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**From Shadows to Spotlight: Feminist Re-Contextualization of Women in Chitra Banerjee's  
*The Palace of Illusions* and *The Forest of Enchantments***

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***Abstract***

*This paper examines Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novels, *The Palace of Illusions* and *The Forest of Enchantments*, to explore how these works re-contextualize women in myth through a feminist lens. Divakaruni's retellings of ancient Indian epics, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, position female protagonists at the centre of the narrative, challenging traditional gender archetypes and offering a nuanced commentary on the roles and perceptions of women in cultural narratives. In *The Palace of Illusions*, Divakaruni reimagines the Mahabharata from Draupadi's perspective, transforming her from a peripheral character to a central figure whose voice and agency drive the story. This novel interrogates patriarchal conventions by depicting Draupadi's strength, resilience, and complexity, thus subverting the passive female archetype. Similarly, *The Forest of Enchantments* provides a retelling of the Ramayana from Sita's perspective. Divakaruni presents Sita not merely as a dutiful wife but as a multifaceted woman with her own desires, struggles, and wisdom. This portrayal challenges the traditional submissive image of Sita, highlighting her inner strength and the injustices she faces, thereby fostering a critical dialogue on gender roles.*

*Both novels serve as feminist commentaries on cultural gender archetypes by giving voice to women's experiences and perspectives. They critique the marginalization of women in mythological narratives and advocate for a more inclusive and equitable representation. Through her compelling storytelling, Divakaruni emphasizes the importance of viewing women*

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*not as mere supporting characters but as complex individuals with their own stories and significance.*

**Keywords:** patriarchy, feminist resistance empowerment, gender discrimination, traditional power structures, marginalisation, *écriture féminine*.

*The Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, two epics written by Maharishi Valmiki and Maharishi Ved Vyas respectively, are mystical and heroic stories of great warriors, dharma-guardians and good men who found place in the respective epics. However, these epics also featured female characters who were essential to the events that took place in them. In contrast to the popular narrative, which portrays women as the protectors of dharma, the article suggests approaching the texts differently. The study claims that the women characters in these epics, who have long been neglected deliberately undeveloped by male authors, have once again found their voices, fears, conflicts, secret desires, anxieties, fury, disapproval, and right to agency sparked by contemporary rewritings and adaptations.

*The Palace of Illusions* (2008) and *The Forest of Enchantments* (2019) by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, recently added in the discourse of mythological fiction, aims to change the narrative by centering women in the text. The goal of Divakaruni's Mahabharata and Ramayana stories is to reveal the tales passed down from one woman to another within the palaces, rather than focusing solely on aristocrats, politicians, and state politics. Women historians are interested in the entirety of women's life (181-182). Chitra Banerjee has always tried to bring readers' attention to the thoughts and feelings of women, and her parallel reading of the epics provides a fresh interpretation that is applicable to the current day. The Indian epics *The Mahabharata* and *The Ramayana* are retold from the viewpoint of the female protagonists in Chitra Banerjee's *The Palace of Illusions* and *The Forest of Enchantments*. There is a hint of feminism because the two female protagonists perceive the entire story through their eyes. Feminism is the philosophy of the political, social, and economic equality of the sexes, promoting equal rights for all. Modern metropolitan women are capable of handling numerous responsibilities by themselves, earning the moniker "superwoman" for their exceptional talent and independence.

In *The Forest of Enchantments*, Divakaruni retells the epic Ramayana from the viewpoint of Sita, a prominent female figure often underutilized in conventional retellings. Divakaruni gives

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readers an intimate look into her thoughts, feelings, and experiences, giving Sita her agency back and presenting her as a multifaceted figure. Divakaruni's portrayal of Draupadi, one of the main characters in the epic Mahabharata, takes the reader to a world of political intrigue, social hierarchy, and gender inequality through her own eyes. Divakaruni expands upon Elaine Showalter's notion of feminist criticism, which she calls "gynocriticism," a brand-new kind of criticism in which women find a place in literature and control the narrative initially propagated by men. The present status of women in literature is debated in this paper, with the idea of '*écriture féminine*' being a key theoretical articulation in French feminist critique.

In *The Palace of Illusions*, the author introduces characters like Dhai Ma and Haradhanu to challenge mainstream narrative and provide a voice for Panchali and Sita respectively. These characters express their deepest desires and remind themselves and the queen about their gender roles. Draupadi and Sita's curious demerality serves as an additional component of the canonical past, which is anecdotal and incompletely digested by the larger narrative. Draupadi doubts her existence and sees herself as "a girl who wasn't invited". Sita, a warrior and healer, identifies with nature and questions her origins. Draupadi holds her father responsible for hiding her uniqueness and appropriating a name that would diminish her significance in the ages to come. She laments her education on restrictive laws in contrast to Dhri's lessons on justice and combat. Draupadi desperately wants to hear Dhai Ma's account of her birth and integrate it into their lives. The feminist writing style of Divakaruni intertwines the narrative of women's imaginations throughout the book, making the utopian potential of French feminist criticism attainable. The introduction of Maharishi VedVyasa as a seer allows Draupadi and Sita to gracefully accept femininity and all its facets. Through the tales of Amba and Ahalya, they question the hypocritical male righteousness and Dharma, toying with women's honor while claiming to be the guardians of dharma. Draupadi receives a lecture from Shikhandi, who remarks, "Little sister, you'll wait forever for a man to avenge your honour."

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel presents the inner realm of women's lives, presenting them as defenders of *Dharma* in a more acceptable way. Women's writings are more focused on the private realm of a woman's existence, distinct from her public life, than men's writings, which place a higher value on ideas and narratives considered conventionally masculine. Both novels depict the aftermath of the war, with Draupadi and Sita taking the initiative to restore order by

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selling jewellery to earn funds and showing compassion for widows whose husbands were killed in battle. The subtle differences in women's writing forces us to react to the minor but significant variations, the cumulative weightings of experience and exclusion that have characterized the history of women's writing. The hole in the teleological story of Draupadi in the epic Mahabharata is the secret desire that Draupadi harbours for Karna even after they are married. Similar to how Sita feels when she first meets Ram, she had visions and nightmares in which she felt a deep connection with Ravana. The general culture is the social environment in which women live. When subjected to patriarchal constraints or segregation into separateness, they redefine and transform these constraints into complementarity, asserting the significance of the role of women, even their "superiority."

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni thus has successfully repositioned women from the epic's hegemonic portrayal by representing the inner realm of women's lives. The concept of "new ladies" in Indian culture has evolved over time, with the aim of redefining women's presence in society and challenging traditional gender norms. The term "*New Woman*" was coined in the late 19th century to describe women who defied social norms regarding gender roles. The modern woman is in charge of her life, whether it be social, personal, or financial. The concept highlights evolving gender standards and the consciousness of discrimination and equality against women. New women demonstrate equal access to economic possibilities, decision-making skills, using authority with purpose, creativity, and compassion. Divakaruni presents this idea of a new woman, highlighting the importance of respect for women's education and female safety and protection in public areas. Women are associated with power, strength, and a never-say-die mind-set. The revised definition of women in literature emphasizes the need for more security and freedom for women to exist in society. The idea advocates that women should be given importance to change the conditioning that exists in society and consider the autonomy of women in patriarchal societies.

*The Forest of Enchantments* and *The Palace of Illusion* explores the feminine viewpoint in Indian mythology, focusing on Sita and Draupadi, two famous female characters from the epics. Both texts emphasize the importance of reshaping women's identities and the need to prioritize their personalities over physical appearance. In the Ramayana, Sita is often misunderstood as a helpless woman who is constantly submissive and humble. However, she is depicted to represent

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the mind-set of the contemporary Indian woman, who is capable, confident, and intellectual. She makes impressive remarks during the Ramayana, despite her appearance, and challenges the patriarchal structure that governs her life. Draupadi, on the other hand, is a clever and powerful woman with mystique, celestial traits, fiery nature, determination to rule, and moral strength. Despite her fiery demeanour, Draupadi has a compassionate side and inspires others to face life with inner strength. She is often portrayed as more ferocious and combative than Sita, who is usually shown as kind and submissive. Draupadi's dark appearance is primarily intended to evoke terror in others, but for the sake of women, society must recognize this. She is the most difficult and disputed female figure in Hindu mythology, as she could be womanly, empathetic, and generous on one hand, yet wreak devastation on people who had offended her on the other. She was never willing to give up her rights as a daughter-in-law or the Pandavas' liberties, and she was always willing to take up weapons or avenge the injustice given out to her chastity. *The Forest of Enchantments* highlights the importance of women's power and the need to redefine their identities. Sita and Draupadi are two of the most famous female characters in the epics, representing the modern Indian woman and her bold and fearless character. By prioritizing inner beauty and embracing her unique qualities, women can overcome the challenges and triumphs of the Mahabharata and other epics.

Chitra Banerjee has skillfully illustrated the life of society's weaker gender in her novels by giving them all the traits of a 'New Woman'. She has tried to give voice to the disadvantaged and convey their tale from their viewpoint. She has used the two powerful female figures from the ancient Indian epics, Sita and Draupadi, to illustrate the issues that women still face today. India's female population is rising, and one can measure a nation's economic progress by looking at how it handles its women. Giving women their due and not treating them like property is becoming the norm. Home is the most important place, regardless of accomplishments, as women are supposed to be achievers who also fulfill their roles as mothers or wives. Many critics contend that male and female authors' works will differ since men and women have different life experiences. Male authors often struggle to write from a female perspective due to their non-existent experience as women. However, they have taken on the female stance in literature, often depicting women in ways influenced by their gender, nationality, and geographic location. Memoirs and epic tales are often created to provide explanations for why things might be the way they are. The twentieth century saw rewritings of Indian epics by both Indian and

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foreign authors, offering a fresh perspective on the stories and their mythological characters. Many contemporary writers have found inspiration for their work in Indian mythology, such as Devdutt Pattnaik, Shivaji Savant, Pratibha Ray, Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, Mahasweta Devi, and Amish Tripathi.

*The Forest of Enchantments* explores the boundaries of morality in a society ruled by men that places restrictions on women's behaviour and judges it according to narrow standards. Sita, the protagonist, questions the boundaries of morality in a society ruled by men and places restrictions on women's behaviour. She is an expert at persuading and has faith in her own social and spiritual resilience. Sita's story highlights the importance of perseverance and resilience of women in a society ruled by men. Despite the challenges, there is still much work to be done to achieve gender equality in literature. *The Palace of Illusions* emphasizes women's equal place in society and their autonomy, highlighting the injustices faced by Draupadi. Divakaruni's portrayal of the epic(s) incorporates a humanist perspective, making it more authentic, contemporary, and personal. She portrays the stories of these women as deliberate choices made by them, rather than societal or male-imposed roles. Both books value the opinions of women, with the voices of Sita and Draupadi being credible and capturing the idea of a new woman. The author redefines and challenges women to pursue self-identity, courage, and self-respect through these characters. Draupadi, the Goddess Shree in human form, was sent to carry out her Karma, bring happiness to everyone she encountered and teach women about their inner strength and how to demand and win justice when needed. Banerjee's Ramayana, on the other hand, humanizes the gods we were taught to revere, making it more approachable and relatable.

Chitra Banerjee's writing is distinctive, using various strategies, including the stream of consciousness, to use the figures of Sita Devi and Draupadi to further her goal. The novels aim to reproduce the epic and the past, offering voice to the voiceless and telling the story of the "others," who are often ignored, disparaged, and denied the opportunity to feel that their cause is legitimate. With each example drawn from the well-known epic and given a new viewpoint, the two novels end up being an amazing gift for readers, with the topics raised being pertinent and giving the book a more general quality that increases its acceptability.

Divakaruni's books are filled with lessons that can be learned from her work. For many centuries,

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the majority of writers were men, but Divakaruni aims to address this imbalance by allowing readers to experience women's unique struggles and view the world through their eyes. She hopes that this encourages female readers to see and understand the world for themselves rather than accepting society's perspective as the only valid one. *The Last Queentoo* is a novel by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni that explores the role of women in society and the concept of female autonomy in a patriarchal culture. The story follows the protagonist, Sita, who challenges the limits of what is deemed appropriate and inappropriate in a culture dominated by males. The novel uses Sita's experiences to expose the gendered double standard and show that it is better for women to resist than to accept their lot in life. Divakaruni criticizes patriarchal interpretations in the Ramayana, such as the notion of Ram being self-assured and stoic, never needing any encouragement whatsoever. Instead, Ram in Divakaruni-Banerjee's work transcends gender stereotypes by admitting his frailty and confiding in Sita about his anxieties. The story cleverly reinterprets Sita's deportation to Valmiki's ashram as the result of Ram's own insecurities and early experiences, lending the entire drama a new perspective by exposing the literary mythology in its true colours.

Divakaruni's exploration of family dynamics and common problems gives the novel a particularly relatable quality, as it becomes clear that even the divine is perplexed by the complexities of mortal interactions. A retelling has the enormous power to empower those who would not otherwise have it, to change the meaning and foundation of an action by redefining the very context in which it was interpreted. *The Forest of Enchantments*, despite being written from a female point of view, genuinely caters to masculine narratives, adopting stereotypically feminine perspectives and contributing to an attribute hierarchy that is skewed towards what men have historically valued. Through Sita's character, it subtly encourages challenges to the ideal while simultaneously highlighting and appreciating patriarchal conventions.

In "The Forest of Enchantments," Sita is the main source of internal and occasionally weak exterior protests. She ultimately submits to Ram's uncompromising demands, resulting in her memories being primarily personal. Banerjee's reinterpretation of the *agnipariksha* emphasizes the *pativrata* ideal of a married lady rather than offering a defiant way out of humiliation. Sita's objection to undergoing a second *agnipariksha* is less about being forced to defend her acts while she was kidnapped and imprisoned against her will but more about rationalizing her actions

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when she was innocent. She not only justifies tyranny in the name of love by forgiving Ram for putting her through the torture, but she also proves herself to be the obedient wife who pardons the unforgivable. The primary criticism of Banerjee's work is that she did not adequately represent Sita's viewpoint; ultimately, *The Forest of Enchantments* remained a story about karma, dharma, and virtue rather than serving as a vehicle for Sita's voice and a representation of the persecution of women in the Ramayana. The female characters in the book were defined by how the men used them, and their worth was determined by how useful they were to the men in the story. Instead of recasting it from a feminist perspective, it reinforces victim-blaming societal norms and values traits from a masculine perspective. Divakaruni thinks that Sita's tale still serves as a motivation for modern women. The unique way Banerjee's Ramayana is narrated through Sita's voice sets the book differently. She is a young princess on the eve of her marriage to the gorgeous prince of Ayodhya, with her mother giving her the timeless wisdom to "endure." Banerjee believes that Ram's complex emotions stem from witnessing his father mishandle three marriages and bring difficulty to his kingdom. Sita's agnipariksha is the pinnacle of the pativrata ideal, as it is more of a ferocious protest against public humiliation than a test of chastity. Banerjee's Sita returns to Ayodhya and starts working as an active administrator for women and children. She is designed to be sympathetic to the underprivileged individuals. The greatest act of rebellion against patriarchy, according to feminist writers, is Sita's last act of defiance—asking the ground to swallow her when she is forced to prove her "purity" a second time. Divakaruni's "The Forest of Enchantments" comes as a text that reclaims the identity of the 'Self' without demeaning the 'other.' The story of Sita, the embodiment of the perfect woman, represents India, a country widely regarded as a haven of spirituality, chastity, and purity. Women are expected to bear the burden of being the "Sita" in the fight to create a "nation" that transcends the current one.

The Ramayana, one of the two great Indian epics, has for centuries represented the gender binary and has repeatedly given rise to interpretations that either accepted or questioned the moral principles of human behaviour and the social structure it established. Every young woman raised in Indian culture has at some point doubted, rejected or accepted Sita's destiny. Divakaruni's work has been reflecting the predicament of women at the crossroads of civilizations for nearly two decades. As they navigate the two cultures, they have inherited and the one they are now in, their existence is characterised by hyphenated identities, split psyches,



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and divided duties. They are constantly faced with the choice to either reject or assimilate. In the diaspora, writings from the diaspora have frequently examined how this impacts women's lives there, as marginalized individuals living in marginalized communities. Sita's story beautifully captures the circumstances facing women in diaspora, as she represents India, a country widely regarded as a haven of spirituality, chastity, and purity. The Sita story has been a subject of much discussion among writers, folklorists, and filmmakers. Ram is often depicted as a perfect, righteousness-focused figure, while Sita is seen as a submissive, loving spouse who needs protection and bears sorrow. However, Ram is often portrayed as weak and abandons his wife when she most needs him. The *Chandrabati* version of the Ramayana represents a comprehensive portrayal of a woman's hardships and experiences in a patriarchal culture. It narrates the tale of Sita's biological birth, upbringing, marriage, pregnancy, delivery, and adulthood, including her abduction, anguish, betrayal, humiliation, banishment, and death. In this rendition, Rama is portrayed as a callous, heartless coward who wrongfully banishes his expectant wife. Sita, however, remains a submissive wife despite Chandrabati's outburst towards Ram.

Divakaruni has revisited the Ramayana to reconcile the seemingly irreconcilable narrative. She has found strength in her cultural heritage, even as she portrays the struggles faced by those who have lost trust in religion and are perpetually tormented by feelings of social estrangement and cultural uprooting. Modern interpretations of the Ramayana have repeatedly rejected the wisdom of Ram and become symbolic of the marginalization of women and "femininity" in a patriarchal structure promoted by Brahmanical ideology. Writers of both genders have reworked the Ramayana, drawing attention to Urmila's plight and connecting her to the victimized woman who was denied any space or voice by patriarchal culture.

Divakaruni has traversed the full spectrum from feminism to humanism, realizing that gender distinctions can hold equal significance without necessarily being arranged in a hierarchical manner. She finds the *Sitayana* to be a tragic love story, with Sita as a more human and relatable character. She highlights Sita's fearlessness, which is sometimes misinterpreted as her meekness, and the difficulty she is facing in transcending the idea that the reader must end up hating Ram in order to care for Sita. Divakaruni's writings on diaspora explore the concept of the Self, highlighting that relocating the Self does not necessarily mean discrediting the "other." Reading

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mythology, history, or any other scenario as a woman does not necessarily imply demeaning the "male" or diminishing it in the "male." This holds true for writing about the marginalised "other" and their desire to regain their identity, as well as for the gender debate. The binaries can coexist; the subversion does not have to be an attack. Regaining control over one does not require destroying the "other." *The Forests of Enchantment* addresses the question of whether the defining of the Self can be independent of diminishing the "other" and instead establish the "Self-ness" of the "other." The novel succeeds in fusing the many identities that a woman battles to maintain while attempting to spread her wings and fit in with a society and environment that are not her own.

In *The Forests of Enchantments*, Sita reclaims her identity, expressing her desires, recognizing mistakes made and confronting both her husband and the Maharishi. She also recognizes Ram's bravery, dedication to his ideals, generosity, and overwhelming love for her. The novel also reclaims the space for peripheral characters, Urmila and Sunayana, and makes an effort to comprehend the beliefs and circumstances that motivate Kaikeyi, Manthara, and Surpanakha. Divakaruni's work goes beyond the rage and frustration of the marginalized, evident in postcolonial texts of the previous century, and seeks to highlight the positive aspects of the situation without diminishing its negative aspects. In Divakaruni's *Sitayana*, the marginalised writers find the fleeting serenity that had eluded them thus far in their quest to reclaim the Self. Contemporary Indian literature has played a significant role in redefining women's roles in society, highlighting the gaps in modern writing and the marginalization of women from prominent roles. The interpretation of Indian mythology is essential to understanding how women can challenge male authority and uncover socio-cultural structures that minimize their potential. This study aims to investigate Sita, the ideal Indian woman, from a fresh angle, addressing issues such as her identity, experiences and the influence of patriarchy on women's psyches and folk tradition.

The cultural trajectory of Indian mythology and folklore highlights the difficulties women face in adhering to social standards established for them. AyutaMohanty's paper "*Revisiting the New Woman in Indian Mythology*" suggests that Indian women are oppressed by patriarchal weights, which are influenced by social, cultural, traditional, and economic elements. One of the most emblematic Indian epics, the Ramayana, has been the focus of numerous analyses conducted

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with the use of contemporary theoretical paradigms. However, Sita's cryptic and mysterious nature has led to her being viewed as a metaphor for all Indian women and a fictional character. Divakaruni's novel is an attempt at examining Sita as a person through the lenses of Indian folk traditions, Karen Horney's theory of personality, and Carol Hanisch's catchphrase, "The personal is political." It looks for societal problems related to women and examines the concept of *self*, which takes into account various factors such as social, spiritual, and emotional dimensions. Carl Rogers (Theories of Personality) asserts that self-concept is always evolving in tandem with changes in the external world, and that three factors influence one's self-concept: belief in oneself, attitude towards others, and attitude towards oneself. In a nutshell, contemporary Indian literature holds the potential to recreate the dominant narratives and give significant female characters from Indian epics new identities by revisiting and reinterpreting old tales. Western feminist Karen Horney argues that society has conditioned women to believe they are inferior to males, which is a social construct rather than a result of their biological gender. Women have long associated themselves with this idea due to social, cultural, and economic inequality. The question that emerges from this theoretical framework is "What is Sita's self?"

In Valmiki's *Ramayana*, Sita is portrayed as a submissive wife, but much research shows that she is more than just a passive object of patriarchal rule. She is a manifestation of the Goddess of power Lakshmi, and her resilience is a reflection of her individuality as she battles patriarchy and makes concessions to gain a respectable position for herself. In Valmiki's *Ramayana*, Sita and Rama argue on the subject of exile with Rama wanting her to remain in Ayodhya and take up the ways of Bharata, an Ayodhya prince who has been crowned. Rama tries to talk her out of following him into exile by emphasizing the difficulties and possible threats she would encounter in the wilderness. Sita hears his justification and is adamant that she be allowed to go with him. She shares with him a sage's prophecy of her future in the forest and wants to explore and take in the beauty of the forest. Sita's resilience and willingness to take risks are what enables her to make such a daring choice. However, she is only shown as a helpless and vulnerable character in ancient literature, and the Indian female mind is subdued by her devotion. Carol Hanisch remarks that the domestication of women is a result of patriarchal arrangement, with women being allocated jobs relating to childbearing, family care, and more such household chores.

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In *The Forest of Enchantments* Divakaruni discusses women's empowerment and endurance, focusing on the difficulties women encounter while continuing to work towards their victory.

Sita's abduction by Ravana serves as a testament to her inner strength and resolve to be a loving wife. However, her image is often presented as fragile due to patriarchal standards, leading to her being portrayed as a helpless person. Valmiki's Ramayana highlights the "*Lakshman Rekha*" passage, which, in modern criticism, serves as establishing patriarchal standards for women. This incident reveals that Sita is a victim of patriarchy, and her persona has been used as a psychological control mechanism to force women to behave in ways that align with masculine ideals.

Sita's character is an inspiration to Indian women, but instead of using the term "inability," she uses "capability and potential." Ram's cold welcome to Sita at the end of his battle with Ravana serves as evidence of this masculine viewpoint. He offers her freedom to go wherever she pleases, claiming that he fought Ravana to rid his family of shame and insults, not for her. Sita uses this humiliation as an opportunity to defend her position and assert her dignity and respect, stating that she couldn't have prevented the accidental touch she had with another man. Sita is a skilled argumentator who speaks up when she thinks it's important, maintaining her principles and self-esteem. A political and power struggle can also be linked to Sita's exile during her pregnancy. Rama deserts Sita to fulfill his duty as a just king, putting his kingly obligations ahead of his marriage responsibilities. Lakshmana obeys Rama's order to leave Sita in the wilderness without alerting her to her impending misfortune. When Sita finds out she has been banished, she laments but doesn't give up. She raises her children skillfully as a single mother while residing in the hermitage of Sage Valmiki, demonstrating Hanisch's concept of "personal, power, and politics."

Indian oral traditions, such as Chandrabati's Ramayana, provide a unique perspective on Sita, a woman who has endured injustice and hardship throughout her life. Chandrabati's Ramayana allows Sita to express her inner thoughts and critique patriarchy for keeping her quiet. Indian folk tradition examines the patriarchal structure from its own perspective, highlighting the inner turmoil that many women experience.

Avadhesh Kumar Singh's article titled "*In Their Own Words and Worlds*" highlights that Valmiki's Ramayana, the *Ramcharitamanas*, and numerous other translations are all essentially

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Rama's ayanas. Singh argues that these traditions are androcentric and a part of learnt tradition, but they openly condemn Rama for his peculiar and severe treatment of Sita. Folklore portrays Sita as more just and superior to Rama, preserving her uniqueness and drawing attention to the conscious efforts made by the written tradition to quiet her. Indian folk traditions reflect Carol Hanisch's thesis that masculine authority invades the personal realm to establish control and make it political. While feminists voice concerns about women internalizing submissive roles, Indian folk tradition solely depicts Sita's miseries and injustices. Authors like Divakaruni have been rewriting and recreating unusual female characters from the tradition to challenge this monopoly of male perspectives.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novels, *The Palace of Illusions* and *The Forest of Enchantments*, thus serve as powerful feminist re-contextualizations of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, respectively. By centering the narratives on Draupadi and Sita, Divakaruni brings the often overshadowed stories of these iconic women into the spotlight, providing them with voices that assert their agency, complexity, and resilience. Divakaruni's feminist lens highlights the injustices and constraints imposed on these women, while also celebrating their inner strength and agency. This narrative shift encourages readers to question and critique the cultural archetypes of gender that have persisted in mythology and literature. By doing so, Divakaruni not only honours these mythological figures but also advocates for a more inclusive and equitable understanding of their stories. Critically, these works illuminate the importance of revisiting and reinterpreting myths to uncover the rich, untold stories of women. Divakaruni's novels challenge the reader to reconsider their perceptions of these iconic women and recognize the enduring relevance of their struggles and triumphs in contemporary discussions on gender and feminism. In essence, Divakaruni's re-contextualizations are both a tribute to and a reclamation of the feminine voice in myth, urging us all to listen more closely to the stories that have long been in the shadows. The exploration is not merely a simplified analysis of a novel that revisits canonical Indian epics from a shifted perspective from one gender to another. It is rather an amalgamation of a critical appraisal, an 'in between the lines' reading and a deep assessment of the unconscious patriarchal imposition that Divakaruni talks about. The agency that Divakaruni attempts to give back is encouraged as well as questioned at times. An example of one such duality being trying to establish Sita as a strong female character while also highlighting that the strength and perspective given to her is itself partially hollow. She is, at

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times, shown as a pitiful and submissive (to a point that one starts questioning the return of agency). On the other hand, Draupadi's perspective is more encouraged than criticized taking into account the secret love she harboured for Karna. The unconscious imposition of male dominance is put to light doing considerably fair justice to the concept of 'Ecriture féminine'. The identity crisis that the two protagonists face, throughout their journey, as a woman is explored through varying lenses ranging from their patriarchal nomenclature, quest of belonging to a life devoid of their own decisions. In a nutshell, the justice that was supposed to be done to the purpose of this research is attained with a new eye to look at Divakaruni's novels.

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