



Goddess As A Symbol Of Inclusivity And Resistance In Feminist Revisionist Mythology

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Abstract: Feminist revisionist mythology examines stories from the perspective of women, thus problematizing patriarchal representations. Feminist writers use literature as a medium to resist sexism and mainstream binaries. Feminists have reclaimed the Goddess as a symbol of feminist identity, inclusivity, and resistance. Hélène Cixous, the French feminist, critiques phallocentrism, which led to the demonization of the serpent-goddess Medusa in the Greco-Roman period. This research examines the goddess in the feminist revisionist mythology of the Indian novelist Anuja Chandramouli. In the novel *Shakti*, Chandramouli uses the goddess as a symbol of resistance against patriarchal violence and authoritarianism symbolized by Indra. In addition to this, *Shakti* also symbolizes the divine feminine that heals from the trauma and violence inflicted by the patriarchal society.

Likewise, in the novel *Mohini*, Chandramouli uses the goddess to foster inclusivity and to critique the binary of self and the other. The research interprets the goddess as emerging as a symbol of inclusivity among various communities, especially during Deva-Asura conflicts. Chandramouli disrupts the idea of righteous violence and war used in the mythical framework, thereby critiquing power and politics. The research endeavors to study how the goddess is employed in feminist revisionism to create inclusive stories of cultural heritage and mythical wisdom. Further, *Mohini* is also an icon of queer identity and resistance against heteronormative modes of thinking.

Hence, the research examines the feminist revisionist novels *Shakti* and *Mohini* as texts that create narratives from female perspectives using Indian goddess mythologies. In addition to feminist consciousness, Chandramouli's novels also foster inclusive storytelling. Thus, creating inclusive myths in a diverse nation like India, where co-existence, harmony, and dialogue are essential. The paper also delves into the importance of recognizing heterogeneity, plurality, and subcultures.

Henceforth, the study locates the goddess as a symbol of stimulating inclusivity as well as resistance in mythology, society, and nation. Interestingly, goddess mythology is also used by the American writer Madeline Miller. The study also compares Miller's use of Greek mythology to resist patriarchal violence and challenge the negative portrayal of women in *Circe*.

Keywords- Feminist revisionism, Goddess, Inclusivity, Mythology, Resistance.

I. INTRODUCTION

Subversive language, however, must be constantly reinvented, because it is continually being co-opted by the powerful. — Carol P. Christ

Feminist revisionist mythology retells a story, mythology, fantasy, legend, culture, or religion from an informed feminist critical perspective, literary theory, and ideology. In the last decade, Indian novelists have been concurrently engaging with feminist revisionist mythology. These retellings of age-old mythical stories are from the point of view of women characters who were earlier neglected, silenced, and pushed to the margins. Patriarchy, gender norms, caste, economics, stereotypes, and power politics are some of the factors responsible for the subjugation of women, lower castes, and other genders in Indian society.

Mythology has been embedded in Indian consciousness since ancient times to impart wisdom and values, promote survival strategies, express aesthetic sensibility, and provide existential answers. In addition, myths have been used for historical record-keeping of Ancient India, and reflect the Indian ethos, belief system, and socio-cultural frameworks that unite people. Myths have been revised, retold, and recreated in C. Rajagopalachari's *Ramayana* (1967), S. L. Bhyrappa's *Parva* (1979), and *Prince of Ayodhya* (2003) by Ashok Banker. In 1938, Raja Rao inaugurated the art of foregrounding mythology in literature with *Kanthapura*. In recent times, there has been a resurgence in feminist revisionist texts such as Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* (2008), Kavita Kané's *Karna's Wife: An Outcast Queen* (2014), and Volga's *The Liberation of Sita* (2016) (Tripathi and Jani).

A common concern in feminist revisionist texts is to challenge patriarchy and the silencing of women's characters in the mainstream mythology. For instance, Kané brings to the centre the peripheral characters like Urmila and Satyawati. Thus, women writers use mythical revisionism as a site of asserting female identity; creating "alternative feminine discourse"; historicising a female literary tradition; and creating gynocentric myth (Dirghangi).

While there has been ample research on feminist revisionist mythology in the Indian space, there is a gap in the study of the Goddess as a symbol of female identity. Further, there is a chasm in the comparative examination of the goddesses in feminist revisionist novels across the globe. This research endeavours to study the goddess as a symbol of feminist reclamation, inclusivity, and resistance. The selected texts include the Indian mythological and historical fiction writer Anuja Chandramouli's *Shakti: The Divine Feminine* and *Mohini: The Enchantress*.

While the Goddess forms a vibrant core of Indian philosophical tradition, her re-emergence in the Western context gained momentum with the women's movement. Patricia 'Iolana has termed this literary phenomenon "Sacred Feminine literature," which is characterised by the use of the great mother archetypes, historical/mythical characters, historical contextualisation, female protagonists, and "universal theological beliefs". *The Mists of Avalon* and *The Da Vinci Code* incorporate Her myth, spirituality, and resacralization ('Iolana).

The western 20th-century women's historical fiction took a keen interest in Ancient Greece and Rome, resurrecting matrilineal religions and goddess culture. Contemporary novels like Madeline Miller's *Circe* and Jennifer Saint's *Ariadne* fall into the genre of feminist myth writings. Interestingly, Greek myths allow for a wide range of feminine archetypes as well as feminist subversions. For instance, Circe inverts patriarchal gender dynamics by transforming men into pigs, in turn, making them effeminate or powerless. Additionally, the text engages with topics of sexual violence and the rape culture. Ariadne tells the stories of women who experienced injustice, like Semele and Leto (Judge).

In "The Laugh of the Medusa," Helene Cixous critiques phallogentrism that led to the demonization of the once-revered serpent goddess Medusa. Feminists have reclaimed Medusa as a symbol of feminist identity, creative force, and assertion. Cixous asserts that *Écriture féminine* is a subversive feminine style of writing that registers female experiences in a language that disrupts phallogentrism by challenging binaries and repressions. Interestingly, this language can be traced to the "mother" or the "mother-child relation", in the "prelinguistic" stage before the child acquires the male-dominated language (Abrams and Harpham). Some of the contemporary feminist mythological retellings exhibit the subversive qualities of *écriture féminine*, as they recentre the focus on women characters, who have either been marginalised or negatively portrayed by the male-dominated canon. The question arises whether the goddess is a symbol of inclusivity and resistance in the selected feminist revisionist mythology.

The current paper examines Chandramouli's selected novels, *Shakti* and *Mohini*, as revisionist texts that narrate Indian goddess mythologies from a feminist sensibility. Additionally, there is a comparative analysis of various feminist revisionist novels featuring goddess mythologies from across the globe. These

include *Circe* by Madeline Miller, *Daughter of the Moon Goddess* by Sue Lynn Tan, and *Lilith* by Nikki Marmery.

The research taps into the gap in reading global goddesses in feminist revisionist literature to trace shared tropes of feminist resistance and inclusivity. Hence, there is a comparative analysis of several contemporary global feminist revisionist writers who write mythologies from a woman's perspective, where the Goddess serves as a resistant yet inclusive agent, resplendent in these polarities that signify an illuminated understanding of the world.

II. SHAKTI AND MOHINI: EMBRACING INCLUSIVITY AND RESISTING BINARIES

Anuja Chandramouli is an Indian novelist whose works involve a wide oeuvre of genres like fantasy, epic retellings, historical fiction, and mythological revisionism. The writer has authored over fourteen novels, including *Arjuna: Saga of a Pandava Warrior-Prince* (2013), *Shakti: The Divine Feminine* (2015), *Ganga: The Constant Goddess* (2018), and *Mohini: The Enchantress* (2020).

Shakti: The Divine Feminine is a retelling of the story of the Mother Goddess from the perspective of goddesses Ushas, Durga, Kali, and the consciousness, Shakti herself. The book explores the diverse facets of the divine feminine in the innocent and hardworking Ushas, the warrior Durga, and the dark Kali. While these goddesses have emerged from Shakti, they have unique qualities, independent existence, and ideologies. Sisterhood is an important theme in the novel that counters male domination and patriarchy.

The Rigvedic Ushas, the goddess of dawn, marks the beginning of each day by riding in her chariot ahead of Surya, the Sun God. She is beautiful yet possesses "fearsome skills" as she drove away the asuras. Chandramouli shows the transformation of Ushas into Durga, after she is abused by Brahma. Here, the writer shows the goddess as resilient and powerful instead of being victimised. Nonetheless, the society indulges in victim shaming Ushas after she goes through a tragic incident of sexual violation. Indra, the ruler of the Devas, and his consort, Sachidevi, represent authoritarianism, patriarchy, violence, and apathy. Here, Sachi works in tandem with patriarchy to bring further torture to Ushas by inciting Indra to use his thunderbolt.

Ushas emerges as a valiant survivor who takes a vow to be a self-sufficient warrior. Later, the goddess transforms into Durga, "the invincible and inaccessible warrior goddess", who would defeat demonic forces and evil that brought grief to Ushas (*Shakti* 30-31). Ushas's twin sister, Ratri, symbolic of decay, accentuates dark thoughts in the minds of those who violated her sister. Thus, Ushas, Ratri, and Durga resist violence against women, domestic abuse, and rape. The text also sends a message that the "unforgivable wrongs" and "foul deeds" perpetuated against the innocent and meticulous Ushas would not go unpunished (*Shakti* 29-30). The goddess heals herself in the form of Durga. Brahma glorifies her in a hymn where she is described as "Mahamaya", "Prakriti", and Mother Nature". Hence, the text affirms that Brahma had realized the consequences of the heinous act he committed, and devotes his final moments to compose hymns glorifying "Shakti's magnificence".

Durga shows compassion even towards the buffalo demon, Mahishasura, whom she is destined to kill. The demon was responsible for mass murders, taking innocent lives, and committing atrocities. Durga sees that guilt and shame are embedded in his subconscious and encourages him to let go of destructive emotions at the time of death. Now, death comes as compassionate merging with the higher consciousness of the devi: "Every single journey taken by his soul along infinite twisting pathways had led him to this moment in her arms, which was to be the culmination of his travels. There had been so many lessons he had failed to learn, but in the little time he had left, his education was complete" (*Shakti* 157).

The celestial society is patriarchal, judgmental, greedy, classist, and casteist in the novel. Vedic scholarship dominates Indra's capital, Amaravathi, and is a norm in the male-dominated society where Indra reigns. Here, Vritra's goddess cult attracts certain followers who reject the materialistic ways of society. As a result, Indra, Sachi, and the sages are threatened by the rise of this cult that would challenge the status quo: religion, throne, and culture. However, Sage Dadichi expounds that Vritra had taken birth to cure his excessive hatred of women in his past life as King Chitraketu, which is why his teachings are "counterproductive":

Nubile girls are trafficked across the length and breadth of the land. Female foetuses are being slaughtered in the womb, and everywhere, there is violence against women accused of being possessed by unholy spirits. Vritra is right in saying that females are a precious gift and should be cherished. But his teachings have been entirely counterproductive (*Shakti* 191).

Dadichi and Brihaspati support the idea of “righteous war” and violence, and order Indra to slay Vritra. The patriarchs create a strong binary between goddess worshippers and the Vedic pantheon, normalising narratives of hate. Using powerful and emotional rhetoric, Brihaspati also spreads misinformation about the Divine Mother, reducing her to physical beauty, failing to understand the mysticism behind Shiva-Shakti: “In fact, he sprouted a third eye just to feast on her unparalleled beauty” (*Shakti* 195).

Followers of the goddess cults were persecuted, and non-conformist women were killed mercilessly in the witch hunt that followed the slaying of Vritrasura. Chandramouli critiques the erasure of goddess cults and the codification of “the iron laws- the Manusmriti-was framed by Svayambuha” to serve men’s needs. Here, there is a systematic censoring and silencing of the voices of goddess worshippers in the Indian context. Traces of Mother goddess worship have been found in Mohenjo-Daro, pointing to the reverence of the divine feminine, fertility, and motherhood that subsided after the coming of Aryans, as male divinities gained prominence (Chitgopekar). Further, this can also be related to the more recent Salem witch hunts in colonial America, where women were charged and executed for practising “witchcraft” (Mark).

Another instance of violence unfolds at Daksha’s yagna, where Shakti is humiliated, accused of “harlotry,” and stripped naked and beaten by a crowd led by Indra. The goddess refuses to indulge in violence; instead, she leaves her body. Shakti emerges as a protesting figure whose free-spiritedness refuses to be contained by the judgmental society. Her love for Shiva was immense, and it pains her to be separated from Him. After they reunite, Smriti helps her come to terms with the past and heal her relationship with Shiva. The pure essence of the divine feminine in Shakti was split into various forms: Parvati, Durga, and Kali, due to patriarchal violence. In the end, Shiva and Shakti are reunited, and the story comes full circle after their relationship has healed through love and forgiveness.

Like Shakti, the novel *Mohini* challenges the idea of a “righteous” war by exposing the destruction of Bhumi Devi and the loss of innocent lives. Goddess Mohini also stands for other genders and creates acceptance of love in all forms. The prelude to the text subverts the male-centric narratives of Mohini, which focused on her physicality and reduced her to a sexual object. Instead, the writer highlights her spiritual elements and autonomy. She is a skilled storyteller who reclaims her voice by speaking about ecological destruction, war, exploitation of women, and marginalisation of third genders.

Shakti reminds Vishnu that wars and violence would be fought, which is why his upcoming avatars required a touch of the divine feminine: “Wars will be fought for the ostensible purposes of peace and equal rights, but they will only serve to exacerbate senseless slaughter and as a breeding ground for greater injustice” (Mohini xi).

The author disrupts the conventional good versus evil binary in the understanding of the devas and asuras, where the devas are revered and the asuras demonised: “Even the fights didn’t always come down to Deva versus Asura. Sometimes Deva fought Deva and Asura fought Asura for mostly moronic reasons that are nevertheless profound in a child’s mind...It was all very complicated” (Mohini 13).

Moreover, the text shows how there were many similarities between the two half-siblings, who had descended from the sage Kashyap. His wives, Aditi and Diti, often mistake the other for their son as “there were simply too many of that squalling, irrepressible lot”. Nonetheless, the mothers were “convinced of the superiority of their own offspring” (Mohini 14). The offspring were “endlessly hungry for everything existence had to offer,” and among them, Indra had the most enormous thirst and appetite for ambition, power, and control. Chandramouli problematises Aditi’s wish for Indra’s victory over Diti’s sons. As explained by Diti, neither Devas nor Asuras would prevail as they represent the two forces in the three worlds.

Creation myths explain the larger phenomenon of life, providing answers to psychological, geographical, and existential questions. The three wives of Kashyap represent different things: Diti stands for Earth, Danu is connected to water bodies, and Aditi symbolises the expansive sky. Interestingly, the ancient Celtic mother goddess Danu is connected to “land, rivers, and fertility”. In the primordial world, the children of Diti and Danu were called the Asuras, who, along with the Devas, were the gods. Indra bifurcates the sky and the Earth, resulting in a duality between the two Gods in the second stage of creation. The Bhagavata Gita says that the Devas and the Asuras are internal qualities within every being, representing an internal conflict. The meaning of the word ‘Asura’ changed in different eras, languages, and societies. In the early Vedic period, it meant a “powerful being”, while in the Puranic time, the word referred to a clan (“Are Asuras the Demons of Indian Mythology?”). Hence, there is a need for a nuanced understanding, as exemplified in Chandramouli’s writings that resist simplification and reductionism.

In the novel *Mohini*, Chandramouli critiques the caste system, endorsing violence, capitalism, exploitation of Bhumi Devi, and the persecution of the minority Asuras. Kavya, the wife of Bhrgu, offers

help by nursing and providing tutelage to the Asuras against her husband's ideology. She is the voice of compassion and love during violence and apathy. However, Chandramouli shows several nuances such as the ravage of Mother Nature, evil like "blood sacrifices" to deities, and possessing the living, the dead, and spirits. Additionally, the text problematizes the churning of the ocean of milk as an androcentric venture that destroys ecology, causes human casualties, and harms animals.

Feminist consciousness and narrative depict the change in society's perception of Mohini from a revered goddess to a pisacha: "From a benevolent goddess to a wicked witch with an insatiable appetite for unwary young men, whom, it was said, I lured into the woods" (Mohini 135). Gender plays a crucial role in the demonisation of women/goddesses who do not conform to traditional expectations. Here, Mohini is marginalised as a transgender who identifies as a woman. Further, during conflict and economic turmoil, women become scapegoats who are targeted, shamed, and executed (Kaiser). The text creates awareness against the violence and hatred towards the transgenders. Societal narrative demonizes Mohini for being born with male and female reproductive organs: "It is unnatural and unholy, which is why that indescribable creature is doomed to meet a horrible end" (Mohini 135).

The author creates sensitive and inclusive narratives about the lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) by using scriptural literature about the diversity of genders. The society is guilty of killing Mohini, who symbolised magic, fantasy, and beauty. This can be interpreted literally and symbolically, where the goddess Mohini is erased, targeting rebellious women and non-heterosexuals. Further, it refers to the loss of beauty, poetry, and art in a world overpowered by capitalism, power-grabbing, and patriarchy. The Harihara putra, Shashta, carries on the legacy of Mohini by standing up for the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ). Narada's discourse highlights the knowledge of sexual orientation, categorization, and acceptance of the diversity of genders in the scriptures. For instance, the discourse mentions that homosexual men are called "kliba" and "Napumsa refers to those with ambiguous genitalia" (Mohini 212). Further, the sage also explains the Ardhanarishwara as symbolic of the co-existence of Shiva and Shakti in one soul. In addition to this, the text refers to the story of Aravan, who sacrificed his life to Kali for the victory of the Pandavas. However, Chandramouli critiques the sacrifice and shows that he was pressured into it by many, including Sahadeva, Krishna, and Arjuna.

In the Kuttantavar folklore, Aravan must be married before the sacrifice, but no woman volunteered to marry him. Hence, Krishna assumes the feminine form and spends the night with him and mourns his death the day after (Chowdhury). Thus, the novel creates acceptance for all kinds of love, as it shows the marriage of Mohini and Aravan before the sacrifice. The text also mentioned the love between Mohini and Shiva in the forest of the cedars. Hence, the goddess is used to create inclusive narratives that show gender diversity and emphasises on queer identity, self-respect, and pride.

Hence, the goddesses emerge as symbols of resistance against patriarchy, authoritarianism, violence, and war. She is evoked to foster inclusivity by critiquing the self/other binary in Indian mythical context; and affirming queer identity and rights. The disruption of the self/other binary in the Deva-Asura conflict is a critique of righteous violence and war. This is significant as the nation has linguistic, religious, gender, and cultural diversity. Chandramouli's inclusive narratives foster unity by addressing specific areas of conflict and power dynamics using goddess mythologies.

III. CIRCE, DAUGHTER OF THE MOON GODDESS, AND LILITH: POWERFUL FEMINIST RECREATIONS

Circe is an enchanting goddess and sorceress in Greek mythology. Homer in *Odysseus* describes Circe as a powerful goddess who knew Polypharmakos, or was adept at using magic, drugs, and charms. The famous myth associated with Circe is her inviting Odysseus's men into her palace using a magical voice, and turning them into pigs after serving them a mixture of "cheese, barley, and honey" in Pramnian wine. Later, she entices Odysseus as he is about to kill her after she offered him a poisoned drink. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, she is depicted as an attractive goddess seated on a throne and dressed in gold (Miate). Thus, she is depicted as a dangerous, seductive, and evil character throughout the classical tradition.

Madeline Miller retells the story of the Greek witch in *Circe* from a feminist point of view. In her words, she reconstructs the tale of "the first witch in Western literature", who is shrouded in mystery. She renders a sympathetic view of Circe, the neglected daughter of Helios, the Sun God, and the nymph Perse. Helios is critiqued as a patriarchal, self-aggrandizing God who is tyrannical and maintains hierarchy. Miller also questions the silencing of women in Classical literature and addresses the crimes perpetrated against women, especially through Circe's resistance to sexual violence. Here, the goddess is depicted as strong, independent, passionate, and skilled at witchcraft.

Circe's neglected childhood and insults result in her doubting her selfhood, which is regained after she is banished to the island of Aiaia after she turns Scylla into a monster. The wild island serves as a retreat and is foundational to the self-discovery of Circe. She is connected to the wildness of the forest, stepping into which her "life began" after being a "bird bred in a cage". The wildness of Aiaia gives Circe the power to tap into her hidden potential and embrace the freedom and courage to overcome her fears. She is interconnected with nature as she tames wild beasts like lions and wolves, and knows the power of mixing herbs. After being raped by the captain in front of his men, Circe retorts to using magic for self-defence and vengeance. She turns the shipwrecked soldiers into pigs who can no longer threaten her, emasculating them in the process. Here, gender and power dynamics render Circe's body vulnerable to violence, sexual objectification, and brutality. Her kindness and hospitality are misused and abused by the patriarchal and brutish soldiers.

Witchcraft is seen as a tool for feminist empowerment in the novel, and in the end, Circe uses it to take away her immortality and embark on a new journey with Telemachus. Like Prometheus, who exercised his power to serve humanity, Circe decides to lead a mortal life and rejects the hierarchical world of the Titans. Her resistance is connected to choosing a liberation and a meaningful life marked by strength, growth, and love. Further, this represents realism instead of an idealised and hollow life. There is also a sisterhood between Penelope and Circe that goes against patriarchal notions. Circe is more resistant than inclusive, but the text hints at her decision to use magic for healing in the end.

Daughter of the Moon Goddess by Sue Lynn Tan retells a story based on the Chinese mythology of Chang'e, who drinks the elixir of immortality gifted to her husband, Houyi, by the Celestial Emperor. The novel is the first book in the *Celestial Kingdom Duology*. In the legend, Chang'e is known as an immortal woman who lives on the moon and becomes contemplative and wise, especially after meeting the rabbit who produces immortality ("The Story of Chang'e - The Chinese Moon Goddess"). The novel begins by Xingyin narrating the different versions of the story of Chang'e in the Chinese mythic tradition: "There are many legends about my mother. Some say she was betrayed by her husband, a great mortal warrior, stealing his Elixir of Immortality to become a goddess. Others depict her as an innocent victim who swallowed the elixir while trying to save it from the thieves" (*Daughter of the Moon Goddess* 3).

The first part narrates the isolated and secretive existence of Xingyin, Chang'e, and Ping'er. Chang'e is depicted as detached, longing, lonely, and melancholy due to the pain of separation from her husband, Houyi. She performs the duties of "lighting the lanterns to illuminate the moon" each day and would stare at the mortal world from their balcony. Xingyin has to leave the protective space of her mother after her secret is nearly out. She takes up housekeeping work at Lady Meiling's house, the Golden Lotus Mansion. Later, she wins the competition for the selection of a companion for the Crown Prince Liwei. The novel resists feudalism, imperialism, authoritarianism, and patriarchy at various junctures. While the Celestial Emperor represents old values of hierarchy, patriarchy, and aristocracy, Liwei is symbolic of an inclusive ruler who protests against the mistreatment of attendants by withdrawing the invitation for the competition, thus symbolising a breakdown of oppressive order.

Liwei also challenges rank and class by extending the invitation to Xingyin, who wishes to participate. Xingyin is selected as the winner of the competition, partly due to her skills and partly due to Liwei's love for her. During their training and classes, Xingyin falls deeply in love with Liwei. Tan's construction of Xingyin is feminist as she challenges traditional gender expectations by learning martial arts, warfare, sword fighting, and archery. She immerses herself in serving the army after the announcement of Liwei's betrothal to Princess Fengmei of Phoenix Kingdom.

Xingyin refuses to yield to Liwei's advances after the incident, as she does not want to sacrifice her pride and dignity for love. Further, she refuses the prince's help and favours to find her a position as she wants to carve her path: "That I had won a position through my own merit, not his favor. I would be beholden to no one" (*Daughter of the Moon Goddess* 165). Moreover, Xingyin also challenges the hierarchy, subordination, and rankism of the army by asking for autonomy to decide what campaigns she takes up. Thus, General Jianyun gives her a "nondescript rank of Archer". Celestial society is full of "vanity", "rank", "bloodlines", and "magic" that determine power dynamics. She rejects jewels and treasures by focusing on her battles alone.

Xingyin's identity as a talented warrior and the first archer is cemented through the course of her expeditions, some of which include slaying the nine-headed serpent, Xiangliu; rescuing Fengmei; saving Liwei's life; and retrieving the pearls from venerable dragons. She also resists violence against women by defending herself against three men who tried to harass her in an empty street in the mortal realm. She pushes

the heads of two men together, kicks them, presses the blade against their throats, and warns them: "I'm guessing this is not your first time. If any of you even think of committing such a vile crime again, I'll come back and sink my knives into your hearts" (*Daughter of the Moon Goddess* 363-364).

In addition to this, Xingyin's divine nature is also brought out especially in the episode where the Dragons refuse to yield to the Celestial Emperor but willingly swear loyalty to her as she is chosen by the Jade Dragon Bow. Further, the text shows her relationship with Captain Wenzhi as she distances herself from Liwei. Although Wenzhi betrays her and the Celestial Kingdom by laying a trap along with the Demon Realm. After winning the fight against them, with Liwei and the Celestial army, Xingyin is finally granted her wish to liberate her mother, Chang'e, from the enchantment and existence on the moon.

In the end, Liwei confesses her love to her and visits her house frequently, which shows that he genuinely enjoys their companionship. Xingyin no longer hides her identity, but she is known for being the daughter of Chang'e and Houyi (Tan). Hence, the goddess Xingyin undergoes trials and tribulations to finally assert her selfhood, identity, and freedom to liberate Chang'e. She resists feudalism, gender stereotypes, and evil to protect her mother and the Celestial Kingdom. Her inclusivity comes in the form of extending her aid to those in need of help, whether it is immortals, humans, or dragons.

Unlike Tan's appropriation of Chinese mythology, Nikki Marmery's *Lilith* resists and revolts against the erasure of the mother Goddess in the Western civilization that is invested in the 'patriarch'. Marmery brings to the centre a demonised figure of the Jewish folklore and Mesopotamian myth, by narrating the story from the Garden of Eden, all the way to the contemporary time, spanning across 6000 years. Adam's first wife, Lilith, defies his authority and dominance when he uses his physical force upon her, and chooses freedom and wisdom instead.

Her narrative criticises Adam or man's androcentric idea of progress that subjugates women and nature to the needs of man. While Lilith and Adam were created on equal footing, he progresses in utilitarian ways by developing irrigation, currency, weapons, writing, and is obsessed with populating the Earth with the human race, Eve secretly nurtures the gift of the divine feminine or the Holy Mother. The text condones the erasure of the Hebrew Goddess Asherah, the Canaanite fertility mother goddess who is associated with the Sea. Lilith transgresses by naming the G-d, and by eating of the forbidden tree. Marmery shows these as acts of rebellion against hierarchy and patriarchy.

The text uses the forgotten goddess to not only assert equality between men and women, but also to highlight the life-giving power of a mother that is unique to women. Lilith, in the guise of a serpent, helps Eve realise that she is not a "helpmeet", and that her body is not "sinful" but natural. As against the hierarchical relationship of the first couple, Lilith enjoys her freedom, sexual desire, and fulfils her divine purpose with Samael. The latter resist the authority of a dominant male divinity and travel to various sites, including the sacred Moon temple at Uruk, where they discover that the "ancient Spirit of Creation" was worshipped as Inanna. Asherah was a revered Hebrew goddess whose existence "was hidden for about two and a half thousand years". In early Israelite religion, she was "the wife of God," whose suppression "started in the 1st millennium BCE and intensified after the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem" (*Lilith*).

Text brings inclusivity in the worship of the divine feminine by different names, and reveals that deities depend on devotees for survival, explaining the loss of Asherah: "She's known by different names and honoured in different ways: She's Inanna in uruk, Hathor in Kemet, Anassa in Alashiya. Astarte, Isis, Anath-they're all the same goddess, the Queen of Heaven" (*Lilith* 90). The text links the rage of the mother goddess to natural calamities such as the flood, which women seers like Norea acknowledge. The texts historicise stories of women that are sidelined in the Western religious sphere. While Lilith is a wild goddess who stood for women's equality, Eve is the domesticated first woman. Lilith is symbolically connected to a leopard whom she adopts and names Malakbel. Eve's legacy lies in preserving the essence of the divine feminine and passing it on to her daughters in ways unsuspected and unrecognised by patriarchy.

Although women in Noah's household are exploited mentally, physically, and psychologically by men, they accept their subordination to men due to fractured selfhood and internalisation of patriarchy. Lilith answers Nahalath's daughter that women can be priestesses as well, reminding her of the power of bearing fruit common to mountains, trees, Asherah, and women. The priestesses, seers, and goddesses emerge as powerful women in 2347 BC: "Next time, I would tell her of the mighty priestess in the Moon Temple of Uruk. Of the snake-wielding celebrant by the sparkling sea in Alashiya. Of those women in the very valley of her ancestors, who harvested saffron for the missing Queen of Heaven" (*Lilith* 146).

In addition to this, Lilith is seen as a protective mother to Asmodai and Malakbel and all her descendants, whom she watches over and loves: "Watched their smiles. I delighted in those that bore traces of my lost son" (*Lilith* 173). Lilith's motherhood is connected to the painful loss of her son, whom she buried. The self-aware narrator speaks of her demonisation by society: "A night-demon who took babies from their

cribs.” (*Lilith* 174). Likewise, women’s position in society degenerates as aspects of the divine feminine decline, dispossessing them of even “the power of procreation”: “Even the children she knits together with her own flesh and blood were not her own” (*Lilith* 175).

Lilith also historicises the archetypal evil woman”, Jezebel, who promoted the worship of the nature Goddesses like “Anath, the warrior”, “Ishat, the source of fire,” along with Gods like Baal, El, and Moloch in Sidon. The story narrates how the princess performs sacred rituals during different seasons, moon phases, and “she provided for the childless women, the widows and the orphans” (*Lilith* 190). *Lilith* recognises her contributions to Samaria’s culture in the ‘The Golden Age’ chapter. However, her demonisation and sexual objectification by patriarchal society is critiqued: “Painted as a harlot: she, who was so faithful to her husband. Damned for her carnality, her beauty, the delight she took in her own body” (*Lilith* 233). This illustrates a pattern of punishing deviating women and controlling their narrative that serves as a warning to other women to conform and serve the patriarchy.

In the end, Marmery brings to the centre the role of Maryam Magdalene as divine feminine, and a quote from *The Nag Hammadi scriptures* marks the beginning of part five of *Lilith* which shows an influence of the *Gnostic Gospels*: “I am the woman crying out, cast upon the face of the Earth” (*Lilith* 232). Magdalene is seen as an embodiment of the goddess, whom *Lilith* sees as possessing the polarities reminiscent of mother goddess Asherah: “Harmony and balance; completeness. I felt the presence of the lost goddess; of the Wisdom I had first tasted in Eden” (*Lilith* 342). She embraces qualities of compassion, kindness, strength, and vulnerability. Her writing is a source of feminist inspiration, wisdom, resistance, and inclusivity. It is an act of rebellion against the male-dominated society.

In the present day, as the narrator resumes writing, she decides not to rewrite about the past but to change the end, symbolic of the future, symbolic of new beginnings, and the need to harmonize masculine with feminine. The presence of the primordial Goddess and Holy Mother is felt in her hybrid forms, be it Panagia, Sophia, Mary, Shakti, or an abundant tree. The author mentions that *Lilith* is “the creation of a patriarchal mind: a warning to women who dare to be equal, and a cautionary tale to men of the destructive power of female sexuality” (*Lilith*). Further, women seek to reconnect with “the goddesses of their ancestors” that were crushed by male dominion, such as “Gaia”, “Shakti in India”, and “Pachamama in Peru”. Also, the Holy Mother can never die as women find new ways to keep her alive in different times, “as Chokmah in the Hebrew, Sophia in the Greek, Brigid in the West.” (*Lilith* 305).

Hence, the mother goddess Asherah and *Lilith* emerge as symbols of resistance, love, power, equality, feminist assertion, wisdom, liberty, and inclusiveness in a world fraught with violence, cruelty, inequality, hatred, androcentrism, misogyny, and patriarchy. Ecofeminist consciousness in the text emphasises the connection between the Divine Mother and the tree of life using Mesopotamian and Hebrew myths.

IV. CONCLUSION

Feminist revisionist mythology retells stories from the perspective of women characters, thus challenging mainstream patriarchal narratives and rewriting the canon. While the Devi is a part of the Indian consciousness, her presence is also increasingly evident in the Western feminist revisionist writings that resurrect matrilineal religions and sacred divine feminine culture.

Goddesses in contemporary mythical and literary texts conceptualise the divine feminine as an agent of resistance and inclusivity. These polar dualities characteristic of the goddess echo in Anuja Chandramouli’s *Shakti: The Divine Feminine* as well as *Mohini: The Enchantress*. *Shakti* retells the story from the point of view of hybrid goddesses, all of whom have unique and interconnected existences. Indra represents authority, patriarchy, and violence that Ushas and Shakti are subject to in the novel. However, goddesses are resilient as they are the higher consciousness, which is compassionate even in death, as seen in Durga’s battle. Chandramouli also critiques the persecution of goddess cults due to male domination and the self/other binary that is used to justify wars.

Similarly, *Mohini* challenges the binary of Devas and Asuras, which results in conflicts, by showing the similarities between the half-brothers. Further, their ambitious churning of the ocean of milk led to the destruction of natural resources and animal habitat. Like Shakti, Mohini was also subject to hatred and demonisation by society, exploiting Bhumi Devi and women. Mohini stands up for the right to love in all forms, thus, being inclusive of queer and non-heteronormative perspectives.

In feminist revisionist texts, the goddess is often connected to nature and wilderness, as in *Shakti*, *Mohini*, *Circe, Daughter of the Moon Goddess*, and *Lilith*. This establishes an ecofeminist worldview where women and nature are viewed as sustainers of life. Also, nature represents her freedom and resistance against

domestication. Additionally, the goddess resists the hierarchical society as seen in Circe's rejection of the world of Titans; Xingyin's refusal to conform to the rankism of the army; and Lilith's refusal to submit to the dominance of Adam. Further, the goddesses also resist patriarchy by subverting gender expectations, as seen in Circe's empowerment through witchcraft; Xingyin's expertise in martial arts, warfare, and archery; and Lilith's tracing of powerful divine feminine figures through civilizational history.

Circe and Lilith refuse to conform to patriarchy as they follow their true purpose and emerge as powerful goddesses. While the witch and the deviant woman are humanised as feminine deities who are deemed dangerous by the patriarchal society, Xingyin works within the celestial framework by disguising her identity to liberate Chang'e. Hence, the Goddess in feminist revisionist mythology is an agent of change; she is a symbol of inclusivity and resistance. Thus, feminists use the goddess to create agency for women, especially through the sacred feminine, matrilineal religions, and primordial energy. For it is time that the feminine is not feared but reclaimed through the soul's connection to the phases of the moon, the coiled serpent energy, consciousness, love beyond boundaries, the fierce tiger, fertile sacred trees, the expansive sea, nourishing grains and barley, syncretism, and the star as the meeting of the spiritual and material realms.

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