

**Sita and Exile: Revisiting Ramayana in Devdutt  
Pattanaik's *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of  
the Ramayana***

**Prerena Kush and Rekha**

Exile symbolises an act of displacement—forcible or voluntary—where the people move from their homeland to a foreign land. The experience of exile spawns the feeling of loss of the familiar surroundings and fear of re-establishment in the new surroundings. However, it also cumulates the growth of people as it enables them to discover their strength to fight for their survival and makes them efficient in dealing with the challenges of life; hence, it is a major cause of the physical or emotional transition in them. But along with its unmitigated outcome to empower people, it often carries dejection and distress with it as it is often observed that the displaced people in exile are eccentrically attached to their homeland, yet they crave to be associated with their host land. Neera Singh in *The Dynamics of Be/Longing* explains that “this condition of being ‘Unhomed’ is associated further with alienation, a desire to reclaim the past yet revolt against it, the inability to move out, and the urge to show solidarity to the homeland but unwillingness to threaten relations with the host country” (9).

Migration and exile are as deep-rooted as the existence of humans on the earth: people migrate searching for ‘greener pastures’ with the hope of constructing a new self in a promised land. Though seemingly gender-neutral, the agency of migration is majorly associated with male domination. The idea of a migrating female seems to be calculatingly ignored by patriarchy. The migration of a male is accepted and applauded for their exploratory, venturesome quality, while for the same quality the migration of a female is questioned and criticized. The discovery and construction of a new self and a new identity are quickly dismissed when it comes to a woman travelling on her own to an unknown land. The double oppression, which a migrant faces, of being able to belong neither to the homeland nor to the host land tends to become triple when the migrating person is a woman: she not only has to deal with the problem of displacement, but also has to face gender discrimination.

The present paper attempts to deconstruct the much-deliberated discourse of exile in *Ramayana* through a feministic reading of Devdutt Pattanaik's *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of The Ramayana* (2013). (Here, *Ramayana* is used to refer to canonical text/s of Ramayana while *The Ramayana* is used to refer to the epic by Valmiki. Focusing on the theme of exile and gender the paper proposes to trace the pattern of the journey of Sita through her exiles and

attempts to graph her transition during these multiple exiles and in addition, attempts to see if each exile obligates any psychological, intellectual, or emotional displacement for Sita.

Marriage is a significant moment in the life of an Indian woman. Since her birth, she has been groomed and prepared for this. She is considered as a lump of clay, meant to be put in a mould, altered and shaped according to the sanctioned manual of the society. She is often treated as the one upholding the idea of perfection and sacrifice. This whole endeavour is arranged to make her a 'perfect' woman till the time of her marriage so that her accomplished perfection could bring a good name to the family. After marriage, a woman has to leave her parental home and move to the house of her husband. The comforts of her parental house and the familiar surroundings in which she had been brought up may change as she enters a new place, lives with new people and new surroundings. The life of a girl runs parallel to that of a migrant who, willingly or forcefully, leaves the land of his/her birth and migrates to a foreign land. The migration also brings the hope of living life in a utopian world where the new land seems promising to provide opportunities at every step. Unfortunately, the dreadful reality is often veiled in the gilded utopia. The migration of a girl from her parental home to her husband's home brings in the same expectations and challenges as that of a person in exile. The journey provides an opportunity to discover a new self. However, the physical locational change brings a girl to a no man's land as the land that she has left behind (the parental home) is unwilling to accept her back because of the prevalent social norms and the new home (husband's home) may not provide her the favourable living conditions to give her a sense of belongingness. Laura Esquivel in *Malinche* (2007) explains the plight of a woman as:

Once again she would arrive at the foreign place. Once again be the newcomer, an outsider, the one who did not belong. She knew from her experience that she would quickly have to ingratiate herself with her new masters to avoid being rejected or, in more dire cases, punished. Then there would be the phase where she would have to sharpen her senses in order to see and hear as acutely as possible so that she could assimilate quickly all the new customs and the words most frequently used by the group she was to become a part of- so that finally, she would be judged on her own merits. (Esquivel 18)

More often than not, marriage for an Indian woman equals itself to the state of exile and during that period she is expected to uphold the image of an ideal daughter, ideal wife, ideal mother, and that of a self-effacing woman who puts the needs of the family before herself. This obsession of perfection by patriarchy is assumed to be derived from the life and behavior of Sita in exile as depicted

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in the *Bhakti* texts based on *Ramayana*. Devotional texts such as Tulsidas's *Ramcharitmanas* and the televised *Ramayana* by Ramanand Sagar tend to portray Sita as 'pativrata' (a woman devoted to her husband) and Ram as 'maryadapurushottam' (a man who is supreme in honour). These texts are acclaimed and accepted without question because they boast of the exploits of *Maryada purushottam Ram* and his charisma, his ability, and most importantly, his Dharma. In these cultural and religious exclusive texts, Ram is considered as an ideal man and Sita, his wife, the ideal woman. In deconstructing Sita's character as a woman of flesh and blood instead of a goddess reincarnated, we come across the hypocrisy of the society and its biased perceptions about women. Sita is ripped off from every human emotion and is presented as the goddess who has an extraordinary endurance for pain. Her ordinariness is overshadowed by the light of her divinity. The voice of Sita is overridden by the patriarchal shrieks of 'honour' and 'reverence'. Madhu Kishwar in *Yes to Sita, No to Ram* (2001) says:

In India, Ram and Sita are not seen as remote figures out of a distant past to be dismissed lightly just because we are living in a different age and have evolved different lifestyles. They are living role models seen as having set standards so superior that they are hard to emulate for those living in our more "corrupt" age, the Kalyug. (291)

Sita suffered multiple exiles in her life. Her first exile started as soon as she was born and abandoned by her biological parents and was left in a trench. Her second exile started when she migrated to Ayodhya after her marriage to Ram, subsequent exile started when she decided to accompany Ram in his exile. The next one was when she was kidnapped by Ravan and was taken to Lanka. This was followed by another exile when she was abandoned by Ram and left in the forest by Laxman following the orders of Ram. These exiles were forced on Sita, but she self-inflicted a life-time exile after being asked by Ram for another *agni-pariksha* (test by fire) to prove to the court that Luv-Kush were his sons and that she had been chaste throughout her stay in Lanka.

Sita's journey as a migrant started right after her birth. She was moved on from one mother to another, from one house to another, till king Janak took her responsibility as his child (also see S. Singaravelu's "Sita's Birth and Parentage in the Rama Story"). The birth story of Sita about her discovery in a trench strips off all the extraordinariness attached from her and makes her as ordinary as any girl child who is not readily welcomed in Indian homes even today and who is either killed before or right after her birth or is abandoned. To obscure the vile practice of abandoning a girl child since Valmiki's time, Sita's abandonment as a child has been manipulated by the patriarchy and is presented as something auspicious to the world.

*Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of The Ramayana* focuses on the abandonment of Sita and instead of letting this voice fade away against the pressure of all the acclaimed texts written on *Ramayana*, the text addresses the hypocrisy of the society where the abandonment is coated and presented as a miracle:

Suddenly the King stopped. The furrow revealed a golden hand: tiny fingers rising up like grass, as if drawn by the sunshine. Janaka moved the dirt away, and found hidden within the soft, moist earth a baby, a girl, healthy and radiant, smiling joyfully, as if waiting to be found. Was it an abandoned child? No, said the farmers, convinced it was a gift from the earth-goddess to their childless king. (9)

The kingdoms of Mithila and Ayodhya stand in contrast with each other. A parallel can be drawn between these two kingdoms and two contemporary families with different ideologies. While Dashrath's family in Ayodhya acts similar to a family which is bent on attainment and recognition of a male child, completely ignoring the existence of its first girl child, Shanta and thus showing a gender-biased attitude, Janak's family in Mithila appears similar to a family which respects and celebrates the birth of a girl child and thus stands against child discrimination. King Dashrath's family abandons the girl child, while King Janak's family adopts the girl and celebrates her birth even though she is not a biological child of the family.

The progressive attitude of king Janak helps Sita to realise the power of choice and how to exert it. She, who as an orphan had no power of choosing the house she was adopted in, takes charge of her marriage and chooses husband herself. After her marriage, shifting to a new home, Sita acquainted herself with new people, customs, and practices. When a bride enters her husband's house, she carries a promise of not only nurturing a new generation but also a promise of understanding and accepting the traditions and culture of her new family and simultaneously familiarising the new family with her own culture and thoughts. To present the transition of a woman from one home to another, Pattanaik's *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of The Ramayana* shows how the bride's family prepares so that the bride could settle down in her new home with minimum discomfort:

A huge caravan of horses, elephants, donkeys and bullocks left the city of Mithila carrying gifts from the home of the brides to the home of the grooms. There were fabrics, jewels and weapons. Craftsmen and their families also travelled alongside to carry skills from the land of Videha to the land of Kosala. Sita especially paid attention to the seeds of pulses and grains, vegetables and fruits, herbs and

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spices. This would be grown in her husband's garden to remind her of home. (60)

Sita's exile from her parental home to her husband's home is reflected here, as traditionally, in an Indian household, a girl has to leave her home after marriage and start a new life at her husband's house. This change was no less than an exile for Sita as she had to leave Mithila and had to move to Ayodhya to start a new life. Sita, being a princess, had the option to carry a part of her home-fruits, herbs, and spices so that she could still have some connection with her parental land. However, even as a princess, she was able to carry only a part of her home but did not have the option to stay back. Sita had to start the same journey as every girl starts after her marriage: of having to shift to a new place to start a new life with new people, new culture, and new traditions. Sita, being a princess, had an option and means to carry a part of her home to her husband's home but not every girl and her parents can do so. The act of making a girl feel at home in the new house has disappeared eventually and has been replaced with the social problem of dowry where the groom's family feels entitled to be showered with gifts from the bride's family. Along with the practice of giving gifts, the women of the bride's family are supposed to pass on the rules to the girl for a successful married life. Nabeeneta Dev Sen in *Lady Sings the Blues* (1998) presents the voice of women in Indian villages as the voice of Sita:

In the women's folk tradition in India, never mind where you are, which century you belong to or what language you speak, you are all sisters in sorrow. Though the singers may live in different parts of the subcontinent, wear different clothes, cook very different food and vote for totally different political parties when they sing the story of Rama, they are astonishingly closeto one another, in their feelings, their perceptions, their expressions, their choices of events and their responses, they echo each other. (19)

The women have created their version of *Ramayana* to highlight the situation of a woman coming to terms with her identity in an alien land. The song serves as a book of code of conduct for a woman to excel in her new life as it conditions her in multiple ways. In one such folk song, a mother shares the secret of a successful married life with her newly wedded daughter. She advises her:

Don't visit your neighbours after sunset,  
Don't go to the washerman in the evenings,  
Never leave your hair open in the street,  
Don't laugh showing all your teeth,  
Don't look around when you are in a crowd.  
Keep your eyes downcast in public.

Never step upon rice husks,  
Strewn on the kitchen floor. (22)

Under the impact of society's tutelage to become perfect in every way, Sita tries to assimilate herself quickly in the new family to rule out any kind of foreignness. She acts and reacts as she is expected to. She adorns herself with beads around her neck, bangles on her arms, vermilion in the parting of her hair, and toe-rings just like any ordinary woman so that these symbols serve as red flags to other men signifying the woman as the property already claimed by a man. If a woman refuses to carry these marriage symbols, she is perceived as an object which has not been claimed yet, hence free to be taken. While married men remain free of any such symbols, their wives become a metaphor for the display of their husbands' authority and wealth and hence a victim of socio-cultural confinement. Devdutt's *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling* through the character of Arundhati, Vashisht's wife, tries to attest this symbolism as an imperative act for an Indian bride and implies that any violation of this would result in ostracism from society. Arundhati cites what the six wives of the rishis had to face when once they forgot to adorn themselves with the symbols of a marriage:

Agni, the fire-god, mistook the women to be without husbands and made love to them. I, however, remained untouched. The rishis abandoned their six wives; they are now known as Matrikas, forest virgins who are bound to no man. I alone, faithful wife of Vashishtha, serve my husband in the yagna-shala while the other six have become tapasvins, refusing to see women. I have a star by my name in the sky beside the constellation of Saptrishi, named after the seven rishis. And the six women, once my sisters, form another constellation, the Kritika cluster of stars. (66)

An Indian woman not only has to bear the physical burden of carrying these symbols of marriage but has to carry the emotional trauma associated with marriage too. Not only she constantly tries to juggle between being a perfect daughter, perfect wife, perfect daughter-in-law, perfect mother in every situation, putting in efforts to make everyone happy and comfortable, but she also has to do away with her former identity as in many parts of India in the name of tradition, a bride is re-named after her marriage.

The Sita of Devdutt Pattanaik stands against the double confinement of women: first, when they are labelled as dutiful wives who are ready to suffer the insufferable for the good of their husbands and secondly, when they are presented as epitomes of purity and selflessness worthy of being followed in the canon of the patriarchal society. While the stark reality of their migration is

brutally covered with the long descriptions of the grandeur of their husbands, the wives remain confined as ever, in response to the existing recognised spatial inequalities of that society where the women dependent on the migrating men, choose to migrate to maintain their social significance, clearly shows that exile is certainly not a gender-neutral phenomenon. The gender biases are that a man would have the charge to protect the woman and look after the needs of her and the house, and the woman would have the responsibility of cooking and making sure that her husband's needs are fulfilled and that he is accompanied by a personal cook, maid, and mistress in the form of a wife. The women migrating to a new land are forced to do so because of their economic and social dependency on men. Sita's decision comes as a fresh wave of air where she is neither interested in maintaining her social significance in her family nor is she adamant to prove to the world that she is a dutiful wife, instead, she decides to choose for herself.

Sita's attempts and struggles to be belonging to the new family are often treated as evident steps a married woman takes to settle herself in the new family, but she exerted her choice and decided to accompany Ram in his exile and thus self-initiated her third internal exile. This exile has been portrayed as nothing more than a wife accompanying her husband out of love for him and duty to stand by him in all situations of life—good or bad. While it may be the impulsive desire to be in the lap of nature that made Sita go with Ram. The elemental desire to be associated with her motherland, nature had made her forget the numerous adjustments and attempts she had been making until then to have a sense of belongingness to her husband's family. Instead of pleading to Ram as a meek wife, she declares her decision to Ram: "I do not need your permission. I am your wife and I am supposed to accompany you, to the throne, into war and to the forest" (82). Also, Sita comforts the wailing mothers by taking charge of the protection of Ram and Laxman as she says, "Mother, do not worry for your sons. In summer, I shall find shady trees under which they rest. In winter, I shall light fires to keep them warm. During the rains, I shall find caves where we can stay dry. They are safe with me" (82). So, Sita not only exercises her power of choice but also sees herself in charge of the exile.

*Bhakti* texts portray the consequences Sita had to face for crossing the *Laxman Rekha* as immensely sorrowful, representing the confinement of a woman in a very controlled space referred to as 'safe-zone' (a patriarchal idea that limits the physical movement and intellectual evolution of women) where she is not allowed to come out on her own, to experience or even see the things around. This controlled zone which is presented as a safe-zone runs parallel with Foucault's idea of confinement, where all the 'misfits' of the society are huddled up together and segregated from the society. In *Madness and*

*Civilization*, Foucault describes a movement (the great confinement) across Europe in the seventeenth century which saw the establishment of institutions that locked up people who were deemed to be ‘unreasonable’. The gaze praxis about the understanding of the term ‘safe’ has evolved over the years: where earlier for a man, a woman being safe might mean the defined space where she can shield herself from the claims of the other men. Devdutt Pattanaik’s *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of The Ramayana* reflects this eccentric understanding of the ‘safe-zone’ through the character of Laxman where he defines a safe-zone for Sita as a space where “Inside is Ayodhya and you are Ram’s wife. Outside is the jungle, you are a woman for the taking” (130). But for a progressive woman, a safe-zone is a space where she could use her freedom to make her own choices without the fear of being possessed or contained. The patriarchal rulebook influenced the *Bhakti* texts asking a man to take on the role of a coloniser and the woman, the colonised, is yet again left out with the role of a nurturer. Any breach in the commandments of that rulebook beget trial and adversity. Karline Mclain says, “The duties of the ideal role models are divided according to their gender: a man’s primary concern is his *dharma*, while a woman’s is her husband” (35). In the *Bhakti* texts, the abduction of Sita by Ravan to Lanka is accounted as the consequence of violation of the prescribed code of conduct for both the genders. Also, Sita’s obedience was shown not only to her husband but also to her brother-in-law as it was Laxman who marked the line, not accepting which Sita was abducted by Ravan. Devdutt Pattanaik in *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of The Ramayana* reflects the change in the society’s perceptions towards Sita and Laxman. Laxman considers jungle as a threat to a woman and as a place which creates an insecure space for a woman. For Sita, the same jungle is a space where she feels free and connected. For her, nature is her homeland and the security of being in her homeland gives her the confidence to explore its limits. She changes the connotations of a woman being perceived as the colonised land and instead takes the role of a subject who has the confidence and strength to deal with the challenges of the outer world.

Sita, who had the potential to lift Shiva’s mighty bow and who could shield herself from *Agni devta* (God of fire) and come out unharmed as she is adept in the art of warfare, has to conceal her might to allow her husband to uphold manly honour in saving her: his wife and a woman. In Ashok Vatika, when Hanuman suggests her to climb his back so that he could take her back to Ram, Sita politely denies: “Let my husband liberate me. His honour is at stake” (196). Devdutt Pattanaik’s Sita chooses to let Ram save her once out of love for him. However, when the world is threatened by the twin of Ravan, a thousand-

headed demon, Sita rises as a fierce warrior and defeats him. This Sita is a much greater warrior than Ram, but she chooses to hide her strength because of her love for Ram. The difference in the experience of a man and a woman in the *Bhakti* texts comes from the gender-based roles appointed by the society, which suggest a woman as a victim of exploitation and a man as a saviour of the woman in distress. While taking charge to kill the twin of Ravan, Devdutt Pattanaik's Sita also takes charge to change the eccentric binary concept of weak/powerless victim and a strong/powerful victor.

Sita's third internal exile manifests the strength of a woman who works till the last stages of her pregnancy. Sita does all the work in Valmiki's ashram till she delivers the twins, and soon after that, she resumes her duties towards the hermitage to provide better living conditions to her children. Here, we see a Sita who is proficient not only emotionally and intellectually but also physically.

The notion of honour has been cleverly employed by patriarchy to justify the victimisation of Sita. Women are the sites of honour to men. The objectification and denial of the choices and freedom are the results of the men of the house trying to locate their honour in the women of the house. The discomfort of the patriarchy seeks to maintain its dominance by constraining the women in a limited and limiting space. The tragic turnout of Sita's life in the *Bhakti* texts is the result of a calculating and misogynist patriarchal society. This misogynist attitude does not change even with women immigrants. If a woman has been a victim of some harassment during the exile, she is stripped of her dignity in the migrating land as well as in her homeland. Sita of the *Bhakti* texts represents women who are first victimised and then are forcefully separated from their family by the society. Many times, families willingly disown them because, being a site of dishonour, they become unacceptable to the society. Sita was abducted by Ravan as an object to satisfy his desires and ego and was retrieved by her husband as an object to retrieve his honour. She was stripped off from her identity and reduced to an object: a cause of glorification for Ram and Ravan both. Just like Sita, Ahalya has also been a victim of the exploitation by the patriarchal society. She represents a wife who gets punished by her husband for her deceitful seduction by another man though without her consent. Sita and Ahalya represent those women who are sidelined and punished by their own family members. But instead of being supported by them, they are further victimised.

Women like Tadaka and Surupankha are described as worthy of either being killed or mutilated by the powerful men in the epic. This clearly suggests that the patriarchy maintains its dominance by categorically representing women as either being 'acceptable' or 'abominable' by consistently ruling out those who cannot be tamed or dominated. Ram claims to rescue Sita to restore her

freedom from Ravan, but he rescues her not as a person but as a property to be possessed. It is never about Sita's freedom but her acquisition by winning a power game. Ram and Ravan's fight is to retrieve their lost honour. Well aware of the suffering of women who are abandoned if they fail to suit the needs of the beholder, Pattanaik's Sita gives a voice to the silent cry of a woman bereft of freedom, whose whole life has been spent in maintaining the honour of the men of the house. Yet the decision about her life hangs in the hands of the gender-biased society. She is given the same verdict as it is given to any woman who signifies the failure of men associated with her. She says:

Renuka had been beheaded because she was unchaste in thought. She remembered how Ahilya had been turned to stone because she was unchaste in deed. She had been unchaste in neither thought nor body, but how does one prove purity? Those who trust need no proof; those who do not trust reject all proof. And whether she liked it or not, she was a blot on Ram's reputation. Ravan had seized her while she was in Ram's protection; she symbolized Ram's failure. (250)

For many centuries, this epic text, confined to the religious and cultural constraints, elevated a woman to be the epitome of virtue while expecting no such traits from a man. Since these codes of conduct cannot be altered, modified, or even eradicated from society, many women in their own way try to fight against the tyranny of the social code and conduct meant for women. Devdutt Pattanaik's Sita abandons Ram long before he had thought of abandoning her. This Sita voices the question by/of a woman who is not trusted by her husband and her family. The question is why the woman's side of the story is not listened to; why does a family choose to take the side of the patriarchal rules and ignore a woman's truth? Instead of hoping for her husband to understand her truth and to trust her, Devdutt Pattanaik's Sita chooses to abandon Ram knowing it too well that a woman anyway has to suffer unjust attitude of the patriarchy as it does not matter to it whether a woman is innocent or not. Devdutt Pattanaik's Sita's retaliation against this unjust attitude is evident when an embarrassed Laxman says that Sita did not deserve the abandonment as she is 'pure' and has taken the *agni-pariksha*: "And if I was not? Would it be socially appropriate and legally justified for a husband to throw his woman out of his house? A jungle is preferable to such an intolerant society" (278). The act of un-bounding her hair attests that Sita had disassociated herself from Ram long before Ram had not even thought about it.

Reaching out for a solution to the abandonment of a woman in her life, where every phase of her life equals itself to one or another form of exile, where she is not just evicted, but is being renounced forever, Madhu Kishwar in her article, "Yes to Sita, No to Ram", says that it was not just Sita who had to

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undergo the fire-trial, but every woman has to undergo multiple trials in her life to prove her worth to the patriarchal society. Kishwar, through the poem “Agnipariksha” urges women to rise like a phoenix from the flames of inequality forced on them and refuse to be consumed by it. “Agnipariksha” goes as:

I too have given agnipariksha  
Not one-but many  
Everyday, a new one,  
However, this agnipariksha  
Is not to prove myself worthy of this or that Ram  
But to make myself  
Worthy of freedom.  
Every day your envious, dirty looks  
Reduced me to ashes.  
And everyday, like a phoenix, I arose again  
Cut of my own ashes  
Who is Ram to reject me?  
I have rejected that entire society  
Which has converted  
Homes into prison. (290)

The terms—marriage, kidnap, migration and exile—become synonyms in the life of a woman as in any given situation, a woman undergoes more or less the same experience: having a mental and physical state of being in exile, cut off from her roots and struggling to adapt to a new environment. Sita felt the same when she got married, when she was exiled to the forest with her husband, and when she got kidnapped by Ravan. Moreover, with every exile Sita lost the people she was associated with. In her first exile, she gets separated from her biological parents; in the second from her father and in her third exile from her sisters and her family of in-laws, and from her husband in her fourth exile. Although she returns to her husband and the family after this fourth exile, she gets separated again and is left only with her children, and in her sixth exile, she abandons everything to stop this process of in and out once and for all. These exiles are not just of/for Sita but also of her relationships and all her familial ties. But instead of retreating in a cocoon, she rises time and again, every time and heals herself of every loss.

To sum up, portraying the skillfulness of Sita through different exiles, Devdutt Pattanaik limelights the idea that to Sita and every woman homeland is a place which provides her the freedom to explore, to exert her choice and rights, and a safe place to seek relief, to rejuvenate and strengthen herself for

her sustenance. The exiles offer her the opportunity to get her selfhood and identity, whereas being a queen and wife of a king, she is denied all that. Sita uses all the opportunities which come her way to go back to nature—be it as a loving wife accompanying her husband in his exile or as a heavily pregnant wife who was abandoned by her husband because of his inability to trust her, and later on as a single mother who prefers to nurture her sons in a forest, close to nature as opposed to raising them in Ayodhya. Even in Lanka, it is her strong connection with nature which gives her the strength to survive her ordeal in Ashok Vatika. She considers the trees and birds her friends. Mother Earth/nature not only becomes her homeland but also personifies as a warrior protecting Sita as we find Sita, in her attempt to shield herself from Ravan, uses a blade of grass instead of using an actual sword. Sita seeks and takes every opportunity to be in the vicinity of nature; she turns every exile of hers as a platform to learn and emerge as a new person. The exile of Devdutt Pattanaik's Sita in *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana* comes to a halt only when she finally returns to her homeland, Mother Earth. There is a gradual transition during every exile of Sita and when we trace the pattern of the journey of Sita, it turns out to be circuitous as she seeks out a new challenge every time and still finds her way back to nature. She decided to go to exile along with her husband even when she had put multiple efforts to mingle with her in-law's family; she felt somewhat at ease when she was shifted to Ashok Vatika instead of being kept in a Palace in Lanka; she gracefully took her role of a single mother when she was in the lap of mother nature while being in the hermitage of Valmiki; she again chose nature over being a queen when she handed herself over to Mother Earth. To Sita, nature is her homeland and the only place she feels at peace, and she is tempted to come back to her homeland repeatedly. Devdutt Pattanaik's Sita turns all her exiles as the agency to exert her own will and live a free life as an individual not limited by patriarchal traditions. She grows into a strong person psychologically, emotionally, and intellectually.

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