

FEMINIST REINTERPRETATION OF MYTHOLOGY IN THE SATI SERIES BY KORAL DASGUPTA

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ABSTRACT

This research paper explores the dynamics of the feminist reinterpretation of Indian mythology in the Sati Series by Koral Dasgupta, focusing on the reimagining of the Pancha Kanyas-Ahalya, Kunti, Draupadi, Mandodari, and Tara. Traditionally depicted within patriarchal frameworks in epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, these women have often been confined to roles defined by silence, sacrifice, and moral judgment. Dasgupta's retellings challenge these conventional portrayals by foregrounding female subjectivity, agency, and emotional complexity.

The research further demonstrates using feminist literary theory and myth criticism as analytical frameworks, this research explores how the author reconstructs these mythological figures as autonomous individuals who question societal norms and resist imposed identities. Through qualitative textual analysis, the study highlights themes such as voice and silence, power and marginalization, identity formation, and resistance to patriarchal authority. The narratives not only humanize these iconic figures but also provide them with psychological depth and narrative agency often absent in traditional texts. Furthermore, this research situates the Sati Series within the broader context of contemporary Indian mythological retellings, demonstrating how such works serve as a medium for feminist discourse and cultural reinterpretation. By reclaiming and recontextualizing mythological women, Dasgupta's work bridges the gap between ancient narratives and modern gender concerns.

The study concludes that the Sati Series functions as a significant feminist intervention, reshaping the perception of mythological women and

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challenging longstanding patriarchal interpretations, thereby contributing meaningfully to contemporary Indian English literature and feminist studies.

KEYWORDS: *Reinterpretation, Mythology, Reimagining, Conventional Portrayal, Female Subjectivity, Emotional Complexity.*

1. Introduction

Mythology has long functioned as a cultural framework through which societies construct and transmit ideals of gender, morality, and social order. In the Indian context, epics such as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata have traditionally portrayed women through archetypal roles-devoted wives, obedient daughters, or morally ambiguous figures-often defined in relation to male protagonists. Within this framework, the concept of the Sati has been historically associated with ideals of chastity, sacrifice, and unwavering loyalty, reinforcing patriarchal expectations of womanhood. However, contemporary literary interventions have begun to challenge and reinterpret these narratives through a feminist lens.

This study aims to examine how the Sati Series employs feminist narrative strategies to reconstruct mythological women's identities and challenge entrenched patriarchal ideologies. By analyzing characterization, narrative voice, and thematic concerns such as agency, sexuality, and power, the research explores how these retellings transform myth into a site of resistance and reinterpretation. Ultimately, the paper seeks to demonstrate that feminist mythological rewritings like Dasgupta's are not merely acts of storytelling but critical engagements that reshape cultural memory and offer new possibilities for understanding gender in both historical and contemporary contexts.

Research Objectives

- Analyze the feminist reinterpretation of mythological narratives in Koral Dasgupta's Sati Series, focusing on how traditional stories are reimagined from a gender-conscious perspective.
- Examine the reconstruction of female identity in the portrayal of the Panch Kanyas-Ahalya, Kunti, Draupadi, Tara, and Mandodarias autonomous and complex individuals.
- Investigate how the concept of "Sati" is redefined from an ideal of chastity and submission to one of agency, knowledge, and self-awareness.
- Explore the representation of women's agency and choice, particularly in relation to themes such as sexuality, motherhood, power, and

resistance.

- Identify the ways in which the series constructs alternative feminist perspectives within Indian mythological discourse.

Patriarchal Construction of Female Voice in the Sati Series

The representation of women's voices in Indian mythology has historically been shaped by patriarchal ideologies that privilege male authority, moral control, and social hierarchy. In canonical texts like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, female characters are often denied narrative autonomy and are instead constructed through male perspectives. Their voices, when present, are mediated, restricted, or moralized to reinforce dominant social norms. Koral Dasgupta's Sati Series engages critically with this tradition by first exposing and then subverting the patriarchal construction of female voice. In traditional mythological narratives, women such as Ahalya, Kunti, Draupadi, Tara, and Mandodari are rarely allowed to articulate their own experiences fully. Their identities are constructed through:

- Male narrators and perspectives
- Moral judgments imposed by society
- Limited dialogue that reinforces obedience or suffering

For instance, Ahalya's story is often reduced to a moral lesson on chastity, while Kunti's voice is constrained within her roles as mother and queen. This reflects what feminist critics identify as the systematic silencing of women, where their subjectivity is over-shadowed by patriarchal discourse.

Feminist Reinterpretation of Mythology in Each Book of the Sati Series

Koral Dasgupta's Sati Series reimagines the lives of the Panch Kanyas-Ahalya, Kunti, Draupadi, Tara, and Mandodari-through a feminist lens. Each book reconstructs a mythological figure by challenging patriarchal narratives and foregrounding female agency, subjectivity, and voice.

1. Ahalya: The Sati Series

Ahalya's narrative, as traditionally constructed, reflects the patriarchal tendency to inscribe female identity within rigid moral binaries of purity and transgression. Condemned and silenced for an act shaped by deception, she is transformed into a symbolic site upon which societal anxieties about female sexuality are projected. The disproportionate attribution of guilt to Ahalya, while the male agent's desire and manipulation remain underexamined, reveals an inherent gender bias within mythological discourse. In feminist reinterpretations such as Koral Dasgupta's Sati Series,

this imposed silence is disrupted, and Ahalya emerges as a speaking subject rather than a passive object of judgment. Consequently, Ahalya's story is transformed from a tale of sin and redemption into a critical commentary on the politics of gendered injustice and the reclamation of female agency.

Highlights of Feminist Reinterpretation:

- Dasgupta questions the narrative of guilt imposed on Ahalya.
- Reframes her not as a sinner but as a victim of circumstance and patriarchal judgment.
- Explores her silence, isolation, and emotional trauma.
- Highlights how her story reflects societal control over female sexuality.

2. Kunti: The Sati Series

Kunti's portrayal in traditional mythological discourse is marked by a duality that venerates and scrutinizes her—revered as the epitome of maternal devotion while simultaneously judged for her premarital motherhood, particularly in relation to Karna's birth. This contradiction underscores the patriarchal tendency to impose moral expectations selectively upon women, especially in matters of sexuality and honor. Her identity is thus constrained within a framework that privileges her role as a mother while marginalizing her personal experiences and choices. In feminist reinterpretations such as Koral Dasgupta's Sati Series, Kunti's character is reconfigured beyond these limiting archetypes. She is presented as a self-aware and strategic individual, whose decisions are informed by political necessity, emotional resilience, and inner conflict. By foregrounding her agency, the narrative repositions Kunti not merely as a maternal figure but as a woman actively negotiating the complexities of power, duty, and personal desire, thereby challenging the reductive moral judgments imposed by patriarchal narratives.

Highlights of Feminist Reinterpretation:

- Presents Kunti as a strategic thinker and political actor.
- Reinterprets her choices (abandoning Karna, guiding the Pandavas) as complex decisions shaped by survival and power.
- Explores female sexuality without moral condemnation.
- Emphasizes her inner conflicts, resilience, and autonomy.

3. Draupadi: The Sati Series

Draupadi's portrayal in traditional mythological narratives often casts her as a catalyst for the Mahabharata war, with her assertiveness and forthrightness interpreted as provocations that destabilize patriarchal order. Such readings exemplify the gendered lens through which female agency

is problematized, reducing her complex character to a source of conflict. In feminist reinterpretations, particularly in Koral Dasgupta's Sati Series, Draupadi's voice is reclaimed and repositioned as a site of resistance. Her courage, eloquence, and insistence on justice are foregrounded, transforming her narrative from one of blame to one of empowerment. By framing her assertiveness as a conscious response to systemic injustice, the series challenges patriarchal constructions of female behavior and recasts Draupadi as a symbol of resilience, agency, and moral authority.

Highlights of Feminist Reinterpretation:

- Highlights her intellectual strength and political awareness.
- Reclaims her polyandrous marriage as a circumstance rather than a moral flaw.
- Portrays her humiliation (vastraharan) as a systemic failure of patriarchal society, not personal shame.
- Gives her a strong, questioning voice.

4. Tara: The Sati Series

Tara is usually seen as the wife of Vali and later Sugriva, with limited narrative importance. Tara's story challenges the marginalization of capable women in historical and mythological narratives. Tara as a monkey queen is often studied with the voice of suppression and hidden within the character of her husband.

Highlights of Feminist Reinterpretation:

- Reimagines Tara as a politically astute queen and strategist.
- Highlights her role in governance and diplomacy.
- Questions the lack of recognition given to women in power.
- Emphasizes her intelligence and leadership.

5. Mandodari: The Sati Series

Mandodari is depicted as the virtuous wife of Ravana, often overshadowed by his character, but Mandodari emerges as a figure of integrity navigating loyalty, morality, and power. Mandodari, the novel moves beyond her conventional portrayal as a silent and virtuous queen, instead offering a nuanced depiction of her intellect, emotional depth, and moral strength.

Highlights of Feminist Reinterpretation:

- Explores her moral strength and independent judgment.
- Shows her as a woman who questions her husband's actions.
- Highlights her emotional resilience and ethical clarity.

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- Portrays her as a voice of reason within a flawed system.

Research Findings

- Reconstruction of Female Interiorities and Memory
- Feminist Narrative Strategies
- Theoretical Engagement With Key Feminist Thinkers
- Narrative Subjectivity and Psychological Voice

Conclusion

A feminist reinterpretation of mythology in the Sati Series by Koral Dasgupta offers a compelling re-reading of traditional narratives that have historically marginalized female voices. By revisiting well-known mythological stories from a contemporary feminist lens, the series challenges patriarchal interpretations and restores agency, individuality, and subjectivity to its female characters. Through its reimagined portrayals, the series dismantles the notion of women as passive, sacrificial figures and instead presents them as complex individuals capable of desire, resistance, and self-definition. It questions deeply rooted cultural norms and highlights how mythology has been used as a tool to reinforce gender hierarchies. At the same time, Dasgupta's work reclaims these narratives, transforming them into spaces of empowerment and dialogue.

Ultimately, the Sati Series not only reinterprets mythology but also redefines it for modern readers, encouraging a critical engagement with tradition. It stands as an important contribution to feminist literature, demonstrating how revisiting and rewriting myths can challenge dominant ideologies and create more inclusive narratives for the future.

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