

GENDER DYNAMICS AND INTRACTABILITY IN THE SELECTED MYTHOLOGICAL WORKS OF DEVDUTT PATTANAİK

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ABSTRACT

Gender has always been the single most important aspect of the lives of men and women in any given culture and at any time in human history. Devdutt Pattanaik's works on Hindu mythology, such as *Myth = Mithya*, *Sati Savitri*, *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana* and *Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of Mahabharata*, enlighten one about the aspects of gender relations by using men as "mind" (culture) versus women as "matter" (body). This shows the fluidity of gender and agency for women. Of course, there will always be an argument about the tension that exists between the patriarchal system that clearly wants to restrict the role of women and the feminist themes that show women making choices against their culture. This paper thus argues that while Pattanaik challenges fixed gender binaries, it also reflects current contestations over gender in complex paradoxes.

Social hierarchies are constructed by class, race, and religion, placing women in subordinate positions. These norms generate stereotypes and determine power dynamics in society. Stereotyping is based on bias and oppression and is continuously a threat to the path of progress towards achieving balance in gender roles. The gender dynamics of Indian society are always related to its mythology and traditions, enlightened by values, rituals, and power structures, giving way to deeper insights into gender roles and identities. In this paper, archetypal representations and feminist revisions can both subvert patriarchal hegemony and contribute to broader discourses on gender equity in modern India. The present research study will utilize a qualitative research approach, which will incorporate content analysis and feminist critical discourse analysis.

Keywords: Gender Dynamics, Intractability, Mythology, Patriarchy, Power Dynamics

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INTRODUCTION

Gender appears to be the most important and influential ruling principle that affects the development and growth of any civilization throughout the world. Unlike biological sex, gender is concerned with socially constructed traits, identity, behavior, and social roles. Gender has been described by the World Health Organization (WHO) as the "characteristics of women, men, girls, and boys that are socially constructed". These encompass norms, behavior, and roles to do with being a woman, man, girl, or boy and also between each other. Since gender is a social construct, it differs from society to society and may also differ over time. Therefore, gender is assumed to be the basis that shapes gender roles, norms and dynamics. The gender classification results in the creation of gender roles and norms, which are viewed to be social expectations and regulations on how one who belongs to a certain gender is supposed to behave, think, relate, or occupy a position in society, where examples are given as males being aggressive, dominant, and providers in the family; conversely, females are envisioned

in passive care taker, nurturer, and submissive positions to patriarchal dominance. The gender norms are not objective; rather, they are built and controlled under the patriarchal system.

As opines Kamla Bhasin (1993), "Patriarchy is a system of power that is based on the belief that men are superior to women and that women are inferior to men" (p.19). Feminist theorist *Bell Hooks* (2004) interprets the devious nature of patriarchy when she says, "Patriarchy has no gender" (p.1). This argument results in the conclusion that patriarchy is not merely a male phenomenon but a societal design that can be internalized by all people, regardless of gender. Therefore, these gender rules and norms guide personal behavior and social interactions, often resulting in stereotypes. Hence, when a person follows or resists gender norms during their day-to-day life, it generates gender dynamics. As UNESCO describes it, "Gender dynamics are the interactions and relations among and between boys, girls, women, women, and men." Cultural, social, economic, and political settings shape these relationships (UNESCO, 2003, p.15). Gender dynamics are key to understanding the problems of gender inequality, since they determine who holds power, who is listened to, and whose lives are recognized in a particular social formation. Example that can be placed in this regard can be: men are usually regarded as powerful and decision-makers in patriarchal societies, where the realm can be anybody, like political, social or economic, or it can be aptly asserted that gender dynamics determine who will talk more, who is going to decide, and who will fill the leadership position? Gender dynamics are a result of gender norms and roles, which are rooted in society at the world's corners. It also represents the prevailing inequalities or imbalances prevailing among the genders.

Analysis of Myth = Mithya

Myth = Mithya fathoms myths as mind-matter engagements, where the interactions of consciousness with the physical world are highlighted. Under this rubric, Brahma, Shiva, and Vishnu tell narratives of their thoughts on gender and the philosophical ideals of creation, preservation, and destruction. For example, the intense and relentless pursuit of Brahma after the Goddess, who is emphatically elusive and the only source of creation, signifies the urge to control, which is always tending toward incestuous desire, a taboo that points out the ambivalence of our knowing of divinity and desire. On the other hand, Shiva's withdrawal from meditation until you are willed by the divine feminine of Parvati merely foregrounds another kind of engagement with femininity. If the male principle is detached, aloof, and distant, wholeness can come about only through the dynamism of the feminine, and these relationships are what the cosmos is all about.

The goddess Vishnu, on the other hand, represents an appealing flirtation with existence. He engages with the world in such a way that it emphasizes the fluidity of gender and the playful aspects of creation. In order to maintain a sense of harmony and balance in life's cosmic dance, it is important to maintain a balance between seriousness and lightheartedness. These deities, when depicted like this, allow for a deeper analysis of gender dynamics, where women are generally portrayed as opposing nature's untamed forces, while men are represented as the more rational and orderly Purushas. But this binary division is crossed by the figure of Ardhanarishvara, who represents the essential unity of these principles in dual form and intimates that the divine cannot be usefully comprehended without recognizing the interdependence of masculine and feminine energies. Although these queer narratives showcase this fluidity, they challenge the narrow perceptions of gender and identity that remain prevalent in society today. A patriarchal system persists as nature and women continue to be domesticated. As a result of this process, cultural narratives often attempt to domesticate Prakriti, creating order and structure in conflict with the chaos and creativity of the world around us. Thus, even as these myths involve us in a complex web of meaning and participation, they reflect the real struggles and tensions between the forces of dominance and liberation, control and chaos, which have characterized the human condition. Ultimately, these are the kinds of narratives that call into question the very bases on which our beliefs about gender, power, and the relationship between humanity and

the divine are premised; they urge a reconsideration of the way we envisage and relate to the world around us.

Sati Savitri: Feminist Defiance

The premise of this 2024 work is to present "feminist stories that they don't tell," which contrast Manu's patriarchy with laws that show women redefining Dharma as if it were a woman's right. Sati self-immolates for the sake of dignity and Savitri outwits Yama in a bid to maintain her husband's agency within the normal norms. In this dynamic, women challenge our anxiety about fidelity by demonstrating their ability to make our lives better. The patriarchy modifies behaviors through myths, but women's choices remain ambiguous in spite of the myths that shape their behavior.

Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana

Instead of creating Sita as a victim, Pattanaik allows Sita to embody the role of a rebel: an earth-child that finds strength in nature, a forest-insistent goddess who defies 'Agni-Pariksha'. It is a feminist movement whose characters reject the concept of "modern" pity and embody liberation feminism (body autonomy), but at the same time reject the concept of "modern" tyranny. Rama's dharma (public doubt) clashes with Sita's in one of the most dramatic scenes in the book, illustrating the eternal friction between mind and matter that is present throughout the narrative.

Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of the Mahabharata

Throughout Jaya's storytelling, women are often the ones who drive victory: Kunti creates warriors to fight for her, Draupadi invokes divine intervention, Shikhandi, who lives both as a man and a woman, is defeated by Bhishma. And then, throughout the narrative, there is polyandry, remarriage in the case of Tara, and agency aplenty, but disrobing sullies this one particular moment of their vulnerability: The quest for "victory" by Epic presupposes that women are empowered, yet patriarchal wars continue throughout time.

Gender dynamics are not static and are open to aging, time, society, and development changes. It can be shaped, structured, designed or re-designed by cultural discourses, systemic injustices, and power structures that tend to accord privilege and advantages to one gender's identity over the prevailing other gender. Gender dynamics also attract resistance against conventional norms and entail a renegotiation of identities, particularly in realms like feminist discourse in literature and mythology. Research on gender dynamics is rooted deeply in history, literature, and mythology because these sources are potent instruments and act as mirrors in amending attitudes towards gender roles and identities in society. Literature, both classical and contemporary, continues in the same tradition by questioning and probing into the roles bestowed upon various genders. Traditional works or old literature tend to reflect on the gender relations of their day, while today's or current literature might critique or subvert them, presenting alternative concepts of identity and equality.

Mythology as founding stories gives form to the values, beliefs, and norms of culture, which have long had a central position in building and reinforcing gender roles. They reflect and reinforce patriarchal ideologies, locating women in subordination and defining their identities in relation to men (Das, p.02). Mythology across cultures and civilizations frequently depicts or represents gods, goddesses, heroes and heroines whose actions and relationships embody societal expectations of femininity and masculinity. Greek mythology, for instance, has strong female characters such as Athena and Hera, whose legends both reinforce and subvert traditional roles. In the same manner, masculine heroes like Hercules and Odysseus are characterized by attributes that cultures have traditionally linked to masculinity, including strength, courage and wit.

Gender dynamics include the habits of interaction and relations of power organized by societal expectations and standards, yet these very dynamics tend to become firmly entrenched in social, economic, and institutional forms. Consequently, efforts toward gender equality commonly encounter the issue of intractability, where gender-based disparities and unjust norms are extremely difficult to reform because they are linked to other social identities and are defended at numerous levels of

society. Intractability is the continuation of problems or issues that are extremely resistant to solution, frequently because of deeply ingrained social, cultural, or psychological forces that make traditional means of resolution ineffective. (Coleman, 2003).

Dating back to Indian mythology, which is extensive and varied, retained by word-of-mouth narrations, the tradition of folklore, scriptures, inscriptions, paintings and written epics such as the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* has been a source and is indicative of cultural norms. In ancient Indian mythological literature, gender roles have been predominantly presented in binary terms, where males have represented masculinity, which finally relates to power and reason, and played the female characters in the role of emotional figures, caregivers, subordinates, passive figures and silent followers. The female characters are frequently depicted in a way that highlights their presence as wives or objects of lust, pleasure and desire instead of autonomous individuals. These representations have been narrowed to fertility, purity or temptation symbols, perpetuating stereotypes that restrict them to certain, yet often constrictive, social roles (Das, p.4). *The Manu Smriti*, or *Laws of Manu*, is an ancient Indian text that has contributed considerably to the structuring of societal norms and values, specifically the status and role of women in Hindu society. It was written circa 200 BCE to 200 CE and ranks among the earliest and most significant texts of Hindu law, defining many aspects of dharma and social order. *The Manu Smriti* is a patriarchal vision, claiming that women must be subservient to men and, most importantly, is defined in terms of their relationships with male entities-fathers, husbands and sons. It claims that "a woman must never be independent" (p.148) and places great emphasis on a woman's role in serving her husband and family. All these claims had helped create the image of women as passive and reliant, perpetuating conventional gender roles that restrict their agency and autonomy (Bhasin, 1993, p.23). Therefore, men had entirely occupied authority and control of mythology, and the figures were molded or created because of their monopoly.

Nonetheless, mythology has never been immobile, and its significance has evolved with the ages and the epochs. Despite widespread misogyny and patriarchal-biased gender norms present in Indian mythological accounts, there are numerous instances of strong, independent women firmly opposed to traditional gender-based roles who neither want to be bound by societal constraints nor rules. Such empowered women demonstrate that Indian mythology encompasses a broad set of narratives that surpass the usually emphasized male-centric accounts. Although all the available prejudices or stereotypes have isolated their tales, their inclusion in the ancient or age-old tales highlights the enduring legacy of powerful, independent, and empowered women who have always been part of Indian society.

Re-telling ancient manuscripts or epics is a continuous and contemporary fashion or vogue in Indian literature. There have been numerous modern authors or writers, such as Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Amish Tripathi, Koral Dasgupta, Kavita Kane and Ashwin Sanghi, who have re-evaluated and re-contextualized Indian mythology with a fresh and new outlook and aspects. It is essentially a retelling or recounting of the stories in a different or unconventional manner, which provides a new outlook and thus often an updated version. Devdutt Pattanaik, a renowned Indian mythologist of today, reinterprets and reexamines these ancient texts from a modern perspective that combines ancient and traditional representations with contemporary explanations to project the depressed or suppressed characters and their views or comments in a straightforward manner. He is also famous for comparing and contrasting, analyzing, and criticizing these characters in a manner that unveils a great deal about Indian society, its culture, and tradition from the 'Ancient Period' to the 'Modern Era'.

Not only this, but he also explores the treatment meted out to women and the culture that shapes and molds human psychology, personality, behavior, perception and dominant mindsets. His retellings not only empower the female heroines but also accord distinguished significance to women whose stories are marginalized or rendered marginalized, thus providing an enthralling and meaningful reinterpretation of mythic stories. Devdutt Pattanaik, in works such as *Myth=Mithya*, *Jaya: An*

Illustrated Retelling of Mahabharata, Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of Ramayana and Sati Savitri, reveals a harmonious thematic meeting with the way long-established gender roles are built, consolidated, testified against, and sometimes inverted within Indian mythology. Pattanaik applies a contemporary, sometimes feminist perspective to ancient or old-aged mythology, but also recognizes the deeply rooted, sometimes recalcitrant character of patriarchy and the patriarchal systems embedded in these myths. Devdutt Pattanaik laid down the philosophical foundation for Hindu mythology, pointing out that "truth is subjective" and influenced by belief systems.

"Myth is truth, which is subjective, intuitive, cultural, and rooted in faith." Myth is, by and large, a cultural construction, a shared sense of reality that unites people and communities. If myth is a notion, mythology is the vehicle for the notion. (Pattanaik, 2006, p.xv). Devdutt Pattanaik explores Indian mythology from figurative and metaphysical perspectives, declaring that myth is never falsehood, but a subjective truth molded by culture. He explains, identifies and locates the androcentric narrative format of Indian myth but also notes that the female archetype (Shakti) is worshipped when divine and managed when manifested as a mortal woman. Pattanaik also authors and emphasizes that: "The divine feminine is adored, revered, and honored, but a mortal woman must be obedient, maintain chastity, be a nurse, be emotional, be a silent believer, and must be sacrificed—these are all not contradictions, but a culture. This observation underscores the stubbornness of mythic gender roles and norms, where the feminine is mighty and constrained, sacred and subdued.

Feminine Intractability and Gender Dynamics in Mythological Archetypes

The mythological figures or characters like *Sati*, *Savitri*, *Sita*, and *Draupadi*, when looked at from a feminist perspective, show clear and sometimes overlapping ways women resist, take control, and stand firm in a male-dominated society. Their recitals of narratives challenge and oppose the traditional stereotypical archetypes of passive and submissive womanhood and thus endowment the intricate, elaborated and multifaceted portrayals of women who not only oppose but also negotiate and reformulate the boundaries imposed on them. Employing Simon de Beauvoir's idea or notion of the woman as the "Other", each character refuses to remain defined solely in relation to the male, be it father, husband or king. *Sati*, for instance, asserts her spiritual and emotional autonomy. *Sati*, as shown in Devdutt Pattanaik's *Myth=Mithya*, is a strong woman who combines bravery, moral strength, and sacred power, making her important in discussions about gender roles and resistance. *Daksha's* youngest daughter, *Sati*, an incarnation of *Adishakti*, refuses every suitor that her parents approve of her, but her willingness to marry a 'Mahadeva' against her father and *Daksha's* wishes clearly displays her defiance against patriarchal authority, as she asserts her right to choose her partner despite social and family disapproval. As a result of her militant resistance, the power structures of her era were challenged, which marked a significant change from traditional views that required women to submit to male control.

The retelling of 'Sati' in Devdutt Pattanaik's '*Myth=Mithya*' showcases the heart-wrenching story of a woman who perishes (immolates) herself in outcry against the disrespect shown to her husband, 'Shiva,' by her own father, 'Prajapati Daksh,' and highlights her emotional and moral intractability- a refusal to tolerate and reject dishonor, even at the cost of her own life. *Sati*, the consort of 'Shiva', is portrayed and sketched not merely just as an ideal and devoted wife but as a woman of fierce autonomy and agency. She directly confronts her father, 'Daksh', and challenges him due to the insult shown to her husband, 'Shiva'. *Sati* embodies the voice of those who challenges ritualism. (Pattanaik, 2006, p.168)

Sati leaped into the sacred fire of the yagna determined to pollute the sacred fire and stop the ritual. *Agni*, the fire god refused to touch her. So, *Sati* invoked *tapa*, the inner fire and set herself alight on the sacred altar. (Pattanaik, 2006, p.169) Her act of self-immolation in tragedy is a protest against the patriarchal norm which seeks to silence her. The tension between 'Sati' and 'Daksh' is symbolic of conflict or friction between patriarchal authority and feminine resistance. Similarly, spiritual and inner

sovereignty distance her from the stereotypical mindset and portrayal of being passive and submissive women. In fact, Sati emerges as a person of resilient agency, she who is willingly able to disrupt the cosmic and familial order to defend her principles. Through '*Myth=Mithya*', Sati has been shown to be not only spiritually and emotionally sovereign but also radically stringent in her resistance to subjugation, hence showing her to be a symbol of both sacrifice and protest in the mythological landscape. Looking at the narrative of Sati, when viewed and analyzed through the feminist lens opens up the intrinsic tensions between societal structures and its associated norms against individual identity; hence, giving an intricate analysis of how mythological women dealt with identity, autonomy, and resistance within the rigid patriarchal framework.

In '*Sati Savitri*', Devdutt Pattanaik revisits the story of *Savitri* - a character renowned in traditional Indian mythology for her devotion and chastity. However, Savitri was an embodiment of courage, devotion, determination, and intellect in Indian mythology, but deeper reading and analysis states her as a symbol of subtle resistance and intractable will within patriarchal constraints. In Devdutt Pattanaik's retelling, Savitri being a female character challenges the traditional and long-established gender roles through her strong advocacy and conscious choice of husband against the conventional tradition of arranged marriage by marrying the man of her choice, Satyavan, who was fated to die after a year of his marriage. The fact that she married Satyavan despite the prediction of his fatal death proves her strong autonomy and emotional intractability, which makes her defy the conventional norm or expectations. Savitri's strength and courage do not lie in overt rebellion; in fact, her silent, calculated, strategic, and decisive resistance was enough while accompanying her dying husband deep into the forest, and later outwitting 'Yama', the god of death, for reclaiming her husband's life. Savitri is portrayed as a woman of intellect, grace, and composure. Her victory over 'Yama', the god of death, stands symbolic for women's empowerment through reason, which was strength, intellectual, and rhetorical skill, smart negotiation, and spiritual steadfastness, thus outwitting the 'Yama', rather than merely emotion. She refuses to submit to fate and actively engages in dialogues with 'Yama' to change her fate-a resistance to the traditional 'Pativrata' image, which limits or controls women to devotion and resilience. 'Savitri' a determined and an intelligent woman who was able to save her husband from the clutches of death. (Pattanaik, 2024, p.13)

She not only saved her husband's life but also his kingdom and his progeny. Such conduct is representative of women's resistance to the rigid system because it underlines wisdom and tackles every hurdle posed to her without confrontation. Her perseverance, loyalty, and tenacity are not passive virtues but active forces that redefine the archetype of the ideal wife. She, being grounded in dharma, took over the control of fate herself hence subverting gender expectations. Savitri's story is told in the *Mahabharata*. Her husband is not chosen for her. She chooses him knowing well the risks involved. She is a determined woman who negotiates with death itself. When given a boon, she is generous enough to first think of her father-in-law, then of her father and only then of herself. And she is clever enough to outwit the god of death herself. Thus, her power comes from her character and her intelligence, making her a heroine among housewives. (Pattanaik, 2024, p. 15). Savitri is the embodiment of moral intransigence and emotional force; therefore, her story is used to illustrate just how endurance and wisdom can help females assert their voices in the patriarchy that repressed them. In one captivating scene, Sita approaches Shiva's bow, at which one of the maids' cries, "That's too heavy. The bow is impossible to pick up for any man," Sita declares, confidently picking it up with one hand and cleaning its underside with great force - demonstrating her unparalleled strength. Of course, this did not go unnoticed; this word reached the King and Queen in no time as they hurried along to the armory to witness this incredible feat of Sita's. With graceful ease, she lifted the bow again, perplexed by all the fuss being made about her actions (Pattanaik, 2013, p. 47). "She is too strong. Who will marry her now?" was what Sita's mother thought as a smile playfully danced on her lips, while her heart felt concerned. In response, it was said by her father, "Someone who is his equal,

or perhaps even stronger," reflecting a deeper understanding of Sita's exceptional qualities and the kind of partnership she truly deserves (Pattanaik, 2013, p.47). This illustrates not only the complexity of gender dynamics, but also the possibility of meaningful relationships that go beyond traditional roles, suggesting that true strength goes beyond inspiration and achievement.

Sita was not known only for her courage and power; she was known for her determination. She was determined, too, when making her decisions. Traditionally venerated as a paradigm of obedience, virtue, and self-sacrifice, her character runs within the confinements of patriarchal boundaries and expectations; still, her choices and willingness often resist the designed patriarchal structure that defines her. Her decision to accompany Rama to exile for fourteen long years exhibits her not just as a dutiful, devoted wife but also shows her as conscious agency, where she herself chooses the hardship of exile over the comfort and luxury of the palace, while maintaining the sanctity of the marital bond on her own terms. I do not need your permission. I am your wife, and I am supposed to accompany you to the throne, to war and to the forest. What you eat I shall taste. Where you sleep, I shall rest. You are the shaft of the bow that is our marriage; you will need string to complete it. My place is beside you nowhere else. Fear not, I will be no burden; I can take care of myself as long as I am beside you and behind you. You will want nothing. (Pattanaik, 2013, p.82)

The words of the young girl stunned shock waves everybody in the palace. She was indeed Janaka's daughter, born of the earth, raised among sages, the one who could hold aloft the bow of Shiva that crushed everyone else. (Pattanaik, 2013, p.82).

Her abduction by Ravana and, post-death of Ravana, when she was set free but the subsequent trial by fire known as 'Agni Pariksha' exposed the purity, pride, and honor that society imposed on her and was to be proved by women alone. Here, Sita's intractability comes up where she defies these ideals—but through her unbending moral strength and dignity, not through loud rebellion. Devdutt Pattanaik's *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana* explores lesser-known facts about Sita: right from her origin or birth to her final departure back to Earth. Sita's final refusal to return to the palace and rejection of Rama after her second exile and finally return to 'Earth' stands as her most powerful conduct of resistance: by refusing to undergo another test of chastity, she is not showing her weakness; rather, it is a powerful assertion of self-worth. She reclaims her narrative from a society that repeatedly questions her chastity and integrity. By refusing to return to Ram, Sita turned away from 'Sanskriti' (cultural/civilization) and the rules of society. She does not need social structures to give her status. She chooses an earth where there are no boundaries and rules (Pattanaik 2013, p.305). Sita's act of refusal is not only personal but political too—which signals a silent but resolute protest against the patriarchal system. Her inner strength was exhibited in her emotional resilience, moral conduct and clarity, and unwavering identity even when she navigated from the role of wife to Ayodhya's queen and finally to the role of mother of two young princes. In this context, Sita emerges not as a passive sufferer, but as a symbol of both spiritual and emotional intractability, asserting that endurance is not submission, but a profound mode of resistance.

Meanwhile, Draupadi represents the most blatant challenge and opposition to the existing patriarchal structural and societal norms of her time. Through *Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of the Mahabharata*, Devdutt Pattanaik unveils the stratified narrative of one of the greatest epics, the *Mahabharata*, majorly focusing on marginalized female perspectives like Draupadi, Kunti, Gandhari and many others. Draupadi was the central character who was the most dynamic and complex among all female figures in the *Mahabharata* and had a powerful essence of strength, dignity and complexity. She possessed strong will and assertiveness, fearlessly confronting powerful men or societal injustices. She was the emblem of outspoken resistance and unrelenting intractability in the deeply entrenched patriarchal structure and its corresponding norms. In contrast to other mythological women who choose to remain silent and endure their circumstances, Draupadi refused to be silent; instead, she was vocal in showing her anguish, pain and great anger. Her marriage was often viewed with disrespect

and moral ambiguity, as it was a polyandrous marriage (she was married to five Pandavas); she was always looked at with gendered scrutiny, yet she was capable of asserting her identity without apology, demanding dignity in a structure not designed to protect her autonomy. The most unforgettable and iconic moment of her resistance emerged in the Kauravas Court of Hastinapur during her attempted robbery scene. 'Go ask my gambler husband if he staked himself first or me. For he staked himself first and lost himself first. How can he still have any rights over me?' (Pattanaik, 2010, p.145).

Draupadi's question annoyed Duryodhana as he thought himself to be above answering any woman, even Draupadi. (Pattanaik, 2010, p.145). In the era of the infamous game of dice, where she was publicly humiliated, she chose not to remain silent. Draupadi's eyes flashed with fire. "I shall never forgive the Kauravas for doing what they have done to me." I shall not tie my hair until I wash it in Dussahana's blood.' (Pattanaik, 2010, p.147)

Her path is lit with outstanding boldness and perseverance, while maintaining her dignity, as she stands as an icon of strength and rebellion. Being the prominent character in the narrative, she is engaged deeply in a moral, philosophical, and righteous debate, showcasing her sharp mind and deep sense of dharma. 'Ask the elders if it is morally appropriate for a woman, the royal daughter-in-law of that, to be staked and lost in a game of dice?' asked Draupadi. (Pattanaik, 2010, p. 145). Draupadi's questions further annoyed Duryodhana. (Pattanaik, 2010, p.145).

Duryodhana, who could never bear the haughtiness of Draupadi, said, 'Your husbands are useless. They cannot protect you. They have staked and lost their kingdom, their weapons, themselves and even you. So come to me. Sit on my thighs. I will take care of you. He then exposed his left thigh and mocked Draupadi with a lascivious look. Draupadi was disgusted by Duryodhana's vulgarity (Pattanaik, 2010, p.145). Is this dharma, 'she asks, 'to treat a woman so?' (Pattanaik, 2010, p.145).' Draupadi directly questions the assembly's silence, where she questions the masculine authority and the powerful people present in the court and challenges the validity of the dharma that these powerful people claim to uphold and protect. Her inexorable cross-questioning and bombastic force of anger towards male authority unveils the weakness of patriarchal ethics and makes her a woman who refuses to be reduced to a victim of the unethical game of dice and associated disrobing by Dussasana.

Even though Draupadi was vengeful, her pursuit of justice is rooted in righteousness and goodness, which makes her a morally complex and layered character. Her intractability is both morally and emotionally valid—her demands for justice and the remembrance of insult catalyzed a war known as 'Dharma Yudh,' which was supposed to redefine moral order and conduct. Women are expected to have passive endurance, but Draupadi was against this order of expectation; instead, her active and vocal resistance became a political tool and fuel to challenge the power forms and structures that silence women's suffering. She carries a feminist sensibility where her anger of anguish, remembrance of insults, and articulation become fuel and weapons of reclamation. During this entire process, she has emerged as a mythological archetype of uncompromising authority, showing radical resistance, and her fearless confrontation within the patriarchal lineage that destroys conventional gender roles. Her blazing defiance, public verbalism of the trauma caused to her, and denial of forgiveness and forget make her a radical element in Indian mythology.

Draupadi, in the end, represents 'Shakti', the feminine and divine force that stands as an ageless character of feminine power, resistance, and transformation. With such emotional intensity and deep humanness, she shows the complex facets of a female experience, or we could say, the layered realities of womanhood that make them oscillate between their duties and the agency of their will. The unapologetic anger of Draupadi and the fierce demand for strong justice fit contemporary feminist critiques of silence and victimhood, claiming that rage can be a productive form of political resistance.

Relevance of Gender Dynamics and Intractability in the 21st Century

The attributes of gender dynamics and intractability that had been epitomized by mythological characters like Sati, Savitri, Sita, and Draupadi are very relevant and continue to exist in the modern age, and persist to inspire women's role in the present-day social, cultural and political panorama. In the context of "Historical and India's Freedom Struggle", many brave and courageous women broke up the barriers of their region and society. Rani Velu Nachiyar (1730-1796) from Sivaganga, Rani Laxmi Bai (1828-1858) from Jhansi, Kittur Rani Cheenama of Karnataka. All these women resisted and fought against 'British Rule'. Savitri Bai Phule is celebrated for her incredible role in women's education and social reform in India. In the domain of politics, women such as Draupadi Murmu and Indira Gandhi have ascended to the highest positions of political power by being 'President' and 'Prime Minister' respectively. Some other female politicians, like Sushma Swaraj, Jayalalithaa, and Soniya Gandhi, have played crucial roles in Indian politics within a predominantly male framework.

In the world of Science and Technology, Tessy Thomas, popularly known as the "Missile Woman of India," was the first Indian woman who successfully led a missile project (AGNIV). She worked with India's Defense Research and Defense Organization (DRDO) and challenged the male-dominated defense research field. India's Shakuntala Devi, known as "The Human Computer", revealed how the intellectuality of females has been underestimated by gender narratives. Muscle power is supposed to govern all sports events and is supposed to be used only by males, but many Indian female athletes have transformed this idea and perception of strength and capability. Mary Kom, P.V. Sindhu, Mirabai Chanu, Dutee Chand, Avani Lekhara, Sakshi Malik, and Saina Nehwal have won Olympic medals for India. Talking about the 'Entrepreneurship and Industrial' domain, Indra Nooyi, who hails from Tamil Nadu, has been globally recognized as the former CEO of PepsiCo. She showed up and is a global symbol of leadership and cross-cultural success for Indian women. Kiran Mazumdar Shaw, India's leading biotech entrepreneur and founder of Biocon, broke stereotypes in the pharmaceutical and biotechnology industry, which is mainly a male-dominated realm. Falguni Nayar, the founder of Nykaa, and Richa Kar of Zivame are among the top Indian female entrepreneurs.

With the introduction of Rafale Fighter jets into the Indian Air Force for military upgrade and advancement, Flight Lieutenant Shivangi Singh became the first female Rafale pilot, who not only broke the long-standing traditional barrier, but also became an inspiring icon for present and future generations. Operation Sindoor, a military operation conducted by the Indian Armed Forces, was led by two senior women officers, 'Colonel Sophiya Qureshi' of the Indian Army and 'Wing Commander Vyomika Singh' of the Indian Airforce, who were specifically chosen to brief the media about the operation's details. Palki Sharma Upadhyay, a roaring, bold, and articulating voice in the media and journalism, presents fact-based journalism. Her international presence and fearless reportage often challenge male-dominated and politically influenced media spaces. Aishwarya Rai, Sushmita Sen and Priyanka Chopra have represented India on the global platform of beauty and fashion. Zoya Akhtar and Megha Gulzar have emerged as bold storytellers in the male-centered narratives of Bollywood. Nandita Das has used cinema to portray female voices in stories of oppression, agency and resilience.

So, across various fields, present-day women, who are much like their pioneers, struggle not just for recognition and remembrance but for autonomy to shape their own identities. The complications existing around gender in the 21st century stretch beyond social concerns; they constitute an inheritance of civilization that is continuously contested, reimaged, and visualized in a new way by each woman who stands firmly against oppression.

CONCLUSION

Hindu myths immortalize both patriarchal and feminist dialectics that persist indefinitely throughout Pattanaik's work. As a result, it invites contemporary reflection and agency thrives amid tension." The retelling of the mythological characters Sati, Savitri, Sita, and Draupadi through a feminist lens illuminates a rich tapestry of female strength, agency, and resistance that challenges and redefines our

traditional patriarchal paradigms. The women exhibited dynamic yet equally powerful forms of strength, resistance, and agency against traditional gender expectations, far beyond just being mythological figures." Devdutt Pattanaik's retellings demonstrate a deeper understanding of women's responses to power, duty, and injustice across a wide range of texts. The characters in this story don't all share the same expression of resistance, but they do share a common tendency to refuse to give in to society and the system that seeks to define and confine them. They have challenged patriarchal expectations in subtle and explicit ways, reflecting that resistance can take many forms—sacrifice, negotiation, or confrontation. Women have reclaimed their agency within patriarchal frameworks by challenging, stretching, and often rejecting societal boundaries, in addition to fulfilling their responsibilities and duties. In contemporary society, where women continue to negotiate identity, freedom, and justice, these mythological women provide enduring examples of courage, integrity, and complexity. These narratives speak of the struggles faced by women across generations—struggles that include both external battles and deeply personal decisions about selfhood, honor, and dignity. Through examining these characters from a critical feminist perspective, we gain insight into the many ways resistance operates, and how myth can enhance our understandings of gender in the past and in the present. As the writer puts it, the intractability of these women is about standing up for something; about asserting a vision of the self that demands respect, recognition, and justice.

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