



Access Online



Article DOI:

10.5281/zenodo.19977010

¹ Research Scholar,
Dept. of English,
Shri Govind Guru
University, Godhra.

² Principal,
Sarvajanik Commerce
College, Godhra

How to Cite:

Asha L. Bavarava
& Dr. Shailendra
Hridayanand Pandey
(2026), From Silence
to Subjectivity:
Revisionist
Mythmaking and
the Reconstruction
of Sita in Modern
Indian English
Fiction, International
Educational Applied
Scientific & Research
Journal (IEASRJ),
Vol: 11, Issue: 4,
22-27

FROM SILENCE TO SUBJECTIVITY: REVISIONIST MYTHMAKING AND THE RECONSTRUCTION OF SITA IN MODERN INDIAN ENGLISH FICTION

Asha L. Bavarava¹, Dr. Shailendra Hridayanand Pandey²

ABSTRACT

At the centre of the Ramayana stands Sita, a figure long received as the embodiment of virtue, endurance, and silent strength. The image is familiar, almost unquestioned. And yet, when her story is revisited through contemporary literary engagements, something begins to shift. Not dramatically, not all at once but enough to introduce a certain unease. There is presence, certainly, but also a quiet absence that becomes difficult to ignore: her interior voice remains only partially heard. It is this absence that the present inquiry turns toward. Modern Indian English fiction, particularly within the framework of revisionist mythmaking, does not seek to erase the archetype. Instead, it returns to it more slowly, more attentively. In texts such as *The Forest of Enchantments*, *The Liberation of Sita*, *Sita: Warrior of Mithila*, and *The Missing Queen*, the narrative does not break away from the epic; it leans into it. And in doing so, something subtle begins to change. The centre of the story shifts almost imperceptibly. What once remained at the margins begins to move inward. Through first-person narration, moments of psychological interiority, and even deliberate silences, Sita's presence acquires a different texture. She is no longer only acted upon; she begins to think, to question, to respond. And with that, the narrative itself seems to loosen. The transformation does not announce itself loudly. It accumulates. It appears in fragments in pauses, in hesitations, in moments where thought seems to gather before it is spoken. What changes is not only Sita's character, but the reader's position in relation to the text. The epic no longer feels entirely fixed; it opens, inviting a different kind of attention one that listens as much to what is unsaid as to what is expressed. Revisionist mythmaking, then, does not operate through rupture. It does not discard tradition; it returns to it. But it returns differently. It creates a space of dialogue where inherited meanings are not fixed, but revisited. Within this space, voices that once remained muted begin to emerge, not suddenly, but gradually, through shifts in perception. And perhaps this is where the significance of these retellings resides.

KEYWORDS: Sita, Ramayana, Retelling, Contemporary Fiction, Myth, Mythology, Feminism

INTRODUCTION

Myth, perhaps more than any other narrative form, does not remain confined to the past. It settles quietly but persistently into collective consciousness, shaping how ideas of duty, morality, and identity are understood in everyday life. Within the Indian cultural imagination, the *Ramayana* occupies precisely such a space. It is not merely a text to be

read; it is something lived, recalled, and internalised. At its centre stands Sita, a figure long associated with virtue, sacrifice, and unwavering devotion. And yet, the closer one stays with her story, the more a certain unease begins to surface. The narrative speaks about her in detail but rarely allows her to speak from within herself. For a long time, this absence has not appeared as a lack. It has

Copyright© 2026, IEASRJ. This open-access article is published under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License which permits Share (copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format) and Adapt (remix, transform, and build upon the material) under the Attribution-NonCommercial terms.

been absorbed into the ideal itself. Silence becomes strength. Endurance becomes moral authority. The image holds. But contemporary readings no longer move past this so easily. They pause. They return. Not to reject the narrative, but to attend to it differently. What if silence is not only strength? What if it also marks something unarticulated? With this shift, meaning begins to move. It no longer rests only in what is spoken, it gathers around what remains unsaid. It is from within this moment of hesitation that revisionist mythmaking begins to take shape. Not as an act of replacement, but as a mode of return. Contemporary Indian English fiction, particularly in its engagement with myth, approaches the *Ramayana* in this spirit. The narrative is not dismantled; it is re-entered, in that re-entry, its centre begins to shift. The focus moves away from dominant heroic frames toward quieter, often overlooked experiences. Figures like Sita begin to appear differently not as fixed ideals, but as sites of reflection. This movement is not confined to literature alone. It reflects a broader cultural impulse, a willingness to revisit what has long been stabilised, to question what has been taken as given. The present study situates itself within this space. It turns to texts such as *The Forest of Enchantments*, *The Liberation of Sita*, *Sita: Warrior of Mithila*, and *The Missing Queen* not as simple retellings, but as engagements that open the narrative from within. Through techniques such as interior monologue, shifting focalisation, and even the deliberate use of silence, these texts begin to alter how Sita is encountered. At the centre of this inquiry lies a question that does not settle easily: when Sita is allowed to speak, what changes? Not only in her character, but in the way the epic itself is understood. The answer does not arrive fully formed. It unfolds through reading, through reflection, through return. Perhaps this is where the significance of these reinterpretations ultimately resides. Not in resolving the silences of the past, but in keeping them open. Each engagement adds something and yet leaves something unfinished. Sita's story does not conclude, it continues. What shifts is not only the narrative, but the way it is read.

REVISIONIST MYTHMAKING AND FEMINIST DISCOURSE

The act of returning to an established text is never entirely neutral. It carries with it an awareness sometimes faint, sometimes insistent that meaning is

neither fixed nor fully exhausted in its first telling. Something always seems to remain, waiting to be seen differently. In literary discourse, this return often takes the form of what Adrienne Rich calls revision, a way of looking back with fresh eyes, of entering a familiar narrative from another direction. What begins as re-reading gradually shifts toward re-writing.

Preservation gives way to questioning and in that shift, revisionist mythmaking begins to emerge. This practice is not simply about telling the story again. It is about engaging with it in a way that unsettles what once appeared complete. Myths often carry the authority of timelessness. They feel universal, almost beyond interrogation. Yet, they are shaped by context, by history, by structures of power that may not always be immediately visible. The narratives they sustain can quietly reinforce assumptions about gender, hierarchy, and identity, even while appearing natural. Postcolonial theory offers one pathway into this questioning. As articulated by Bill Ashcroft and others, the idea that "the empire writes back" suggests that voices once marginalised can return not passively, but with the capacity to reshape dominant narratives. Although this idea emerges from colonial discourse, its resonance extends further.

Within mythological retellings, it opens a space for figures such as Sita, in texts like the *Ramayana*, to be encountered differently. Presence, one begins to realise, does not always guarantee articulation. A character may stand at the centre of the narrative and yet remain only partially voiced. Feminist criticism deepens this line of inquiry by attending to representation itself. It does not simply reject traditional portrayals; it examines how they have been formed and sustained.

Women in myth are often rendered as symbols of virtue, sacrifice, or transgression rather than as individuals with interior depth. What shifts when this symbolic frame is unsettled? When Sita is approached not only as an ideal but as a subject capable of reflection, hesitation, and thought, the narrative begins to alter not overtly, but in ways that reshape how it is read.

Deconstruction, associated with Jacques Derrida,

introduces another dimension by questioning the stability of meaning itself. It draws attention to the oppositions that structure interpretation speech over silence, presence over absence and reveals how they privilege one term while diminishing the other. When this perspective is applied to Sita, her silence no longer appears as a simple lack. It begins to suggest a space where meaning gathers, even if it is not fully articulated. Silence, then, is no longer empty; it becomes charged with possibility. At the same time, these frameworks do not operate in isolation from context. In the Indian literary and cultural landscape, reinterpretations of myth often take a more negotiated form. They do not necessarily oppose tradition; they remain within it, working through its structures. Meaning shifts, but without overt rupture. What emerges from this is not a fixed method, but a field of interaction. The Eastern mode is not devoid of critique; the Western framework is not detached from context. They intersect, overlap, and reshape one another. Revisionist mythmaking, in this sense, becomes less a defined strategy and more an ongoing process a way of returning, questioning, and re-seeing.

Perhaps this is where its significance ultimately resides. Not in arriving at a final interpretation, but in sustaining the act of interpretation itself. Each return alters the narrative slightly. Each reading reveals something that was not visible before, while leaving something else unresolved. Meaning does not settle; it continues to unfold. And in that unfolding, stories such as that of Sita do not remain fixed; they remain alive, open, and continually reimagined.

SITA IN THE CLASSICAL CANON: THE POLITICS OF SILENCE

To understand the force of contemporary reinterpretations, one must return however briefly to the narrative space in which Sita first takes shape. In the *Ramayana*, traditionally attributed to Valmiki, she stands at the centre of the story's emotional and ethical movement. And yet, this centrality carries a quiet paradox. She is constantly present, but her inner life feels only partially accessible mediated, approached, but never fully entered.

Sita's character emerges through a series of moments that have come to define ideal womanhood. The

decision to accompany Rama into exile is read as devotion. Her endurance in Lanka becomes strength. The trial by fire transforms into a test of both chastity and dharma. And finally, her withdrawal from the world composed, dignified, yet leaving behind a sense of unease. These episodes do more than narrate her life; they begin to stabilise her meaning, fixing her within a recognisable moral frame. From this stability, an archetype takes form clear, powerful, enduring. But also, in a certain sense, closed. Sita appears less as a figure of interior movement and more as a vessel through which cultural ideals are affirmed. The narrative does not merely describe her; it shapes how she is to be understood. It is here that silence begins to matter. Not as a simple absence, but as something structured. Sita speaks, but sparingly. And when she does, her voice remains aligned with the larger demands of duty and order. Her experiences are present, yet their inner depth does not fully unfold. The narrative moves forward, and something seems to remain behind unspoken, unresolved. But this silence does not remain singular. At times, it appears as strength, a form of restraint, perhaps even an ethical discipline. At other moments, it suggests limitation, as though articulation is shaped by what the narrative allows. The text does not resolve this tension. It leaves it open.

It is from within this openness that reinterpretation begins. The gaps are small, but persistent. They create an entry point not to replace the story, but to return to it differently. Sita's narrative is not undone; it is re-entered. Within this re-entry, something begins to shift. Not abruptly, not through rupture but gradually, through a change in how she is seen. Silence begins to carry multiple meanings. The archetype loosens, though it does not disappear. Sita remains, but not in a singular form. Perhaps this is where the enduring significance of her narrative lies. Not in arriving at a final understanding, but in remaining open to return.

Each reading alters the balance slightly. Each interpretation brings something into focus while leaving something else unresolved. The story continues not as something fixed, but as something that lives through being read, questioned, and reimagined.

NARRATIVE RECONFIGURATIONS: SITA AS SPEAKING SUBJECT

If the classical narrative leaves Sita within a space of partial articulation, contemporary retellings do not attempt to close that space. Instead, they remain within it more patiently, more attentively. And within this return, something begins to shift. Not toward a single redefinition, but toward a series of movements through which Sita gradually changes from a figure observed to a presence that speaks. The transformation is neither sudden nor uniform. It unfolds through different narrative approaches, each altering the way her story is encountered. In *The Forest of Enchantments*, the shift begins with voice. The move to first-person narration does not simply retell events; it reshapes them. What once appeared external now gathers memory, reflection, and hesitation. Sita does not merely respond, she interprets. In that act of interpretation, the moral centre of the *Ramayana* begins to loosen. What seemed unquestioned acquires complexity. Authority disperses. The reader is drawn closer, not to certainty, but to understanding. In *The Liberation of Sita*, the movement is quieter, yet no less significant. Sita's journey extends beyond herself, unfolding through encounters with other women Ahalya, Surpanakha, Renuka. Their stories do not resolve her own; they reflect it back to her differently. What was once solitary begins to feel shared. Liberation does not arrive as confrontation; it emerges through recognition.

A different form of articulation appears in *Sita: Warrior of Mithila*, where Sita is reimagined as visibly powerful strategic, politically engaged, active within structures of authority. This representation expands her role, yet it also introduces a tension. The narrative does not resolve this. It leaves the question open, allowing agency itself to remain under consideration.

In *The Missing Queen*, the strategy shifts again. Sita is absent, yet central. Her disappearance shapes the narrative, drawing inquiry toward her. Silence, here, does not withdraw; it compels. And yet, her voice remains mediated spoken through another perspective. Across these retellings, there is no single direction that Sita follows. Her reconstruction unfolds through multiple modes voice, relation, action, absence. Each engages with her silence differently. None resolves it completely. Instead, they

allow it to remain open.

What emerges, then, is not a fixed identity, but a process. Subjectivity begins to appear as something that forms gradually within narrative, across interpretation, and through the act of reading itself. Sita does not become one definitive figure. She remains multiple, shifting with each return. Perhaps this is where the significance of these reinterpretations ultimately lies. Not in defining Sita once and for all, but in allowing her to remain in motion. Each retelling adds something yet leaves something unfinished. The narrative does not conclude it continues. And in that continuation, meaning does not settle; it expands.

SILENCE REVISITED: FROM PASSIVITY TO ETHICAL AGENCY

The reinterpretations discussed thus far begin by unsettling a long-held assumption about Sita, that her silence signifies passivity. When viewed through the lens of revisionist mythmaking, this silence does not disappear; instead, it shifts. It no longer appears as a simple absence of voice. Something begins to gather within its restraint, intention, perhaps even a form of ethical reflection that resists immediate articulation. In the classical narrative of the *Ramayana*, silence is closely aligned with virtue. It becomes part of an ideal patience, obedience, endurance where composure is valued over expression. This alignment has shaped how Sita has been understood across generations. Yet, contemporary retellings do not pass over this so easily. They pause within it. They ask not only what silence means, but how it is formed. When Sita's experience is approached from within her own perspective, her silence begins to appear less imposed and more negotiated emerging within constraint but not entirely defined by it.

With this shift, silence begins to change its texture. It does not simply indicate submission; it may also suggest withdrawal a turning away from structures that do not fully recognise or respond to her experience. At times, it appears as an inward movement, a space where reflection takes place without the need for external validation. Endurance, then, is no longer easily read as passive acceptance. It begins to suggest a way of preserving the self within limitation. Agency, in this context, becomes less visible, less declarative. It may exist in the act of

withholding itself.

Yet, these reinterpretations do not attempt to fix silence into a single meaning. They leave it open. Silence does not become purely empowering, nor is it reduced entirely to suppression. It remains layered capable of holding multiple meanings at once. And it is precisely this ambiguity that allows Sita's subjectivity to emerge without being confined.

What follows, then, is not a movement from silence to speech, but a rethinking of silence itself. It begins to function as a form of expression quiet, indirect, but meaningful. It no longer stands opposed to voice; it becomes one of its subtler forms, capable of carrying depth without necessarily becoming explicit. This is where the significance of these reinterpretations ultimately resides. Not in replacing silence with speech, but in learning to remain with silence to read it differently. In this shift, Sita does not become fully defined. She remains open, continuing to invite reflection. And in that openness, her presence does not diminish, it deepens.

CULTURAL AND IDEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The reconfiguration of Sita in contemporary retellings does not remain limited to literary form; it gradually enters the space of cultural negotiation. Here, myth is no longer distant from lived reality. Narratives such as the *Ramayana* continue to shape how duty is understood, how morality is interpreted, how identity is formed. And when these narratives are revisited, the shift is not only interpretative, it begins to influence how they are experienced in the present. In this context, revisionist mythmaking appears less as rejection and more as return. Not a dismantling of tradition, but a re-entry into it. The authority of the epic is not overturned; it is approached differently. Attention shifts. What once remained at the margins begins to come into view. By foregrounding Sita's subjectivity, these narratives alter the internal balance of the epic. The *Ramayana* no longer holds as a single, unified moral structure; it opens gradually to multiple perspectives that exist alongside one another. And with that opening, authority itself begins to feel less singular, more distributed.

This movement introduces a quiet but significant

change in how tradition is understood. It no longer appears fixed. Instead, it seems to move reshaped each time it is revisited. The relationship between past and present, too, becomes less oppositional. Contemporary values do not stand outside tradition; they enter into conversation with it. Sometimes they align. Sometimes they remain in tension. And perhaps it is within this tension that meaning begins to take shape not as something resolved, but as something negotiated.

The question of gender sharpens this negotiation further. When Sita is approached as a figure capable of thought, choice, and reflection, long-standing ideas of femininity begin to loosen. Yet this shift does not arrive through rupture. It remains within the framework of the epic. Change does not appear imposed from outside; it emerges from within the structure itself. And this suggests a different way of thinking about transformation not as a break, but as a reworking of continuity. What begins to emerge, then, is an understanding of myth as something that does not close. It continues. Each return alters it slightly. Each interpretation shifts its emphasis. In allowing Sita's voice or even her silence to carry new meanings, contemporary narratives participate in this ongoing movement. They do not simply reinterpret the past; they reshape how the present is understood through it. Perhaps this is where the deeper significance of these reinterpretations lies. Not in resolving the tension between tradition and modernity, but in sustaining it. In allowing it to remain active. In keeping it open. Myth, in this sense, does not remain preserved, it remains alive.

CONCLUSION

The movement from silence to subjectivity in contemporary retellings of Sita does not follow a clear or linear path. It neither abandons tradition nor simply asserts voice. Instead, it unfolds as a gradual shift in perception a different way of seeing her within the *Ramayana*. What emerges is not a single, stable image, but a range of possibilities that resist final definition. Through revisionist mythmaking, contemporary Indian English fiction approaches the epic as something that continues to evolve. Sita's character moves beyond the familiar associations of silence and endurance. At times, this shift appears through reflection, at others, through relationships,

action, or even absence. Her presence changes not by replacing the old, but by expanding it. And with this expansion, the reader's role shifts as well. Meaning is no longer simply received; it is engaged with, shaped in the act of reading itself. Yet, these reinterpretations do not resolve the tensions they uncover. Silence and agency remain intertwined. Continuity and change do not separate cleanly. The narrative does not offer closure; it holds these tensions open. And perhaps it is this openness that sustains the relevance of myth, allowing it to be revisited across contexts and generations. In this sense, the power of myth lies not only in its continuity, but in its capacity for reinterpretation. Contemporary retellings do not move away from tradition; they return to it differently. And in that return, Sita's story does not conclude, it continues to shift, inviting each reading to encounter it anew.

REFERENCES

1. Divakaruni, Chitra Banerjee. *The Forest of Enchantments*. HarperCollins, 2019.
2. Tripathi, Amish. *Sita: Warrior of Mithila*. Westland Publications, 2017.
3. Volga. *The Liberation of Sita*. Translated by T. Vijay Kumar, Harper Perennial, 2016.
4. Arni, Samhita. *The Missing Queen*. New Delhi: Orient Blackswan Pvt. Ltd. 2010.
5. Abrams, M H, and Geoffrey G. Harpham. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Boston, Thomson Wadsworth, 1999.
6. Ambia. In *a Forest, A Deer*. Tr. Lakshmi Holmstrom. Oxford University Press, USA, 2006.
7. Arni, Samhita. *Moyna Chitrakar. Sita's Ramayana*. Toronto: Groundwood Books. 2011.
8. Desai, Meghnad. *Sita and some other Women from the Epic*. In *Search of Sita: Revisiting Mythology*. Ed. Malashri Lal, Namita Gokhale. New Delhi: Penguin Books. 2009.
9. Divakaruni, Chitra Banerjee. "Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Forest of Enchantments*: A Saga of Duty, Betrayal, Integrity and Honour." *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, 11.2. 2019.
10. Hess, Linda. "Rejecting Sita: Indian responses to the ideal man's cruel treatment of his ideal wife." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 67.1 (1999): 1-32.
11. Kumar, Amit, and M. Phil Scholar. "A Psychoanalytical Study of Female Characters in Volga's *'The Liberation of Sita'*." *The Criterion: AN International Journal in English* 13.1 2018.
12. Sharma, Sunita. "Myth modernity and philosophy in Amish Tripathi's novels." (2016). Thesis: <http://hdl.handle.net/10603/197989>
13. Singh, Avadhesh Kumar. *Ramayana through Ages: Ramkatha in Indian Languages*. Delhi: D. K. Printworld. 2007.
14. Valmiki. *The Ramayana*. Translated by R. K. Narayan, Penguin Classics, 2006.
15. Yardi, Madhukar R. *Epilogue of Ramayana*. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 2001.