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English

COUNTER-NARRATION AND THE RE-CONSTRUCTION OF 'SITA' IN AMISH TRIPATHI'S SITA: WARRIOR OF MITHILA

KEY WORDS: Counter-narration, Marginalized Voices, Power, Politics, Gender Hierarchies

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ABSTRACT

Counter-narration strategically re-casts dominant narratives, foregrounding marginalized voices through agency and performativity while contesting hegemonic master narratives that normalize patriarchal ideologies over centuries. Valmiki's Ramayana, an ancient epic of power politics, governance, and rigid lineage hierarchies, exemplifies such mastery by constructing Princess Sita as the passive, oppressed consort of Prince Rama whose swayamvara marriage reinforces women as possessions acquired through masculine valor. This paper applies counter-narrative theory (Hyvärinen, Svane, McDowell) to Amish Tripathi's *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* (2017), demonstrating how he systematically deconstructs Sita's mythic passivity. Tripathi reimagines Sita's discovery not from ritual furrow, but rescued by Queen Sunaina from a culture defending her against wolves elevating maternal agency from inception. Sunaina and Sita emerge as warriors, scholars, and rulers defying Manusmriti prohibitions against women's education, martial training and public authority. At sixteen, Sita administers Mithila autonomously: "The sixteen-year-old Sita had been administering the kingdom reasonably well" (107), investing gold donations in roads, slum housing, and unpoisonable water infrastructure rather than personal prestige. Her gurukul education spans philosophy, mathematics, statecraft and weaponry; Guru Shvetaketu and sage Vishwamitra initiate her into forbidden rituals equipping her against evil. As McDowell interprets Keene, such counter-narratives wield "power...to push back, challenge, or yes, counter the harm done by other stories" (n. pg.). Tripathi retains mythic characters/settings while reengineering signifiers Sita as economist-diplomat, Rama secondary producing "verbal artefacts" (White) aligned with contemporary women's empowerment discourses. This revisionist project restores narrative authority to the silenced feminine subject across education, warfare and governance, empirically illustrating literature's capacity to destabilize entrenched gender hierarchies and catalyze socio-cultural transformation.

INTRODUCTION

This paper examines how Amish Tripathi's *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* (2017) appropriates, reconstructs, and problematizes the passive representation of women within the dominant Hindu patriarchal framework of the *Ramayana* through a counter-narrative lens. The *Ramayana*, a primeval epic revolving around Prince Rama and Princess Sita is interwoven in a social world that is defined by power, governance, lineage, and patriarchy. It glorifies Rama as the perfect man who is good, loyal to his father, and a hero and introduces Sita to a plot that tends to favor male action and female obedience. The marriage of Rama to Sita via the *swayamvara* tradition supports the patriarchal reasoning where the woman is often viewed as an object of choice as opposed to a subject of choice. Within this model, the female desire, voice, and agency become secondary to the authority of men, and womanhood is socially constructed as unnaturally passive, obedient, and less adventurous than manhood. It is against this backdrop that Tripathi represents an imaginative recreation of Sita in her novel by endowing her with power, wisdom, authority and political will, thus questioning the myth of female silence and submissiveness.

The *Ramayana* is one of the most venerated epics of ancient India, which has transcended its cultural and geographical context and has become a common story for most of the Southeast Asian countries. The tale of Rama, Sita and Ravana has been retold in numerous ways over the centuries, in countries like Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and others, adapting the story to fit local customs and culture, languages and religious beliefs. This cross-cultural and cross-transnational movement of the text shows its immense mobility and universal qualities, with each area of the world 'recording' the epic in its unique historical and cultural frame. Moreover, the *Ramayana* has never been static and has been passed down in various forms, such as oral narration, written texts, visual arts, theatre, dance, and even digital performances today. This insurmountable adaptability exemplifies the epic's ability to transmit moral and philosophical values across time, space and form. It has been rewritten from different aspects many times and performed

on the stage in India and other countries of South East Asia and several aspects of the story are iconic. Archana Pathak Bhatt One of the most sacred epics of ancient India, the *Ramayana* has outgrown its cultural and geographical roots to be a common story in much of Southeast Asia. The tale of Rama, Sita and Ravana has been renewed and given a new dimension in the centuries in such countries like Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos where it was rewritten to the local traditions, languages and religious values. This cross-national journey of the text is quite flexible and universal as each region re-explores the epic in its historical and cultural context. Moreover, the *Ramayana* has not been bound to one specific medium, but has constantly transformed in various forms of expression, starting with ancient oral and written manuscripts, visual art, theatre, dance, and even modern digital performance. The perennial flexibility is a testament to the power of the epic for delivering moral and philosophical ideals across time, space and form. It has been re-staged, rewritten in other point of views many times and been acted on stage throughout India and other South East Asian countries and some parts of the story is iconic. The *Sita Syndrome: Examining the Communicative Aspects of Domestic Violence from a South Asian Perspective* (2008) written by Archana Pathak Bhatt states that "Sita's story is well known throughout the South Asian communities both in South Asia and in the U.S. diaspora. The story has been passed down through long standing oral traditions as well as more recent political and media outlets" (155). Basuki and Setiawan in their essay, "Reinterpreting *Ramayana*: The (Re)Production of the Meanings of Power in "Ramayana", an East Javanese Shadow Puppet Performance Text" (2012) The Indonesian adaptation of the *Ramayana* in the traditional puppet theatre, or wayang performance, offers a striking example of the text's continual reinterpretation across cultures and media. Ki Sinarto, an Indonesian writer, created an audio-recorded version of the *Ramayana*, where the character of Sita is subverted, and her origins within the story are explored. In this variation, Sita is portrayed as the reincarnation of goddess Vedavati, the goddess of prosperity, which is why she is connected to both prosperity and misfortune. The plot is very different from the one in Valmiki's canonical text,

especially regarding Sita's childhood and her ties with Ravana. In Vibhishana's fear that Ravana, once he discovers Sita's identity, will marry his own daughter to gain a blessing of prosperity, he throws the baby Sita away. Sinarto's story continues. Ravana, unaware of this betrayal, keeps on searching for his lost child till his servant Togog tells him of her disappearance. Eventually Ravana comes across Sita who is already married to Rama. So, Rama, disheartened at the lack of success in gaining the throne in Ayodhya, forsakes Sita for a while in the forest, so that things turn out the way they do. Then Ravana leads her to Lanka, where she undergoes a climactic battle with ironic undertones, as Rama fights against his own father-in-law. In the battle, several warriors are killed including Ravana's brother Kumbhakarna and finally Ravana and Rama meet each other. In the battle Rama is able to defeat Ravana, but he fails to see the truth as Ravana accuses him of being blind. During the battle, Ravana challenges Rama's moral and divine power by saying that even as an avatar of Vishnu, he is blinded to the truth. The story ends with Ravana's philosophical flight away, as Rama considers his words to be a twist on how the story would normally be resolved in the name of righteousness—a call for moral reflection. In this reinterpretation, Ki Sinarto takes a classical epic and uses it as a tool of cultural discussion and theological reflection, showing how local variations continue to re-invent the Ramayana's ideologies and emotions.

Valmiki's Ramayana portrays Sita as a victim, as a woman who must be dominated and defined within the context of a male-dominated system of social organization that determines her identity. Her quietness and strength come to symbolize the idealized womanhood handed down to her by the dominant cultural and moral rules of the epic tradition. In Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Forest of Enchantments*, however, Sita's voice is restored, and is placed in the centre of the story. Divakaruni questions the unspoken rules and codes of patriarchy and the injunctions that have historically made Sita a mere receptacle of destiny instead of an agent of destiny. This reinterpretation of the author challenges the myth of divine birth by deifying and mystifying Sita's existence in Valmiki's version. In Divakaruni's re-telling, the story of Sita's birth becomes more of a human and rational one: King Janaka tells his wife and daughters about the birth of the infant Sita as part of family tradition, describing how he found the baby Sita when he was ploughing a sacred field. Through this reclamation of narrative, Sita is able to interrupt, reinterpret and inhabit her narrative, adding her reflections to the one her father once told her. Through this narrative structure, Divakaruni not only restores Sita's agency and subjectivity but also exposes the patriarchal mechanisms that have long dictated the representation of female virtue and obedience in the epic tradition.

A baby lay in his path, naked and newborn, glistening in the young sun as though it was a mirage. He was amazed that I didn't cry, regarding him instead with unblinking eyes. I had kicked off the cloth that swaddled me, a gold fabric finer than anything our Mithila weavers could produce...Sceptics wondered which cunning person had placed me there, at just the right moment, to be discovered by Janaka. It must have been someone who knew my unworldly father well...Other kings would have ordered for her to be brought up in a servant's home. But my saintly father picked me up and held me to his chest. (Divakaruni 6)

The child is subsequently raised by King Janaka's childless wife, Queen Sunaina, who assumes responsibility not only for Sita's nurturing but also for her holistic development as an individual. Unlike the conventional portrayals of royal upbringing that emphasize feminine grace and domestic virtues, Sunaina ensures that Sita receives a well-rounded education that includes both intellectual and physical training. She invites women from the nearby hills skilled in the

indigenous art of self-defence to instruct Sita in martial techniques and physical endurance. These women teach her that her body can be a strength and not a weakness, that she has the power to be physical. Sita's childhood experiences are formed through a non-traditional educational system, giving her a sense of independence and strength which will become apparent in her resistance to control by patriarchs. Thus Divakaruni's Sita not only challenges the stereotype of submissive ideal woman but also imagines her as a woman with compassion and resistance, who can unite the tenderness with strength, which is hardly given to women in epic tales. "itself could become a weapon". Sita "learned to move like a panther on the hunt, to run and leap and climb in silence, to fall the right way without injury, to accept pain when it came" (10). In a systematic progression, Divakaruni dismantles the archetype of an "ideal Sita" as described in Valmiki's Ramayana – who is pliable, subservient, and domestic. Divakaruni, recognizing the absence of a voice and narrative for Sita in the epic itself, provides her with one in this work: Women are objects of male agency (alms, kitchens, private spheres) rather than subjects of their own story. The feminization and the individual agency and emotion that this reclamation of Sita's perspective brings to the life of Rama make the story more rationalized and more romantic than the traditional one. Sita is not simply Rama's loyal wife but also a thoughtful partner who has her own aspirations, questions, and choices that impact their journey together. However, despite the progressive changes, Divakaruni still has a few structural limitations of the original text as Sita is confined to the domestic and feminine sphere of her world of palace life, sisterly bond and maternal duties. The isolation and, as a result, the empowerment that she experiences in these realms simultaneously make the retelling a close cousin to the story of Valmiki, and yet not quite the same. Consequently, Divakaruni's *The Forest of Enchantments* achieves a delicate balance: it subverts patriarchal stereotypes without fully dismantling the gendered spatial and social hierarchies that underpin the *Ramayana* tradition. Simply rewriting a canonical text is not enough to trace and address the gender norms prescribed in India's socio-cultural code; it is simultaneously important to re-examine India's complex history and cultural past and to re-create a new narrative concerning women in India, which can only be achieved through counter-narrating the cultural/canonical texts.

Counter-narrative

Matti Hyvärinen, in "Narrative Contestations" (2007), argues that "the themes of silenced, forgotten or marginalized narratives thus re-emerge constantly" and that narrative studies in the humanities remain concerned with the conventionality of narrative and its structural patterns.

Following this lead, scholars sometimes wanted to show how people are always telling the same story, with only slight variation. The 'narrativist' historian Hayden White understood historical narrative as being imposed on the factual plurality of events and, therefore, equalled the need to narrativize and to moralize. There is no shortage of literature proffering narrative a straightforward ideological and/or political role be it benign or detrimental. (1-2)

Hyvärinen further contends that the vocabulary of counter-narratives destabilizes the dominant, hegemonic framework of the master narrative, thereby privileging alternative voices that resist narrative essentialism (Hyvärinen n. pg.). Similarly, Marita Svane maintains that such retellings disrupt entrenched power structures by amplifying marginalized perspectives within the mythic tradition. "[i]n theorizing counter-narratives, it is important to reflect on what kind of entities counter-narratives are. Do they exist in a similar way to master-narratives or is their ontological status, their mode of being, different?" (36). She holds that the "theorization of master-narratives has been dominated by François Lyotard's conceptualization of grand narratives that have a legitimizing

role, such as the narratives of Enlightenment or Marxism. Others have used the notions of dominant cultural narratives, culturally dominant narrative models or scripts, to draw attention to how certain narrative models have normative power to guide people's actions." (36). On the other hand, "[c]ounter-narratives are conceptualized in relation to master-narratives, as narratives that resist and challenge them" (36). Narratives and stories possess constructive or destructive potential based on the narrator's identity and their socio-cultural context. Eric McDowell examines how retellings wield this power. "danger of narrative how stories can distract us from thinking critically to make harmfully distorted representations seem natural and true" (McDowell n.pg.). He examines John Keene's thesis on counter-narratives, asserting that "Keene's counter-narratives both demonstrate and enact the power of narrative. They not only use important stories to assert the dignity of misrepresented characters and invite our empathy, but they also ask us to think critically about how stories wield their power" (McDowell n.pg.). Vaisekka tapaus (Difficult case) is a key example Hyvärinen analyses in his work on counter-narratives. It's a doctor's story column from a Finnish weekly journal for medical professionals, where anonymous physicians share challenging cases that contest dominant medical narratives. These stories often highlight ethical dilemmas, patient perspectives, or systemic flaws that challenge official or "master" medical accounts, demonstrating how counter-narratives gain tell ability by invoking and resisting cultural canons. Hyvärinen uses it to test his Bruner-inspired theory, showing how such tales embody more narrativity through their oppositional positioning.

Sita Reimagined: Amish Tripathi's *Sita: Warrior of Mithila*

In their essay "Introduction: What counter-narratives are: Dimensions and levels of a theory of middle range" (2021) Klarissa Lueg, Ann Bager and Marianne Lundholt are concerned about the necessity of counter-narratives. They contend that:

[b]eing observant of narratives represented in the social world, and of the power relations they are embedded in, can contribute to the gathering of insights on marginalized positions. Stories revealing these marginalized views can be called counter-narratives. Counter-narratives resist another narrative, this one often being, or being perceived as being, more powerful. Most affirmatively, counter-narratives can be interpreted as creative, innovative forces fostering beneficial societal change; forces holding productive potential for progress, development, as well as for ethical issues such as justice and accessible resources. Counter-narratives cannot be reduced to emancipatory, liberating or constructive stories. Instead, they can be hostile, and destabilizing: phenomena such as the loosely organized misogynist "manosphere" (4)

The *Ramayana* embeds power dynamics that mirror the patriarchal codes of the *Manu Smriti*, which systematically marginalize women by excluding them from socio-political agency. "[O]rdinary women were kept in their domestic place by the misogynist authors of *Manu Smriti*, which may have been simply a normative manual but which some later Hindus regarded as their sacrosanct law code" (Ananta Raman, xiii). Amish Tripathi's *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* reconceptualizes and destabilizes the *Ramayana*'s master narrative, actively challenging and resisting its embedded patriarchal ideology rather than offering mere emancipation, liberation, or reconstruction. In this context, Serpil Oppermann's argument concerning the historicity and textuality of narratives, alongside postmodern histories, proves particularly pertinent. She invokes the New Historicist debate, which posits that history functions solely as a "verbal construct," while texts, whether literary or historical serve merely as testimonies to the past. She cites Jonathan Culler as saying that "history manifests itself in narrative constructs, stories designed to yield meaning through narrative ordering" (qtd. in Oppermann 14).

Daniel Taylor asserts that "[a] story is the telling of the significant actions of characters over time." (Taylor 15). He notes four aspects of story. The first is the telling aspect of the story that first marks its humanity, sending it out into the world as an act of faith. The second aspect is something to tell, something worth telling, that matters to the teller, to the listener. The third aspect is the character, what Taylor defines as "a bundle of values in action. Character is what we are at our core, our essence, that which is remembered long after a story is forgotten." Taylor's fourth aspect is the telling of significant actions of characters over time." (qtd. in Bennet 2).

The story of the original *Ramayana* typically adheres to Taylor's four aspects of storytelling. His "second aspect" – "something to tell, something worth telling, that matters to the teller, to the listener" and the "third aspect" – "the character", defined as "a bundle of values in action" This constitutes the essence of the grand narrative. For centuries, since sage Valmiki composed this epic, the story has held profound significance for Indian tellers and listeners alike, with its characters evolving in complexity to embody enduring social symbols of virtue and vice. The stories in this grand narrative reinforce the patriarchal ideology that the ideal story has the male at the centre and in charge of situations, while the woman is at the margins and always secondary, subscribing to the patriarchal gender role of "good girl" always virtuous and submissive. Prince Rama, the central character, is a bundle of patriarchal values which have been emulated by the ideal male in Indian stories over centuries, and Sita has embodied another set of values that point to the subservient ideal female.

Sita's birth narrative in Valmiki's *Ramayana* is deliberately mystified to reinforce patriarchal ideology, positioning an ordinary human woman as unfit consort for the divine Prince Rama. This entrenched binary of male dominance and female subordination has been repeatedly contested in late twentieth- and twenty-first-century feminist discourse. Amish Tripathi's *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* exemplifies counter-storytelling that destabilizes cherished Hindu patriarchal norms by granting marginalized characters narrative agency and performativity. Through this reclamation, Tripathi transforms the passive Sita myth into active resistance against the ideological master narrative. Within this paper's focused scope, select examples from Tripathi's text illustrate how his reimagined characters and plotlines systematically challenge the *Ramayana*'s patriarchal framework.

In the *Ayodhyakanda*, Section CXVIII, Sita recounts her birth story to Anasuya, the wife of Sage Atri. She asserts:

Mithila's lord, the heroic Janaka, justly ruleth the earth, engaged in observing the duties of Khsatriyas. As he was ploughing a plain intended for a sacrifice, I rose from under the earth.... Tending me with my body covered with dust, Janaka, engaged in throwing handfuls of dust (to level hollow spots) was struck with amazement. Being childless, he took me upon his lap from affection, and saying- 'This is my daughter', conceived affection for me. (500)

King Janaka immediately hears an oracle declaring "O King in all righteousness this daughter is yours," prompting him to entrust the child to his eldest wife for care and upbringing. Sita grows up in opulence and love befitting a princess of her era, learning *stree-dharma* the prescribed conduct for a virtuous woman in both her natal and marital homes. This conventional arc of delicate princess to devoted wife and daughter-in-law is radically reconstructed by Amish Tripathi in *Sita: Warrior of Mithila*. In this context, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's advocacy for narrative multiplicity proves relevant, as does Eric McDowell's review "Counternarratives: The Power of Narrative," which underscores stories' dual capacity to reinforce or dismantle entrenched power structures.

In her well-known TED Talk, "The Danger of a Single Story," Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie argues for the importance of a

multiplicity of stories, voices, and perspectives in order to do justice to the fullest range of experience and explode reductive stereotypes of people and places. "Stories matter," she says. "Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and malign. But stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity." (McDowell n.pg.)

Indeed, Amish Tripathi incorporates contemporary female experiences such as mandatory training in martial arts and self-defense into his reconstruction of Sita from the ancient epic, transforming her from passive icon to empowered warrior. To humanize her divine origins, he introduces an alternative birth storyline infused with fantasy elements, forging empathetic bonds between human and non-human realms that challenge traditional mythic hierarchies. Most dramatically, Tripathi reimagines Sita's discovery: rather than emerging from a ritual furrow during King Janaka's ploughing, baby Sita is rescued by the courageous Queen Sunaina from a perilous forest encounter. Returning from pilgrimage, the royal couple witnesses a lone vulture valiantly defending itself against a wolf pack; as the compassionate queen not the king rushes to aid the bird, she discovers it shielding a crying infant with its wings, risking death to protect the foundling. This vivid scene not only elevates female agency from the outset but also subverts anthropocentric norms, positioning nature itself as Sita's primal guardian and underscoring Tripathi's counter-narrative strategy of resistance through maternal heroism and interspecies solidarity.

Sunaina was perhaps fifty metres away when she noticed the bundle for the first time. The vulture was protecting it from the pack of wolves. It was lodged in what looked like a little furrow in the dry mud. The bundle moved. 'By the great Lord Parshu Ram!' exclaimed Sunaina. 'That's a baby!' Sunaina pressed forward, rapidly goading her horse into a fierce gallop. As she neared the pack of wolves, she heard the soft, frantic cries of a human baby, almost drowned out by the howling animals....The child, wrapped in a rich red cloth with black stripes, was crying desperately. She signalled a soldier to pick up the precious bundle as she continued to soothe the bird. (Tripathi 17)

The ensuing description deconstructs the patriarchal authority of the original myth, rendering it realistic and humane. Janaka and Sunaina summon the royal doctor to examine the baby, who "bandaged a wound on her right temple with some herbs and neem leaves" (19). The childless couple embraces her as a divine blessing from Devi Kanyakumari and names her Sita. Here, Tripathi deftly merges his revision with the canonical tradition, explaining her name through the furrow motif from the original epic (20). Unlike Valmiki's *Ramayana*, which erases Queen Sunaina, Tripathi's narrative elevates both Sunaina and Sita as empowered figures skilled in military strategy and statecraft, while portraying King Janaka as a contemplative philosopher who prefers his wife to rule Mithila thus inverting traditional gender hierarchies from the outset.

Hayden White contends that historiography transcends mere factual recounting, functioning instead as a "poetic process." Historical narratives constitute "verbal artifacts," wherein their representational strategies remain "essentially provisional" (42). Historically, Indian women adhered to the behavioural codes mandated by the *Manusmriti*, subjecting themselves to its structures of dominance. Which barred them from male domains like education, martial arts, statecraft, or even appearing before unrelated men.

5/151. Girls are supposed to be in the custody of their father when they are children, women must be under the custody of their husband when married and under the custody of her son as widows. In no circumstances is she allowed to assert herself

independently. 5/158. Women have no divine right to perform any religious ritual, nor make vows or observe a fast. Her only duty is to obey and please her husband and she will for that reason alone be exalted in heaven. (*The Modern Rationalist*)

By way of counter-narration, Amish Tripathi creates a new set of "verbal artefacts" more faithful to contemporary notions of the empowered female. In Chapter One of the novel, he introduces Sita as a valiant woman intelligent, powerful, and adept in warfare who single-handedly combats the vicious militia of enemy Raavan. Amish portrays her as a great archer: we read "There were great archers who could shoot arrows by relying on sound. But very few could throw knives at the source of a sound. Sita was one of those very few." (4). The master-narrative is resisted and destabilized as the present narrative violates the codes of *Manusmriti* regarding women's education. In keeping with women's rights, Amish's Sita receives equal opportunity in every aspect of life. In Chapter Four, her parents, Janak and Sunaina, decide that Sita was "old enough to leave for gurukul; literally, the Guru's family, but in effect a residential school [that] offered lessons in the core subjects of Philosophy, Mathematics, Science, and Sanskrit. Sita would also receive education in other specialised subjects like Geography, History, Economics, and Royal Administration, among others" (42-3) (parenthesis mine). Sita also receives training in warfare and martial arts, defying traditional gender constraints. Her guru, Shvetaketu, commends her exceptional wisdom, pragmatism, and indomitable fighting spirit (51). While the patriarchal post-Vedic master narrative systematically denies Sita the authority and opportunity to participate in religious rituals, Tripathi's reinterpretation radically subverts this exclusion. In a striking departure from canonical tradition, both her guru Shvetaketu and the venerable sage Vishwamitra initiate her into clandestine rituals, positioning her as a pivotal agent in combating evil forces. This empowerment transforms Sita from a passive emblem of virtue into an active guardian of cosmic order, rendering her instrumental in preserving world peace. Through these narrative interventions, Tripathi reconfigures Sita's metaphysical and martial roles, challenging the epistemic boundaries that historically confined women to domestic and devotional spheres within the *Ramayana* tradition.

Amish Tripathi inscribes a new history, positioning Sunaina and Sita as active participants in the public domain. Sita leaves her *gurukul* and returns to assume Mithila's reins after Sunaina's death, aiding her father in governance: "The sixteen-year-old Sita had been administering the kingdom reasonably well. She had consolidated her rule by retaining the team that had advised Sunaina, careful to continue systems that her mother had instituted" (107). This counter-narrative generates fresh "verbal artefacts" by establishing Sita a female as autonomous ruler and decision-maker, independent of male guidance and excelling as economist and politician. Facing her uncle Kusadhwa's threats to embargo Mithila's trade and resources, Sita demonstrates diplomacy and foresight for sustainable development. Rejecting 100,000 donated gold coins as mere authority symbols, she invests in public welfare: improving roads, water supply, and housing for the poor to boost trade and security. She prioritizes "two potential projects that needed investment. One was the road that connected Mithila to Sankashya. The other was cheap, permanent and liveable housing for the slum dwellers" (109). Ensuring unpoisonable clean water, she digs a deep city lake, embodying able administration and socialism. Thus, Tripathi deconstructs the pliant Sita of the master-narrative, birthing a new-age, educated, empowered woman asserting personal power.

CONCLUSION

Amish Tripathi's *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* masterfully counter-narrates Valmiki's patriarchal *Ramayana*, transforming passive Sita into an empowered warrior-administrator who defies *Manusmriti* codes through martial prowess, *gurukul*

education, autonomous rule, and ritual participation. As McDowell notes of Keene's theory, such counter-narratives wield "power...to push back, challenge, or yes, counter the harm done by other stories" (McDowell n. pg.). By recasting Sunaina as heroic rescuer and ruler, granting Sita economic foresight and diplomatic agency "The sixteen-year-old Sita had been administering the kingdom reasonably well" (107) Tripathi generates new "verbal artefacts" that contest centuries-old gender hierarchies while resonating with contemporary women's empowerment discourses: "the process of supporting women, to help them discover and provide them with the support to assert their personal power" (Dev 70). This revisionist project reveals counter-narration's radical potential: retaining mythic characters and settings while reengineering signifiers for egalitarian ends, restoring "agency, depth, and dignity to figures formerly denied full [humanity]." Tripathi's Sita thus bridges ancient epic and modern politics, empirically demonstrating how contemporary literature can destabilize entrenched master narratives, claim narrative space for the marginalized, and catalyze socio-cultural transformation toward gender justice.

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