

Scheherazade's Isomorphic Replication: The Narrative Praxis as an Exigency for Sustaining Survival and Political Authority in Amish Tripathi's *Sita: Warrior of Mithila*

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Abstract

*In the evolving landscape of contemporary feminist literary criticism, the reimagining of classical myths provides a fertile terrain for exploring the dynamics of agency, power, and identity. Amish Tripathi's *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* represents a significant departure from traditional narratives of the Ramayana, presenting Sita not as a passive emblem of chastity and obedience, but as a proactive agent navigating complex social, ethical, and political landscapes. This paper argues that Tripathi's Sita exemplifies a modern manifestation of narrative sovereignty, drawing compelling parallels with Scheherazade of *One Thousand and One Nights*, whose storytelling ensures both survival and empowerment. By employing narrative as a strategic and transformative tool, Sita asserts control over her own fate, negotiates her political environment, and challenges patriarchal structures that seek to limit her autonomy. Through a detailed analysis of her embodiment, ethical agency, and rhetorical engagement, this study examines how Sita's physical and intellectual capacities are interwoven with her moral and political authority, redefining the parameters of female heroism in mythological storytelling. Furthermore, the paper situates Tripathi's work within the broader framework of feminist mythography, interrogating how the reconstruction of Sita's*

Submitted: 01.10.2025

Accepted: 22.12.2025

Published 30.12.2025

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identity destabilizes conventional gender norms and amplifies the discourse on female subjectivity in Indian mythology. By juxtaposing textual analysis with feminist theoretical perspectives, this research highlights the ways in which narrative, embodiment, and political acumen converge to position Sita as both a survivor and a sovereign, ultimately demonstrating that the act of storytelling itself can serve as a radical instrument of empowerment, resistance, and self-determination.

Keywords: Feminine divine, feminist mythology, female agency, empowerment, reimagining myth

Introduction

This article explores the adaptation of mythological figures to address contemporary social concerns. It argues that while Sita has traditionally been portrayed as a passive emblem of virtue and suffering, Tripathi's retelling represents a radical intervention that transforms her into a sovereign subject. Central to this transformation is the metaphor of Scheherazade from *One Thousand and One Nights*, framing storytelling and narrative reclaiming as essential tools for survival and the assertion of political authority in a patriarchal framework.

Review of Literature

The review of literature synthesizes and critically engages with five scholarly articles that explore the representation of Sita in Amish Tripathi's *Sita: Warrior of Mithila*, placing it in dialogue with traditional portrayals, particularly from Kampan's *Ramavataram* and Valmiki's *Ramayana*. Collectively, these studies analyze Tripathi's novel as a significant contemporary retelling that reconfigures Sita from a paragon of passive, spousal virtue into an active, warrior-administrator, while also probing the limits and contradictions of this feminist reconstruction.

A central theme across the literature is the deliberate subversion of Sita's traditional archetype. Dr. Sivaranjani G. establishes the foundational contrast: Kampan's 12th-century Sita embodies "extraordinary beauty and desirable feminine nature," an emblem of spousal duty and sacrifice, while Tripathi's Sita is re-envisioned as a 'fearless warrior of Mithila.' This shift is not merely cosmetic but structural. As Patel Anilkumar notes, in Valmiki's epic, Sita is often a 'passive spectator' and a 'damsel in distress,' whereas Tripathi's protagonist is the 'hero' of her own narrative, centralizing her life from infancy to her political and martial training.

The articles detail the mechanisms of this transformation. Sita's upbringing under the pragmatic Queen Sunaina and education at Rishi Shvetaketu's gurukul—where she masters philosophy, statecraft, and martial arts—is repeatedly highlighted as the crucible for her empowered identity. Her designation as the seventh Vishnu by Vishwamitra is identified as a radical narrative device, framing her not as a divine consort but as a human leader chosen to usher in a new social order.

The scholars largely agree that Tripathi's novel injects strong feminist elements into the mythological narrative. Key evidence includes: Agency and Choice: Sita actively plots her marriage to Ram as a strategic alliance for joint leadership, reframing the *swayamvar* from a passive selection to a calculated political move (Sharma; Asha Kiran). Breaking Gender Roles: She performs funeral rites for her mother, serves as Prime Minister of Mithila, and shares domestic duties in exile, challenging prescribed gender norms. Mentorship and Lineage: The role of Queen Sunaina is critically elevated from a minor figure to a 'bold and proactive' ruler and the primary architect of Sita's warrior ethos. However, the literature also presents a nuanced critique, questioning whether the novel fully 'shatters gender stereotypes.' Asha Kiran's article offers the most comprehensive critique, arguing that while Sita and Sunaina are empowered, other female characters fall into regressive tropes: Kaikeyi as the manipulative queen, Shurpanakha as the temptress, and Urmila as the emotionally dependent archetype. This creates a tension where a progressive protagonist exists within a world that still harbors patriarchal caricatures.

Furthermore, several scholars point to contradictions within Sita's own characterization. Asha Kiran observes that despite her pragmatism, Sita exhibits moments of stereotypical femininity, such as sudden self-consciousness about her appearance before Ram. The analysis suggests that Tripathi struggles to depict a 'thinking woman, a warrior and ruler' experiencing love without resorting to clichés. Two innovative frameworks in Tripathi's retelling receive significant attention. First, the Purusha-Prakriti dichotomy from Samkhya philosophy is employed to conceptualize the Ram-Sita dynamic not as hierarchical but as collaborative. Sita as *Prakriti* (pragmatic, creative energy) complements Ram as *Purusha* (the spiritual, idealistic principle). Their proposed 'joint Vishnuhood' symbolizes a balanced, gender-collaborative model of leadership (Asha Kiran; Sodha). This philosophical grounding is seen as a strength, offering a culturally rooted argument for equality.

Second, the multi-linear narrative structure of the Ram Chandra Series is acknowledged as a key strategy. By devoting separate volumes to Ram, Sita, and Raavan, Tripathi provides extensive 'backstory' and psychological depth, particularly for Sita, whose pre-marital life is elaborately constructed (Sharma). This narrative choice is central to the character's modernization. Meenu Sharma's article provides a valuable expansion by comparing Tripathi's Sita not only with Valmiki but also with *Ramayana 3392 AD*, a graphic novel set in a post-apocalyptic future. This comparison reveals divergent strategies for empowerment: Tripathi emphasizes earned, human skills (martial prowess, administration), while *3392 AD* grants Sita supernatural 'earth magic.' However, Sharma critiques the latter for ultimately portraying Sita as a powerful yet naive figure requiring male protection, thus reinforcing the 'precious object' trope. This contrast underscores that a modern setting alone does not guarantee a progressive portrayal; agency and narrative control are paramount.

The consensus across the literature is that *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* is a culturally significant work that successfully repositions Sita as a relevant icon for

contemporary times. She is celebrated as a ‘strategic leader,’ ‘undaunted hero,’ and an ‘epitome of strength’ who can inspire modern women (Sodha; Patel). The retelling is praised for combining mythological resonance with modern concerns like governance, gender equality, and pragmatic leadership.

However, the review also surfaces critical caveats. The empowerment is seen as focused largely on the titular character, with a surrounding cast that sometimes upholds old stereotypes. The analysis calls for a more consistent feminist vision throughout the narrative universe. Ultimately, these studies affirm that Tripathi’s novel marks a pivotal moment in the literary reception of the Ramayana, actively participating in the ongoing cultural dialogue about gender, power, and tradition by offering a Sita who is ‘the shaper of destinies’—her own and her nation’s.

Methodology

The research employs a qualitative textual analysis juxtaposed with feminist theoretical perspectives. It integrates John Berger’s theories on the primacy of vision to analyze how the patriarchal ‘gaze’ has historically fixed Sita’s identity. Additionally, the study utilizes narratological frameworks—such as focalization—to examine how shifting the narrative perspective to Sita’s consciousness grants her agency. It further situates the work within the broader context of ‘feminist mythography,’ drawing on scholars like Alicia Ostriker and Adrienne Rich to examine the intentional ‘re-visioning’ of classical texts.

Results and Analysis

The analysis reveals that Sita’s power operates across multiple registers, including textual focalization, embodied performance, and political rhetoric. By placing Sita’s thoughts and ethical dilemmas at the center of the story, Tripathi reverses traditional epic hierarchies. Sita’s warrior training is analyzed as an ‘embodied narrative’ that materializes her subjectivity through physical action rather than passive ritual. Furthermore, her role as a political actor demonstrates a mastery of rhetoric, where she uses strategic arguments to influence governance and challenge traditional gendered spheres of power.

Discussion

The discussion highlights how Sita’s agency is inseparable from her moral and ethical reasoning. Unlike traditional portrayals where female virtue is limited to obedience, Tripathi’s Sita possesses a robust moral consciousness that informs her proactive decision-making and pragmatic leadership. This ethical engagement is seen as a culturally rooted model of gender-collaborative leadership, exemplified by the *Purusha-Prakriti* dichotomy. However, the paper also notes a tension within the retelling, where a progressive protagonist sometimes exists alongside supporting female characters that still inhabit patriarchal archetypes.

The endurance of myth lies in its capacity to adapt. Across cultures and generations, mythic figures are not fossilized relics of the past but living symbols that are rewritten to address contemporary anxieties and aspirations. Romila

Thapar says, “myths act as a mirror reflecting a culture’s self-image, revealing its underlying social beliefs and norms” (3). Sita, one of the most iconic figures in the Ramayana tradition, has historically occupied the position of passive virtue: she is revered for her chastity, patience, and suffering rather than for agency or power. This dynamic is rooted in a fundamental principle of perception. In his famous work *Ways of Seeing* (1972), John Berger articulates the primacy of vision, stating that “Seeing comes before words” (Berger, 1972). He elaborates: “But there is also another sense in which seeing comes before words. It is seeing that establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it. The relationship between what we see and what we know is never settled.” For centuries, the cultural *seeing* of Sita has been framed by a patriarchal lens, positioning her as an object to be observed, judged, and symbolically consumed. Nidhi Dawesar further enhances this point by stating,

Sita evolved out of man’s interpretations and was later reinterpreted in the retellings of the Ramayana. Sita’s character remained in the comfort zone of their writings and depended on the socio-cultural hegemonic status. Sita is always born according to men’s writings and her reinterpretations in the Indian myths and epics. Men always portrayed Sita as the perfect female time and again to suit them accordingly and complement them. (Dawesar 4)

The relationship between what is *seen* and what *could be known* has been rigidly fixed by tradition. Amish Tripathi’s *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* represents a profound literary intervention that uses words to unsettle this settled relationship. By radically reimagining her character, Tripathi challenges what we think we know about Sita by fundamentally altering how we see her, transforming her from an object of the gaze into the sovereign subject of her own narrative. To understand this transformation, one may invoke the metaphor of Scheherazade, the legendary storyteller of *One Thousand and One Nights*. Like Scheherazade, who survives the wrath of her husband by weaving tales that delay her death and reshape the king’s perception, Tripathi’s Sita survives patriarchal silencing and reclaims sovereignty through narrative. Her ability to tell, retell, and embody stories becomes central to her subjectivity, aligning her with a long tradition of women who transform vulnerability into power through the art of storytelling. This comparison is not accidental or superficial. Scheherazade’s nightly act of storytelling resonates with Sita’s broader act of reclaiming narrative in a patriarchal mythological framework.

The Arabian Nights tales are a vast repository of narrative experiments where storytelling becomes a literal means of staying alive. Scheherazade interrupts the cycle of violence by using narrative as a bargaining chip; each story defers death, but more importantly, each story reconfigures power relations and the very gaze of the king. Similarly, in Tripathi’s retelling, Sita interrupts the cycle of her own silencing and objectification by stepping into the role of an active subject, whose voice not only narrates her destiny but also reshapes the mythic framework of the Ramayana for modern readers. In both cases, survival and sovereignty are not secured by

brute strength alone but by a mastery over language, meaning, and the power to direct the cultural imagination.

The significance of this shift becomes clearer when one considers how mythic women are traditionally remembered across cultures. From Helen of Troy, whose beauty sparked wars but whose own voice is absent in Homeric epics, to Draupadi of the Mahabharata, whose disrobing becomes a narrative centerpiece but whose strategies and intellect are often overshadowed by male heroes, women in myth are more often the 'spoken about' rather than the 'speakers.' They become symbols, vessels, or objects within stories told by men, defined by a male gaze. What Scheherazade and Tripathi's Sita share is the audacity to move from object to subject, from being seen to controlling the act of seeing, from silence to voice, from representation to agency. In this transformation, both figures highlight the subversive potential of narrative itself—a power that is often underestimated in patriarchal cultures that privilege physical strength or political dominance.

It is also important to note that Scheherazade and Sita inhabit different but parallel contexts of patriarchal violence. Scheherazade faces the immediate threat of execution by a king whose misogyny has been inflamed by betrayal. Her survival strategy is therefore immediate and tactical. Sita, on the other hand, faces a broader systemic silencing in a mythological tradition that often denies her depth, complexity, or autonomy. Her challenge is not survival in the literal sense but survival in the cultural imagination: to resist being reduced to a passive emblem of chastity and instead emerge as a complex agent of action, thought, and narrative authority. By aligning Sita with Scheherazade, one understands that narrative is not merely an aesthetic tool but a weaponized act of survival against cultural erasure.

Furthermore, this metaphor underscores the dialogic relationship between myth and modernity. By reinterpreting Sita as a Scheherazadean figure, Tripathi engages in a form of feminist mythography—an intentional rewriting that foregrounds female agency in traditions where it has been marginalized. The feminist re-writing of myths subverts "the dominant ideology's hidden male bias" (Ostriker, 214) and makes "corrections" to the constructed "images of what women have collectively and historically suffered" (Ostriker, 73). Sally Robinson is also interested in "how gender is produced through narrative processes, not prior to them" (198), and she argues that "women's self-representation most often proceeds by a double movement: simultaneously against normative constructions of Woman that are continually produced by hegemonic discourses and social practices, and toward new forms of representation that disrupt those normative constructions" (11). Supporting this view, Makinen explains that part of the task of feminists working with the fairy-tale genre is to establish a tradition in which women are not relegated to this victim/villain dichotomy where passivity is virtuous and activity villainous:

... feminist theorists point to the patriarchal inscriptions of the best-known tales such as "Cinderella" and "Sleeping Beauty," with their vaunting of feminine passivity and rejection of feminine activity as wicked or monstrous. Feminist

fairy-tale historians argue for women's active roles as tellers of stories and for tales that celebrate active female protagonists and feminine wisdom while acknowledging that these tales have been largely suppressed by the predominantly male compilers. (148-9)

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar refer to these dichotomous representations of women in fairy tales as "the angel-woman and the monster-woman" in their reading of "Snow White" in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (36). This approach resonates with what Adrienne Rich called "re-vision"—the act of looking back at old texts from a new critical direction. Tripathi's novel, then, is not just a fantasy retelling but a cultural intervention. It positions Sita as a figure of narrative sovereignty, capable of rewriting her destiny and, by extension, reconfiguring the gendered imagination of Indian mythology, thereby actively unsettling the relationship between what we see and what we know.

The movement from object to subject is not only a thematic shift but also a narratological one. Narratologists like Gérard Genette and Mieke Bal have emphasized the importance of focalization in determining agency within a text. In earlier Ramayana tellings, Sita is almost always the object of the narrator's gaze; the story is told *about* her, not *through* her. Tripathi reverses this hierarchy by placing Sita's consciousness at the center. Her thoughts, her doubts, her ethical dilemmas, and her strategies become the substance of the narrative. This change in focalization effectively grants her narrative sovereignty: she is no longer the passive recipient of others' actions but the lens through which the story unfolds. This shift in perspective is a direct narrative enactment of Berger's principle. If seeing establishes our place in the world, then Tripathi ensures that we see the world of the Ramayana through Sita's eyes, thereby establishing *her* place as the central conscious being. Just as Scheherazade rewrites her life by controlling the flow of narrative, Sita rewrites her identity by becoming the focalizer of her myth. Readings such as those based on "general character" (Propp 3), however, have gone out of fashion, as Benson explains: "In the case of theory, enquiry into the workings of narrative has moved away from, indeed critiqued, the search for deep structures and abstract, essential geometries, in favor of a pluralistic concern for desire itself in the productive interaction of narrative space, including the possibilities of interactivity, in postmodernist theories; and for the specificities of context on feminist and postcolonial concerns for a pragmatics of narrative" (*Cycles of Influence*, 17). This evolving approach supports Tripathi's repositioning of Sita's narrative agency within a complex ideological, cultural, and ethical context. This narrative sovereignty has broader implications for feminist readings of mythology. If, as Gayatri Spivak argues, the subaltern cannot speak within dominant discourses, then Tripathi's Sita represents an attempt to create a discursive space where the subaltern is not only heard but also central. Of course, one could critique the extent to which this reworking fully liberates Sita, since Tripathi still anchors her within traditional ideals of dharma and loyalty. Yet the very act of re-centering her voice marks a radical intervention in cultural memory. By aligning her

transformation with Scheherazade's paradigm, one can see how narrative is not merely an aesthetic tool but a weaponized act of survival against cultural erasure. As Gerald Prince defines it, narrative is "recounting a product and process, object and act, structure and structuration of one or more real or fictitious events communicated by one, two or several narrators to one, two or several narrates" (63). However, Joan Peters contends that a focus on the gender of the author, narrator, character, or reader "produces yet another interpretive methodology that attempts to account for the entire work from a feminist perspective, and this is not something that narratology is designed to do" (13). This acknowledgement invites a nuanced approach that balances feminist critique with narrative theory to understand Tripathi's complex reimagining rather than reducing it to a singular feminist lens.

The first register of narrative power in *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* lies in the novel's very form. Tripathi focalizes the story through Sita, granting her thoughts, reflections, and ethical dilemmas narrative space. Readers encounter her not merely as Rama's wife or Ravana's captive but as an individual who narrates her life through choices and reflections. This shift in focalization is crucial, for as narratology suggests, control over perspective is equivalent to control over reality within a text. In Tripathi's world, Sita is no longer narrated by others; she narrates herself. This narrative autonomy is parallel to Scheherazade's self-preservation through storytelling, where speaking becomes the act of surviving. The literary consequences of this change in form are profound. In traditional Ramayana tellings, narrative attention is overwhelmingly devoted to Rama's trials, his divine mission, and his struggles against Ravana. Sita's experiences, while pivotal to the emotional resonance of the story, are often rendered in minimal strokes, almost as if her interiority were irrelevant to the epic's moral design. Tripathi reverses this hierarchy by immersing readers in Sita's consciousness, offering detailed depictions of her training, political learning, moral deliberations, and private emotions. The result is that readers begin to see the Ramayana world not as a stage for Rama's heroism but as a space that Sita herself actively shapes through her decisions and interpretations. This narrative re-centering transforms her from a secondary figure into the architect of the story's moral and thematic substance.

Equally important is the portrayal of Sita's embodied narrative. Her training as a warrior is not merely physical but profoundly symbolic. Each scene of training, combat, or demonstration of skill becomes a story she tells through her body—a narrative of resistance, strength, and ethical courage that challenges the deeply ingrained patriarchal assumptions of femininity within the Ramayana tradition. In classical tellings, Sita's body is often the site of control, judgment, and verification: it is tested in fire to prove chastity, observed to validate virtue, and subjected to societal scrutiny. Indu Swami observes,

In the Ramayana, Sita's role is solely seen or estimated in relation to her husband, Ram. Her sole purpose in life is to follow the footsteps of her husband. Sita's image as mother is glorified and she is repeatedly referred to as Mata-Sita, but as wife she is subject to the whims of her husband, who abandons her

only because of the derogatory remarks of a commoner. (3)

Tripathi's reimagining radically subverts this paradigm by transforming her body into a medium of expression and power. This embodied narrative aligns closely with contemporary theories of performativity and feminist embodiment. Adrienne Rich in her essay, *When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision* remarks: "Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction— is for us more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival (18)." Scholars like Judith Butler argue that gender is not a static identity but a series of performed acts that acquire meaning through repetition within social frameworks. Sita, through her warrior training and strategic maneuvers, performs acts that repeatedly defy normative gender expectations. Each leap, each strike, and each tactical decision functions as a performative assertion of her agency. The text offers a concrete manifestation of this idea when "There were great archers who could shoot arrows by relying on sounds. But very few could throw knives at the source of a sound. Sita was one of those very few (4)." Unlike classical Ramayana iterations, where her passivity is ritualized and celebrated, Tripathi's narrative emphasizes that her actions are the tangible materialization of her subjectivity. She does not wait for rescue or validation; she constructs meaning, authority, and identity through embodiment. Her body becomes a textual site where readers can witness the convergence of strength, intellect, and morality. These scenes of embodied storytelling are deeply intertwined with the novel's broader narrative strategy. Just as Scheherazade uses her voice to influence the king's perceptions and reshape moral order, Sita's physical actions communicate narrative truth to observers and adversaries alike. For example, when she demonstrates her martial prowess before skeptical council members or skeptics within Mithila, her actions simultaneously narrate courage, competence, and moral authority. As the author writes,

Sita had quickly pulled out the medical aid kit from the saddlebag and dressed Hanuman's injuries. They were not life-threatening but a few of them were deep. Sita stitched a couple of gaping wounds. She found some rejuvenating herbs around the clearing and made an infusion, using stones to grind the leaves with some water. She gave it to Hanuman to drink.

As Hanuman gulped the medicine down and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, he watched Sita.

She is not nervous ... She didn't get scared ... This girl is special ... (77)

This visual narrative challenges patriarchal observers who attempt to define or constrain her, asserting that narrative power need not be confined to words alone. By embodying her story, Sita demonstrates that storytelling can be multidimensional, spanning the verbal, the symbolic, and the physical.

Tripathi's depiction of Sita's embodied narrative emphasizes the intersection of ethics and action. Each combat training session or strategic negotiation is framed not merely as an exercise in skill but as an ethical rehearsal. The narrative voice

intrudes to comment,

As a Lankan closed in, she lassoed her bow, entangling his lathi with the bowstring, snatching it from him. Sita hit back with the bamboo lathi, straight at the Lankan's head, knocking him off his feet. She swirled the lathi over her head, its menacing sound halting the suddenly wary soldiers. She stopped moving, holding her weapon steady. Conserving her energy. Ready and alert. One hand held the stick in the middle, the end of it tucked under her armpit. The other arm was stretched forward. Her feet spread wide, in balance. She was surrounded by at least fifty Lankan soldiers. But they kept their distance. (12)

Her physical mastery is inseparable from her moral reasoning; she trains not for glory or domination but for the protection of her people and the enactment of dharma. The text itself underscores this tension: "It's not over yet. I'll call upon the citizens to join me. Even if my people stand here with kitchen knives, we will outnumber the Lankan scum ten to one. We can fight them. (246)." In this sense, her body becomes a narrative medium that communicates values as well as competence. The embodiment of ethics and strength through narrative acts reinforces the central thesis of the novel: survival and sovereignty are inseparable from the capacity to narrate one's own identity through both action and reflection. Tripathi also uses these embodied sequences to challenge the dominant cultural memory of Sita. Historically, mythic interpretations have emphasized her patience, endurance, and suffering as defining features of her femininity. She is the embodiment of kindness—the kind of person who, as Kipling wrote "If you can keep your head when all about you, are losing theirs and blaming it on you, if you can trust yourself when all men doubt you (*If*, 1)." These qualities, while admired, often rendered her a passive figure in the narrative economy. By contrast, in *Sita: Warrior of Mithila*, her embodiment is active, intentional, and ethically charged. Each physical act becomes a micro-narrative, a story within the story, that asserts her agency and her role as a moral and political actor. This shift in emphasis transforms the reception of Sita in contemporary imagination: she is no longer merely the symbol of chastity and endurance but a figure whose identity is actively authored through ethical, strategic, and martial narratives. Sita's embodied storytelling demonstrates how narrative sovereignty operates across multiple registers simultaneously: textual, ethical, political, and physical. Her body communicates her story to those around her while also asserting her identity to herself, creating a recursive narrative loop where action, reflection, and perception intertwine. In effect, she extends the Scheherazade metaphor: just as Scheherazade's storytelling delays death and shapes perception, Sita's embodiment delays cultural erasure and shapes the imagination of mythic audiences. Through her actions, she demonstrates that survival and sovereignty are not only achieved through intellect or dialogue but through a consistent, intentional performance of strength, ethics, and narrative authority. In Tripathi's narrative, the body itself becomes a site of storytelling, a canvas upon which the heroism, intelligence, and agency of the modern Sita are vividly inscribed.

The second register of narrative power emerges in Sita's role as a political actor. Tripathi frequently places her in situations where words are weapons—diplomatic negotiations, strategic speeches, and persuasive arguments. In these contexts, Sita wields rhetoric to frame political realities, convincing allies, challenging opponents, and navigating the complexities of governance. In a pivotal conversation,

Sita paused to formulate her thoughts. 'I've been thinking about this since you spoke to us at the gurukul last year, Guruji. You said society needs balance. It needs intellectuals, warriors, traders, and skilled workers. And that ideally, the scale should not be tipped against any group. That there should be a fair balance between all.' (81)

This dimension of narrative power underscores a critical expansion of her agency: it is not enough for her to survive physically or embody moral strength; she must also influence the structures of authority and decision-making around her. Just as Scheherazade's stories subtly reshape the king's understanding of justice, mercy, and governance, Sita's political narratives reshape the perceptions, loyalties, and actions of those who inhabit her mythic world. In this way, narrative is both a tool of survival and a mechanism of sovereignty. Sita's engagement with politics is particularly notable because it challenges traditional gendered assumptions about power in the Ramayana. Classical tellings often confine women to private, domestic spheres, reserving public decision-making for male figures like Rama, Dasaratha, or other kings and generals. Tripathi disrupts this norm by positioning Sita in the center of political discourse, granting her authority to shape outcomes through intelligence, foresight, and eloquence. For example, when she questions Rama, "Why can't there be two Vishnus? If we work together, we can end this stupid fight between the Malayaputras and Vayuputras. We can all work together and set India on a new path" (Tripathi, 251). These moments are not mere plot devices; they illustrate how narrative—spoken, strategic, and performative—functions as an instrument of power. Sita's rhetorical skill, like Scheherazade's storytelling, becomes a form of subtle yet potent domination, allowing her to navigate hierarchies without relying on brute force alone. This political register of narrative also demonstrates the ethical dimension of Sita's sovereignty. Her persuasive acts are never morally neutral; they are guided by her understanding of dharma and justice. In Tripathi's depiction, leadership is inseparable from morality: the power to influence others carries an obligation to act wisely and compassionately. Sita's speeches, debates, and strategic counsel embody this ethical engagement, making her narrative authority simultaneously political and moral. This mirrors Scheherazade's approach, where her tales do not merely entertain but teach ethical and civic lessons to the king, ultimately reforming his governance. Both figures illustrate that survival and sovereignty in patriarchal or hierarchical systems are mediated not just by physical skill or personal virtue but by the capacity to communicate effectively, ethically, and strategically.

Sita's role as a political actor highlights the performative dimension of narrative in public spaces. Her speeches, arguments, and tactical instructions are observed and evaluated by others, creating a feedback loop in which narrative shapes perception and perception reinforces authority. For instance: "Sita smiled. 'My apologies for having doubted you, Arishtanemiji.' Arishtanemi smiled. 'Misunderstandings can occur within the closest of families. All's well that ends well.' (231)". In doing so, she embodies what Pierre Bourdieu might describe as symbolic capital: her ability to narrate and persuade confers legitimacy and influence, reinforcing her position within political hierarchies. This dynamic demonstrates how Tripathi transforms narrative into a form of power that operates beyond the personal or familial sphere, extending Sita's influence on the social, political, and cultural domains. Her sovereignty is thus performative, communicative, and relational, underscoring the multifaceted nature of narrative authority. The interplay between narrative and political action in Tripathi's novel underscores the broader theme of mythic reinvention. As Meenakshi Mukherjee opines, "The increasing popularity of Indian mythological fiction in English is evidence of the enduring appeal of ancient narratives, as well as the ability of contemporary authors to successfully adapt and reinterpret these stories for new generations of readers" (9). By situating Sita as both warrior and diplomat, he reconfigures the cultural imagination of female agency, illustrating that power need not be exclusively physical or hierarchical. Narrative, whether through persuasion, storytelling, or strategic communication, becomes an ethical, political, and existential tool. Sita's capacity to influence the course of events, while remaining ethically grounded, positions her as a sovereign figure whose authority derives as much from her intelligence and moral reasoning as from her martial prowess. Like Scheherazade, she demonstrates that the ability to narrate, to communicate, and to shape perception is central to survival, empowerment, and the exercise of sovereignty in patriarchal or mythic contexts.

Narrative also functions as a medium of ethical survival in *Sita: Warrior of Mithila*. Beyond physical prowess and political strategy, Sita's survival is deeply intertwined with her capacity to navigate complex moral landscapes. Tripathi's emphasis on Sita's moral deliberations underscores that survival in myth is not merely a matter of skill or strategy; it is inseparable from the capacity to act ethically under pressure. Her narrative—through thought, speech, and action—thus becomes a vehicle for exploring the delicate balance between power, justice, and human responsibility. Sita's ethical narratives are particularly important when considered against the backdrop of the traditional Ramayana, where women's moral virtue is frequently reduced to obedience, chastity, and endurance. While these qualities were celebrated, they often denied women the right to interpret and exercise ethical judgment actively. Tripathi subverts this limitation by granting Sita a robust moral consciousness that informs her decision-making. Her deliberations, whether in moments of combat, negotiation, or governance, reflect nuanced engagement with principles of dharma, fairness, and social welfare. She articulates

this approach herself: “Freedom is good, but in moderation. Too much of it is a recipe for disaster. That’s why the path I prefer is that of balance. Balance between the Masculine and Feminine” (Tripathi, 280). In doing so, she transcends the role of passive moral exemplar and emerges as an ethical agent whose judgments shape the course of events, demonstrating that narrative and morality are deeply intertwined in the construction of sovereignty.

The concept of narrative as ethical survival is enhanced by Sita’s ability to communicate moral reasoning to others. Just as Scheherazade’s tales educate the king and redirect his sense of justice, Sita’s words persuade, instruct, and inspire her allies. She demonstrates that ethical authority is performative: it is not only internalized but enacted, conveyed through persuasive articulation of principles, strategic argumentation, and decisive action. Her narrative presence is thus both reflective and active: she simultaneously thinks ethically, debates morally, and acts in ways that reinforce the ethical order she seeks to uphold. The interplay between thought, speech, and action exemplifies the potency of narrative as a tool for both personal survival and collective moral leadership. The ethical dimension of Sita’s narrative resonates with broader philosophical inquiries into the nature of myth and morality. Myth, as Joseph Campbell and other scholars have noted, is not simply a repository of stories but a mechanism through which societies encode moral norms, confront dilemmas, and imagine ethical possibilities. Tripathi’s novel positions Sita within this tradition while expanding it: her narrative authority allows her not only to embody moral ideals but also to reinterpret and apply them dynamically. By doing so, Sita becomes a conduit through which ethical reflection is made accessible to the reader, demonstrating that the survival of virtue in challenging circumstances requires both strategic reasoning and narrative articulation.

Tripathi also highlights the tension between ethical ideals and pragmatic exigencies in Sita’s narrative. Her survival often requires making difficult choices that balance personal integrity with political necessity. These moments of moral negotiation illustrate that ethical survival is not straightforward or linear; it is a complex process of continuous judgment and adaptive reasoning. Through her reflective narration, Sita models a form of ethical literacy that emphasizes discernment, responsibility, and foresight, showing that true sovereignty arises not merely from strength or skill but from the capacity to navigate moral complexity with clarity and courage. Finally, Sita’s ethical narratives affirm the broader feminist project of reclaiming female agency within myth. By granting her a voice in moral and political discourse, Tripathi challenges historical erasures that relegated women to passive roles. In doing so, he emphasizes that narrative itself is a tool for asserting both personal and cultural sovereignty: it allows marginalized voices to survive, instruct, and transform dominant ethical frameworks. Sita’s narrative, therefore, operates simultaneously on multiple levels—as a story of individual survival, as a lesson in moral deliberation, and as a cultural intervention that reshapes collective understanding of female heroism and agency within Indian mythology.

Tripathi's *Sita* demonstrates that storytelling, embodiment, and moral agency converge to produce a multidimensional model of survival and sovereignty. In *Sita: Warrior of Mithila*, these elements are not separate traits but interdependent aspects of her identity, each reinforcing the other in a dynamic interplay. Her narrative voice asserts intellectual sovereignty, her bodily actions communicate strength and resilience, and her ethical decision-making situates her as a moral and political actor. Together, they constitute a holistic conception of agency that transcends conventional representations of female characters in myth, challenging the long-standing archetypes of passivity, subservience, and silence. Through this convergence, Tripathi constructs a Sita who is simultaneously thinker, warrior, leader, and narrator, offering readers a model of feminine power that is active, intentional, and ethically grounded. Tripathi's own words in *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* make this personal and explicit:

Happiness is not an accident. It is a choice. It is in our hands to be happy. Always in our hands. Who says that we can have only one soulmate? Sometimes, soulmates want such radically different things that they end up being the cause of unhappiness for each other. Someday I will find another soulmate, one who also wants what I want. He may not be as fascinating as Bharat. Or, even as great as Bharat will be. But he will bring me what I want. Simple happiness. I will find such a man. In my tribe. Or, outside of it. (59)

The synthesis of these registers also illustrates the intricate relationship between narrative and identity. Tripathi further humanizes this agency in intimate terms when he writes, "Sita reached out and placed her palm on Ram's hand. 'You share my fate and I share yours. That is what a true marriage is.' She entwined her fingers through his. 'Ram, I am your wife. We will always be together; in good times and bad; through thick and thin'" (Tripathi, 200). This moment illustrates Sita's affirmation of relational partnership grounded in mutual commitment, asserting her voice within the framework of dharma and marital bonds on her own terms. By narrating her experiences, Sita asserts control over the interpretation of her life; by embodying her ideals through action, she materializes her subjectivity; and through ethical reasoning, she guides the consequences of her choices within a complex social and mythological context. Edwin Schur, comments:

When a woman achieves to an extent or in ways that stereotypical notions describe as beyond female capacities, it is assumed and said that she must be 'exceptional'...it is not just an assertion that most women do not do these things, but rather an implicit claim that 'typical,' 'normal,' and even 'natural' women do not and cannot do them. Such reasoning allows the categorical type to stand, as does the description of a woman who behaves contrary to type as 'acting like a man,' or as being 'masculine. (30)

She becomes an example of what Simone de Beauvoir articulates: "once she ceases to be separate the system based on her dependent crumbles; between her and the universe there is no longer any need for a masculine mediator" (Beauvoir,

142). The interplay of these dimensions demonstrates that survival and sovereignty are not abstract ideals but lived practices, enacted through words, deeds, and ethical reflection. Through this synthesis, Tripathi's Sita offers readers a vision of female heroism that is active, intellectually grounded, and ethically complex.

Conclusion

The paper concludes that Tripathi's Sita represents a holistic model of feminine power that integrates intellectual, physical, and moral agency. By aligning her with the Scheherazadean paradigm, the study demonstrates that storytelling and self-representation are radical instruments of resistance against cultural erasure. Ultimately, this retelling successfully repositioned Sita as a relevant icon for contemporary times, unsettling traditional patriarchal seeing and affirming that survival and sovereignty are achieved through the capacity to narrate one's own identity.

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