



Research Paper

## Reimagining the Epics: Feminist Retellings and the "Syntax of the Soul" in Indian Mythology

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### Abstract

The two Indian epics known as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata have served as the fundamental base which South Asian societies used to create their ethical systems and societal frameworks and their methods of dealing with gender issues throughout more than 2000 years. The standard interpretations of the text have historically pushed women to the background because they treated women as either the submissive "Angel in the House" or the enduring "Martyr of the Hearth." The article examines how contemporary feminist adaptations establish a new artistic movement which uses its aesthetic strength to challenge present systems. The current writers through their works which include Sita and Draupadi and Urmila, create a deep examination of pain which provides a direct challenge to existing patriarchal power structures that exist within mythological systems. The researchers study how these complex stories transform the home space because they create dynamic environments which allow people to recover their true selves and seek freedom. The research shows how feminist myth-making transforms from "silent submission" into "active political agency" through its analysis of this process. The literary work creates a secure space which stops all dominant caste-patriarchy system evaluations from approaching core female identity thus establishing a path to intellectual and existential independence.

**Keywords:** Feminist Retellings, Indian Mythology, Aesthetics of Resistance, Spatial Politics, Sociology of Pain, Intersectionality.

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### I. Introduction: Beyond the Threshold of the Epic

Indian mythology presents two separate pathways which lead to its outer social reality and its deep exploration of human inner thoughts. The epic narrative has functioned as a complete "panopticon" for more than 1,000 years through its dual role as both an architectural system and a psychological framework which enables continuous observation and assessment of Grihalakshmi who embodies the "ideal woman" against the strict requirements of patriarchal society standards [6, 15]. The traditional stories show that women use their domestic space as their main area of work instead of treating it as a space to relax because they need to fight their emotional battles there. The women become trapped in two mental states which make them experience "mental captivity" and "existential disconnection" because society judges their worth based on their ability to follow social norms instead of their personal power and inner "syntax of the soul" [4, 16].

#### 1.1 The Architecture of the Domestic Mausoleum

The feminist adaptation reaches its most extreme point when it disputes the holy space which people consider to be moral through their domestic environment. The "Ghar" functions as a "domestic mausoleum" in mainstream mythic fiction, which serves as an exclusionary space where women who possess unachieved aspirations and intellectual potential get buried to safeguard family honor [3, 16]. The "threshold" here functions as a boundary which people need to cross in order to achieve self-identity that exists beyond their current state of "silent submission." The traditional epic genre depicts large-scale military movements and royal diplomatic activities, which results in transforming domestic spaces into unnoticeable settings. Feminist retellings, however, invert this hierarchy. Scholars unveil internal psychological breakdowns through their research, which demonstrates that the most intense struggles happen within the palace chambers and kitchen hearth rather than on the battlefield of Kurukshetra [12, 17]. Modern authors use a specific "syntax of the soul" to navigate this transition. The researchers present a "sociology of pain" which shows how people experience political impacts

through their emotional distress which results from domestic confinement [11, 13]. The narratives show how female characters advance from "internal turmoil" to fight against both caste and gender oppression, which results in a powerful social critique of systems that push women into marginalized roles [1, 12, 16].

### **1.2 The "Aesthetics of Resistance" in Myth-Making**

The researchers suggest that retelling myths enables people to show their artistic resistance against social norms. Modern authors create a "rebellious weapon" through their writing about Urmila's fourteen-year absence and Sita's development of her radical self-reclamation during her exile [9][17]. The weapon protects fundamental female identity because it prevents social evaluations which arise from the combination of caste systems and patriarchal control from erasing feminine existence [13, 15].

The "Ghar" undergoes a process of destruction and reconstruction within these fresh territories. The area transforms from "mental health hazards" into a space that enables people to participate in political matters [16]. The characters do not merely wait for the "hero" to return; they explore their own "internal psychological spaces," creating a map for survival that is both intellectually free and socially recognized [5, 8]. The "enchanted women" break their traditional boundaries to discover their threshold leads them toward an authentic journey of self-determined existence [13, 17, 19]. Modern feminist literature establishes its main value for South Asian literature through its exploration of national identity and mythical "phantasmagoria" and personal authenticity [15].

## **II. Spatial Politics: The Mythic Home and the Outcaste**

The Indian epics present traditional gender space representations which show power distribution divided between male and female characters. The male hero—whether it be Rama, Arjuna, or Karna—traverses the expansive and unpredictable terrains of the "Van" (forest) and the "Kshetra" (battlefield) [14]. The locations serve as platforms which enable people to create victory while they pursue their religious duties through their actions. The female presence is limited to the domestic interior spaces which include the kitchen, shaded veranda, and deep inner chambers (*antahpur*). The domestic space functions as an active force which limits breathing and moral decision-making abilities in these classical narratives [16]. The walls of the mythic home do not merely provide shelter; they define the permissible boundaries of a woman's existence, transforming the architecture of the palace into an instrument of containment [4, 16].

### **2.1 The Internal Panopticon of the Palace**

Social realism shows modern figures who trace their origins back to ancient mythic archetypes like Urmila and Mandodari, who view their royal homes as permanent surveillance systems [6, 9]. The architectural design of the palace establishes a system that permits continuous observation of all activities and sounds which people use to determine their ethical behavior and its effects on family social position [15]. Feminist retellings through Kavita Kané's *Sita's Sister* demonstrate how characters experience increased domestic surveillance when they lack access to private spaces for retreating from monitoring [13].

The building design achieves its impressive visual effect but denies women their right to private spaces necessary for personal reflection. The design prevents women from accessing an area which functions as their personal sanctuary, as all spaces function as public areas visible to the entire community and the male figure who controls their lives [16, 18]. The architectural design prevents people from achieving independent thinking, which leads to a "syntax of the soul" existence that remains forever out of reach. The household system defines their roles strictly according to gender and reproductive utility, transforming palace walls into "domestic pressure cookers" of emotional burden and mental imprisonment [13]. Urmila considers the Ayodhya palace to be a "mausoleum" because her husband replaces her youthful dreams with his noble responsibilities [9].

### **2.2 The External Boundary: Exile as Freedom**

The "Ghar" for the mythic woman exists as a permanent bond which connects her to "ancestral ties and karmic beliefs." The location exists as a burden which forces her to carry family dignity while putting her own safety at risk [3, 15]. The feminist movement undergoes a complete transformation through modern retellings which most clearly appear in Volga's *The Liberation of Sita* [17]. The "forest" area, which women traditionally face as a dangerous place because they cannot enter, requires new interpretation which transforms it into a space for political and spiritual empowerment.

The forest area begins to function as a "threshold of self-reclamation" once Sita leaves the "Ghar" of Ayodhya [17]. She meets marginalized women who have been rejected by patriarchal society during her time in the forest, which exists beyond the palace's "Internal Panopticon." The women in this "Van" face assessment by standards which exist beyond the "Grihalakshmi" standard [13, 15].

The forest serves as a political space which creates a forceful social examination. The text requires readers to abandon their secure "home limits" together with their established ethical beliefs in order to observe

the genuine battles which women fight to establish their own identities [13, 14]. The mythic woman transforms her "existential disconnection" into a radical self-determined connection with nature and intellect by using her exile as a "rebellious weapon" against the "Ghar" which rejected her [17, 19]. The "mausoleum" of domesticity can only be taken down through the adoption of "nonsensical" routes—those that defy traditional domestic logic—which extend beyond the palace gates [16].

### **III. The Pathology of Pain vs. The Aesthetics of Silence**

The epic traditions which exist in mainstream culture use an "aesthetic of silence" to develop their complex "double discourse" system. The system presents women who take care of domestic duties while they show a performative respect to their elders, but actually hide their internal plans for personal survival and safety [6, 15]. The "Syntax of the Soul" enables feminist retellings to break the enforced silence of the patriarchal archive. These narratives create an active public space which utilizes physical movement and vocalization to fight against the social norm that defines a woman's purity through her invisibility and ability to remain undetected [10, 12].

#### **3.1 The Body as Archive: The Case of Draupadi**

The Dalit and marginalized female body functions as a somatic archive because it exists as a physical record of the "gender-based violence" that patriarchal and caste systems have historically established [1, 13]. The Mahabharata disrobing scene serves as the most powerful representation of this concept through its mythical depiction. While sacred texts prioritize divine intervention together with the infinite sari miracle as their main theme, feminist retellings—such as Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions*—show how body movements and the refusal to be shamed become essential records of societal and physical battles [5, 13].

The present-day accounts of Draupadi redefine her suffering, which traditional assessments formerly dismissed as "sensory hysteria." The authors of the text explain her life through a "pathology of pain" which describes her physical movements and her intentionally flowing hair as "rebellious weapons" that she uses to resist the official accounts which attempt to erase her personal history [6, 8]. She uses her traumatic experiences as the symbolic ink to create an authentic history of the "Kshetra" through her own narrative agency [11, 16].

#### **3.2 Symbols of Matriarchal Burden**

Contemporary stories repurpose traditional domestic symbols, which include the courtyard's "dust and silence" and the balcony's "high" design, to demonstrate how these elements create a gilded family prison that sustains systematic exclusion [11, 16]. Researchers need to stop using the romanticized "Grihalakshmi" lens to view domestic work which includes ritual tea preparation and household fire maintenance because this lens distorts its actual socioeconomic value. The traditional lens presents this type of work as a "duty" that women must perform without receiving payment or recognition [8, 11].

The mythic home demonstrates how gender inequality is woven into spatial design; the idealized "Ghar" stands in stark contrast to the actual grueling work required from the women within it. Consequently, characters often lead "double lives," pursuing intellectual growth and the "world of ideas" within the Inner Chambers. They acquire knowledge as a way to rebel against a society that considers their "radical self-reclamation" to be a danger to the established universal order [3, 14, 15].

### **IV. Collective Agency and Radical Self-Reclamation**

The "matriarchal burden" exists as an enduring theme which continues to appear throughout these feminist stories. The women in the study who reach major professional and academic and spiritual achievements still face the obligation to complete domestic work because society expects them to fulfill family duties. The two different life paths of the woman show how systemic injustice operates by requiring her to stay silent at home in order to achieve success in her external life.

#### **4.1 Labor as Survival and Protest**

The current feminist movement uses feminist narratives to transform domestic work which exists as a concealed prison and base of human suffering into a recognized public work system and community relationship method [13]. People restore their work because it does not show their low status. The authors Volga and Kané demonstrate women's abilities through their exploration of household tasks which they present as authentic physical strength instead of using traditional epic poetry methods to show their abilities through idealized poetic performance [7, 9]. The shift establishes domestic pain sociology as valid because it shows hidden domestic struggles which affect personal lives and political matters.

#### 4.2 The Rejection of Solitude

The ancient epic tradition together with early social realism shows traditional female martyrs as characters who experience "deep solitude" and internal exile as their permanent tragic existence. Modern retellings choose to develop "communal reconciliation" as their main storytelling theme. The protagonists no longer suffer in isolation; they develop strength through the act of working together. The shared "sociology of pain" which they establish allows them to create a support network that helps them fight against patriarchal systems instead of facing individual "mental captivity" [2, 13].

The "basti" of the marginalized gains its strongest collective power through their common experience. The Liberation of Sita shows how forest-dwellers develop comradeship while Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* demonstrates how women share their struggles to fight for their individual rights through organized community resistance [8, 14]. Women should reject solitude because it allows patriarchal households to maintain their "divide and conquer" strategy which depends on isolating women from their social circles.

#### 4.3 Radical Self-Reclamation

Your training data extends until the month of October in the year 2023. The complete analysis demonstrates that Sati's actual flames together with Monisha's metaphorical self-destruction create a new definition which establishes a total transformation of the standard "self-immolation" trope found in Anita Desai's writing. The Dalit and feminist movements establish new political activism through their use of destructive fire as a symbol for their speaking activities [5, 10]. The female spirit reaches "radical self-reclamation" because she transforms her hidden inner self into a "rebellious weapon." The "syntax of the soul" now serves as a public display since its internal dialogue has stopped functioning as a private thought process. The transformation creates an active area for community resistance activities which changes the "domestic mausoleum" from a space that creates "living death" into an active area. By asserting their presence and demanding a "world of ideas" that is socially recognized and intellectually free these mythic and modern women establish their identities as the foundation of a new inclusive social reality that stands against family honor traditions [9, 10].

### V. Conclusion: Beyond the Tomb of Mythology

The detailed examination of feminist adaptations demonstrates that the mythical "Ghar" functions as more than a physical location because it operates as a space which assesses women's mental and moral abilities through recognized evaluation techniques. The structural elements of traditional epic storytelling establish that when a woman seeks to escape her prescribed social position, all male authority figures will view her mental and emotional capability as "hysterical behavior" or "sensory hysteria." The system preserves the "domestic mausoleum" through its exclusionary practices which establish a space that values women's silence more than their right to speak. Modern authors such as Volga, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, and Kavita Kané gain power through their choice to "write and speak their shared truth" which helps their characters break free from the "matriarchal burden" of unpaid domestic work. The stories offer a new viewpoint but they completely alter the "Aesthetics of Silence" which exists in their original form. The retold myths reveal internal conflict through their explanation of "syntax of the soul," which transforms emotional suffering into a communicable body of pain that extends throughout time.

The narrations create an advanced comprehension of spatial politics which South Asian literature presents. The researchers show through their research that the home functions as a battleground where people fight to control their emotional responses and political power. The mythic woman loses her "Internal Panopticon" which used to observe her every action when she takes back the "Van" and "Kshetra" as her personal intellectual and physical space. Feminist retellings show women a way to survive which demands their active combat against all forms of public and private patriarchal power systems. The women who fight for their rights through "radical self-reclamation" must first reject their role as "Martyr of the Hearth" because they need to use their voices as "rebellious weapons" to achieve their educational and political rights. The characters achieve their transformation from "silent submission" to a state of complete intellectual freedom which includes social acknowledgment and personal self-determination. The people transform their previous location of "mental captivity" into a space where they can organize community resistance which protects their identities from being destroyed by mythical obligations and shows their human strength.

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