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Rewriting Myth: A Feminist Revisionist Analysis of Amar Jyoti's Poetry

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Abstract

As knowledge of values, beliefs and traditions continues to be passed from one generation to another via myth stories, they are central to our culture. In an ultra Patriarchy, these tales often have the effect of mythifying and sanctifying the qualities of manhood: manliness and heroism. On the other hand, they place women in what are largely sacrificed, chastized and tolerant types of roles. To enrich the analysis of the selected poetry, the study adopted the theoretical approach of 'revisionist mythology,' which was propagated by the American poet and critic, Alicia Ostriker. The study traces the discussions about the mythological female characters Sita, Draupadi and Ahalya, whom Amar Jyoti reinterprets in her poetry and lineates to question inherited gender norms. This analysis centers in large part on the process of which these inimitable figures are turned from weak and subservient into powerful and resistant icons. Her deconstruction of the role of female figures in dominant mythological narratives like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, she not only criticizes patriarchal structure but also recuperates these myths as an active place of resistance and re-articulation as well. The study argues that Amar Jyoti's poetry transforms myth into a critical site of feminist resistance and enables the reconstruction of female subjectivity within contemporary Punjabi literature.

Keywords: *Punjabi women poetry, revisionist mythology, Sita, Draupadi, Ahalya.*

Mythology plays a significant role as a foundational narrative of a culture and shapes the way of thinking of a particular society. As Joseph Campbell argues, mythology serves as "the provision of a cultural framework for a society or people to educate their young, and to provide them with a means of coping with their passage through the different stages of life" (The Power of Myth 139). These ancient mythological tales also remain deeply connected to religion and everyday rituals. This religious association gives them a holy status and makes them even more powerful and influential in society. As World History Encyclopedia defines, mythology explains "the cosmological and supernatural traditions of a people, their gods, heroes, cultural traits, religious beliefs, etc." Initially, these narratives were passed orally from one generation to the next and were later written down to preserve them over time. As historian Vansina points out in Oral Tradition as History, before the advent of writing, myths lived completely through oral tradition, a method that is still vital in many societies today (5). In other words, mythology is a legendary tale that usually centers on a particular hero or event, and explains the mysteries of nature, life, or the universe without being based on real facts.

In the modern era, especially during recent years, myths have become a common topic of literary criticism. As Northrop Frye argues, literature is the "central and most important

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extension of 'mythology'... every human society possesses a mythology that is inherited, transmitted, and diversified by literature" (Words with Power xiii). Although myths originate in the remote past, their significance to a particular culture continues to inspire readers across the ages. The flexibility of incorporating myths into mainstream literature provides ample possibility for a diverse range of interpretations. The references to mythological characters and events, especially from the Mahabharata and the Ramayana have been widely used in Indian and Punjabi literature, and they serve as fictional stories about ancient Indian civilization and play a significant role as the basis of literature. As A. K. Ramanujan argues, Indian mythology operates as "a living, breathing tradition" that is constantly retold, reinterpreted, and reinvented across regions, languages, and historical periods (Three Hundred Ramayana 24). In the context of women's lives, however, such myths often construct rigid and idealized models of femininity that are unattainable and exclusionary and produce internalized guilt and a persistent sense of inadequacy. Laurence Coupe suggests that rather than rejecting myth altogether, contemporary discourse seeks to reinterpret and demystify these inherited structures and to expose their ideological underpinnings (24). Northrop Frye also argues, "No rendering any myth into conceptual language can serve as a full equivalent of its meaning. A myth may be told and retold: it may be modified or elaborated, or different patterns may be discovered in it; and its life is always the poetic life of a story, not the homiletic life of some illustrated truism" (599).

Mageed, in his article, argues that mythological narratives have always been centered around males, where masculinity and male heroism are glorified. Women in these tales, on the other hand, are often, typically stereotyped, oppressed, silenced, and pushed to the margin. But with the rise of feminist literary criticism and gender studies in the second half of the twentieth century, feminist critics have been concerned with an investigation of the representation of women in myth (662). The tradition of retelling mythical stories from a woman's perspective has become highly popular today. By rewriting these myths, feminist writers expose deep-rooted male dominance and highlight women's real-life struggles and sufferings. This approach permits writers to reshape women's portrayals in mythology, which also helps to break from rigid gender roles and change a legacy long rooted in patriarchy. This practice is commonly known as "feminist revisionist mythology." The present study adopts a qualitative textual analysis and employs close reading as its primary method to examine Amar Jyoti's selected poetry. Her poetry is analyzed through the lens of 'feminist revisionist mythmaking', a concept theorized by Alicia Ostriker. The analysis primarily focuses on how Amar Jyoti, in the selected poetry, retells mythological tales to highlight and reclaim women's identity.

The concept of 'Revisionist Mythmaking' has emerged as a significant approach for writers to create a counter-narrative to the most frequently, often patriarchal, and neglected depictions

of women in myths. In her essay The Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythology, Ostriker observes that revisionist mythmaking offers "one significant means of redefining ourselves and consequently our culture" (71) and points out that retelling of myth is primarily focused on individual and cultural transformation. She further elaborates that such a practice allows a woman writer to "simultaneously deconstruct a prior 'myth' or 'story' and construct a new one which includes, instead of excluding, herself" (71). Focusing on its critical task, she argues that Revisionist Mythmaking lies, "in the challenge to and correction of gender stereotypes embodied in myth, revisionism in its simplest form consists of hit-and-run attacks on familiar images and the social and literary conventions supporting them" (73-74). This theoretical practice, suggested by Ostriker, aligns with broader feminist criticism in numerous ways, which interrogates how myths have historically sustained patriarchal ideology and contributed to the marginalization of women. In response, they rework traditional myths from a gynocentric perspective and place women at the center, and portray them as autonomous and complex individuals. This interrogates earlier representations in which women's identities were defined in relation to men. As Simone de Beauvoir argues, "man defines woman not in herself but in relation to him," denying her autonomy (26).

Similarly, Alice Ostriker observes that within feminist revisionist writings, "the old stories are changed, changed utterly, by female knowledge of female experience" (73), which indicates a patriarchal myth to experiential rearticulation. In this respect, Adrienne Rich defines 're-vision' as "the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new direction" (18) and argues that 're-vision' is a significant factor in arousing feminist consciousness. Further, she contends 're-vision' emerges as a prerequisite for women authors whose writings and self-identity have been shaped by an androcentric tradition composed of mythical or folkloric images that "negate everything she is about: she meets the image of women in books written by men. She finds a terror and a dream … not herself" (21). Together, these views prove that when women rewrite old myths, she attempts to bring ignored female voices to the forefront and transform ancient myths into a tool for resistance and change.

As feminist literary critics underscore, a woman's register, representation, and imagery have been missing in mythology, where women are depicted from a patriarchal perspective with a diminished identity and neglected voice. Feminist revisionist mythmaking, thus, appears as a feminist approach to review and reclaim the representation of women in myths from a perspective. This approach, thus, proposes a significant means of redefining women's identity and, consequently, of restructuring the literary tradition. It may be defined as a methodical re-visionary use of gender portrayal and is a means of inspecting and seeking to modify the self and the culture, in short, to subvert and change the life and literature female poets inherit. In revising ancient myths, feminist revisionist mythmaking, thus, offers a margin in which

females can identify outside the prevailing gender norms determined by the patriarchal structure and can find a better space and reclaim their voice. By employing feminist and gender-based theoretical frameworks, such as Alicia's theory of 'feminist revisionist mythmaking' and Simone de Beauvoir's criticism of myths, this study aims to analyze how Amar Jyoti retells the ancient myths to challenge patriarchal structure and to redefine women's roles in her poetry.

In the contemporary era, numerous Indian writers have undertaken the task of rewriting the mythological epics to foreground the perspective of marginalized figures, particularly women. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's The Palace of Illusions reinterprets the great epic, The Mahabharata, from a feminist perspective, and seems to transform Draupadi from a passive victim into an active agent of her destiny. It is also worth mentioning that many renowned writers, such as Devdutt Pattanaik, have reinterpreted the Indian mythological narratives to suggest new observations of the Indian traditional system. In the book entitled Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of Ramayana (2013), he retells the epic 'The Ramayana' from a feminist point of view. In this way, a new trend of storytelling has emerged that gives a powerful voice to those who have long been marginalized in society. Consequently, the rewriting of ancient myths has become a significant trend in modern times, successfully challenging and redefining prevailing cultural views. Due to their close association with religion, these mythological narratives are granted a status of truth and authority. This religious support enables these narratives to actively shape gender roles in culture and society. Feminist critics argue that these traditional narratives mainly focus on men and are inclined to glorify male power while keeping women powerless. In other words, these texts often depict women as diffident, submissive, and untrustworthy figures. Consequently, women are frequently defined by these mythical female figures rather than by their own identities. In this regard, Nivedita Menon asserts that gendering denotes the process through which individuals are defined as "proper" men and women through strict patriarchal norms; some of these norms are internalized while others are forcibly imposed (ix).

Punjab's turbulent historical background, marked by invasion, conquest, partition, and identity crisis, has aroused the creative imagination of Punjabi writers with various themes. Punjabi poetry, from the early verses of Nath Yogis and Sufi saints to the modern poetry, demonstrates a great influence of Indian mythology. Richard Carnac Temple, renowned scholar, observes that "the plot structure of Punjabi folktales and bardic poetry was indistinguishable from one another," with both influenced by the Puranans and other epics (The Legends of the Punjab 45). The mythological influence can also be seen in Modern Punjabi women's poetry, as they frequently invoke legendary female figures to explore the themes of women's oppression and resistance. Anne Murphy notes that modern Punjabi

writers demonstrate "complex commitments both to religion and to fiction" (101), navigating "exclusionary and plural discourses" in their engagement with the past (91). Similarly, Iffat Kazmi argues that postcolonial Punjabi poets "deployed the contestatory genre of Hir to critique the multiple patriarchies of nation, region and community" while reappropriating traditional voices for feminist ends (Kazmi 19).

Punjabi women poets, each with a distinct voice, can be seen as laying the foundation for modern feminist poetry in Punjabi literature. They openly reject traditional approaches to thinking and choose to focus on women's real-life issues. Some of these women poets are radical and bold, and they are not ready to accept patriarchal dominance. A significant factor contributing to this radical and revolutionary attitude is the influence of the radical feminist movement of that time. These women poets strategically use the references to mythological and folkloric figures, particularly from the qissa tradition and Hindu epics , to critique patriarchal structures, articulate female agency, and reconstruct gendered identity. On one hand, traditional local archetypes such as Heer , Sassi , and Sohni , alongside mythical figures like Sita , Draupadi , and Ahalya , and others, continue to resonate deeply within the Punjabi female imagination. On the other hand, feminism emerges as a conscious ideological force, actively shaping and transforming the evolving literary landscape. During this period, nearly all Punjabi women poets were deeply influenced by this radical feminist movement. This influence can also be seen in Amar Jyoti's poetry. As discussed earlier, the present study focuses on the analysis of the retelling of myth in her selected poetry. Though there are a few studies where Amar Jyoti's poetry has been studied from feminist angles, the issue of the deconstruction of myth in her poetry has hardly been elaborated on earlier. The present study also attempts to correlate myth and feminist structure, which hitherto has not been explored.

The themes of Amar Jyoti's poetry range from socio-cultural issues to various political confrontations, environmental issues, religious animosity, and gender inequality. To depict all these issues, she also uses references from Indian mythological narratives. As in her poetry collection Darupadi To'n Durga, she mentions the following:

> Whenever Draupadi wept, she wept through my own eyes in the form of tears. I have always said to her that tears alone cannot define her essence. She must not merely rebel; she must become the rebellion itself. Forged in the crucible of a thousand years of defiance, she should evolve into the form of Durga. Durga, who is powerful and self-confident, is the only source of Draupadi's liberation from the darkness of life. Now, Draupadi's destiny is not merely that of a helpless woman; rather, before me now, it stands as the lamentation of our earth. (Darupadi To'n Durga) 9)

In Amar Jyoti's poetry, women are seen as defiant, believing that traditional roles are no longer relevant and opting for revolutionary notions. She employs critical mythological approaches to formulate an oppositional perspective against patriarchal dominance. By retelling these mythical narratives, Amar Jyoti's poetry shifts the focus to women's real-life experiences

rather than idealised notions of womanhood. In doing so, her poetry challenges myth and patriarchal structure and creates a space for women to identify themselves. It can be mentioned that by deconstructing mythical narratives, Jyoti offers a radical perspective, where the conscious woman flatly refuses to accept male dominance. As in her poetry collections Mainu Sita Na Kaho (1988) and Draupadi Ton Durga (1990), Amar Jyoti challenges traditional representations of mythological women figures through a feminist lens. This revisionist approach is sharply evident in her verses, where she declares: Do Not Call Me Sita/ Before facing the Agni-Pariksha (ordeal by fire)/ I must engage in a reasoned dialogue/ with my life partner (Mainu Sita Na Kaho 227) . Through these lines, Jyoti radically deconstructs the image of one of the Ramayana's most iconic female figures. Opening with the bold rejection, "Do Not Call Me Sita", the speaker directly exposes the cultural image of the idealized woman, characterized by silent suffering and unconditional submission. This rejection is not merely a negation of a name, but a complete refusal of the socio-mythological tradition that mandates the Agni-Pariksha as a prerequisite for proving womanhood. Jyoti effectively recontextualizes the Agni-Pariksha, shifting it from a singular, divine event into a metaphor for the bold challenges and systematic trials women face daily. However, the key intervention occurs in the speaker's demand for reasoned dialogue (daleel) with her life partner (humsafar) before any trial. By insisting on this dialogue, the speaker completely redefines this bond. She shifts the relationship away from a patriarchal hierarchy, where the woman is always treated as the accused, and turns it into an equal partnership grounded in intellectual independence.

However, this refusal of a name is not a refusal of the socio-mythological script. Here, the speaker Jyoti effectively decontextualizes the Agni-Pariksha from this singular event of divine provenance and turns it into a metaphor for the trials and tribulations of life that women are subjected to on a daily basis. However, the key feminist intervention in this poem is the speaker's demand for daleel or reasoned dialogue with her life partner/her husband/her human safeguard (humsafar) before she can agree to any trial by fire/agony for her legitimacy. It is this dialogue with her partner that marks a shift from a patriarchal hierarchical relationship where the woman is always first accused and proven guilty, to a more egalitarian relationship of two independent individuals. Furthermore, Jyoti's use of reason serves to secularize the sacred myth and replaces the mysticism of the ordeal with the logic of human dignity. In ordinary readings, Sita's purity is proven through a miraculous and non-verbal spectacle. But Jyoti's speaker argues that her worth is established through her own voice and reason. This deconstructive move matches with Alicia Ostriker's concept of 'revisionist mythmaking,' where the poet enters a myth to redefine ourselves and our culture (71). By demanding a reasoned conversation, the woman in Jyoti's poetry directly exposes the

'Sita syndrome' of passive suffering. Ultimately, the poem argues that the modern woman's journey is not about proving herself to a patriarchal structure through fire, but about asserting her autonomy through the power of the word. In another poem, Satt Ghare (Seven Pitchers), Amar Jyoti sophistically retells the climax of the Ramayana and shifts the focus from Sita's victimhood to her enduring hardships. As she writes:

> Sita was banished to the forests
>
> to endure a curse, the curse of remaining alive
>
> in the seven pitchers buried with in the womb of the earth
>
> Sita has sprouted once again
>
> leaving the curse alive behind her
>
> (Sochan De Nishan 52)

In these verses, the most significant intervention is the paradoxical curse of survival. In a patriarchal society, a woman's honorable death is often preferred over her dishonorable life. Here, Amar Jyoti seems to criticize a society that views a woman's independence and survival as a burden. However, the imagery of Sita's birth from seven pitchers in the womb of the earth symbolizes a transformation from a myth of erasure to a myth of restoration. This metaphor depicts Sita as a recurring, generative power, and suggests that her existence cannot be destroyed. The curse that persists serves as a disturbing reminder to the patriarchal world of its own moral failures.

Amar Jyoti also retells the myth of Ahalya to depict how women were historically confined to the domestic boundaries and denied social progress. In traditional Indian mythology, Ahalya is turned to stone by a curse and can only be freed by the touch of Ram's feet. Jyoti, however, revises this tale by reframing stoniness not as a divine punishment for adultery but as the destructive pain and suffering that women are passed from one generation to the next. Instead of waiting for a male to save her, the woman in her poetry lights her own sacred fire (dhuni) . She throws into the fire all "the pains and sufferings that have been passed down from her mother's time to her own." As Amar Jyoti writes: May the heat of this fire melt the stone statue of Ahalya/ so she no longer has to wait for any Ram (Sochan De Nishan 240). In these verses, the poet rejects the traditional idea that a woman needs a man or a masculine power like Ram for liberation. By seeking to melt the stone through self-generated warmth, which symbolizes the shared generational grief and bond between women, the poet argues that true freedom is a self-directed, internal process rather than a privilege granted by patriarchal authority. This analysis reflects Adrienne Rich's argument that "women writers do not simply 'retell' myths; they 'revision' them to find a new source of female power" (35). Through this lens, Ahalya is no longer a static figure of expiation whose existence is validated by man's touch. Instead, she

becomes an active subject whose melting signifies a bold refusal to wait for patriarchal refusal. Jyoti thus rejects the traditional myth of the male savior and replaces it with self-reliance. In doing so, she positions the modern woman as both a revolutionary and the architect of her own destiny.

In her poetry, Amar Jyoti also undertakes a critical rereading of the Draupadi myth in which she refuses to represent the mythological heroine as a passive victim. Instead, she reframes Draupadi's suffering as a turning point in the evolution of female consciousness. In the classical narrative of the Mahabharata, Draupadi is usually remembered as the ultimate symbol of victimization. She was gambled away by her husbands and even subjected to public disrobing (Vastra Haran). While conventional interpretations often focus entirely on this humiliation, her own voice and choices are historically buried beneath a male-dominated narrative of revenge. Jyoti reinterprets Draupadi's tale as a reflection of our modern society, a place where a woman is still suffering systematic abuse and expected to depend on external or masculine help (often divine) to protect them. But instead of praising Draupadi for quietly enduring her sufferings, the poet argues that this cycle needs to be 'transformed'. For Jyoti, simply surviving trauma and calling on men to take revenge and to protect you will never lead to real liberation. She states: My pen/ holds this vow/ may our earth/ transform/ from Draupadi/ into Durga (Mannat, Sochan De Nishan 142). The feminist power in these lines comes from the aspiration to convert Draupadi into Durga. This transformation represents a move from "a subordinate woman who speaks but is ignored" to an "autonomous goddess who acts". While Darupadi represents a woman who is trapped inside the patriarchal structure, Durga represents a force that exists outside of these boundaries. Durga needs no one else; she is self-armed, self-reliant, and absolutely powerful. By aspiring this shift for "our earth," Jyoti argues that modern women need to stop playing the role of silent victims. Instead, they need to focus on the role of the protector and the destroyer- someone who can both defend and attack back. In this way, Jyoti uses her pen as a weapon to break down old traditions and to rewrite the stories of the world. By doing this, she wants to ensure that women are no longer trapped in endless suffering.

Amar Jyoti also attempts to reimagine the Mahabharata by extracting the male protagonists of their mythological significance and centering the narrative on Draupadi's humiliation. She boldly challenges the very concept of 'protection' as a way of patriarchal control. Furthermore, she argues that the men in the epic did not attempt to save Draupadi; instead, they wanted to 'wrap her' in restrictive social norms to make their own lives easier and secure. This revisionist perspective reveals that these male heroes were not saviors at all. Rather, their own survival and reputations depended entirely on Draupadi's capacity to quietly suffer and endure pain. As she writes:

Draupadi's hair was untie

she went into a salon

to cut them in a fashionable style

Draupadi made a fearless

declaration: she no longer wants to wait

for any Bhima.

(Othe Ek Draupadi Si, Waqt Mausam Ate Nazam 169)

The most revolutionary moment in the poem is when Jyoti's unbound hair has a new significance for her. In the original myth, her free hair represents trauma and her reliance on a male power to come to her aid. In retelling this the poet negates this notion of male power over women. Jyoti has Draupadi cut her long hair in a fashion to project a voice of self-ownership over blood revenge for undergoing a salon to cut the long hair in a fashion. But Draupadi totally denies all the restrictions and takes the decision to move forward in this simple act. The poem ends with a statement: Draupadi will not wait for another Bhima. The declaration represents a complete changeover from the usual inability of the female to be a hero to itself and await rescue from a male force. Rather she engages in 'dislocutions' as feminist author Elaine Showalter has called them, "refusals" (128) to be the site of an "altercation of men" (127). With this, Amar Jyoti restores Draupadi back to being her own agent. She abandones the chain of anger and revenge in favor of a contemporary theatrical tale of individual freedom and self-reliance, instead of norm facing constructions like patriarchy for safety.

Finally, Amar Jyoti's focus in poetry is to showcase the personality of modern female who can take up every task with bold attitude and assert her identity through it. A few authors have also tried to narrate classical myths with a new face in their own language, but, the directness and boldness Jyoti has shown in reinterpreting the story is going entirely different. This poetic rendition of these stories is therefore an important evolution in the present-day collection of Punjabi women's poetry, as they are now being turned into a potent tool of resistance and interrogation. Her attitude towards the ancient myths, such as The Mahabharata and The Ramayana, in her poetry, is defiant. So, she attempts to critically interrogate and rewrite these narratives. As we see, by retelling the tales of Sita and Draupadi, Jyoti exposes the patriarchal structure rooted in these great epics. She openly challenges the idealized and submissive image of a woman portrayed in these narratives.

By interrogating these mythological narratives, her poetry tackles the deep roots of male dominance. Historically, these traditional tales have played a significant role in keeping

patriarchy alive. Jyoti's poetry boldly challenges and rejects these gender hierarchies and male supremacy. Furthermore, she rejects the gender biases that often cause unfair and irrational treatment in women's daily lives. On the contrary, she constructs the portrayal of a modern woman who fully knows her own rights and identity. Therefore, her poetry not only revisits myth but also boldly exposes those social biases that keep gender prejudice alive today. Ultimately, she offers a life-changing perspective of female identity built on self-reliance. Her poetry foregrounds the actual life struggle of modern women and shatters traditional stereotypes, and uncovers the hidden power structure embedded in our culture.

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Notes:

[1] One of the ancient Indian sacred epics of the Hindus written in Sanskrit, traditionally ascribed to sage Vyasa. It deals with 18 days the civil war waged between the *Pandavas* and *Kauravas* cousins at *Kurukshetra.*

[1] One of the ancient Indian mythologies/sacred epics of the Hinduism written in Sanskrit, traditionally ascribed to the sage Valmiki. It describes how the legendary king *Rama*, aided by his brother and the monkey king *Hanuman*, rescued his wife *Sita* from *Ravana,* the ten-headed demon king Lanka.

[1] In their very famous work *Feminisms*, Arpita Mukhopadhaya and Sumit Chakrabarti mentions the waves of feminist movement: 'In order to classify the shifting movements in the history of feminism, the paradigm of 'waves' came into use. Thus 'first wave feminism' is used to signify the feminist movements of the late-nineteenth century and the early-twentieth century that were aimed to acquiring equal rights for women. 'Second wave feminism' refers to the feminist movements of the 1960s and 70s that addressed issues such as women's employment, role in the family and sexuality, along with their political rights…. Apart from the historical approach, attempts are also made, to group feminist activity and attitudes under different theoretical frameworks. Broadly, they are put under three categories: Liberal feminism, Marxist or Socialist feminism and Radical feminism. Liberal feminism argues for equal rights for women based on the ideology of the liberal state of equal rights and privileges for all citizens. Marxist and socialist feminist system believes that gender inequality is related to the capitalist mode of production, while Radical feminists identify patriarchy to be the root of all evils against women.

Apart from these broad categories, there are several other categories such a psychoanalytic feminism, postmodern feminism, black feminism, post-colonial feminism, post structural feminism, cyber feminism and so on…..Radical feminism, in all its various approaches, explore the reproductive and sexual roles of women… They debated the over-emphasis on distinguishing 'masculine' and 'feminine' traits. Radical feminism also underlines the importance of flexibility in exercising sexuality by women (2019: 2-7).

[1] The *Qissa* traditon is a vibrant Punjabi oral and literary genre of epic-romances that narrate tales of tragic love and moral piety, blending Persian-Islamic forms with indigenous folk motifs to foster a shared cultural sensibility across religious communities (Mir 4).

[1] Hindu epics are the two great Sanskrit itihasas (histories)—the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*—that narrate divine incarnations and moral dilemmas to teach dharma (duty) through heroic legend (Winternitz 27).

[1] *Heer* is the courageous heroine of the Punjabi qissa the *Heer,* written by eighteenth century *Sufi* poet Waris Shah*,* who defies caste norms and family authority to love Ranjha, and became an enduring symbol of tragic romance and social resistance in Punjabi literature.

[1] Sassi is the devoted heroine of the Punjabi qissa *Sassi Punnun* who defies caste and family to pursue her beloved Punnun.

[1] *Sohni* is a potter's daughter and heroine of the classical Punjabi-Sindhi *qissa Sohni Mahiwal.* She defies family and social norms for her beloved *Mahiwal*. She swims across the Chenab River every night just to meet *Mahiwal*. In the end, she drowns trying to reach him, and the story has become a timeless symbol of true, selfless love and sacrifice.

[1] In the *Ramayana, Sita* is the wife of the god *Rama*. As per mythology, she is regarded as an ideal of womanhood. But she can be seen as a symbol of women's suffering because she endured immense hardships despite being pure and devoted. Her story highlights the unfair trials women face in a society that often doubts their character.

[1] In the *Mahabharata, Draupadi* is the main female protagonist known as the courageous, fiery wife of five *Pandava* brothers. She often seen as a symbol of women's suffering and strength because, despite being a queen, she faced severe insults, humiliation, and pain caused by men in power.

[1] *Ahalya* is the beautiful wife of Sage *Gautama* in the *Ramayana* who was cursed to become a stone after being tricked by Indra but was later freed by the touch of Lord *Rama*. She is seen as a symbol of women's plight because she was unjustly cursed, while her husband abandoned her.

[1] The translation of this paragraph, from Amar Jyoti's original poetry book *Darupadi To's Durga*, is done by the researcher. However, the translation is of working nature only.

[1] *Agni-Pariksha* refers to the unfair 'trial by fire' undergone by *Sita* in the *Ramayana* to prove her purity. It represents the deep pain and silent suffering women face due societal doubts and patriarchal society.

[1] All the excerpts from the original poetry have been translated by the researcher unless otherwise indicated. The translation, however, is of working nature only.

[1] *Dhuni* is a sacred, perpetually burning fire in Hindu and Nath traditions that symbolizes purification, transformation and burning away of ego, karma, and worldly attachments to achieve self-realization.

[1] The *Vastra Haran* of Draupadi is the tragic incident in the *Mahabharata* where the *Kauravas* attempted to publicly disrobe Queen *Draupadi* in the assembly.