



Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana

Devdutt Pattanaik

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It is significant that the only character in Hindu mythology, a king at that, to be given the title of ekam-patni-vrata, devoted to a single wife, is associated with the most unjust act of abandoning her in the forest to protect family reputation. This seems a deliberate souring of an uplifting narrative. Rams refusal to remarry to produce a royal heir adds to the complexity. The intention seems to be to provoke thought on notions of fidelity, property and self-image.

And so the mythologist and illustrator Devdutt Pattanaik retells the Ramayana, drawing attention to the many oral, visual and written retellings composed in different times, in different places, by different poets, each one trying to solve the puzzle in its own unique way.

This book approaches Ram by speculating on Sita: her childhood with her father, Janaka, who hosted sages mentioned in the Upanishads; her stay in the forest with her husband, who had to be a celibate ascetic while she was in the prime of her youth; her interactions with the women of Lanka, recipes she exchanged, emotions they shared; her connection with the earth, her mother, and with the trees, her sisters; her role as the Goddess, the untamed Kali as well as the demure Gauri, in transforming the stoic prince of Ayodhya into God.

Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana Details

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From Reader Review Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana for online ebook

R K says

3.5

Just a note, I won't be marking this book as spoiler filled because it's a book that is relevant to Indian culture. It's like posting a review on the Bible and marking it as "contains spoilers". It doesn't really make sense. Also, if you've never read the Ramayana, then I highly recommend reading a simple version first to get an understanding of the story before jumping into this book.

Devdutt Pattanaik is a storyteller and this book unfolds as such. It's similar to the stories your grandparents told you when you were young. The narration is simple but the message gets across, and for a complex tale that is the Ramayana, simplification is best. The story of the Ramayana is not so much a story as it is philosophy. Obviously, when you are young you don't think with such depth but the questions remain, no? It's only when you're older that you go back to seek answers and find that the characters from an epic written 1000s of years ago are seeking the same answers.

I'll be honest, the Ramayana is not my most favourite story and Ram is not someone I wholly admire (the horror, I know). Now most of you may think it's because Ram abandons Sita at the end. The whole oppression against women issue, and you would be right. I won't lie by saying that I wasn't disappointed by this "hero", "holder of rules" "God on Earth" man. But, I think it's partly due to the version of the story that I was told, and I think a good storyteller is one who is able to bring complexity to the characters. The characters in most Indian stories are very complex because of the ideologies they carry that show the complexity that is Indian culture. Pattanaik knows this and is trying to reveal these complexities in a way that's understandable to the modern day reader, and I think he did a good job because he was able to make me see Ram in a different way.

One thing I really liked was that Pattanaik kept the chapters short and at the end of each chapter, he included a small section that informed the reader about the various interpretations that particular chapter has in different cultures. Indian culture and religion is very different from most cultures as they allow for many interpretations and interjections that make sense to the culture. In some versions Ram is an avatar (btw, it's pronounced av-thar) of Vishnu. In others, he is unaware of his godliness. All interpretations are accepted because it's not the story that's being communicated but the ideas.

Pattanaik also informed the readers of changes that were made throughout the centuries. He also prods the reader to question the characters. Question their actions, thoughts, and behaviors. He includes different interpretations made by scholars and poets and asks you if it's right or not. Finally, he includes Western interpretations of the story. He mentions how these interpretations are often inaccurate and have been purposely exploited in the past to justify British rule over India. Even now, most Western interpretations are sadly inaccurate. But it's not their fault. Western language lacks the ability to accommodate for Indian ideals (and it's not like the British were very open to accommodations during their colonizing days.) and so the main ideas get lost in translation. He also points a finger to oppressors and politicians who use these stories to justify their campaign. Showing Ram as a Greek Hero (strong, muscular, fierce, etc) is inaccurate. Justifying violence and oppression against women due to the way women are treated in the stories is also inaccurate because not only is it wrong but an injustice to the story itself.

So why are we being told this story from Sita's perspective? It's not like she does much and Pattanaik can't

make her into some war heroine as that would deviate far too much from the story and her character. I think it's to make the reader see how she views the world, her people, Ram, Ravana, and life itself. It's said over and over again how she is the independent one. That Ram needs her but she doesn't need him. That she chooses of her own will to follow him into exile and into the forest when she is abandoned. And where most readers relate to Lakshmana's confusion and anger at Ram's abandonment, Sita never gets angry at him. I for one, never understood her character and as to why she wouldn't be pissed off by the fact that she was being shone this way. But from this book, I understood why she acted the way she did. Pattanaik also humanizes Ram. He shows various instances where Ram is openly expressing himself and the one that was new for me was when he speaks to his sons about his feelings on abandoning Sita. Ram is praised as the upholder of rules. He puts the kingdom above everything, even himself and those he loves. When rumors start about Sita, he has no choice but to continuously sacrifice what he loves for the success of the kingdom and he starts to hate it. He will always love the kingdom and its people but even he admits that he's in misery without the freedom of the forest and without Sita beside him.

Ananya Vetaal says

Ramayana is a story of rules, conduct, sacrifice and patience. It is about gathering strength to let it go. Parts of it may be harsh, even heartbreaking but that is how life is. Parting with this book was tough. It is not a very happy ending but then Ram would not look at it like that. Calm and balanced, he always puts Ayodhya first and not himself. This selfless and sacrificial outlook makes him Vishnu walking on earth and elevates him to the position of god.

Sucharita Paul says

"Within infinite myths lies an eternal truth
Who sees it all?
Varuna has but a thousand eyes
Indra, a hundred,
You and I, only two"

Ramayana is an age old saga that has been passed on from generation to generation through two primary means of communication - maukhik (orally) and likhit (written). Another medium got added to the list much later - that of moving pictures, and this has been utilized multitude of times in narrating the epic tale. But perhaps Devdutt Pattanaik's Sita, is the one, which has touched me in a way no other could. Unlike Mahabharata, Ramayana is considered to be a much simpler tale with lesser diversions and sub-tales, but here in Sita, you get all that there is to read and understand about the story of Ram - the seventh incarnate of Lord Vishnu. The supporting tales mentioned here, do not hinder the flow of the narrative, rather they are brought out at the most logical junctures where they actually belong. The author tries to bring many sub-stories, regional twists and beliefs into the fold of the main legend. The action of Ravana is compared and contrasted with some Greek and Roman mythological figures as well. Furthermore, there is perfect dose of analysis and commentary part in the narrative which makes 'Sita' an introspective piece of writing.

In order to stay true to the title 'Sita', the author has attempted to bring a woman's perspective in the

proceedings, which has otherwise been left unregistered by the earlier story tellers. It begins with Sita's early years in her maternal house. We have been generously introduced to the childhood period of Rama and his three brothers, however, there is not much that has been written about Sita as a child. The things that interested her, her pastimes, her relationship with her parents, sisters and others in the kingdom - do not find much of a mention in many writings. Here, she is portrayed as a well-read, wise, strong and confident character. It is amazing how filling colours in a pencil sketch takes the whole creation to a completely different level and that is what happens to the character of Sita. Pattanaik also highlights the relationship that Sita shared with other women characters - the queens of Ayodhya, Anusuya, Mandodari and Trijata. Their conversations make it easy for the readers to understand the personalities and thought process of various actors.

Though a religious epic, Ramayana is a story which leaves many wondering and questioning about the fairness and rightfulness of the decision taken by Ram in banishing his pregnant wife. In Sita, Devdutt Pattanaik has tried to address this sensitive issue by highlighting the divine connection that Sita had with Ram, and vice-versa. Sita tried to pacify the embarrassment of Lakshman thus - 'Ram is dependable, hence God. I am independent, hence Goddess. He needs to do his duty, follow rules, and safeguard reputation. I am under no such obligation. I am free to do as I please: love him when I am separated from him, love him when I am rescued by him, love him when he clings to me, love him even when he lets me go.' This makes Sita a highly magnanimous person and one worthy of everyone's admiration and adulation.

This book definitely comes strongly against the male domination and blind propagation of Dharma. It is a perfect take on the inner strength and resilience of women and how they don't always need a man to feel complete. But even when delivering a strong picture of women, this book binds her to an image of sacrifice and withdrawal which has always been expected out of a woman. As a reader, there are few questions that have been playing around in my mind. Why do women always have to choose self-retreat as a glorious option when fighting patriarchy? Even when self-realisation is a great state of mind, why can't we opt for a different ending to each life even in fiction?

I would like to quote a few nuggets of intellect that would make one introspect and contemplate over and over again-

"Kanyaa-daan - I give you Lakshmi - wealth, who will bring you pleasure and prosperity. Grant me Saraswati, wisdom. Let me learn the joy of letting go. Indaan only wisdom is asked in exchange, unlike dakshina - where wealth is asked in exchange and bhiksha, where power is asked in exchange."

"Before your wife came into your life, you were a student, with no claim on property. After your wife leaves your life, you must become a hermit, with no claim over property. Only as long as she is by your side do you have claims over wealth. Without her, you cannot perform yagna, you must only perform tapasya."

"For many, the Ramayana is Ramveda, great wisdom, and the relationship between Ram and Sita is of word (mantra) and meaning (artha): one cannot exist without the other."

"By refusing to return to Ram, Sita turns away from sanskriti and the rules of society. She does not need social structures to give her status. She chooses the earth, where there are no boundaries and rules."

Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana is a brilliant read. It explores the enigma of Sita and explains her real strength of character. Devdutt Pattanaik has the acuteness to bring out the untapped wisdom that is lying deep in the mythological stories of yore. It makes you rethink the pre-set social norms of right and wrong. Devdutt is a master story teller. With this book he gives detailed insights about stories that have been

told for ages and effortlessly manages to makes us fall in love with mythology.

Gorab Jain says

First line - To all those who believe that the Mahabharata is more realistic and complex than the Ramayana: May they realize that.....

Well researched and presented in a crisp format. The illustrations are apt and marvellous, and the author's commentary at the end of each chapter is the icing on the cake, setting the context by summarising the various prominent versions.

Has ignited the curiosity to read the various versions of different character's point of views.

Loved the contrasts and linkings with the Mahabharata:

1. The epic Ramayana is aligned along the Dakshina-patha or the south highway that connects northern India to southern India while the epic Mahabharata is aligned along Uttara-patha or the north highway that connects western India to eastern India. Thus the two great epics cover the length and breadth of India.
 2. In the Ramayana, Vishnu as Ram supports Surya's son (Sugriva) against Indra's son (Vali). In the Mahabharata, Vishnu as Krishna supports Indra's son (Arjuna) against Surya's son (Karna). Thus balance is restored over two lifetimes.
 3. In the Mahabharata, Vishnu as Krishna encourages the burning of a forest to build a city. In the Ramayana, Shiva as Hanuman resides in a forest and burns down a city.
 4. Both the Ramayana and the Mahabharata end not with victory of the heroes but knowledge transmission, a reminder that the war is less about things and more about thoughts.
 5. Both the Ramayana and the Mahabharata raise the question of whether kingdoms are the properties of kings. Both agree that they are not.
-

Priya says

I never really liked the Ramayana. Reasons:

1. I thought it was too righteous or glorifying the righteous
2. I did not like the fact that Rama abandoned Sita
3. I thought it did not have shades of grey like the Mahabharata.

But let me tell you, that after reading this version, this retelling of it, I am blown, I am impressed! Particularly by Rama and his wisdom. I have now learnt to appreciate Hanuman much better. In fact, this story shows not just the love of a man for his wife, it shows love of an inspired soul towards the source of inspiration.

Plus the book always has Pattanaik's trait of explaining the deeply intertwined mythology. And connecting the dots of various rituals all over India and threading them with Ramayana story. In this book, we also read about the Javanese and Sri Lankan rituals/origins/heritage sites. I loved particularly the verbal exchanges between Ram and Lakshman, Ram and Sita and in many cases, Hanuman and Lankites. I was happy to know that Rama too was in despair. He was normal like the rest of us. He was freaking out, he was losing it and the only reason why he was a much better individual is the speed with which he recovered from desperate

situations. The way he turned the situation into something that can grow inspiration.

As opposed to the tiresome, elongated, highly wannabe prose rich version of Ashok Banker, Pattanaik is clever with his brevity.

Most of all, I appreciate the fact that the book showed what's actually evil. I did feel exercising control against the will of another is evil. That is certainly demonstrated well in Pattanaik's words. Sita particularly talks a lot about free will in a way that is difficult to compare with the world right now.

The end is written in a way that doesn't spell distaste for Rama in your head, as is usually the case. Today Rama is slightly unpopular among urban audience because of what might be construed as chauvinistic and selfish decisions. Pattanaik brings forth the power of Sita to turn around this perception. "He is God, he can abandon no one and I am Goddess, I cannot be abandoned by anyone" is a perfect quote and note to start and end the book. In short, Pattanaik turned me into a Ramayana fan. I would say this is the best retelling of the story in modern times!

Apart from all this, I like the art too. Devdutt Pattanaik cleverly puts in wonderful unique mural like art all over the book, which makes it more interesting to read. I loved the way the publishers have dealt with the book as well, its design, its art, everything.

Pooja says

This book is fantastic.

My mind was blown seeing the epic story of Ramayana in a different yet the very way we should and have to see it.

I've been introduced to Ramayana by TV series, movies. Never through literature. I've its book in my home. But every time I read it, I have to put it down in the middle. Next time when I read it, I read from the start and the same story goes and is going since many years.

Why this book is different than all the stories I've heard? I've heard stories from Ram's perspective, watched series from Ravan's perspective. All these years of wanting to read something from Sita's point of view but never really realizing it and coming across this book was I'll say totally coincidence.

I have lost the count of people I've told this story to.

The starting is superb. The ending is mesmerizing. All in all, it filled the parts of Ramayana where I had doubts since ages.

Reading Sita, in my opinion, was reading a fan fiction of Ramayana but in a good way, a way I would have liked to read.

Well, it bugged me a big time, that Sita is not the superhero of this book at some points. When I saw the whole picture, it didn't bother me. I didn't mind who was the hero at what parts or anything.

Avanthika says

I've always liked Mahabharat more than the Ramayan. There's no fun when there are no shades of evil. But then, when I read the story again and again, I found the "righteousness and perfectionism" of Ram to be the real evil.

I loved the prologue which compared Ramayan & Mahabharat which actually sounded like a warning of Ram's actions to me.

" To all those who believe that the Mahabharata is more realistic and complex than the Ramayana : In one, the protagonist is a kingmaker who can move around rules, while in the other protagonist is a king who must uphold rules, howsoever distasteful they may be. "

From Valmiki's script which was dated back to 2nd century BCE, Devdutt has interpolated different works across centuries which are about Ramayana. So what you have in your hand, brings to light the stories you have never heard of.

Devdutt Pattanaik's Sita throws a deeper insight into Sita's life. Hanuman goes in search of Ram's lost ring inside the earth and in Nag-log, Vasuki demands Hanuman to share Sita's story. Here it starts, the story of Sita, the martyr of Ramayana.

Greatest injustice in Ramayana, according to me, is done to Sita. Being a princess, she went to forest with Ram to accomplish his exile. She was then kidnapped by Ravana where she spends the most stressful time of her life. Her conversations with the Lankan women are all perfect. Just perfect. It doesn't stop there, Sita's suffering. Ram returns triumphantly rejoicing Ravan's death and gossips about Sita's purity perturbs Ram. Lakshman takes Sita to leave her in the forest taking in account Ram's order. Lakshman is very much upset and disturbed, and Sita utters these words -

"You feel your Ram has abandoned his Sita, don't you? But he has not. He cannot. He is God - he abandons no one. And I am Goddess - I cannot be abandoned by anyone." I loved every bit of Sita from then on. Her attitude is icing on the cake.

Kalidasa's Raguvamsa, Bhoja's champu ramayana, Kamban's Ramavatharam, Akbar's collections of Ramayana Paintings, 1943's film Ram Rajya (the only film seen by Mahatma Gandhi) , Ramanand sagar's Ramayana, Ashok Banker's Ramayana series are all taken into account while Devdutt penned down this book. The thing which is lovely is, Devdutt's book reveals new and minute details about Ramayana which includes rural-side stories of it.

The best book on Ramayan I've ever read :)

Manu says

Fantastic!

When I reached page 250 (almost 5/6th of the book!) - at which point Sita is freed - I finally allowed myself the comparison that had been bubbling inside my head for a while. Jaya, an illustrated retelling of the Mahabharata by the same author, ranks among my top five books of all time. Thus far, this book had not really touched those levels. Rationalisation was easy - the Mahabharata is perhaps a more complex and interesting tale because of the sheer number of characters, the back stories, and the grey shades that permeate every character in it. There were many little nuggets I hadn't known about earlier, and that made the reading more exciting. On a relative note, the Ramayana is more 'linear', and there are a limited number of layers that the author can add, to situations or characters. I consoled myself with the fact that the narration was as spectacular as Jaya, and I had gained at least a couple of perspectives beyond my current understanding of the epic and its underlying philosophies. (Aham, and Aham Brahmasmi, for example) I did wonder though, why the author had to call it Sita - there wasn't really a justification.

And then, I continued reading. It is in Uttara- Ramayana that the author really comes into his own, almost like a reflection of his protagonist - Sita. The author had mentioned a dichotomy of prakriti (nature) and

sanskriti (culture) on several occasions, and Sita's separation from Ram gives her the freedom to live her life in tune with the former. This section shows the maturity of Sita's character and also becomes a justification of the title, for we truly understand that Ram and Sita are inseparable as concepts. Despite knowing the story, the narration in the final pages really tug at your heart!

Ram's characterisation also deserves a mention. He is steadfast in his dharma, and does not expect any understanding from anyone else, including fate. He implicitly knows that Sita is the only one capable of understanding his reasons and actions fully. His perspectives are not blind - in fact, several times in the course of the book, he justifies the positions and actions of characters who might be considered antagonists. His faith in karma and dharma are unflappable and the author brings out the Maryada Purushottam really well.

The narrative largely remains faithful to Valmiki's version but also has an eclectic mix of other versions. At some points in the book, we also get an understanding not just of (the then) prevalent societal mores, but also their reasons.

It is a wonderful read, and takes its rightful place beside Jaya as a favourite!

P.S. If you have read Jaya, and noted the difference between Jaya and Vijaya, watch out for the parallel take on Durga and Shakti.

Miria says

This book made me see Ram through Sita's eyes! Truly he is the best avatar of all Vishnu's avatars. After I finished the book I clenched it to my heart and uttered "Ram..... Raaammmmm.... Raaaaaammmmmmm...". Pattanaik has done an extensive research for the book. As a child, I was only familiar with Kamba Ramayanam although I have heard about Anjaneyar's version (the one he wrote on trees) and also Valmiki's. This book provided a comparative study of different versions of Ramayana. I recommend this book for EVERYBODY.

||Swaroop|| says

Devdutt Pattanaik's Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana is indeed an interesting retelling of the epic Ramayana. Clearly, a lot of research and hard work has gone in the making of this book. Ramayana is all about an ideal way of living and Devdutt Pattanaik presents before us a lot of ideals and examples.

However, I had a very different expectation from this book. I was looking for the Retelling of the Ramayana from Sita's perspective and there was nothing much from that point of view in this book.

From her faith came her patience.

"Agni, the fire-god, said, 'I burn only impure things. This one I cannot burn, for she is pure of thought and body.'

Shruti says

I never had a fascination for Ramayana, because I've always seen Sita as a victim of gender oppression, who

spends her life loving and longing for Ram, only to be rejected not once but twice for no fault of hers.

However, this book gave me an entirely new perspective of the great epic. Pattanaik does not write it in the conventional manner by focusing the tale on Ram, rather his central character is Sita.

Pattanaik draws Sita as an independent, intelligent, calm and courageous woman who argues with Ram to join him in exile, stoically waits for Ram to rescue her from Lanka and later raises her children as a single mother. It is now that I can see that Sita could always make her own life, with or without Ram, yet she gives up everything for Ram and his kingdom.

I've also discovered many unknown facts of the characters. I didn't know that Sita was a great cook or that she was the only person, apart from Ram, who could effortlessly lift Shiva's bow, or that she invented a lot of board games that are still played in rural India.

The book also brings new prospective to Ram. Pattanaik justifies Ram's actions, pointing out that whatever Ram has done, is for the reputation of the Raghu-Clan. He is the 'Maryada Purushottam', who never breaks any rules and thus abandons Sita despite his own unhappiness. He also never remarried, like most of the men in that time, making him 'Ekam Patni-vrata'.

Pattanaik blends together many retellings and narratives of the Ramayana from different regions across India and outside India, and adds notes at the end of each chapter. I loved the artwork that has been applied by the author in each section.

The conversations between the different characters are so well crafted and insightful. After almost every paragraph it motivates us to pause and think, and then introspect on our own life. The book stresses that there are various ways of looking at the Ramayana. As Pattanaik puts it,

"Within infinite myths lies an eternal truth

Who sees it all?

Varuna has but a thousand eyes

Indra, a hundred

You and I, only two."

Sita is a must read and is one such book that uncovers more layers on consecutive readings.

Sakshi says

The stark difference in villains and heroes and of right and wrong in Ramayana reveals that it is either only an imagined narration or a story so old retold many times that it adds events to recreate the moral positions of gods and demons to reinforce the basic storyline eventually. This is what Devdutt Pattanaik emphasizes in this retelling as he acknowledges first the many re-tellers of Ramayana - the mothers, fathers, grandparents, aunts, uncles and teachers. In the case of Mahabharata, it is not so.

The title Sita at first eluded me as I was expecting this to be Sita's tale which will answer questions particularly about Sita's exile and death. By the end of the book, Hanuman refers to Sita as Ram's Sita and Ram as Sita's Ram. That's when the entire idea behind the title unfolds. The two concepts Sita and Ram are not separate and by calling it Ramayana we are forgetting Sita. Sita's exile is only one event like various others to communicate the idea of commitment and it questions - to whom? So in the Uttar-kand as she says to Lakshman, Sita is the Goddess or nature she is free from the obligations of the institution of marriage. She

is devoted to Ram because of her love for him. However, Ram is God he represents culture he has a duty to his kingdom and his duties as king, but also as a husband. These two different positions that he is in is the cause of Ram's anguish. On the contrary, Sita is free as she accepts the course of nature and questions cultural constructs as exemplified in her conversations and attendance in the discussions of Upanishads. When Ram calls her back she is not bound to him as a wife, nor as a queen but Ram was bound to her as her husband. That's why perhaps she sees that going back to Ram on the condition of proving herself once more means to enter the city again as Ram's wife and not Ram's Sita with the same rules and chose instead to dissolve herself in the earth to align freely with nature.

In focussing on the idea of social relationships, Ramayana delves into the concept of devotion displayed by its many characters Sita, Lakshman, Bharata, Hanuman, Shabari who unlike Ram make choices out of affection and so break the rules. To say that Ram represents the struggle with rational and emotional will be too simplistic but it's nevertheless true of Ramayana. So I feel that there was a swift and unpredictable change in Ram at the end of the exile. In the epic, we are always evaluating Ram's decision; he is either a prince, a God, a King, or even A husband or A brother. Only in some brief instances is he not in a social role.

This book draws out the different stories that add shades to Ramayana. Mainly the stories that are not a part of either Valmiki or Bengali Ramayana. They tell a history of their own. I liked the story from Orissa where after her return to Ayodhya, Sita is one day asked by her maids to show how attractive Raavan was. She says she had not seen his face but draws a picture from the reflection of Raavan she saw in the sea when he was abducting her. This is at once an episode of Sita's innocence and her personal growth. What she originally restrained from looking at she draws in front of her maids. This failure to understand the boundaries of her position which eventually starts off the gossip in Ayodhya is so unacceptable to the moral conscience. Perhaps that is where I feel Ram was wiser as he saw that the people of Ayodhya are not capable of viewing things from any other perspective than their own. A theme of understanding that is repeated in Indic thought of Aham Brahmasmi (tat tvam si).

Septisme says

"‘She never listens,’ snapped Ram. ‘When I told her to stay in the palace, she insisted on accompanying me to the forest. When you told her to stay inside the hut in the forest, she insisted on stepping out. When I was rude and tried to set her free from the obligations of marriage after I killed Ravana, she insisted on walking through fire, displaying her chastity, and returning to this city with me. If I tell her that she is the subject of gossip and so cannot be associated with me in any way, she will ask complex questions that I will not be able to answer. It is best this way. She will understand. She has to understand.’"

So basically Ram dumped Sita because he did not have answers. Just like people who would basically suppress a human being because they do not confirm to their ideas. So basically to become "RAM" you turn into an egoistical patriarch?

Firstly this book had nothing to do with Sita and now the so called maryada purushottam (the word irks me to no end) dumps his wife and he is the Perfect King, whose rein we seek to replicate?

No Thanks! Give me an imperfect Mahabharata anyway.

Just FYI the rating of the book is because,

(a) The misleading title: there is nothing about Sita here

(b) Overfawning on Ram. Devdutt Pattanaik usually shows you the Devas with both their follies and greatness. The judgement is done by you as a reader. This book just seems like it was written by someone else.

Snigdha says

"Be the best you can be, in the worst of circumstances, even when no one is watching".

When a book is filled with such impelling and inspirational words who wouldn't like to read and muse upon the life we are living in present time and beyond.

This is a modern retelling of epic saga of war between evil and good. For a change, it's more focused on Sita, showcasing her in a heroic light rather than making it all about Ram, the Savior as told and believed since eternity.

The book is divided into multiple parts like Marriage, Exile, Abduction, Rescue and a final epilogue. Each part describes a period of Sita and Ram Life. Apart from their life, multiple other short stories are narrated to uncover the hidden facts about other less and more important characters of Ramayana. Each and every part is so beautiful crafted that you get entertained and at the same time take a moment to reflect it in your being.

As the central character is Sita, so we get to know many otherwise obscure facts about her and how she felt through the ups and downs of her life. Readers will also get a chance to see Sita and Ram's relationship in a new pink light which was never revealed before.

Overall it's a very impressive book written in most alluring words making the Ramayana retelling a wonderful read. The one piece in the book I liked the most goes like:

"Every human creates his own imagined version of the world, and of himself. Every human is therefore Brahma, creator of his own aham.

Aham Brahmasmi, I am Brahma.

Tat tvam asi, so are you.

We knot our imagination with fear to create aham. Tapasya and yagna are two tools that can help us unknot the mind, outgrow fear and discover atma, our true self."

Ramya (Idea Smith) says

I am utterly disappointed with this book. Let me make it clear at the start that I'm disappointed because of my expectations of the author, based on past books, and not because the book itself has major flaws.

After reading and enjoying 'The Pregnant King' and 'Jaya' by Devdutt Pattanaik, I had high expectations from this book. Dr. Pattanaik's story-telling, I thought had a marvelous way of constructing the narrative, devoid of the over devout tone that one finds in all religious stories across India. With 'Jaya', it allowed me to discern larger lessons, more intricate realizations from the nuances of Mahabharata, since it did not stick to the

formula of the Pandavas as starkly good and the Kauravas as big villains. 'The Pregnant King' had a similarly objective tone, while also telling a great story.

Sita, I'm afraid is a cop out. It is a narration of the Ramayan, exactly the way I've heard from every single religious person I've know. The title appears to be picked to throw you off, give the impression that this is another point of view of the Ramayan. But truly, Sita is a cardboard character at best, in this narrative and appears in very few chapters.

Ram is the starring superhero who can do evil. All his violent acts and decisions are miraculously vanished away by the victims claiming to be a curse that they are liberated from, by being slaughtered by Ram.

From a fiction point of view, Lakshman is the classic sidekick character, created only to glorify and showcase the protagonist's superiority. The only thing he does is pitch fits at every given opportunity, giving Ram a chance to say something profound.

Ravana is the worst depicted of the lot. Unlike Jaya, where character nuances were explored, in this tale, Ravana is depicted as an excessive supervillain. His wisdom and kingdom sovereignty (that have been talked about by historians) are brushed away with flimsy explanations, painting him out to be a bad guy, simply because he is BAD.

'Jaya' referenced several local legends and religious myths to add detail and colour to a complex story. 'Sita' in contrast, consistently refers to 4 or 5 other tellings of the Ramayan and in this book, just attempts to collate all of them in one narrative. Since, none of them really vary in any significant manner except for the most minor of details, this barely adds anything to the story.

If you have never read or heard the Ramayana, this is one narrative that's decently written. That said, it paints a very one-sided stark view of a narrative that is much more complex and thus, is incomplete and superficial.

Sneha says

i had major expectations from this book and probably that is why i got dissapointed.

the title suggests that the story is from sita's perspective, something similar to The Palace of Illusions where the narrative departs from tradition and gives an insight from draupadi's or kunti's perspective.

but this, it was all about RAM! the author through sita somehow tries to justify everything which we find wrong with ramayana (sita's exile for example) by calling it a western perspective or a selfless act of love!

nevertheless, the comparative approach of picking up ramayana from across the country, SE asia and folklore is commendable. the language is simple and at places beautiful. but overall the book did not leave me with a good feeling, call me a crazy over-analytical feminist!

Swetha says

When you're reading Devdutt Pattanaik during the Navratri season and the visitors, whose general perception is that you are good for nothing, accidentally catch a glimpse of your book, be sure to hear '*Oh, I follow all his observations online. He is brilliant!*'. All of a sudden you are revered and thought of as well-read. No

kidding.

My knowledge of Ramayana has stemmed from the following factors:

- 1) Parents using this ithihaasa as a means to implant virtues in me
- 2) Amar Chitra Katha
- 3) Other illustrated comics issued by Ramakrishna Math
- 4) TV shows with cacophonous characters plastered in artificial jewellery and outrageous makeup
- 5) Shlokas
- 6) To some extent, my own imagination

Through this book, I feel like I have had an extensive reading on the epic. Not only does Pattanaik present his retelling, he also produces facts on the Ramayana. He tells us how every class/religion/nationality has their own version of the Ramayana, reminding us that it has been circulated amongst varied people for centuries. While my eyes purposely skipped the illustrations, because I still have the magnificence of Amar Chitra Katha in my head, it certainly acts as an added advantage. The literature is graspable and I don't see why this shouldn't be circulated among the younger sections of the society to expand their knowledge.

Smitha says

One awesome read... words fail me to describe this book. But Pattanaik once again proved that however many times a story is repeated, there's always something new, if one is talented enough to get to know the reader's pulse.

It taught me many lessons of life which I oft forget... But still I am irked at Ram for all that he does towards Sita in the latter half of the book.

Lakshman is whom I can correlate with. He thinks almost like the common man. Sita was the strongest personality throughout the books... perhaps that's why the book is named after her.

Would surely read this again...

And would surely recommend this to all.. provided they are somewhat versed with the happenings in Ramayana.

Vinay Leo R. says

Mythology is a genre I've grown up reading or hearing stories from; especially Indian mythology. The tales of the Kauravas and Pandavas, Krishna, devas and daityas, gods and goddesses... they were my bedtime stories. The avatars of the gods also came into the picture, and I remember not just hearing stories from the Ramayana, but also watching the serial on television. So reading a retelling of the book began with the expectation that the magic of the original would be retained.

Like his retelling of the Mahabharata, Devdutt Pattanaik does the retelling of the Ramayana justice. He goes in depth into the great epic but doesn't just tell its story again. He offers his thoughts on the vignettes after them. My focus was primarily on the retelling, and I felt that how he narrates it keeps it short and interesting. And again, his artwork spread across the book helped in that aspect, and also to bring a picture to mind. He

manages to keep me engaged from the start, and also makes me happy to read about some parts that I hadn't previously known. He also explains some aspects of today's culture/traditions that I'd seen but felt a mystery.

These are characters which are so well known, yet the sketches when read seem fresh. I'd not known Rama as a character who never questioned, but accepted the way of life that had been taught to him, nor had I known the way Sita was born, or the quick tongue of the princess that always caught on a question. Similarly, I didn't know Lakshmana hadn't slept during the period of the exile. So there were aspects to each character that I liked discovering.

The Ramayana has many versions in India, original and retellings, both. At the end of each vignette, the author offers his thoughts on the vignette but also tells us which version he has referred to. And more often than not, those thoughts offered me food for thought, just like the original had. Some parts even made me wonder if what I had read before was true, or if it happened the way it is written in this epic retelling.

I'd felt Jaya: the retelling of the Mahabharata was the best I've read for retellings of that epic. I've no doubt that this book is the best retelling of the Ramayana that I've read to date too. Well researched, magically narrated, aptly illustrated... this book will remain a favorite.

Vinay Leo R. | A Bookworm's Musing

Samisha Sood says

Earlier i had doubt about this book as Devdutt's Jaya has better ratings and reviews on Goodreads. After finishing it up, I do not regret my decision of picking it up instead of 'Jaya'.

Devdutt makes ram a hero, then a villain by showing his wrong decisions and again justifies his doings. Throughout the book he keeps comparing krishna with ram; how they represent a complete contrast and yet together make one vishnu.

Hanuman is shown with the capability to outshine all but still modest and wise. Better described in Sita's words-

"Most people seek to be the sun around which world revolves. Very few are willing to be the moon, allowing others to be the sun despite having full knowledge that they can outshine everyone else."

No version or series or anime movie based on ramayana made me cry until i read two page description of Sita's descent in earth in chapter 'Sita returns to her mother'.

Page to page , this book has endless quotes which i wanted to bookmark or highlight and quote here. To quote one-

"He remained trapped in culture and nature set her free."
