



## Red- Exploring Sita's Bond with the Colour of Passion in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Forest of Enchantments*

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### **Abstract:**

*Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel The Forest of Enchantments is the re-recounting Ramayana, through Sita's viewpoint. Banerjee places Sita as the novel's focal point and gives us Sita's adaptation of the epic. Banerjee, since her last youth felt that there was something else to the personality of Sita that the way Indian mainstream society believed her to be. The personality of Sita was viewed as accommodating and a quiet victim. Nevertheless, Banerjee's Sita has been depicted as a human, with every one of the human feelings. In addition, she has shown Sita's calm fortitude which was not difficult to be mixed up with resignation. This considerable number of characters makes Banerjee's Sita the embodiment of an ideal lady who knows the distinction between when to compromise and when to say no. Furthermore, with the personality of Sita, we can see the escape clauses of the public and how ladies are separated and constrained by their own home, their public, traditions, traditions, customs, and so on transmits the pursuers into a scholarly universe where the retelling of Sita's sad, yet widely inclusive and interesting story loans voice to the purposely quieted female characters. This paper focuses on colour of passion, red, the aura that Sita carries throughout her journey as a woman giving voice to her journey that loves scrutiny, empowers orientation uniformity, advances compassion, and undermines the connection between the edge and the standard.*

**Keywords:** Myth, identity, bond, passion

The Indian epics, for example, Ramayana plunges more profound into the dubious status of women in the public eye. The female characters have been introduced all the time as demure and hopeful however never celebrated as the exemplification of mental fortitude. *The Forest of Enchantments* is an impeccable work that remade the characters from the old Indian folklore. To illuminate contemporary women, the creator obliges the personality of Sita with both feeling and downfall that she must endure throughout. The most impressive feelings that a lady feels are barely at any point tended to by the male storytellers in their works who stay content in managing with the activities and occasions on a physical plane. It tells the stories of lords and rulers, their wins



and losses in fights, the carnage, and the brilliance of triumph with sot in managing with the activities and occasions on a physical plane. It tells the stories of lords and rulers, their wins and losses in fights, the carnage, and the brilliance of triumph with sovereigns, women and princesses going about as docile, whose very presence in the story is to assist the male heroes in accomplishing their desire and successes in their lifetime. *The Forest of Enchantments* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has given place to most of the forgotten female voices and has not only enlightened their character but also given them a voice of courage. To name a few, we have Sunaina who is known for her wit and intelligence, Kaikeyi for her bravery and fighting chivalry, Kaushalya for her all-encompassing love and care, Ahalya is known for her bone-chilling silence, Mandodari for her unflinching confidence and Surpanakha for her rage and her determination to avenge her situation. Sita plays a pivotal role in the novel, and she is painted as a lady with fiery inquiries which in turn gave her character a variety of shades. In the opening pages we find Sita disappointed with the rendition of Ramayana and awe find sage Valmiki insisting Sita to fill up the gaps in the story with her own share of experience. of experience. The moment she plunged her plume into the inkpot the unheard voices of Ramayana reverberated despondently "write our story, too. For always we have been pushed into the corners, trivialized, misunderstood, blamed, forgotten— or maligned and used as cautionary tales."(Divakaruni 04) Thus Sita decided to carry the light of womanhood for the sake all women irrespective of time and age. This gives her a purpose to compose Sitayan and to do this she chooses the colour of blood, a huge characteristic of womanhood and a sign of ripeness- "How else could I write my story except in the colour of menstruation and childbirth, the colour of the marriage mark that changes woman lives, the colour of the flowers of the Ashoka tree under which I have spent my years in captivity in the palace of the demon king?" (Divakaruni 03) However, unexpectedly, 'red ink' additionally addresses power, energy, gore, and the annihilation of battle in the book. Her personality is misinterpreted; she is well established in customary qualities and simultaneously inserted alongside the precepts of independence. She is a lady who does not need anybody to practice unlimited oversight over her. When lord Dasharath declined Malini (nursemaid) to go with them and denied Sita to impart her cart to Urmila, she got fomented with the reaction and guaranteed herself "...once I was settled in Ayodhya, I'd make sure that King Dasharath didn't dictate my life."(Divakaruni 54) She is fervently free and conclusive who dismissed the endeavors of submissive enslavement dives in the profoundly man-centric culture.



Chitra Banerjee has depicted Sita as an embodiment of boldness and perseverance and of sense of pride. The personality of Sita stresses a lady who battles to hold the ground in a public which has a vile tendency towards the men. However, Sita is heavenly, yet she is a lady and shares much for all intents and purpose with the ladies of the world. It took Sita monstrous boldness to defend herself and demand everybody to allow her to go with Ram to the woods. At the point when Sita was enamored by Ravana, it took her huge fortitude to be solid and not surrender to the cravings of Ravana. It took her a ton of fortitude and persistence to sit tight for Ram, to safeguard her from an obscure island that she had been charmed. After she was saved by Ram and later disgraced and dismissed by the individual, she cherished the most, it took her massive boldness to bring in the fire to hold her nobility: “love and happiness might not be in my control, but at least my dignity still remained mine. I might not be able to have the life I wanted, but I could choose the manner of my death.” (Divakaruni 245) At the point when Sita had given the fire-test and emerged as unadulterated, it likewise took monstrous fortitude on her part to pardon Ram and return to Ayodhya as his sovereign. It was a direct result of her affection for Ram that she had the option to bear the aggravation of doubt and dismissal and had the solidarity to excuse him: “love is the spade with which we bury, deep inside our being, the things that we cannot bear to remember, cannot bear anyone else to know.” (Divakaruni 246) Furthermore, when Sita was sent away into the backwoods, pregnant with Ram's kid, it took huge mental fortitude to conceive an offspring and raise the young men without any assistance. Banerjee has shown the personality of Sita as the soonest illustration of a solitary parent. She, without the assistance of Ram, brings her children up in a great manner and this episode can be engaging to every one of the ones who raises their kids all alone. Additionally, toward the finish of the novel, when Ram offers to take her back as her sovereign if she gives a second intense fire test, it took a great deal of boldness to turn down the proposal by Ram: “No more!”— “For the sake of my daughters in the centuries to come, I must now stand up against this unjust action you are asking of me.” (Divakaruni 357) “Because this is one of those times when a woman must stand up and say, No more!” (Divakaruni 357)

Marriage is viewed as a holy and a significant establishment in the Indian culture across all religions. In India marriage is not just a connection between two people and a collusion between the two families. Marriage ceremonies and customs have been referenced in various strict Hindu texts like the Upanishads and Vedas as a holy observance. Since old days, distinctive marriage customs and ceremonies are noticed all through India. These customs differ as indicated by the



locale, position, and group. Although there is a ton of divergence in the ceremonies related with relationships all through India. There are sure customs which are normal and hold an extraordinary importance in the wedding service. The Sindoor plays a significant part in Hindu ceremonies and celebrations. It is socially viewed as holy and promising by wedded Hindu ladies and their families. During the day of marriage, the spouse applies sindoor on wife's "maang" which is addressed as the focal point of every heartfelt inclination. At the point when the husband to be applies sindoor to the lady of the hour, the service is known as 'Sindoor Dana', in this way representing her conjugal status. An unmarried lady and a widow are absolved from applying sindoor. Red as the shade of sindoor or vermilion addresses promise and hallowed, in this manner, by applying sindoor it means a fresh start for the lady. Red Sindoor is an image of holiness, promise and the delight that the woman represents and carries with her in the new house, when she is hitched. She gets a blissful red tone in her new house. The lady communicates her regard for her significant other's life span, yet after his passing, she is abstained from applying sindoor as she grieves for her dead spouse. Applying sindoor after marriage is a customary social practice among Hindu wedded ladies. Red additionally means Shakti or strength. It is ordinarily accepted that during the Aryan occasions, Aryan groom would apply his blood on the lady, accordingly, implying their wedlock. Mahawar or the red color which is applied by the lady of the hour on the big day and utilization of sindoor are done to satisfy God. Nevertheless, during the current age, sindoor is to a greater degree an agent of beauty enhancement. Red communicates strict and promising importance in Indian culture. Red glue or tilak is applied on the brow during celebrations, or sindoor is applied by wedded ladies. In Hinduism, sindoor is an image of a wedded lady's celibacy, love, and devotion towards her significant other. This intense imprint engraved on the temple and in the splitting of a lady's hair fills in as a token of her hetero character, inaccessibility to different men, furthermore the responsibility for body by her significant other. Problematizing how this hetero patriarchal basic has muddled the real limits between the individual, social and cultural aspects of womanhood is also focused on in the text.

Sita satisfies every one of her obligations as a little girl, sister, daughter-in-law, an ideal soulmate, and a mother. She can connect with the aggravation and sufferings of her nearby ones, yet additionally others like Ravana's sister Surpanakha and Ahalya, the spouse of Sage Gautam. Sita was dependably an adoring and really focusing sister on Urmila. After her marriage with Ram, Sita recuperates the connection between Kausalya and ruler Dasarath. She filled her surroundings



with the passionate red aura which also enchanted the great Ram. She stands for all the qualities the red marriage mark stands for. Yet, she goes through a lot of hardships to make her mark in the history of humankind. So, when the opportunity was presented to her to voice her own thoughts and register the memories that are submerged in narrating the greatness of the king, she chose to do so: “In red ink I began to write – in crooked, effortful lettering because it had been so long since I’d composed anything- the Sitayan.” (Divakaruni 4) Divakaruni's Sitayan in *The Forest of Enchantments* (2019) is a promising piece of writing that is absorbed Sita's quest for self. This work is particular from other retellings of Sita's story since it is indiscriminatory in nature with regards to the portrayal of fringe voices. Focusing on aggregate great and strengthening of ladies for a huge scope makes this artistic endeavor an extraordinary talk. The significance of Sitayan's womanist viewpoint combined with its basic spotlight on the authenticity of the underestimated characters to move towards the middle makes this story every one of the more pertinent in contemporary terms. Sita's deep bond with the red colour since childhood draws every breath she took in the storyline. It also shows how this hue is attached to the life of every woman till date. This colour of womanhood has been in the palms of Sita since she understood the responsibility of being a woman. Red has also given her a sense of magic that only a woman can highlight. She has been remarkably close to nature as a child and in one instance she felt deep empathy for the flowers that are plucked for worshipping gods. The first time she felt her strong nature when she held mandara blossom in her palm: “Now I held a wilting mandara blossom in my palm and blew on it gently. Its petals grew strong and vivid red again, and I smiled. My small magic, which never failed to please me.” (Divakaruni 11)

Sita, the girl of Earth-goddess, was the admirer of nature and she could mend any plant with her inexplicable touch. She additionally inspected the debilitated individuals and assisted them with mending. Individuals experiencing serious infections would drag themselves to Mithila to meet her. Sita likewise wanted to visit the woods, which interested her. She preferred not to cull the blossom as she suspected it was a sort of homicide and culled cautiously just the sprouts assuming she was asked by the cleric as a proposing to God. At the point when Sita was heading out to Ayodhya after her union with Ram in a cart, she was bothered by the ways the fighters were annihilating the trees which came in their direction. She informed Ram concerning her pain and requested that the warriors not hurt the plants. In these instances, we find the compassionate and fertile nature of red within the very soul of Sita.



Shading is a type of non-verbal correspondence and 'Red' can address a scope of feelings from outrage to activity to assurance to desire or to passion. This tone draws in the most consideration and is related with temptation, sexuality, sensuality, and interminability, potentially considering its nearby association with enthusiasm and with risk. Kaushalya knew the importance of this shade as it is known to enhance deep marital bonds and she advises Sita to get dressed in this colour which will rightly show her strong place beside Ram and to mark the true union between a man and a woman and her “With a spring in her step, she led me towards my quarters, chattering about the prayer ceremony she was planning for Ram and me, and how the red silk with the parrot-green border would be just right for the occasion.”(Divakaruni 67) We consider imperativeness, the nurturing force of blood, and aiding individuals out of luck. We give red roses when we are infatuated and refer to just exceptional encounters as "banner days." Red invigorates us, gets us spurred, and wearing red tells individuals we feel certain and prepared to take on the world. Sita's happiness knew no bounds as she was ready to begin her journey as a woman placed rightly beside the man of her dreams.

Red has also guided Sita in her life whenever she felt danger circulating her senses. The moment she placed her feet inside the palace, she could feel an invisible sense of nearing doom. The ladies whose voices resonated with Sita were led by the second queen of Ayodhya, Kaikeyi, who had a place with the realm of Kekaya. She was Bharat's mom and prevalently known as the carrier of cataclysm to the realm. A famous herbologist and hero with aptitude in impressive undertakings, she was an amazing lady. She was charming and brave. Kaikeyi's nearest accessory was Manthara, who was her counselor and nursemaid. Manthara finds notice in Sitayan considering her deceptive ways and evil doing. She is at first felt sorry for by Sita for being a deformed hunchback. It was because of Manthara's duplicity that Ram was expelled for quite a long time to an existence of difficulty and disconnection away from his realm. Kaikeyi is seen in a red sari with a line of servants ready to welcome Sita. This colour paints the character of kaikeyi as a dominant female influence not only on the life of the king but also the sons. This red beacon marked the upcoming events that will change the lives of Ram and Sita forever. Even the first meeting between Sita and Kaikeyi has its share of red: “The expensive cream-coloured parchment was heavy and soft to the touch and sealed with a red seal I did not recognize, a tiger in mid-spring. I broke the seal and unrolled the parchment. It was an invitation from Kaikeyi to visit her in her chambers this afternoon.” (Divakaruni 78) The tense equation between them since the beginning





of her married life has its share of danger looming over. In another part of the story when Sita is kidnapped and put in the Ashoka Garden in Raavan's abode, she felt the same fear and danger enveloping her mind: "One of my guards produced a torch, and in its smoky flame I saw that I was in a grove of enormous trees laden with large red flowers. I recognized them. A hysterical laugh spiraled up inside me at the irony of the universe, for they were ashoka trees, a name that meant joy." (Divakaruni 174)

Red also becomes the colour of victory and joy when Ram and Sita make their way back to the kingdom: "And thus Ram and I rode in triumph at the head of the procession, the royal umbrella of red silk now unfurled above our heads, to the palace entrance where Kaushalya and Sumitra, aged now and half-blind with years of tearful sorrow, were waiting impatiently to greet us with platters of lamps and auspicious sindoor powder and sandalwood paste and sweetmeats." Sita endured a lot while bringing up her sons alone in the forest and when the right time came for the deserved acknowledgement of Sita's sacrifices, we again come across the image of Sita as a queen adorned with a red Sari: "Urmila has set out the most beautiful saris for herself and me, in complementary colours, parrot green for her and hibiscus red for myself. I protest that it'll make me look like a bride, especially with all the jewelry she's taken out of her coffers for me to wear." (Divakaruni 328) But this time we see Sita in a different light as she is there as a mother and not an object of admiration for the eyes of Ram. She takes a stand for all the future daughters of the land and denies giving Agni Pariksha saying: "Because if I do what you demand, society will use my action forever after to judge other women. Even when they are not guilty, the burden of proving their innocence will fall on them. And society will say, why not? Even Queen Sita went through it." (Divakaruni 334)

In her keynote address, at the University of Santa Cruz in 1978, Carol P. Christ, clarifies how social images that have strict meanings 'produce powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in the people of a given culture'. Following this interaction, the legislative issues of misappropriation and reappropriation of the exemplified utilization of sindoor as a social image guarantee a progression of interrelated examinations on body, limit, possession, expansionism, and transnationalism in India. Christ cautions women's activists not to pass on these images to the watchfulness of men on the grounds that these images 'cannot fail to affect the deep or unconscious structures of the mind.' (P. Christ 246) The significance of Christ's call for women's activist attention to question the misappropriation of these social images, not in seclusion from, but related



to issues of orientation, sexuality, race, standing, nationality, and religion. Further, strange interventionism has added another aspect to this body legislative issues that twists the standards of orientation, position, class, and strict radicalism, along these lines proposing that women's liberation should be receptive to the variety of underestimated lives-both inside and across public settings while considering the meaning of these social images. Sita has proved through her journey that as a woman the boundary is marked in red. The functions and limitations of a female body is somewhere deeply embedded in this hue and women till now are associated with the red imagery. The coming of womanhood, the realization of it, the pain of motherhood and the burden of honour for a family fall on the shoulder of a woman and this is nicely depicted through the strong words of Sita. Her ways have paved the road to rethink on the roles of feminist and to restructure its boundaries.

Alice Walker in her prominent work *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* certifies that,

The writer—like the musician or painter—must be free to explore, otherwise she or he will never discover what is needed (by everyone) to be known. . . . Yet the gift of loneliness is sometimes a radical vision of society or one's people that has not previously been taken into account. (Walker 264)

Walker was an essayist with sincerity and involved a lot of passion in her work, joining most of extreme importance to a writer's scholarly freedom. Divakaruni's *Sitayan* has that similarity with Walker's soul of scholarly opportunity as it passes on the overlooked demonstrations of the fearlessness in women characters with a conviction that most contemporary portrayals need. Divakaruni's narrating in the voice of Sita is in discriminatory in nature since she gives importance to every one of the female characters. She drains her characters sincerely to be unified with the embarrassment and underestimation that they have suffered from for ages. Her story reintegrates the fringe female characters into the standard by articulating their voices. Stories coming from assorted female characters converge into a bound together entire in *Sitayan* and make a feeling of interconnectedness. The edges are given an articulate voice and accentuated to start an exchange with the standard. *The Forest of Enchantments* obliges the strong *Sitayan* which addresses and motivates the contemporary and future ladies. It teaches ladies to shield their confidence, to be undaunted, and specific while compromising for those they love. The womanist point of view of Divakaruni makes a device of ladies' composing that is persuasively provocative and promising.





In a period, where women do not have right to talk, she was raising her voice with solid assurance. Her tough soul and solid obstruction help us to remember the lines of the poetry ‘Still I Rise’:

You may write me down in history  
With your bitter, twisted lies,  
You may tread me in the very dirt  
But still, like dust, I’ll rise. (Angelou, lines 1-4)

Red has always been the colour that marked the life of Sita. She possesses the strength, vigour, passion, and love that are the significant qualities of this hue. The lines of the poem show how she retold her own story, gave all the women voice to stand up with and instead of being lost in the pages of myth, she rose like a flame emitting the red aura around her.

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