree of agency and desire. But this nominal freedom is punished and distanced from the sphere of the "civilized", reinforcing limits rather than transgressing them.

The anxieties and scripts embedded in epic myth persist and re-emerge in the social realities of modern India. Victim-blaming, control of female sexuality, and the normalization of violence against women are not new phenomena, but the continuing legacies of a mythic tradition that privileges purity over justice and silence over self-expression. Dev Sen, Bhattacharji, and Watson-Lynn all point to the persistence of societal attitudes that prioritize collective reputation and male honour over the well-being and consent of women. (Bhattacherji 161) Statements made by several Indian politicians in recent years, blaming victims for violence, trivializing or excusing male aggression as "boys will be boys", find their antecedents in the Ramayana's policing of Sita's chastity and Rama's abandonment of her for reasons of public opinion. (Watson-Lynn 2017) The systematization of rape as a "conquest" and the glorification of masculine violence finds eerie resonance with epic battles, abductions, and the ritualized suffering of women.[iv] Responses to rape continue to focus on the character of the victim, the behavior or dress of the woman, and the impact on family honour, echoing the *Agnipariksha* and the legal and ritual structures that validate suspicion toward the woman above all. In ritual terms, the preference for the boy child and the suppression of the status of daughters continues to affect birth rites, familial expectations, and women's access to inheritance, education, and agency. Daughters are still considered a "curse" in some settings, denied the right to perform last rites or claim property. In reserved scriptural terms, the mother of sons is the best of women, further codifying the reproductive imperative (Bhattacharji 107). Shreeya Devi Tatiah's essay "The Rights and Status of Women in Hinduism" traces women's position in India from ancient to modern times. Examining the *Mahābhārata* and the *Dharmaśāstras*, she shows how rights in marriage, property, and education

declined with growing restrictions. Highlighting both historical decline and modern activism, she notes that while legal progress exists, genuine change depends on sustained collective effort. Neelima Shukla's article examines how Hindu women pursue gender equality within their faith. She discusses faith-based feminism, where texts are reinterpreted for empowerment, paralleling similar efforts in other religions (Shukla 66-68). Citing reformers like Ram Mohan Roy and Gandhi, she underscores the role of reinterpretation in advancing women's rights.

Resistance, Redemption, and the Polyphony of Retellings

The Agnipariksha (fire ordeal) is a well-known event from Valmiki's *Ramayana*. It marks the point where Sita is forced to prove her chastity. Rama, to keep his honour intact, abandoned Sita, claiming that her captivity in Ravana's house dishonours him and makes her unfit to return as queen. Society's judgment, rather than love, guides his decision. Sita, devastated, calls upon the fire god to affirm her chastity, choosing flames over humiliation. (VI.CXVIII) It was crucial for women to be seen as pure and chaste. As the verse says: "kiṁ māmasadṛśiṁ vākyam īdṛśiṁ śrotra-dāruṇam/ rūkṣiṁ śrāvayase vīra prākṛtaḥ prākṛtām iva" (Dutt). This verse suggests Sita's subversive resistance. It has been translated by different authors. One of the translations is, "Why dost thou, O hero, like a common man addressing an ordinary woman, make me hear those harsh and unbecoming words, painful unto the ears?" (Dutt). The term 'Prakrta' means common man‖ or ordinary man‖ (Reddy). Referring to Rama as a "common man" reflects a rare subversive defiance against patriarchal authority. Recent decades have seen the emergence of powerful feminist retellings- works that challenge the patriarchal script both by giving voice to silent figures and by creating new spaces for critique. Nabaneeta Dev Sen's *Sita Theke Shuru*, Mallika Sengupta's *Sitayan*, and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Forest of Enchantment* all reassert the complexity of female experience and the legitimacy of dissent. In such texts, Sita's suffering is not inevitable or glorious, but is the occasion for questioning, rebellion, and, ultimately, renunciation. After repeated humiliation, Sita's refusal to return to Rama or to validate his justification for abandonment is depicted as an act of agency and final resistance. Mallika Sengupta's Sita, who tells her story in her own voice, represents the mythic potential for self-definition and transformation. What stands out in Sengupta's text is the appearance of a nameless woman who twice inspires Sita to think differently and challenge norms. This figure can be seen as Sita's rational self, an alter-ego, pushing her to break through imposed codes of conduct. In the end, this inner strength enables Sita to claim her rights and leave patriarchy defeated. Divakaruni and Dev Sen also foreground female solidarity: their narratives highlight not only Sita but also Urmila, Surpanakha, and other "forgotten" women, intersecting their fates and voices, building a chorus of sisterhood hitherto absent in classical renditions.

The feminist and intersectional critiques advanced by Uma Chakravarti, Sukumari Bhattacharji, and others map the terrain in which myth must be analyzed- not as fantasy or irrelevance, but as a deep archive that continues to mould society's values, roles, and normative behaviours. By integrating the structures of Brahmanical patriarchy (marriage, ritual, purity, property) with the terrains of gender, caste, and class, these scholars illuminate the many-sided struggle required for change. The task, as they see it, is to move from exclusion to voice, from service to recognition, and from sacrifice to autonomy- both by reappropriating mythic narratives and by contesting the social structures built upon them.

II. Conclusion

Indian Mahakavyas and mythological traditions offer complex and sometimes contradictory models for the interpretation of womanhood. Through these narratives and their numerous retellings these texts have contributed to the formation of values that sustain the subordination of women, the policing of their sexuality, and the monitoring of their autonomy and agency. In doing so, they have ensured the transmission and naturalization of patriarchal ideology across centuries. Yet, these very texts also contain, in subtexts and silences, the seeds of resistance: Sita's words, Surpanakha's challenge, Urmila's unacknowledged labour, and the stories of Urvashi and other mythic women all offer fragments of dissent, hints at alternative conceptions of selfhood and solidarity. The modern retellings, feminist critiques, and intersectional analyses examined here show that myth, far from being mere reflection or absolute authority, can be a site for contestation and transformation. If we are to fully understand and challenge the ways in which myth shapes gender identity in India, we must read these texts critically, seeking out their complexities, contradictions, and the spaces they open for reimagining the place and voice of women. By doing so, we honour both tradition and change, re-centring agency not in sacrifice, but in speech, solidarity, and resistance.

References

[1]. Alan, M. R. *Women Empowerment in Hinduism*. Darsana: Thesis for Diploma in Philosophy, Feb. 2025. ResearchGate, doi:10.13140/RG.2.2.11914.17606.
[2]. Bhattacharji, Sukumari. *Prabandha Sangraha 1 & 2 (Collection of Essays)*. Gangchil, 2002.
[3]. ---. *Women and Society in Ancient India*. Basumati Corporation, 1960.
[4]. ---. "A Revaluation of Valmiki's *Rama*." *Social Scientist*, vol. 30, no. 1/2, Jan.-Feb. 2002, pp. 31-49. JSTOR, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3518243. Accessed 10 July 2025.

[5]. Bhattacharya, Pradip. "Women in Ancient India." *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 26, no. 24, 15 June 1991, p. 1426. JSTOR, https://www.jstor.org/stable/4398068. Accessed 10 June 2025.

[6]. Bhattacharya, Sukumari. "The Position of Women in Vedic Society." *India International Centre Quarterly*, vol. 19, no. 4, Winter 1992, pp. 40-52. *India International Centre*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/23004007. Accessed 10 June 2025.

[7]. Borhan Ghazal, Mona. *Virtuous Women in Mythology and Holy Books*. AuthorHouse, 2013.

[8]. Chakravarti, Uma. *Gendering Caste: Through a Feminist Lens*. Sage Publications, 2003.

[9]. Dasgupta, Sayantani. "Goddesses: Durga in Perspective." *India International Centre Quarterly*, vol. 43, no. 2, Autumn 2016, pp. 98-109. *India International Centre*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26317422. Accessed 10 August 2025.

[10]. Dasgupta, Shukla. Goddess: Feminine Power in Indian Myth. Roli Books, 2009

[11]. Devi, Reema, and Priya Raghav. "Deconstructing Sita: A Study of Female 'Self' under Patriarchy." *IIS University Journal of Arts*, vol. 12, no. 3 & 4, 2023, pp. 74-85.

[12]. Divakaruni, Chitra Banerjee. The Forest of Enchantments. HarperCollins Publishers, 2019

[13]. Doniger, Wendy. *The Hindus: An Alternative History*. Penguin Press, 2009.

[14]. Gautam, Shriya. "Women in Indian Mythology: Seeking Order in the Chaotic Interpretations." *Conference Paper*, May 2018, University of Oxford.

[15]. *Valmiki*. *Ramayana*. Translated by Ralph T. H. Griffith, Project Gutenberg, 18 Mar. 2008, www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/24364. Accessed 21 July 2025.

[16]. "Intersectionality." *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2024, https://www.britannica.com/topic/intersectionality. Accessed 31 July 2025.

[17]. Jha, Varsha. "The Mytho-epic Re-imagination." *Indian Literature*, vol. 60, no. 6 (296), Nov.–Dec. 2016, pp. 183-193. Sahitya Akademi, JStor

[18]. Kandali, Madhava. *Satakanda Ramayana*. Edited by M. C. Bordoloi, Assam Prakashan Parishad, 2015

[19]. Lewis, Jone Johnson. "Cultural Feminism: What Is the Essence of Being a Woman?" *ThoughtCo.*, 30 May 2019, https://www.thoughtco.com/cultural-feminism-definition-3528996. Accessed 18 August 2025.

[20]. Mandal, Mohosin. "Feminist Movements through the Ages in India: An Empowering Voyage from Prehistoric Age to the Period of Nationalism." *The Criterion: An International Journal in English*, vol. 5, no. 5, 2020, doi:10.53032/tcl.2020.5.5.22.

[21]. Mathur, Gayatri. "History and Position of Indian Women in Vedic Times: A Brief Discussion." *MuMukshu Journal of Humanities*, vol. 9, no. 2, Dec. 2017, ISSN 0976-5085.

[22]. Mohan, Meenakshi, editor. *Tapestry of Women in Indian Mythology*. Hawakal Publishers, 2022. JSTOR, https://www.jstor.org/stable/27277306. Accessed 20 August, 2025.

[23]. Murty, G. R. K. "Sita in Valmiki's *Ramayana*: A Feminist Archetype." *The IUP Journal of English Studies*, vol. 8, no. 4, 2013, pp. 7-14.

[24]. *Ramayana: The Story of Lord Rama*. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1988

[25]. Murty, Sudha. *The Daughter from a Wishing Tree: Unusual Tales about Women in Mythology*. Penguin Books India, 2011.

[26]. Narayan, R. K. *The Indian Epics Retold: The Ramayana, the Mahabharata, Gods, Demons, and Others*. Penguin Books India, 2000.

[27]. Neelakantan, Anand. *Valmiki's Ramayana*. Westland Publications, 2021.

[28]. Paranthaman, G., et al. "Indian Women Status: A Historical Perspective." *MJSSH Online*, vol. 3, no. 2, Apr. 2019, pp. 258-266. ISSN 2590-3691

[29]. Pattanaik, Devdutt. *Indian Mythology: Tales, Symbols, and Rituals from the Heart of the Subcontinent*. Lake Book Manufacturing Inc., 2003.

[30]. Pathak, Hari Priya. "Hinduism and Women Religious Beliefs and Practices." *RAI's Research Association for Interdisciplinary Studies*, June 2019.

[31]. Rout, Naresh. "Role of Women in Ancient India." *Odisha Review*, Jan. 2016.

[32]. Sen, Nabaneeta Dev. *Sita Theke Shuru*. Ananda Publishers, 1996.

[33]. Sen, Purobi. "Un-Tamed and Un-Apologetic 'Rakshasis': A Dichotomic Study of the Polarity of Women in *The Ramayana*." *IIS University Journal of Arts*, vol. 13, no. 3, 2024, pp. 146-61. ISSN 2319-5339 (P), 2583-7591 (O).

[34]. Sengupta, Mallika. *Sitayan*. Ananda Publishers, 1996.

[35]. "Sita in the Ramayana: Character, Role and Portrayal." *Study Today*, 2024, https://www.studytoday.net/sita-in-the-ramayana/. Accessed 29 August 2025.

[36]. Shukla, Neelima. A Reflection on the Challenges for Hindu Women in the Twenty-First Century, https://www.totetu.org/assets/media/paper/j019_061.pdf, accessed August 20, 2025

[37]. Tripathi, Gauri. *Women in Indian Mythology*. Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India, 2008.

[38]. Watson-Lynn, Erin, "India: Still Blaming Victims for Violence Against Women," The Interpreter, Lowy Institute, https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/india-still-blaming-victims-violence-against-women, accessed August 30, 2025

Notes:

[i] Sukumari Bhattacharji explained that the marriage hymns reflect a deeply patriarchal view of women- seeing them as impure, dependent, and needing purification through marriage. The bride is expected to fully submit to her husband, lose ties with her parental home, and dedicate her life to her in-laws, while no such expectation is placed on the groom. Bhattacharji, Prabandhasangraha 2, 350

[ii] Uma Chakravarti analyzed that women were closely monitored on their sexuality by the male members. They were restricted from having any relation with the lower caste men. female body or sexuality were objectified as "gateways".

[iii] As Sudha Murty notes, "This well-known drama in Sanskrit literature is considered to be a gem of the language. The pure affection between Vasavadatta and Udayana was used as an inspiration for future literature in Sanskrit." Murty, Daughter from a Wishing Tree: Unusual Tales About Women in Mythology, 175

[iv] Erin Watson-Lynn's article "India: Still Blaming Victims for Violence Against Women" explores how societal attitudes in India continue to stigmatize women and blame victims rather than perpetrators in cases of gender-based violence, reflecting the ongoing legacy of patriarchal norms.