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INDIAN DOLLS IN THE HAND OF SOCIETY: SITA AND DRAUPADI IN  
INDIAN LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to explore the larger-than-life mythological characters of Sita and Draupadi in Indian epic poetry and literature. It seeks to examine the aura, mindset, and nature of these heroic figures, shedding light on their journeys, struggles, and daunting situations.

Moreover, it delves into the correlation between Janaki (Sita) and Panchali (Draupadi). Through this analysis, this review hopes to provide a deeper understanding of the challenges and perseverance of these iconic female warriors in Indian history. The study draws inspiration from the epic tales of Ramayan and Mahabharat, which depict the stories of Sita and Draupadi, respectively. Although they were princesses, they showcased the sweet and sour personalities of women's nature. Despite facing numerous obstacles and societal norms, these characters displayed unwavering courage and fought fiercely for their rightful place in society. Ultimately, this review seeks to delve into the inspiring stories of these legendary women and inspire readers about their resilience.

Keywords: Sita, Draupadi, Sweet and Sour nature, Comparison, Correlation of Sita and Draupadi, Indian epic poetry.

Introduction

Gender is a creation of society, shaped by those who seek to dominate the fragile ones by trapping them into self-guilt or societal norms so the "Indian dolls in the hands of society" reflect the reality of life. According to the convenience of society, women can be treated as treasures or bargaining chips, merely to demonstrate the supervision of the maker of social norms. In this article, women are compared to fire and water, reflecting how they adapt smoothly to the changing times. Only victims

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can cross the bridge from injustice to justice with the support system of confidence. With determination, they can win any fight, whether it's within the confines of their homes or outside. To survive in society, one has to become Sita or Draupadi, or maybe one fills the shoes of both of them because in front of the standing the greatest monsters are Ravan and Dushaan, who are nothing but clones of society. What matters is that one must stand up for oneself. May be behind every successful man, there is support from women – be it a wife, mother, or others but on the flip side the success of women totally depend her compelling nature.

### Objective

Probing inner strength against societal norms, reflecting the compelling nature of inner fire with the calmness of water: if fire has the power of distraction, then it has the power to purify the negative with its positive fierceness. In the darkest moments, it can show the path, but if one tries to play with it, it can easily destroy not only individuals but everything nearby. On the contrary, only water can overpower it with its serene nature.

The strong waves of water can easily embrace the city within a limited amount of time. Even though they significantly control our lives, at the end of the day, it is the earth that controls their aggressiveness. The same goes for Sita and Draupadi. The purpose of this research is to understand the point of Sita and Draupadi from different aspects of life. To illustrate the point, we can reckon male dominated society, works from literacy writers, movies etc

Embarking on a literary journey, we discover the rich tradition of ancient Indian epic poetry that originated in the mystical Indian subcontinent. The Ramayana and Mahabharata serve as impeccable examples that beautifully represent the history of Indian culture. Though numerous writers have tried to modify and translate these tales into various languages over time, there is no comparison to the original versions which were in Sanskrit. Most importantly, in Sanskrit, the primary language for poetry and literature, is also known as the classical age of Sanskrit literature or Puranic Granth.

The researcher would like to take the liberty to share my perspective on the two iconic figures that stood out like antitheses but shared a "never give up" attitude while facing life's complexities. Sita and Draupadi are eternal symbols of courage that have been exemplified for generations. Although their timelines were different, they exuded a resemblance and a marked difference in personality, which ultimately defined their identity and demonstrated the reflection of one another.

*Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* are both prominent ancient texts in India, with similarities and differences. One of the main connections between the two is the powerful link of Lord Vishnu, as both Rama and Krishna are revered as his incarnations. Additionally, both texts depict the cultural and social norms of ancient India explicitly. However, there are also differences between the two stories. *Ramayana* reflects love and trust between brothers, while *Mahabharata* portrays hate and the desire to prove superiority between the Kauravas and Pandavas. Another notable difference is the portrayal of two influential female characters. Sita remains a silent supporter and follower of her husband, while Draupadi is vocal and takes a stand, sharing her views. Another significant distinction is the geography of both stories: *Ramayana* travels from north to south, whereas *Mahabharata* moves horizontally from east to west. In the end, both *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* offer vital insights into ancient Indian history and culture. Both texts contain crucial lessons about morality, humanity, and relationships. Despite the differences in the stories, both contain symbolic characters and reflect the essential qualities of human nature. These two epics are considered significant pieces of India's cultural heritage and continue to influence Indian society and values.

Indian Dolls in the Hand of Society: Sita and Draupadi in Indian Literature: Both Sita and Draupadi give a glimpse of two powerful women of our Indian history even though they have their approaches and methods to win a battle over the greatest villain of history but got rejected, betrayed,

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and failed by their loved ones. This showcases the significant weakness of a lady who wins a war outside the house but is still trapped in shackles in the name of love and sacrifice. In our world, women are characterized into two categories: on one hand, as goddesses of happiness, and prosperity, and even society compares females with Laxmi, and on the other hand, there is a part of society who selflessly treat them like slaves where they do not have the right to share their view or feeling regarding serious issues.

**Sita:** Sita was larger than life as a legendary character in Ramayana. Her birth was considered "unnatural" since she was born from the earth, and hence she was also known as "Dhartiputri", meaning daughter of the earth. Despite coming from just soil, she displayed a tolerance and endurance personality when faced with hurdles in her life. It is believed that she was the avatar (a Sanskrit term) of goddess Laxmi. After passing an archery test, she got married to Ram. She was completely devoted to her relationship and accompanied her husband and brother-in-law to the forest for fourteen years without any scepticism. When she was captured by Lankeshwar, she never gave in to his demands or accepted any of his facilities. She followed her heart and waited for her husband's rescue mission. This showcases that when a person can set their mindset, nothing can influence or lure them.

After winning her freedom from Ravan, she underwent a chastity test to prove her purity and devotion towards her relationship while crossing the fire bridge without any protection. Unfortunately, this led to more problems as when her character was questioned for the second time, she simply opted for exile instead of proving anything. In the last phase of her life, when her husband and in-laws asked for her forgiveness and return, she refused their demand and chose to accept Mother Earth while rejecting all relations.

Sita was a courageous and strong-headed person who always displayed the power of courage. She fulfilled all her duties as a daughter, wife, and daughter-in-law but at the same time never gave in to her beliefs.

**Draupadi:** Draupadi was the most enigmatic character in the history of literature, proving that a woman can be both the creator and destroyer of a family, depending on who she loves or hates. At the top of it, she would go to great lengths without contemplating any ramifications or its adverse effect towards mankind when ruled by her emotions. Draupadi was always a problematic figure, unlike Sita who was a perfect figure as a wife or daughter-in-law. The reason behind the birth of Draupadi was a dense desire for revenge, anger, and to destroy the enemies. She accepted her destiny when emotionally manipulated to wed five brothers but the emotion was broken when she was insulted in front of everyone after she lost in a game of dice without her permission. This incident shows that in a problem one has to take to oneself not willing to help a victim even society full of warriors or valiant heroes. Finally, she took her revenge after she washed her hair with the blood of Kauravas. She reflects that for revenge one is ready to cross any bridge which may be full of fire or blood.

The Palace of Illusions (2008) by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni about Draupadi Versus Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of Ramayana (2013) by Devdutt Pattanaik.

"The Palace of Illusions" traces the life journey of Draupadi to the time she rightfully snatched their rights from enemies while satisfying the thirst for her experience and struggle to remain the winner after crossing the hurdles. Even though Draupadi was a victim of the political war between Kauravas and Pandavas, she was the most intelligent and determined person who was ready to share her view regarding incidents. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's style of telling the story is engaging and the mystical elements are worth reading. At the same time, the author highlights the idea that women should raise their voices against the wrong person. It does not matter if they are their husband, father, or son. Most importantly, they should not compromise their rights as human beings just for acceptance from society. By witnessing different incidents, anyone can understand whenever Draupadi made any sacrifice, she was the one who paid a high price, either emotionally kidnapped or losing her dignity.

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On the other hand, *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of Ramayana* conveys the message that Sita fulfils the shoe of Kali and Gauri in the way she holds every relationship during her story and the way she handles nonviolence and recognizes the enemy. Nevertheless, Sita always was a shadow of her husband while standing next to him in a problem silently.

In the end, Sita and Draupadi represent the idea of perfect women but still, their weakness was the main reason for their downfall. Sita was a silent victim who left all the facilities and luxuries as a queen and was exiled into the jungle to provide the best teaching and sacrament to her twins without morals and emotional support from her family members while Draupadi took every insult seriously and swore to take revenge from everyone for their misdeeds. Both women portray the picture of modern women who require a shield while facing thunderstorms while shielding their family from an angry sky. Devdutta Pattanaik's ideas are informative and thought-provoking.

In sum, the review explores the different sides and determination of women when they face the cruelty of life without any supporting pillar. Sita and Draupadi both were princesses in their era especially since they both were privileged extraordinarily. Sita was the daughter of Mother Earth she indicates the delicate side of a female who is full of love and sacrificed just like soil which has a personality of harvesting and providing comfort to everyone. Meanwhile, Draupadi was born from the fire she had a multilayer personality and represented the idea of fierceness and determination to achieve what she wanted and that she was always vocal about her feelings and desires. This article conveys that some of our personality traits are strong reasons for an individual's survival and how society can easily transform an innocent doll into a warrior by pushing out the boundaries for just namesake of societal norms, and their interest.

We cannot neglect the fact that even though they faced almost the same circumstances, their approaches were entirely different. This highlights how every individual deal with the same situation in a unique way. The cherry on top is that their social barriers and shackles greatly influenced their journeys. For example, Sita was known for her purity, and on the contrary, Draupadi was ready to question the royal court without any fear. This shows that for a woman, respect is not an accessory that can be snatched by anyone; rather, it is an integral part of her soul. Lastly, fire has played a significant role in their journeys, connecting them. This element of fire is not just a physical entity, but it reflects the quality of a woman and how she can easily transform herself from flowing water to fiery fierceness in times of need.

*Psychoanalysis of Sita's Character through the Lens of Psychology:* The characterization of Sita reflects how deeply societal rules influence an individual's mind. Moreover, with the aid of psychological theories, one can enhance perspectives and understand the grounds for making specific decisions in paramount times, which also manifest the personality of a person in the darkest nights of their life. If a person profoundly understands the definite scenario, when Sita left the kingdom and opted to accompany her husband into exile, there was nothing wrong because it portrays that she values her relationship over opulence or is emotionally intertwined with her matrimonial bond. During the time of her illegal detention by Ravana, Sita demonstrated her accountability and firm faith in her husband, aligning with Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Erikson's stages of psychosocial development.

Under the framework of cognitive dissonance theory, during times of difficulty and challenges, she revealed a moral and unbending persona, which helps her feel more at peace and consistent. Moreover, Sita opens new approaches toward life where more than opulence, determination is required to create a picturesque scene. The Big Five personality traits highlight her inner light, including high openness, conscientiousness, coping mechanisms, psychological resilience, secure attachment to Ram, and low neuroticism. These traits help her face hurdles with a calm mind, allowing readers to understand her psychological resilience. However, one cannot ignore her deepest insecurities and fears when she was directionless, passively vulnerable as a wife or mother. Literary scholars like

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Dr. Sudhir Kakar, Dr. Devdutt Pattanaik, and Dr. Arshia Sattar highlight her as a symbol of virtue and strength, emphasizing the psychological impact of societal expectations on individual choices. Dr. Sudhir Kakar remarks, "Sita's character embodies the ideal of feminine virtue and strength, navigating the complexities of duty and personal integrity with remarkable resilience." Dr. Devdutt Pattanaik notes, "Sita's journey is a testament to her inner strength and unwavering faith. Her actions, driven by love and duty, highlight the psychological resilience required to uphold one's principles in the face of adversity." Dr. Arshia Sattar adds, "Sita's decisions, whether to accompany Rama to the forest or to return to the earth, reflect a profound understanding of her own values and identity. Her story is a powerful exploration of the psychological impact of societal expectations on individual choices."

Psychological Perspective on Draupadi's Trial: Draupadi is not only a name but also the definition of a fearless person who seeks justice with unwavering bravery in the face of adversity. It's easier to explore the psychological depth of her qualities with the collaboration of experts in the field to understand body and mind language. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs shows her search for identity beyond being a wife, especially when her dignity was insulted and she was rejected by her five husbands. That was the moment she realized she could no longer depend on others and had to raise her voice against the community and alliance.

Furthermore, according to Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development, theories prove that her unshakable advocacy of self-awareness and unyielding commitment make her as strong as a mountain. Last but not least, her thirst for justice is driven by the desire to align her life with her core values. Moreover, Krishna served as her counsellor. Even though she was always emotionally dependent on Arjuna, mentally she would always seek guidance from Krishna. This demonstrates her strong coping mechanism, with Krishna being her guide, aiding her in overcoming challenges. Draupadi's strongest weaknesses, such as impulsiveness in nature and vulnerability, navigate her through strenuous conditions. Experts like Dr. Sudhir Kakar view Draupadi as a symbol of feminine strength and justice, embodying the balance between duty and personal integrity. Dr. Devdutt Pattanaik emphasizes her inner strength and dedication to justice, showcasing the resilience needed to remain true to one's principles. Dr. Arshia Sattar notes that Draupadi's choices reflect her deep understanding of her values and identity, revealing the psychological impact of societal expectations. For further exploration of Draupadi's character, refer to sources like \*The Inner World: A Psycho-Analytical Study of Childhood and Society in India by Dr. Sudhir Kakar, and *Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of the Mahabharata* by Dr. Devdutt Pattanaik.

**Example from cinema:** The movie has a huge element of time travel that reflects our attitudes toward society and its norms. While researching Sita and Draupadi, there was a question about the challenges women face in today's era and how they can bring forth the hidden Draupadi and Sita within themselves to confront the cultural propaganda. I came across the movie *Lajja*, directed by Raj Kumar Santoshi, which reflects the journey of self-discovery, facing the monster in the name of family, etc. The story revolves around four protagonists and how they transform from ordinary to extraordinary personas while dealing with pressure from society, the struggle between freedom and being caged in the name of marriage, caste, and dowry, and their path from victimhood to empowerment and defiance.

Vaidehi is a character who shares a unique bond with all the other characters, whether they are protagonists or antagonists. Even though she herself is a victim of cheating by her partner, she neither receives any support from her family nor from her in-laws. However, when she realizes her relationship is toxic and without a future, she leaves. The path ahead is filled with hurdles and never-ending problems, yet she witnesses that she is not the only one facing an identity crisis. Our world is full of Maithili, Janki, and Ramdulari, who are waiting for the glow of a candle in a forest filled with inner and outer monsters. These demons feed on gaslighting, manipulation, and victim-blaming.

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The flick draws a parallel between these fictional characters and larger-than-life heroines, highlighting the change from being victims (like Sita) to becoming strong and defiant (like Draupadi).

In the beginning of the movie, the audience witnesses Vaidehi as loyal in her marriage, silently suffering and enduring the abuse of her husband's extramarital affairs, which he does not try to hide. The catalyst for change happens when she decides to leave the country and her husband without a second thought. The watcher witnesses this turning point from submissive to rebellious. In the final stage, she becomes the voice of communities divided by abuse and pain. The audience can easily understand her trauma, experiencing an emotionally abusive lifestyle full of luxury that led to isolation and self-despair. In her healing, with the support of other women, Vaidehi breaks the cage and transforms her helplessness into strength.

Maithili is the traditional bride-to-be who has many expectations from her future husband but feels ditched when, in the middle of her marriage, her in-laws ask for dowry and she is labelled as a burden. After witnessing this injustice, she rejects the vows of marriage and stands against her greedy in-laws, reflecting Draupadi's assertiveness. The humiliation and shame reflect the helplessness of her parents, who are unable to act against the wrongdoing, similar to Sita's struggles with societal expectations. The catalyst for change occurs when she challenges societal protocols, and with flying colours, she reclaims her dignity and finds a partner who is ready to support her unconditionally.

Janaki, another influential character who is an unmarried pregnant theatre artist, faces a similar situation to Sita. Her boyfriend, doubting the foundation of their relationship, betrays her by leaving her, exposing her to the world without a valid reason. This gives a glimpse of Sita and her inner fears. During the public humiliation, she refuses to undergo an ordeal to prove her purity but instead questions the male-dominated society, igniting the fire of fairness. This is the best illustration of Sita turning into Draupadi. On one hand, there is Janaki's humiliation which leads to self-awareness, inspiring others on how to turn trauma into empowerment.

Last but not least is Ramdulaari, a character known for her love and dedication not just to her own relationships but to anyone in society facing the caste system. She helps women who are victims of male violence, making them aware of the benefits of education and the power of earning. Ramdulaari, a social worker, supports women rejected by their families and stands strong against patriarchy's harsh realities, though in her case, no one helps her even though everyone is aware. Her brutal rape and burning alive by the villain reflect the cruel reality and selfishness of the people around her. However, her tragic end becomes a learning step for the women of the village, who, inspired by Ramdulaari, kill the criminal in front of eminent figures, proving their unity and leading to communal mobilization and strength in solidarity.

Through Vaidehi's eyes, the audience explores the contrast between Western culture and the multicultural road of India which particularly show the place of women in their homeland. Vaidehi's journey leads her to meet different sides of humanity, including a thief who helps a stranger without any motive by giving her the money he stole for his dream job, a theatre performer whose downfall reflects modern views in a hypocritical male-dominated society, and Bulba, one of the few good-hearted men who is fighting against male domination for the welfare of women and children in the village. In exploring different narratives, the questions arise about the ethics and hypocrisy in religion and culture, cast, gender and beyond it.

**Research strategies':** Research methods are the tools that help researchers clarify their objectives and achieve their desired outcomes. By employing various methods, researchers can obtain more accurate results. Using a range of research tools is beneficial because it leads to more precise and reliable findings rather than confusing results.

Based on the data and information I have gathered from various sources; I believe a quantitative approach is the most effective for analysing literary texts like the Ramayana and Mahabharata. This approach will allow for a detailed literacy analysis, thematic analysis, and competitive analysis. However, obtaining clear insights from such sensitive language can be challenging.

Therefore, instead of relying solely on original texts, I plan to use collections from various articles, essays, and other secondary sources. Additionally, interviews with literary scholars and surveys with readers will provide further insights into the characters of Sita and Draupadi.

Listening to podcasts, watching movie, audio files reading articles by psychologists will be particularly valuable, as they can offer a deeper understanding of the characters' minds, bodies, and motivations. Expert insights will help identify significant elements such as sacrifice and justice, and determine where these concepts apply. Having a clear direction is crucial for fruitful research; without it, efforts to understand sacrifice and justice may become directionless.

The argument of this research is that, despite Sita and Draupadi being exemplary figures of desirable qualities such as being a wife, daughter-in-law, daughter, or mother, they exhibit significant personality clashes. Nevertheless, their approaches to life's challenges demonstrate remarkable resilience, inner strength, peace, and calmness. They were capable of making decisions, but rather than acting impulsively, they first took the time to reflect and calmly consider the best course of action. Even though they were aware of the possible outcomes, they remained determined to act according to what they believed was right.

Their ability to navigate societal and family expectations while balancing their roles often involved sacrifices that went unrecognized by their family members or loved ones. This study aims to highlight that, despite their different circumstances and struggles, Sita and Draupadi share a common quest for justice, power, and female empowerment. This quest reflects the rights of every woman, yet societal expectations often lead to self-neglect in the effort to balance family responsibilities.

## Conclusion

This study highlights the importance and significance of Sita and Draupadi for our society and families. To be progressive and achieve our goals, we need to embody the qualities of both Sita and Draupadi, adapting to circumstances as required sometimes as Sita and sometimes as Draupadi. Compared to Sita, Draupadi is more practical and exhibits greater finesse in decision-making. While Sita often prioritizes her husband, father, and family over herself, Draupadi demonstrates the ability to make bold decisions for herself. Her refusal to forgive her husband and in-laws at certain times illustrates her steadfast commitment to right approach toward life and herself.

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