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# A Critical Study of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's The Forest of Enchantments

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**ABSTRACT:** The Forest of Enchantments by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni narrates the ancient Indian epic Ramayan from one of the well-known female characters in Indian literature, Sita. Through the numerous accounts of Sita, the narrative emphasizes Sita's identity as a woman as well as her spiritual being. The story of Sita by Divakaruni explores her character's complexity in great detail, presenting a vivid picture of relationships, emotions and social expectations against the backdrop of a magical forest. The study aims to investigate Sita's relationship with nature. Sita finds solace in her agonising exile and solidarity in the jungle. She opposes the sharp distinction between what is right and wrong arguing the viewpoint vary, it gives her voice, wisdom and agency to acknowledge that everyone has their own understanding of Dharma. The paper aims to investigate the relationship between Sita and environment in the novel. The ecofeminist current that dominated justified women's interest in preservation of environment in terms of their common subjugation to patriarchal systems and their innate ability to be nurturing or caring beings.

Additionally, the paper will examine how women are associated with nature and are seen as a source of power. Specifically, it will examine how Sita's relationship to the environment gives her the ability to speak for all the other women in the Ramayana, even those who are marginalized and undervalued, thereby presenting a more progressive and modern image of women in Indian mythology. It attempts to investigate Sita's agency at several points in the story, this study is significant in the modern era. With rich symbolism and vivid imagery, Divakaruni's lyrical and remindful work captures the beauty and magic of the forest. She challenges readers to examine their own views, values, and presumptions by guiding them on a journey of self-discovery and reflection through her exquisite narrative.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's book The Forest of Enchantments throws light on the Ramayan in the words of Sita. Sita is considered to be one of the most significant figures in literature and a popular subject for feminist and literary studies. This is mostly because of the confusion surrounding her exile, which gives rise to Divakaruni's interpretation of the epic, which seeks to explain Sita and other marginalized women in the Ramayana. Laced with Sita's grief, her joy, her sufferings, her success, her heartbreak, her strength, *The Forest of Enchantments* also shows us the lives of various other women who are misinterpreted and are deported to the margins such as *Kaikeyi*, *Suparnakha*, *Mandodari*. By providing these women with an opportunity to express themselves and share their side of the story, she hopes to dispel the myths around them.

Since Ramayan resonates even today, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni makes it more relevant with underlying questions in the narrative: *What are the rights of a woman in any relationship? How should a woman be treated by their loved ones? When a woman is supposed to take stand and speak for herself?*

Divakaruni gives Sita more authority by saying, "Write our narrative too, we've always been forced into awkward situations, dismissed, misinterpreted, ignored, or demonized, and our stories have been exploited as warnings (Divakaruni, 2019, p. 4). The Forest of Enchantments explores themes that are still very much relevant and prevalent in today's world, such as women's struggles, honour, and sense of obligation to society and oneself.

Sita's narrative is presented in The Forest of Enchantments (2019), using her own words. She imparts her own perspective on love, along with her joys, sorrows, and perseverance. In addition, the narrative tells of Sita's voyage from earth to heaven and back, as well as her affinity for and her beautiful bond with the natural world. It illustrates Sita's capacity to heal herself and the natural world. The story also demonstrates how the misogyny of great warriors resulted in the exploitation of women and the natural world. The book tells us about the clash between civilization, nature, and man and woman. It also demonstrates the relationship between the exploitation of women and the natural world. Furthermore, the narrative emphasizes not just Sita's spiritual nature but also her identity as a woman.



Considering that the forest serves as a vital source of empowerment in this story, this essay aims to investigate Sita's relationship with nature. Painful unity and exile in the jungle are Sita's sources of strength. In emphasizing that perspective varies, Sita challenges the sharp distinction between good and evil and asserts that every person has their own unique understanding of dharma. This gives her voice, wisdom, and agency.

The purpose of the study is to examine the relationship between Sita and the environment in the context of the ecofeminist spirituality movement, which defended women's interest in the preservation or well-being of the environment by pointing to their shared vulnerability to patriarchal systems and their innate nurturing or caring nature. The study of Sita's relationship to the environment and how it empowers her to speak for all the other women in the Ramayana, even the marginalized and outcast ones, will also be covered in this paper. Women are traditionally associated with nature and are seen as a source of power. Thus, this study is significant since it attempts to investigate Sita's agency in the various stages of the narrative.

### **A Critical Study of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel titled *The Forest of Enchantments*:**

The Forest of Enchantments by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is a grasping retelling of the ancient Indian epic Ramayana from the viewpoint of Sita, the story sometimes disregarded female protagonist. Divakaruni skillfully handles themes of autonomy, love, sacrifice, and the expectations that society has of women in her narrative.

In contrast to stereotypes that limit Sita to being a submissive victim or a faithful wife, the story shows Sita as a complicated person. Readers are able to see Sita's inner struggles because Divakaruni gives her a voice. She makes Sita more approachable and engaging by humanizing the character. Sita's struggle for autonomy in a society where patriarchal conventions rule is one of the book's main themes. Although Sita is destined to play specific roles as a wife, mother, and daughter, she is continuously in search of independence and self-determination. Divakaruni emphasizes Sita's wit and courage as she overcomes the obstacles placed in her path by society.

The Forest of Enchantments also explores the quality of relationships and love. Rama (Sita's husband), and Sita are shown to have a complex and turbulent relationship. Divakaruni examines the conflict in their marriage between personal fulfillment and obligation as well as the effects of outside influences. The book also looks at various kinds of love and friendship via Sita's interactions with other characters. Another common theme in The Forest of Enchantments is sacrifice. It is said of Sita that her willingness to suffer for the benefit of others—especially her love for Rama and her commitment to her children—is both tragic and admirable. Divakaruni presents sacrifice as a deliberate decision motivated by love and commitment rather than as a passive acceptance of fate.

To sum up, The Forest of Enchantments offers an insightful examination of female autonomy, love, selflessness, and cultural norms. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni gives readers a new outlook on one of the oldest epics in history by reinventing the Ramayana, while also serving as a reminder of the themes' ongoing relevance to modern society

## **II. NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES**

In the Forest of Enchantments, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni uses a variety of storytelling devices to create an engrossing and captivating tale:

**1) First-Person Narration:** The majority of the book is told from Sita's first-person point of view, giving readers a close-up look at her feelings, ideas, and experiences. This narrative decision gives us a better understanding of Sita's character and sheds light on her motivations and inner difficulties.

**2) Memories & Flashbacks:** Divakaruni uses memories and flashbacks to give the story depth and perspective. Readers get a fuller grasp of Sita's journey and the crucial events that have shaped her character through her memories of prior events.

**3) Dialogue:** Dialogue moves the plot along, reveals character dynamics, and conveys information. Divakaruni skillfully uses speech to address topics like love, duty, and sacrifice, as well as to give a life to the characters.

**4) Symbolism and images:** To set the tone, emphasize themes, and hint to future events, symbols and images are interwoven throughout the story. The story is given depth and readers are transported to the world of ancient India through the use of rich, vivid images.

**5) Blending Myth and Reality:** Divakaruni skillfully blurs the boundaries between the fantastical and the real by fusing mythological motifs with the protagonists' real-life experiences. This strategy emphasizes the legendary themes'



eternal importance and gives the story additional layers of meaning.

All things considered, Divakaruni's deft use of narrative devices in *The Forest of Enchantments* enriches the reading experience by engrossing readers in Sita's world and encouraging them to consider the timeless topics the book tackles.

### III. THEMES

"*The Forest of Enchantments*" by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is a retelling of the Indian epic, the Ramayana, from the perspective of Sita, Lord Rama's wife. The work explores several important issues, including:

**Feminism:** The work explores Sita's character and her hardships as a woman in a patriarchal culture. It investigates her agency, bravery and resilience in the face of societal norms and gender roles.

**Love and Relationships:** The story explores the complexities of love and relationships, with a special emphasis on the difficulties of Sita and Rama's marriage. It also looks at other relationships, such as those between brothers and families.

**Identity and Self-discovery:** Sita's trip through the jungle causes her to contemplate on her identity and life purpose. As she goes through various difficulties, she challenges her responsibility, devotion, and self-worth.

**Nature & Environment:** The forest provides a backdrop for most of the action, and its depiction represents both beauty and danger. The tale investigates humanity's relationship with nature and the significance of environmental conservation via Sita's adventures in the jungle.

**Power and Politics:** The novel explores the political plot surrounding Rama's kingdom, as well as the power struggles that takes place within it. It also explores how power dynamics affect individuals and society as a whole.

**Theology and Faith:** The plot is firmly founded in Hindu mythology and theology, including themes such as karma, dharma, and divine intervention. Sita's faith and commitment are tested as she struggles with her convictions and the obstacles she endures.

Overall, "*The Forest of Enchantments*" is a subtle investigation of these ideas within the context of a timeless epic, giving readers a new perspective on the Ramayana story.

### IV. CHARACTERS

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's "*The Forests of Enchantment*" features various significant characters from the Ramayana, an Indian epic, each with their own difficulties and purposes. Listed below are a few of the key characters:

**Sita:** The book's main character, Sita is shown as a strong, self-reliant woman who encounters many difficulties and hardships along the narrative. The narrative revolves around her loyal love and devotion to Rama, along with her ability to persevere in the face of hardship.

India, a land of culture which strongly believes in superstition and preserving the culture is a prestige of the country. Indian literature depicts the myths and legends. Indianness can be seen in Indian literature. Divakaruni makes use of various techniques like dream, magic realism, culture, and myths.

**Rama:** Described as the perfect king and spouse, Rama is the husband of Sita and the prince of Ayodhya. But his choices and deeds that most notably, banishing Sita which are questioned, exposing the subtle aspects of his personality.

**Lakshmana:** Rama's loyal younger brother, Lakshmana protects Rama and Sita during their banishment. His commitment to his family and his loyalty to them are recurring themes in the narrative.

**Hanuman:** An important character in both "*The Forests of Enchantment*" and the Ramayana, Hanuman is a loyal monkey fighter and devotee of Lord Rama. The story is around his unwavering bravery, commitment, and devotion to Rama. The main antagonist of the Ramayana, Ravana, is portrayed in the book as a complicated person. Although he is presented as a strong and intimidating opponent, the book also looks into his motivations and weaknesses, giving him



more refinement.

**Surpanakha:** Surpanakha, Ravana's sister, is also a major character in the narrative. Her meeting in the forest with Rama and Lakshmana initiates a series of events that culminate in Sita's kidnapping which later on resulted in a battle.

These folks are only a handful of the numerous characters seen in "The Forests of Enchantment." Every character adds to the story's depth and complexity, giving readers a new understanding of the ageless Ramayana tale.

### **A CRITICAL APPRECIATION OF CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI'S THE FOREST OF ENCHANTMENTS:**

From the viewpoint of Sita, Lord Rama's wife, "The Forest of Enchantment" by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an engrossing retelling of the Indian epic, the Ramayana. This is a critical analysis of the book:

**Narrative Perspective:** By choosing to portray the story from Sita's point of view, Divakaruni gives a story that is typically dominated by male characters more nuance and complexity. The work provides a feminist retelling of the Ramayana by giving voice to Sita, illuminating the challenges and sufferings of women in ancient India.

**Characterization:** The characters in "The Forest of Enchantment" are nuanced and complex, questioning standard readings of the Ramayana. Sita emerges as a dynamic protagonist, dealing with challenges of love, loyalty, and self-discovery. Other characters, including Rama, Lakshmana, and Ravana, are portrayed in a more multifaceted light, emphasizing their shortcomings and vulnerabilities.

**Exploration of Themes:** The themes explored in the story include feminism, love, identity, power, and spirituality. Readers are compelled to consider bigger societal concerns such as gender roles, power dynamics, and the nature of faith as they follow Sita's trek through the forest.

**Engaging Prose:** Divakaruni's writing is lyrical and descriptive, transporting readers to ancient India's beautiful landscapes. Her evocative descriptions and rich imagery bring the Ramayana universe to life, immersing readers in the sights, sounds, and experiences it contains.

**Reinterpretation of Mythology:** "The Forest of Enchantment" provides a new viewpoint on the ageless epic Ramayana, questioning conventional readings and encouraging readers to reevaluate familiar characters and events.

Overall, "The Forest of Enchantment" is a thought-provoking and wonderfully written work that provides a new perspective on the Ramayana while also presenting crucial issues about society, identity, and the human condition. Divakaruni's superb narrative and astute criticism make it an engaging read for anybody interested in mythology, literature, or social commentary.

### **V. CONCLUSION**

The Forest of Enchantments (2019) by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni gives the misunderstood, misinterpreted, and marginalized women of the Ramayana—one of the most famous Indian epics ever—a platform to express themselves and find their own liberation. This demonstrates the need for examination and attention given to fiction, particularly myth reinterpretations. A hero's position and power often set him above all else, including men, women, and the environment; as such, he is considered divine and superior. In this book, Divakaruni shifts the focus from her own narrow, blind perspective to that of others, women, and the natural world. In Sita's story, Sita continually reinterprets and tests the bounds of moral and social conventions. The many facets of Sita's persona as a strong, independent lady that show up at various points in the story. In addition to allowing for a variety of viewpoints and scenarios, Divakaruni's attempt to change the narrating voice to that of Sita marks a departure from myth and epic literature and a move toward realism and sarcasm. When myths and fantasy include elements of human interest and reality, readers are permitted to suspend disbelief and express concern about the stories' incredulity. In conclusion, Sita is able to tell her side of the story because of her exile from the restrictive environment that silences her voice and uniqueness to a magical adventure in the forest, a place of possibilities and freedom. This is a test of progress that results in personal empowerment. In Divakaruni's The Forest of Enchantments (2019), Sita asserts her equality and empowerment in the patriarchal society by raising her voice in protest and opposition at different points in her life.

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