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Sita, Mithila, and Indian knowledge systems: reimagining myth, gender, and civilizational ethics in Amish Tripathi's *Sita: warrior of Mithila*

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Abstract

This article examines Amish Tripathi's *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* (2017) as a revisionist mythological narrative that reconfigures Sita from a devotional icon into a politically aware, intellectually trained, and ethically decisive subject. Engaging with Simone de Beauvoir's foundational feminist argument in *The Second Sex* that women are socially constituted as the Other, Vandana Shiva's ecofeminist framework in *Staying Alive*, and C.G. Jung's theory of the archetypal feminine in *Aspects of the Feminine*, the paper argues that Tripathi's novel draws on both Western feminist theory and indigenous Indian knowledge traditions to reconstruct Sita as a civilizational grounded feminist icon. Rashmi Luthra's concept of women-centred interpretations of Indian epics, Rajeswari Sunder Rajan's critique of Hindu goddess imagery, and Chandra Talpade Mohanty's framework for decolonizing feminist scholarship provide the critical scaffolding for the discussion. The paper also foregrounds Amish Tripathi's own civilizational vision articulated in *Immortal India*. The study argues that the novel's importance lies not only in its feminist recasting of Sita but in its portrayal of Indian tradition as a living, rational, and adaptive system of ethical inquiry.

Keywords: *Sita, Amish Tripathi, feminist mythology, revisionist Ramayana, de Beauvoir, ecofeminism, Mithila, dharma, Jungian archetype, Indian tradition*

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1 INTRODUCTION

Mythological fiction in contemporary India is not a form of retreat from the present; it is one of the most active sites through which Indian society negotiates its cultural identity. When Amish Tripathi published *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* in 2017, the novel did not arrive simply as another adventure story set in ancient India. It arrived as a sustained cultural argument: that Sita, one of the most widely recognized women in Indian civilization, cannot be fully understood through the lens of submission and sacrifice alone. The novel insists that behind and beneath the Sita of pious obedience lies another Sita

— a warrior, a strategist, a just administrator, and a woman whose excellence is inseparable from the civilization that formed her.

The significance of this argument extends beyond literary history. In *Immortal India: Young Country, Timeless Civilization* (2017), Tripathi himself argues that Indian civilization carries within it ancient principles of governance, ethics, and social organization that remain relevant to the contemporary world (Tripathi 45). *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* can be read as the novelistic enactment of that thesis — a narrative demonstration that myth is not dead material but a living resource for ethical thinking. This is a cultural position consistent with what Neeru Tondon, in *Feminism: A Paradigm Shift* (2008),

identifies as the need to move feminism beyond imported Western categories toward frameworks grounded in the historical and cultural specificity of Indian women's lives (Tondon 22).

This paper reads *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* through an intersectional theoretical framework that draws on Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist feminism, Vandana Shiva's ecofeminism, C.G. Jung's depth psychology, Chandra Talpade Mohanty's postcolonial feminism, and the scholarship of Rashmi Luthra and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan on the representation of women in Indian mythological and religious contexts. Together, these frameworks allow the paper to show how Tripathi's novel operates simultaneously as feminist revisionism, civilizational recovery, and postcolonial cultural assertion.

The paper proceeds through a series of analytical sections. After reviewing the relevant scholarship and laying out the theoretical framework, it examines the novel's representation of Mithila, Sita's formation and agency, its treatment of dharmic ethics, its feminist recovery of tradition, its ecological imagination, and its mythological revisionism. A sustained comparative and cultural discussion leads to a conclusion that positions the novel as a significant contribution to contemporary Indian literary and civilizational discourse.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The feminist study of *Sita* begins with the recognition that her traditional image in Valmiki's *Ramayana* is heavily shaped by patriarchal norms of womanhood. She is faithful, obedient, patient, and ultimately sacrificed by the very institutions that claim to protect her. This image is not static, however. As Rashmi Luthra argues in her important essay "Clearing Sacred Ground: Women-Centered Interpretations of the Indian Epics" (2014), women-centred reinterpretations of the Indian epics have consistently sought to recover suppressed female perspectives from within the tradition itself. Luthra demonstrates that such interpretations constitute a form of feminist practice that is culturally specific to South Asia, resisting the universalizing impulses of

Western feminist frameworks while achieving genuinely critical and liberatory ends (Luthra 137).

Rajeswari Sunder Rajan's influential essay "Is the Hindu Goddess a Feminist?" (1998) raises the important question of whether the symbolic power assigned to female deities in Indian tradition translates into actual empowerment for women. Sunder Rajan argues that while Hindu goddesses embody extraordinary power, their idealized qualities — cosmic force, absolute purity, supernatural energy — can function to restrict rather than empower ordinary women by setting standards of femininity that are impossible to achieve (Sunder Rajan WS35). This insight is directly relevant to any reading of *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* because Tripathi's *Sita* is explicitly not idealized in an otherworldly sense; she is powerful in practical, political, and educational terms that real women can aspire to emulate.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty's foundational essay "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" (1988) provides a crucial methodological caution for this study. Mohanty warns against the tendency of Western feminist scholarship to construct a monolithic 'Third World Woman' as the passive object of analysis, thereby reproducing colonial discursive structures. Any feminist reading of Indian mythological fiction must therefore be attentive to the cultural specificity of its subject, avoiding the imposition of Western feminist categories on texts that emerge from very different epistemological traditions (Mohanty 62). Tripathi's novel invites precisely this kind of culturally grounded reading because its feminism is rooted in Indian civilizational concepts rather than in liberal individualism.

Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949; Vintage, 1997) provides the foundational theoretical vocabulary for understanding *Sita's* traditional representation as the Other. De Beauvoir argues that across human history and culture, man has positioned himself as the Subject — the absolute, the essential, the transcendent — while woman has been relegated to the position of the Other: inessential, incomplete, and defined exclusively in opposition to man (de

Beauvoir xxii). This structural opposition is not natural but socially constructed, reproduced through institutions, ideologies, and cultural practices including mythology. De Beauvoir's framework enables us to see Sita's traditional representation as precisely this kind of construction: a myth that naturalizes female submission by presenting it as the essence of ideal womanhood.

Vandana Shiva's *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development* (1988) contributes an ecofeminist dimension to the analysis. Shiva argues that the development paradigm in modern India has simultaneously marginalized women and destroyed ecological systems, and that indigenous knowledge systems — particularly those held by women — offer resources for resisting this double marginalization (Shiva 2). The connection between female empowerment and ecological consciousness is central to Shiva's argument, and it finds its literary expression in the world of Mithila as Tripathi imagines it.

C.G. Jung's *Aspects of the Feminine* (2003) and his essay "Approaching the Unconscious" in *Man and His Symbols* (1968) offer an archetypal dimension. Jung identifies the feminine as a fundamental psychological archetype, but his framework also serves to naturalize certain images of femininity (Jung, *Aspects* 7). Amish Tripathi's Sita disrupts Jungian expectations by combining the archetypal warrior (associated in Jungian psychology with the masculine) with the ethical and relational dimensions of the feminine, creating a figure that exceeds conventional archetypal categorization. Laurence Coupe's *Myth* (1997) and *Myth: The New Critical Idiom* (2009) and Ernst Cassirer's *Language and Myth* (1920) provide theoretical tools for understanding how myths function as cultural systems that structure collective imagination.

V. Singh's research on modern retellings of Indian myths (2017) and P. Kumar's work on the fascinating world of retellings (2016) situate Tripathi's novel within the contemporary genre of mythological fiction in India. Ashakiran A.S.'s essay "Amish's Sita — Warrior of Mithila, Shattering Gender

Stereotypes?" (2017) provides direct scholarly engagement with Tripathi's treatment of gender, demonstrating that the novel's feminist revision is recognized within academic discourse as a significant cultural intervention. Shubha Mukherjee's work on the New Woman in Indian fiction (2007) and Marianne Berger Woods's bibliography of the New Woman (2009) provide the broader context within which Sita as a new kind of female figure can be understood.

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

This paper adopts an intersectional theoretical framework that draws together existentialist feminism, postcolonial feminism, ecofeminism, depth psychology, and myth theory. Each framework contributes a distinct dimension of analysis while all converge on the central argument: that Tripathi's Sita: Warrior of Mithila is a feminist mythological novel that simultaneously draws on Western feminist categories and indigenous Indian civilizational values to construct a new kind of female heroism.

De Beauvoir's existentialist feminism establishes the baseline: Sita's traditional representation as the Other is a culturally constructed condition, not an essential or natural one (de Beauvoir 267). The novel's revisionary project is therefore a deconstruction of the myth of essential femininity as submission, and a reconstruction of femininity as agency, competence, and public responsibility. Mohanty's postcolonial feminism adds the important qualification that this deconstruction must be culturally grounded: it cannot simply import Western categories but must work through the specific intellectual and cultural traditions of Indian civilization (Mohanty 64).

Shiva's ecofeminism contributes the ecological dimension: the connection between female empowerment and ecological knowledge that characterizes Tripathi's Mithila reflects an indigenous epistemological tradition in which nature, human society, and ethical responsibility are understood as deeply interdependent (Shiva 38). Tondon's argument for a paradigm shift in Indian feminism frames the novel as part of a broader cultural movement toward

forms of feminist practice that are historically and culturally rooted in India's own philosophical traditions (Tondon 34).

Jung's archetypal theory of the feminine provides a psychological dimension, but it is used here critically rather than affirmatively. The point is not that Sita fulfils Jungian archetypes, but that she disrupts them, refusing to fit neatly into either the archetypal feminine (passive, relational, receptive) or the archetypal masculine (active, aggressive, conquering) (Jung, *Aspects* 79). Tripathi's Sita is a figure that exceeds conventional archetypal categorization, and this excess is precisely what makes her culturally significant. Coupe's and Cassirer's work on myth allows us to understand this significance structurally: myths are not merely stories but symbolic systems that organize collective understanding, and when a myth is rewritten, the collective understanding is reorganized (Coupe, *Myth* 5; Cassirer 8).

4 MITHILA AS A KNOWLEDGE-CENTRED POLITY

Tripathi's representation of Mithila is one of the most intellectually significant features of the novel. Mithila is not presented as a conventional ancient kingdom characterized by military power, dynastic intrigue, or religious ritual. Instead, it emerges as a polity organized around the values of learning, merit, ethical governance, and collective responsibility. This is a representation that makes a civilizational claim: that ancient India possessed models of political organization in which knowledge and ethics were inseparable from legitimate authority.

This claim resonates with what Jasbir Jain, in *Indigenous Roots of Feminism: Culture, Subjectivity and Agency* (2019), identifies as the need to recover and recognize the indigenous roots of feminist practice in India — roots that are embedded in the cultural, intellectual, and institutional traditions of Indian civilization rather than derived from Western theory alone (Jain 11). Mithila, as Tripathi imagines it, is a kingdom that has cultivated exactly such indigenous roots: its political authority is grounded in ethical competence, its governance is oriented toward

collective welfare, and its educational system produces citizens capable of thinking, judging, and acting responsibly.

The emphasis on meritocracy in Mithila's governance is especially significant in the context of contemporary debates about institutional accountability and democratic governance. Tripathi draws on ancient Indian concepts of *Rajadharma* — the specific ethical obligations of rulers — to construct a model of political legitimacy that is neither simply hereditary nor simply electoral, but grounded in demonstrated wisdom, ethical discipline, and commitment to the common good. In *Immortal India*, Tripathi argues explicitly that Indian civilization has developed sophisticated models of governance that the modern world would do well to study (Tripathi 112); Sita: Warrior of Mithila gives these models narrative form.

The educational culture of Mithila is also central to the novel's civilizational argument. Knowledge in the novel is not merely instrumental — a means to political power or economic advantage — but holistic: it encompasses intellectual, physical, ethical, and spiritual dimensions. This is consistent with what Maitrayee Chaudhuri, in *Feminism in India* (2005), identifies as one of the distinctive features of Indian feminist thought: its tendency to locate individual development within a larger ethical and social framework rather than reducing it to individual autonomy alone (Chaudhuri xvii).

5 SITA'S FORMATION: THE NEW WOMAN OF ANCIENT INDIA

The concept of the New Woman has a long history in Indian literature and criticism. As Shubha Mukherjee argues in her essay on the New Woman in Anita Desai's fiction, the New Woman in Indian literature is distinguished by intellectual independence, professional competence, and emotional resilience (Mukherjee 87). However, Mukherjee's analysis focuses primarily on the modern urban setting. Tripathi's achievement is to project the concept of the New Woman backward into the mythological past, showing that the qualities associated with the New

Woman — competence, agency, ethical independence — are not modern imports but recoverable dimensions of Indian tradition.

Rashmi Bhat's argument that the fulfilment of the New Woman in India remains a myth is relevant here as a counterpoint. Bhat's essay suggests that the social conditions for genuine female empowerment in contemporary India remain inadequate (Bhat 54). Tripathi's novel does not directly address these conditions, but it contributes to them imaginatively by providing a mythological precedent for female excellence that is culturally authoritative. By showing that Sita was a warrior and administrator in ancient India, the novel challenges the claim that female subordination is inherent to Indian tradition.

Sita's education under Sunaina is the narrative mechanism through which her agency is constructed. The range of her training — martial arts, political administration, philosophy, economics, ethical reasoning — constitutes a multidisciplinary curriculum that corresponds closely to the ancient Indian gurukul tradition. Marianne Berger Woods, in *The New Woman in Print and Pictures* (2009), documents the ways in which the image of the New Woman has been constructed and circulated through cultural media (Woods 3); Tripathi's novel participates in this constructive process by using mythological narrative as the medium for a new image of Indian womanhood.

De Beauvoir's insistence in *The Second Sex* that women are not born but made — that femininity is a social construction rather than a natural given — provides the philosophical foundation for understanding what Tripathi is doing with Sita (de Beauvoir 267). By showing in detail how Sita is educated and formed, the novel implicitly argues that her excellence is not miraculous or divine but achievable: it is the product of specific educational and institutional conditions that could in principle be reproduced. This is a powerful feminist argument precisely because it grounds female excellence in social and cultural conditions rather than in exceptional individual nature.

6 DHARMA, ETHICS, AND PUBLIC LIFE

Dharma is the ethical backbone of the novel. Tripathi consistently presents dharma not as a rigid code of religious obligation but as a dynamic principle of contextual ethical reasoning — a framework for thinking about what justice, responsibility, and collective welfare require in specific circumstances. This treatment of dharma is consistent with its classical articulation in texts such as the *Mahabharata*, where dharma is understood as subtle (*suksham*) and context-dependent rather than mechanical.

Sita's conduct throughout the novel reflects this understanding of dharma. Her decisions are guided not by blind obedience or personal ambition but by a disciplined concern for the welfare of her community and the requirements of justice. This makes her a figure of dharmic leadership in the tradition of what Radha Kumar, in *The History of Doing* (1993), describes as the long history of Indian women's engagement with public life and social responsibility (Kumar 2). Kumar's documentation of women's movements in India from 1800 to 1990 provides historical evidence that Indian women have consistently participated in public ethical life — a tradition that Tripathi's novel recovers in mythological form.

The concept of *Ram Rajya* — the ideal polity that the novel anticipates — embodies a political vision in which governance is oriented toward justice, accountability, and the welfare of all citizens. This vision is not merely nostalgic; it is a normative claim about what political institutions should aspire to. In this sense, the novel participates in the ongoing Indian debate about the relationship between tradition and democracy, suggesting that ancient Indian political philosophy offers resources for contemporary governance that deserve to be taken seriously.

Amrita Basu's research on the gendered imagery of Hindu nationalism (1996) is relevant here as a cautionary note. Basu demonstrates that images of powerful women in Hindu culture — goddesses,

warrior queens — have sometimes been appropriated by Hindu nationalist movements in ways that serve patriarchal rather than feminist ends (Basu 72). Tripathi's representation of Sita must be read in the light of this caution: the novel's feminist credentials depend not only on making Sita powerful but on making her power accountable to ethical values that are genuinely oriented toward justice and collective welfare rather than cultural exclusivism.

7 GENDER, POWER, AND INDIGENOUS FEMINISM

The feminist significance of *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* lies not only in what it does for Sita's character but in what it argues about Indian tradition. By recovering female agency from within the mythological tradition, the novel challenges the colonial and patriarchal narrative that Indian culture has always subordinated women. This is precisely the kind of culturally grounded feminist recovery that Jasbir Jain advocates in *Indigenous Roots of Feminism*: a feminism that draws on the specific intellectual and cultural resources of Indian civilization rather than importing frameworks that may distort as much as they illuminate (Jain 19).

Mohanty's framework is crucial here. Her argument against the construction of a monolithic Third World Woman as the passive victim of patriarchy and underdevelopment applies directly to readings of Sita that reduce her to a symbol of female suffering. Tripathi's novel resists this reduction by insisting on Sita's active agency, her political competence, and her ethical complexity. This resistance is itself a postcolonial feminist act: it refuses the role of the passive Other that both Western feminist discourse and Indian patriarchal tradition have sometimes tried to assign to Sita (Mohanty 65).

Ruth Vanita's work on "The Sita Who Smiles: Wife as Goddess in the Adbhut Ramayan" (2005) provides an important scholarly precedent for Tripathi's revisionary project. Vanita demonstrates that within the Indian mythological tradition itself, there are alternative images of Sita that are more powerful and more complex than the canonical Valmiki version

(Vanita 208). Tripathi's novel draws on this tradition of internal revisionism, showing that the recovery of female agency from within Indian mythology is not an imposition from outside but a recovery of dimensions that have always been present, though often suppressed.

The figure of Sunaina, Sita's adoptive mother, extends the feminist argument beyond the individual to the institutional level. Sunaina is not simply a nurturing mother figure; she is an educator, a political authority, and a model of female competence in public life. The mentorship she provides Sita is not domestic but political and intellectual. This representation challenges the assumption that women in Indian tradition were confined to private, domestic roles, and recovers a tradition of female intellectual and political mentorship that has been largely invisible in canonical accounts.

Amrita Basu's cautionary analysis of Hindu nationalism's gendered imagery remains relevant, however. The question of whether Tripathi's empowered Sita serves genuinely feminist ends or whether it can be co-opted by cultural nationalist projects that celebrate female power while restricting female freedom is a real one (Basu 78). The novel's feminist credentials are most secure when Sita's power is grounded in her ethical commitments and her accountability to the common good rather than in cultural pride or civilizational triumphalism.

8 GENDER, POWER, AND INDIGENOUS FEMINISM

Vandana Shiva's *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development* (1988) provides the theoretical framework for reading the ecological dimension of Tripathi's novel. Shiva argues that the same development paradigm that has marginalized women in India has also destroyed ecological systems, and that indigenous knowledge — particularly the knowledge held by women and rural communities — offers the resources for an alternative relationship with the natural world (Shiva xvi). This argument has deep resonances in Indian philosophical tradition, where the relationship between human society and

the natural world is understood as a moral and spiritual question rather than merely a technical one.

In *Sita: Warrior of Mithila*, nature is not merely a backdrop for human action but an active presence in the moral and civilizational texture of the story. The forests, rivers, and landscapes of Mithila are treated with reverence and ethical sensitivity, reflecting an understanding of the human world as embedded within and accountable to the larger living world. This ecological sensibility is consonant with Shiva's ecofeminist argument that the subordination of women and the exploitation of nature are connected dimensions of a single patriarchal and developmentalist logic (Shiva 39).

The novel's ecological imagination also connects with Jung's understanding of the feminine archetype as closely associated with nature, fertility, and the cyclical rhythms of life (Jung, *Aspects* 35). However, Tripathi avoids the essentialist trap of reducing Sita to a nature-goddess whose power is purely symbolic. Instead, her ecological awareness is grounded in practical and ethical terms: it is the basis for a governance model that takes seriously the responsibility of human communities toward the natural systems on which they depend. This is ecofeminism as policy and ethics rather than mythology alone.

The connection between ecology and governance in the novel reflects a civilizational vision consistent with what Shiva identifies as the indigenous Indian understanding of dharma as encompassing not only human social relations but the entire living world (Shiva 40). When Sita governs, she governs as a subject who understands herself as part of a larger ecological and ethical order. This vision has profound contemporary relevance in a period when environmental crisis has become one of the defining challenges of human civilization.

9 MYTHOLOGICAL REVISIONISM AND CULTURAL MEMORY

Ernst Cassirer, in *Language and Myth* (1920), argues that myth is not a primitive form of thought that

modernity has superseded, but a fundamental mode of cultural cognition through which communities organize their collective experience and transmit their deepest values (Cassirer 9). Laurence Coupe extends this argument in *Myth* (1997) and *Myth: The New Critical Idiom* (2009), demonstrating that the revisionary retelling of myths is one of the primary ways in which cultures renew themselves — adapting inherited narratives to changed historical circumstances while maintaining continuity with the tradition (Coupe, *Myth* 10). V. Singh's research on modern retellings confirms that this process is actively underway in contemporary India (Singh 173).

Tripathi's *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* participates in this process of mythological renewal. The novel does not simply retell the Ramayana; it reimagines it from the perspective of a female protagonist whose competence, agency, and ethical vision challenge the androcentric structure of the canonical narrative. This is revisionist mythology in the service of feminist and civilizational ends: it uses the narrative authority of the mythological tradition to make arguments about gender, governance, and cultural identity that are urgently relevant to contemporary India.

P. Kumar's work on the world of retellings of Indian epics (2016) situates Tripathi within a wider generic tradition of mythological revisionism, but also notes the distinctive scale and cultural ambition of Tripathi's project (Kumar 88). Unlike retellings that simply add emotional depth or psychological interiority to canonical female figures, Tripathi's novel reconstructs the entire political and institutional world of the Ramayana from the ground up, creating an alternative mythological universe in which the premises of female subordination have been fundamentally altered.

K.R.S. Iyengar's foundational work on Indian Writing in English (1985) provides a historical perspective on the tradition within which Tripathi's novel sits.

Iyengar documents the long history of Indian writers using English as a medium for exploring Indian cultural and spiritual themes, and this tradition provides the cultural legitimacy for Tripathi's use of popular fiction as a vehicle for serious civilizational argument (Iyengar 3). Ashakiran A.S.'s analysis confirms that the scholarly community has recognized *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* as a significant contribution to this tradition (Ashakiran 45).

10 A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

When read alongside other significant works of Indian mythological revisionism, Tripathi's *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* reveals its distinctive character. Mahasweta Devi's *After Kurukshetra* (2010) offers a radically different kind of mythological revision: where Tripathi's novel is heroic and civilizationally optimistic, Devi's work is fragmentary, traumatic, and attentive to the experiences of the marginalized and the defeated. Ken Dowden's *The Uses of Greek Mythology* (1992) provides a comparative Western perspective on how societies use mythological narratives for cultural and ideological purposes, confirming that the revisionary use of myth is a universal cultural practice (Dowden 22).

The comparison with Devi is particularly instructive. Devi's feminist mythological revisionism focuses on the women who are left behind — the widows, the defeated, the women whose bodies become the sites of historical violence. Tripathi's revisionism focuses on the woman who leads, who governs, and who embodies civilizational values at their finest. These are not competing visions so much as complementary ones: together, they reveal the full range of female experience that mythology can represent when it is freed from patriarchal constraints.

V. Singh's comparative analysis of several modern retellings of Indian myths (2017) notes that such retellings differ significantly in their political and cultural orientations: some are primarily nostalgic,

celebrating an idealized past; others are primarily critical, using the mythological past to expose the injustices of the present; and others, like Tripathi's novel, are primarily reconstructive, using mythological narrative to imagine alternative possibilities for the present and future (Singh 180). Tripathi's reconstructive approach is particularly suited to the task of feminist mythological revision because it insists on the availability of these alternative possibilities within Indian tradition itself.

Dashgupta's *Ramayana 3392 AD* (2014) illustrates yet another revisionary approach — the futuristic transposition — which further confirms the creative vitality of the *Ramayana* as a narrative resource in contemporary India. The breadth and diversity of this revisionary tradition provides the context within which Tripathi's contribution can be properly appreciated.

11 IMPLICATIONS AND SIGNIFICANCE

The implications of this study extend across several domains of scholarship and cultural practice. For literary criticism, the paper demonstrates that popular mythological fiction can be a site of serious intellectual and ethical engagement, and that the tools of feminist, postcolonial, and cultural theory can illuminate dimensions of such texts that are invisible to purely aesthetic or formal analysis.

For feminist scholarship in India, the paper contributes to the growing body of work that seeks to ground feminist theory in the specific cultural and intellectual traditions of Indian civilization. By showing how Tripathi's novel draws on indigenous Indian concepts of dharma, education, governance, and ecological ethics to construct a feminist argument, the paper demonstrates that the dichotomy between Western feminism and Indian tradition is a false one — that Indian tradition itself contains the resources for a robust and culturally grounded feminist politics (Jain 27; Tondon 41).

For cultural and educational policy, the paper suggests that literary texts like *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* can play an important role in the cultural transmission of Indian civilizational values, including the value of female agency and leadership. The Ministry of Education's emphasis on Indian Knowledge Systems under the NEP 2020 creates a context in which such texts can serve as pedagogically valuable resources for introducing students to indigenous Indian intellectual traditions in an accessible and emotionally engaging form.

Ruth Vanita's work on the *Sita* of the *Adbhut Ramayan*, Basu's analysis of Hindu nationalist appropriations of female imagery, and Sunder Rajan's critique of the goddess-feminist equation all serve as important cautions: the cultural significance of a powerful female figure in Indian mythology is not automatically feminist (Vanita 210; Basu 74; Sunder Rajan WS36). The paper has argued, however, that Tripathi's novel avoids the most obvious ideological pitfalls by grounding *Sita's* power in ethical accountability, practical competence, and civilizational values that are oriented toward justice and collective welfare rather than cultural exclusivism or nationalist triumphalism.

12 CONCLUSION

Amish Tripathi's *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* is a work of mythological revisionism that simultaneously engages with the feminist tradition inaugurated by de Beauvoir, the postcolonial critique developed by Mohanty, the ecofeminist framework articulated by Shiva, the archetypal psychology of Jung, and the specific cultural and intellectual traditions of Indian civilization (de Beauvoir 267; Mohanty 65; Shiva xvi; Jung, *Aspects* 79). Through this intersection of theoretical frameworks and cultural materials, the novel constructs a *Sita* who is genuinely new — not because she imports alien values into Indian mythology, but because she recovers dimensions of

Indian civilization that patriarchal and colonial interpretive traditions have suppressed.

The novel's representation of *Mithila* as a knowledge-centred polity, its construction of *Sita's* agency through a multidisciplinary education, its treatment of dharma as a living ethical principle, its feminist recovery of indigenous female leadership, its ecological imagination, and its revisionary engagement with the *Ramayana* tradition all contribute to a rich and complex cultural argument. That argument is, at its core, a feminist one: that Indian civilization has always contained within it the resources for female excellence, and that the recovery of those resources is both possible and necessary for the present.

In the context of the growing scholarly and policy emphasis on Indian Knowledge Systems, the novel's civilizational imagination takes on additional significance. Literary texts like *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* demonstrate that the recovery of indigenous knowledge traditions need not be confined to academic and technical domains; it can also take place through the imaginative power of narrative, which is uniquely capable of making ancient knowledge emotionally compelling and culturally alive for contemporary readers. This is perhaps the most important contribution of Tripathi's novel: it shows that mythology, properly revisioned and imaginatively rewritten, remains one of the most powerful vehicles for cultural renewal and feminist reconstruction (Coupe, *Myth* 14; Cassirer 83).

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