

Sita, not Ram's story retold

By Sanskriti Singh

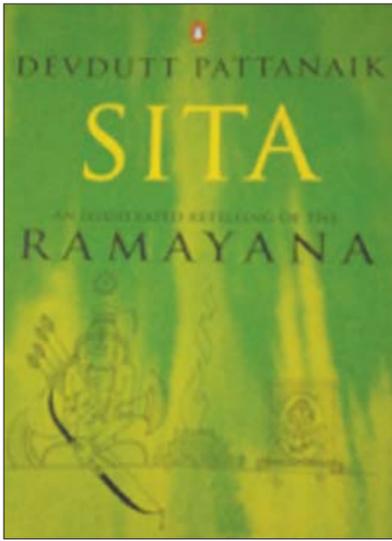
Indian mythology has been a genre I have grown up reading or listening to the stories, especially from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. For example, the stories of Rama and Sita, the demons and the gods in the Ramayana are fascinating. I have always been interested in the Ramayana and to read a retelling of this epic has to be interesting enough and must provide new aspects.

The book *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of The Ramayana* retold by Dr Devdutt Pattanaik has all the contents of the epic but are presented in a new way. We always hear about Rama but this was the first book which described Sita as a goddess — Sityan instead of Ramayan could well be its title.

The book has 3 major parts. First, an author's note — what Shiva told Shakti.

This part mainly explains the story or the core of Sita and Rama's life. Shiva explains the different incarnations of Vishnu. The author has also brought forward the concept of Suryavansh as the story revolves around the Solar Dynasty. He explains the birth of Rama and the reason he came to Earth.

The second important section of the book is the 'Prologue' that starts with Hanuman illustrating the story of Sita to Vasuki, the God of the Nagas. This is followed by the birth of Sita. She was born of the earth and raised among sages. She was found by Janak, the Rajrishi, and he brought her up amidst an environment of knowledge and the Vedas. Thereafter comes her Marriage — 'Janak told her to bring happiness to marriage rather than seek happiness from it'.



The next section deals with the Exile — 'She followed her husband to ensure that he never feels incomplete'. This deals with her experiences during the exile. Next is the Abduction — 'Her body could

be imprisoned, but never her mind', illustrates her captivity by Ravana, the king of Lanka.

How can we forget Sita's patience and faith? Hence this section is named Anticipation — 'From her faith came her patience'.

Ram would have never left Sita in any bad situation but people in Ayodhya brought the purity of a Sati to question. Rama rescued her in the Rescue — 'Lanka desired her submission, Ayodhya demanded her innocence'.

And then the last section considers the freedom of Prakriti from the bounds of Purush, explaining the injustice that Ram and Raghukul meted out to the Pure Goddess who had submitted herself to her husband's family. Here we are also introduced to Luv and Kush, the twin sons of Rama and Sita, and her role of a single mother.

The conclusion signifies Sita's return to Mother Earth, aptly called the Freedom — 'He remained trapped in culture, but nature set her free'.

This whole Prologue ends with the grief Rama felt without his Sita and how he decided to leave Earth and go back to Vaikunth, the dharm of Vishnu. This section brings the book to an end with the Epilogue — Ascent to Ayodhya.

Devdutt has done justice to the epic by retelling the Ramayana and giving it a different angle. Being a constant reader of mythology, I found the book reasonably justified and fascinating. And surely we cannot forget the artwork that has been applied by the author in each section. The presentation is amazing. What comes to my mind when I read this book is the artistry and splendid narration. I came across various parts which helped

me discover the unknown facts of the characters. Before reading this book I never knew that Rama was a person who never questioned things or contradicted them, he accepted life the way it came to him, nor did I ever know that Sita was a curious princess who had hundreds of questions about everything, or the sacrifice Urmila made for her husband. These untold aspects of the characters are graciously revealed in the book.

The book has many vignettes and the author has offered his personal views and provoking new questions to arise in our minds. As a reader, look for the answers between the infinite myths.

The interesting plot, which explains women's point of view and the indirect metaphors, have explained what a woman's decision depends on. Sita as an example of women in general is a perfect way of defining truth, grace and knowledge along with rules and regulations of marriage and motherhood.

The book is a splendid representation of literature. It must be read by one and all. It is easy to understand and the narration will keep you spellbound. And you are sure to love it more with the beautiful lines conveyed by the author:

"Within infinite myths lies an eternal truth/ Who sees it all?"

(The author is a Class X student of B.K Bajoria School)

Book: Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of The Ramayana; Author: Dr Devdutt Pattanaik; Publisher: Penguin Books India; Pages: 220; Price: Rs 328

Clean clause



One of the most important parts of looking and feeling good is your personal cleanliness and hygiene. You may have attractive features and an alluring figure, but lack of cleanliness can put people off. Believe me, it shows, says beauty expert **Shahnaz Husain**.

We are also exposed to air pollutants. They are posing a threat to health too. Apart from lung and respiratory problems, the skin and scalp also bear the brunt of pollutants. They not only cause dryness of the skin and hair, but actually disrupt the normal acid-alkaline balances. They can cause rashes and other eruptive conditions.

Pollutants also collect on the scalp and can also affect the eyes, causing burning or redness. If there is a rash or eruption, add a little rose water to sandalwood paste and apply on the face. Wash off with plain water after 15 minutes. For the scalp, mix one teaspoon each of vinegar and honey with one egg. Massage the mixture lightly into the scalp. Leave on for half an hour and then wash the hair. Rinse well with water. Or, give the hair hot oil therapy. Heat pure coconut oil and apply on your hair. Then dip a towel in hot water, squeeze out the water and wrap the hot towel around the head, like a turban. Keep it on for five minutes. Repeat the hot towel wrap 3-4 times. This helps the hair and scalp absorb the oil better. Leave it overnight and wash hair the next day.

Eyes should be washed with plain water several times. Soak cotton wool pads in chilled rose water and use them over the eyes as eye pads. Lie down and relax for 15 minutes. This really helps to remove fatigue and brightens the eyes.

Improper daily hygiene can undermine the health in a number of ways. The skin is influenced by many external factors, like dirt, chemical pollutants and bacteria.

By daily washing, bathing and cleaning, we can help in removing this and keeping ourselves free from infections and accumulation of toxic wastes. Dirt and pollutants can block the pores of the skin and hamper the excretion of wastes. As you know, the skin excretes waste substances through sweat. Sweat and sweat deposits also settle on the skin and must be removed daily. In fact, it is the decomposition of bacteria in sweat that causes an unpleasant body odour and decomposition begins to occur about six hours after you sweat.

Daily bath is a must. All parts of the body should be washed well, specially the neck, armpits and feet. These are areas where germs accumulate. Apart from a mild soap, you would need a clean rough-textured washcloth or loofah, sponge, a long-handled brush for the back, a pumice stone, a nail brush, an aromatic oil, cologne, talcum powder.

If you have dry skin, a pre-bath cream or oil application will help. Sponges are ideal for soaping the skin, while a washcloth helps to scrub the body. This not only removes dirt and pollutants, but also helps to cleanse the skin of dead cells and stimulate circulation.

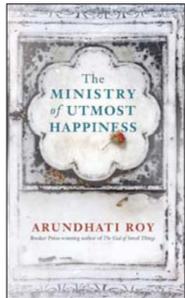
A pumice stone can be used on the elbows and heels. An aromatic oil can be added to the bath water.

Talcum powder during summer helps sweat to evaporate. Use a cologne or deodorant soon after your bath while the skin is still damp. Pay special attention to the feet. After washing them well, dry them thoroughly and apply talcum powder, during the hot weather. In summer wear open footwear, so that the sweat evaporates. This helps to avoid fungal infections like athlete's foot and ring worm, which grow on moist skin.

Cleanliness and hygiene also extend to your clothes. Sweat clings to clothes and leads to bad odour. Change your clothes daily. Wear cotton clothes in summer.

Utmost happiness after 20 years

Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, which hit the bookstands across India on June 6, comes 20 years after the author's *The God of Small Things*, which won the Booker Prize in 1997 and was a bestseller in more than 30 languages worldwide. Excerpts:



The first time she made her way past the crowd — the sellers of itars and amulets, the custodians of pilgrims' shoes, the cripples, the beggars, the homeless, the goats being fattened for slaughter on Eid and the knot of quiet, elderly eunuchs who had taken up residence under a tarpaulin outside the shrine — and entered the tiny red chamber, Jahanara Begum became calm. The street sounds grew faint and seemed to come from far away.

She sat in a corner with her baby asleep on her lap, watching people, Muslim as well as Hindu, come in ones and twos, and tie red threads, red bangles and chits of paper to the grille around the tomb, beseeching Sarmad to bless them. It was only after she noticed a translucent old man with dry, papery skin and a wispy beard of spun light sitting in a corner, rocking back and forth, weeping silently as though his heart was broken, that Jahanara Begum allowed her own tears to fall. This is my son, Aftab, she whispered to Hazrat Sarmad. I've brought him here to you. Look after him. And teach me how to love him. Hazrat Sarmad did.

For the first few years of Aftab's life, Jahanara Begum's secret remained safe. While she waited for his girl-part to heal, she kept him close and was

fiercely protective of him. Even after her younger son, Saqib, was born she would not allow Aftab to stray very far from her on his own. It was not seen as unusual behaviour for a woman who had waited so long and so anxiously for a son.



When Aftab was five he began to attend the Urdu-Hindi madrasa for boys in Chooriwali Gali (the bangle-seller's lane). Within a year he could recite a good part of the Quran in Arabic, although it wasn't clear how much of it he understood — that was true of all the other children too. Aftab was a better than average student, but even

from the time he was very young it became clear that his real gift was music. He had a sweet, true singing voice and could pick up a tune after hearing it just once. His parents decided to send him to Ustad Hameed Khan, an outstanding young musician who taught Hindustani classical music to groups of children in his cramped quarters in Chandni Mahal. Little Aftab never missed a single class. By the time he was nine he could sing a good twenty minutes of bada khayal in Raag Yaman, Durga and Bhairav and make his voice skim shyly off the flat rekhab in Raag Pooriya Dhanashree like a stone skipping over the surface of a lake. He could sing Chaiti and Thumri with the accomplishment and poise of a Lucknow courtesan. At first people were amused and even encouraging, but soon the snick ering and teasing from other children began: He's a She. He's not a He or a She. He's a He and a She. She He, He She Hee! Hee! Hee! (ANS)

QUIZ

1. What is the unit that is used to express nuclear sizes?
2. When was the first Journalist Day celebrated all over the country?
3. Who received the World Health Organisation Director-General's Special Recognition Award for global tobacco control for 2017?
4. What is the name of the hottest star that was discovered recently?
5. In which year were the names of the Laccadive, Minicoy and Amindivi islands changed to Lakshadweep by an Act of Parliament?
6. The world's oldest Buddhist shrine was destroyed in the Nepal quake in 2015. What is the name of the shrine?
7. Which celebrity is credited for inventing gravity-defying 45-degree lean shoes?
8. Who wrote the first history book?

Picks of the day: Identify the personalities



Last week's answers: 1. The statue of the Fearless Girl 2. Liar Liar GE2017 3. Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein of *The Washington Post* 4. C.A Bhavani Devi 5. *Cleyera grandiflora* 6. Vijaydan Detha 7. Juan Manuel Santos 8. *Los Tres Golpes*: mix of mashed plantain, fried eggs, slices of deep-fried cheese, and circular slabs of crispy, fried and strangely addictive salami

Picks of the day

1. Nikos Kazantzakis 2. Benjamin Earl King 3. Jacob Zuma 4. Runa Laila

The winner of last week's quiz contest is Chesrang Sangma

Send in your answers to sundayshillong@theshillongtimes.com. Names of the first five persons with all correct answers will be published next week and the first entry with all correct answers will get **Rs 200**. You have to collect the prize money from *The Shillong Times* office after providing proof of your identification.

Need to call a spade a spade

Journalism is a noble profession. It gives one the power to tell the truth and expose the corrupt. The power of words surpasses the power of money and muscle. A well-researched report and strong words can make a lasting impact on society and can even bring about a perceivable change.

With the advent of technology, journalism has attained a different dimension. The electronic medium brings news faster than newspapers. Social media flash breaking news even faster. But the role of print media in forming mass opinion has not diminished, especially in a place like Shillong. While news can be obtained at ease using technology, for analysis of news one needs to turn the pages of a quality newspaper.

However, no matter how glamorous journalism looks from a distance,

the job is tedious and needs undivided focus of a professional. Again, print and electronic media have their own challenges. With so much competition in the media sector, time is a major challenge and everyone has to chase the deadline. One's efficiency will be judged not only by the journalistic but also how fast one can deliver.

In the race to remain in the game, professional ethics sometimes take a backseat and one has to compromise his or her stand. In doing so, not only the credibility of the profession is lost but also the common man is misled. This has to change and the old glory of the profession has to be revived so that only truth prevails at the end.

(Contributed by Priyanka S Raj)

(Continued from Page A)

"It is all up to the Government to decide because we NGOs have continually stressed that a mechanism is important. We feel the Government should put on hold everything to decide first and then to release the KSU members," FKJGP's Rani says.

Green alarm

An important factor that should have worried not only KSU or FKJGP but even the Government and the local population is that how the project will affect the natural diversity of the State and how much green cover will it lose in order to lay down the railway tracks.

Saikia of IIT-Guwahati says the political class of Meghalaya will have to be extra alert that the rail-

ways do not bring "massive environmental degradation".

"The classic example is that in Uttarakhand. Rapid improvement in transport facilities led to rapid but unwise development of Uttarakhand. The 2012 disaster was a result of this. The people of Meghalaya will have to ensure that railways bring only limited damage but more good," he adds. Heavy rain led to floods and landslides in Uttarakhand in August 2012 killing more than 30 people and destroying several villages.

In the doldrums

Work on the railway project in the Meghalaya portion has stopped

though it is in progress in the Assam part. An official of the Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) says workers are scared as the May 27 attack was not the first time. In 2015, a similar attack took place and without provocation.

"I think the mass here wants the railways because they are aware of the benefits. It is only a handful of people who are creating trouble. Meghalaya, unlike Manipur or Nagaland, is not a militancy-hit state. Those who are creating hurdles are locals... The Prime Minister (Narendra Modi) wanted railway line in every northeastern state by 2020. But the way things are progressing, 2030 also seems a distant dream," says the NFR official.

The word of caution had also come from veteran politician D.D Lapang who had said if the violence continued then the State might lose its chance of moving a step forward on the development path.

NFR could not give a time frame as to when they can start work again in Meghalaya putting the project in the doldrums for now.

Dialogue is the need of the hour and all stakeholders — the Government and the opposition, the protesters and the public — need to participate. Instead of rhetoric and hyperboles, politicians need to be logical and honest in explaining the pros and cons of railways to the protesters who, in turn, can be less emotional and more practical in analysing the future prospects.

(With inputs from Nabamita Mitra)

ESSAY COMPETITION

Pen is mightier than sword and words are louder than scream. So Sunday



Shillong is giving readers between 20-26 years of age the opportunity to write not more than 600 words on 'India and secularism'. The best essay will get Rs 200. The winner will have to collect the money from *The Shillong Times* office after providing proof of identification.

Off The Track

