

The Mythical Feminine: Sati's Journey in Literature and Television

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Abstract:

This paper explores the portrayal of Sati, a significant figure in Indian mythology, as reimagined in Amish Tripathi's Shiva Trilogy and the television series Devon Ke Dev... Mahadev. Through a comparative study, the research examines how the mediums of literature and television reinterpret her character to resonate with contemporary audiences. The analysis delves into the narrative arcs, thematic emphasis, and cultural symbolism associated with Sati in these adaptations, highlighting her evolution from a traditional mythological figure to a modern feminist icon.

By focusing on the mediums' distinct approaches to storytelling, this study investigates how literature and visual media shape audience perceptions and cultural impact. The Shiva Trilogy presents Sati as a warrior and equal partner to Shiva, embodying strength and individuality, while Devon Ke Dev... Mahadev emphasizes her divine grace and spiritual essence. The research further explores the societal implications of these portrayals, particularly their influence on gender discourse and the reclamation of mythological figures as symbols of empowerment. This study aims to contribute to the growing field of mythology in popular culture, offering insights into the dynamic interplay between medium, mythology, and audience engagement.

Keywords: Sati, Shiva Trilogy, Amish Tripathi, Devon Ke Dev... Mahadev, Television Series, Mythology Retelling, Modern representation.

Introduction:

Myth is essentially a cultural construct, a common understanding of the world that binds individuals and communities together.

- **Myth = Mithya, Devdutt Pattanaik**

Indian Mythology is a great scope to contemporary Indian English writing to explore with distinct lenses. Mytho-fiction is a genre that offers an expansive realm for creativity, going far beyond simple retellings or re-imaginings of traditional myths. While retellings and re-imaginings play an essential role in revitalizing timeless tales, the genre's true potential lies in its ability to inspire entirely original storytelling. By drawing from the rich tapestry of mythological narratives, settings, and archetypal characters, writers can weave new stories that not only resonate with readers but also challenge and expand the boundaries of traditional mythology.

This creative freedom allows authors to move beyond the familiar and delve into uncharted territories of myth. For instance, they might choose to explore lesser-known myths, giving voice to characters or stories that have historically been overshadowed by more popular narratives. Alternatively, they could reinterpret well-known mythological tropes or figures in ways that defy expectations, offering fresh perspectives that

resonate with contemporary audiences. Some writers might even go a step further by crafting entirely new mythologies, complete with their own unique pantheons, cosmologies, and cultural contexts, thereby creating worlds that are both innovative and deeply immersive.

The genre also encourages experimentation with storytelling techniques. Writers can play with narrative structures, such as nonlinear timelines or multi-perspective storytelling, to reframe how myths are experienced. They can also shift the point of view, presenting a familiar myth from the perspective of a traditionally marginalized or secondary character, thereby adding depth and complexity to the narrative. Themes, too, can be explored in new and profound ways, allowing mytho-fiction to address contemporary issues like identity, power, morality, and the human condition through the lens of ancient symbolism.

By embracing these possibilities, mytho-fiction transcends the limitations of traditional mythological narratives. Retellings and re-imaginings are just the beginning—a foundational layer upon which writers can build something entirely new. The genre invites authors to push creative boundaries, challenge conventions, and craft stories that are not only rooted in the essence of mythology but also boldly innovative. This openness to reinvention and exploration makes mytho-fiction a fertile ground for storytelling, offering writers endless opportunities to embark on imaginative journeys that captivate and inspire.

"Post-millennial" refers to the period following the start of the 21st century, particularly after the year 2000. This term is used to describe cultural, social, and economic phenomena, as well as generational characteristics, that have emerged in the years following the turn of the millennium. It encompasses the trends, events, and developments that have shaped society and culture in the early 21st century.

It was during the mid-2000s that mythology-inspired fiction in English began to appear. Ashwin Sanghi (*The Rozabal Line*) Amish Tripathi (*The Immortals of Meluha*) and Ashok Banker (*Slayer of Kamsa*) are generally recognised as the authors who first published in this genre. Since then there has been a surge of mythology-inspired fiction in English hitting the bookshelves, all of which draws predominantly on narrative aspects and the protagonists of the Indian epics, namely the Mahabharata and the Ramayana as well as the Puranas and Indian folk traditions. (Chattopadhyay et al. 143)

‘Amish is a fresh new voice in Indian Writing - steeped in myth and history, with a fine eye for detail and a compelling narrative style.’

- Shashi Tharoor, Minister of state in the Indian government and celebrated author

In recent years, Indian mythology retellings have increasingly favored feminine characters, bringing their stories and perspectives to the forefront. These reimaginings challenge traditional patriarchal narratives by giving voice to women who were often sidelined or depicted primarily in relation to male protagonists. For instance, *The Palace of Illusions* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni reinterprets the *Mahabharata* through the eyes of Draupadi, portraying her as a complex, assertive, and deeply human figure grappling with love, power, and destiny. Similarly, Kavita Kane's *Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen* explores the *Mahabharata* from the perspective of Uruvi, a lesser-known character, shedding light on the personal and emotional struggles of women in a male-dominated epic. Amish Tripathi's *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* reimagines Sita not just as a dutiful wife but as a fierce warrior and a political strategist, breaking away from her traditional image as a passive figure of virtue. These retellings not only humanize mythological women but also highlight their agency, strength, and individuality, offering a fresh lens through which to view Indian mythology. By centering feminine characters, these narratives resonate with contemporary audiences, particularly in their exploration of themes like gender equality, autonomy, and resilience.

**Ya Devi Sarva Bhuteshu Shakti Rupen Samsthita,
Namastasyai Namastasyai Namastasyai Namoh Namah.**

In Amish Tripathi’s *Shiva Trilogy*, Sati is portrayed as a remarkable character who embodies strength, resilience, and individuality. She is far from the traditional portrayal of women in Indian mythology, stepping beyond the confines of being defined solely by her relationships or sacrifices. Sati is a warrior, a leader, and an equal partner to Shiva, standing as a symbol of empowerment and self-determination. Her character is marked by a deep sense of justice and an unwavering commitment to her principles, as seen in her efforts to challenge societal norms, such as caste discrimination and gender inequality. Despite being ostracized for bearing the stigma of being a “Vikarma” (a person believed to carry bad karma), Sati refuses to be diminished by these prejudices, instead choosing to confront them head-on with dignity and courage. Her relationship with Shiva is portrayed as one of mutual respect and partnership, further emphasizing her agency and individuality. Through Sati, Tripathi reimagines a mythological figure not just as a divine consort but as a multi-dimensional human being who inspires both the protagonist and the readers with her strength and grace.

In the television series *Devon Ke Dev... Mahadev*, Sati is portrayed as a deeply spiritual and devoted character whose journey is one of love, self-discovery, and transcendence. As the daughter of King Daksha, she is initially caught between her loyalty to her father and her growing love for Lord Shiva, the ascetic god who defies societal norms. Sati’s character arc is marked by her inner strength and her willingness to challenge the rigid and materialistic beliefs of her father. Her love for Shiva is portrayed as transformative, leading her to embrace her true self and her divine purpose. Sati’s ultimate act of self-immolation, performed in defiance of her father’s disrespect toward Shiva, is a powerful assertion of her agency and principles. This act not only highlights her unwavering devotion but also symbolizes the triumph of spiritual truth over ego and pride. Through her portrayal, Sati emerges as a figure of immense grace and resilience, embodying the eternal struggle between duty and love, and the pursuit of higher truths in the face of societal constraints.

Shiva Trilogy by Amish Tripathi	Devo ke Dev Mahadev
Sati - Multi Dimensional human	Sati - Semi God
Humanism of characters	Godliness
Practical Action - Rising up towards end	Ethical Action - Not in the flow of actions
Events with pre-planning	Connected events with surprising actions
Retelling with totally new dimension	Retelling is favored to Traditional mythology
Mythification of History	Mythification of myth

Agency in Amish Tripathi’s Shiva Trilogy

Sati is depicted as a warrior and an equal partner to Shiva, embodying agency through her actions, decisions, and resistance to societal norms. Her rejection of societal prejudices, such as her defiance against casteism and her active role in battles, showcases her as a figure who transcends traditional gender

roles. This aligns with de Beauvoir's idea that women must assert themselves as subjects rather than being confined to the status of objects.

One of the earliest demonstrations of Sati's agency is her refusal to let the stigma of being a Vikarma—those considered cursed due to bad karma—define her life. Despite societal ostracism, she carries herself with dignity and strength, refusing to internalize the discrimination imposed on her. This defiance is a testament to her resilience and belief in personal worth over societal labels. Sati's role as a warrior is a significant aspect of her agency. She is not a passive consort but an active participant in battles, showcasing her martial skills and strategic mind. For example, when the village of Kashi is under attack, Sati fights valiantly to protect its people, demonstrating her courage and sense of duty. Her prowess in combat earns her respect, not just as Shiva's wife but as a leader and protector in her own right.

Sati's relationship with Shiva is another area where her agency shines. Initially hesitant due to her past and societal expectations, she ultimately chooses to love Shiva on her own terms. Her decision to marry him is not influenced by pressure or obligation but by mutual respect and understanding. This choice reflects her autonomy and her ability to prioritize her desires over societal constraints. Sati consistently challenges societal norms and injustices. Her confrontation with the rigid caste system and her advocacy for the oppressed highlight her moral courage. For instance, when a Vikarma woman is mistreated, Sati publicly stands against the injustice, defying societal norms and asserting the equality of all individuals. In her marriage to Shiva, Sati is not a subordinate figure but an equal partner. She advises Shiva on matters of governance, strategy, and morality, often serving as his moral compass. Her ability to influence and guide Shiva underscores her role as a figure of wisdom and strength, not just in their personal relationship but also in their shared mission to bring change to society. Sati's ultimate act of self-sacrifice to protect her principles and Shiva's honor is perhaps the most profound demonstration of her agency. Her decision to end her life in defiance of Daksha's insult to Shiva is not an act of weakness but a powerful assertion of her autonomy and commitment to her values.

Identity Formation in *Devon Ke Dev... Mahadev*

In the early stages, Sati's identity is closely tied to her father, King Daksha, a staunch proponent of materialism and order. She is raised to uphold his values and follow his rigid worldview, which dismisses asceticism and spirituality, especially Shiva's unconventional ways. Sati's internal conflict begins as she starts to question the dichotomy between her father's beliefs and her own inner inclinations, signaling the first step in her identity formation.

Sati's love for Shiva becomes a pivotal moment in her journey. It is not merely romantic but symbolic of her awakening to a higher truth and her spiritual calling. Her love challenges her to confront her fears, societal norms, and familial opposition. This process of choosing Shiva, despite Daksha's vehement disapproval, reflects her growing autonomy and the assertion of her individuality.

Sati's decision to embrace Shiva's path signifies her rejection of the materialistic and hierarchical values imposed by her father. By choosing to align with Shiva, who represents spirituality, freedom, and transcendence, Sati forges an identity that is independent of her familial ties and societal expectations. Her transformation from a princess bound by duty to a woman driven by love and truth highlights her journey toward self-definition.

Sati's self-immolation is the culmination of her identity formation. When her father humiliates Shiva and denies his divinity, Sati chooses to sacrifice her life rather than continue to live in a world that disrespects her beliefs and values. This act is not one of defeat but of ultimate agency and self-realization. It

symbolizes her complete rejection of the materialistic identity imposed on her and her embrace of her spiritual truth.

Sati's journey does not end with her death. Her rebirth as Parvati signifies the transcendence of her earthly struggles and the formation of a divine identity. As Parvati, she fully embodies her spiritual purpose and reunites with Shiva, representing the harmonious union of the material and spiritual realms.

Sati and the concept of Transcendence

Sati's identity as a warrior further illustrates her transcendence. In a society where women are often relegated to passive roles, Sati asserts her agency by becoming a skilled fighter and protector. Her participation in battles, such as defending the village of Kashi, is not just a demonstration of her physical strength but also a statement of her autonomy. She chooses to fight for justice and protect the innocent, transcending traditional gender roles and societal expectations. Through her warriorhood, Sati redefines herself as an active agent of change, not a passive subject of fate.

Sati's relationship with Shiva is another critical aspect of her transcendence. Initially hesitant to embrace love due to her past and societal norms, Sati eventually chooses Shiva as her partner based on mutual respect and understanding. This choice is an act of self-assertion, as it is made on her terms, free from external pressures or obligations. By embracing love as a conscious decision, Sati transcends the constraints of fear and societal judgment, affirming her right to define her life and relationships. Sati's transcendence is also evident in her moral courage to confront societal injustices. For example, when she publicly defends a Vikarna woman who is mistreated, Sati directly challenges the discriminatory practices of her society. Her actions not only assert her belief in equality and justice but also inspire others to question and resist oppressive norms. By standing against these injustices, Sati rises above the constraints of tradition, asserting her freedom to act according to her principles.

Sati's ultimate act of transcendence comes in her self-sacrifice. When faced with the betrayal and threat of the Nagas, Sati chooses to confront them alone, knowing the risks involved. Her decision to protect her people, even at the cost of her life, is a powerful assertion of her autonomy and moral integrity. This act is not one of defeat but of ultimate freedom—Sati's choice to define her destiny on her terms, even in the face of death.

Sati's transcendence extends beyond her life, as her actions and principles leave a lasting impact on those around her, particularly Shiva. Her courage, wisdom, and moral clarity serve as a guiding force for Shiva, shaping his journey and his understanding of justice and leadership. Sati's ability to transcend her circumstances inspires others to rise above their limitations, embodying the transformative power of her choices.

Sati's Death as an Act of Agency

Sati's death, particularly her act of self-immolation in traditional narratives, has long been viewed as a passive sacrifice—a tragic submission to the circumstances around her. However, modern retellings, including Amish Tripathi's *Shiva Trilogy* and interpretations in works like *Devon Ke Dev... Mahadev*, reframe her death as a powerful act of agency. This reframing positions her self-immolation not as a surrender but as a deliberate, conscious choice to assert her principles and reclaim her autonomy, even in the face of overwhelming societal constraints.

In traditional narratives, Sati's self-immolation occurs during a yajna (sacrifice) hosted by her father, King Daksha, where Shiva is insulted and disrespected. Sati's death in this context is not simply a response to

her father's actions but a profound rejection of a world that denies her love, autonomy, and spiritual truth. By choosing to end her life, she asserts her agency in a situation where her voice is ignored, and her identity as Shiva's consort is dishonored. This act is not about succumbing to despair but about refusing to live in a world that negates her values and dignity.

Simone de Beauvoir's philosophy emphasizes the reclamation of subjectivity—the ability to define oneself rather than be defined by others. Sati's self-immolation aligns with this idea, as it becomes her ultimate assertion of selfhood. In modern retellings, this act is portrayed as a conscious decision to reclaim control over her life and destiny. By choosing to immolate herself, Sati rejects the objectification and subjugation imposed upon her by patriarchal norms, asserting her right to define her existence on her terms.

In Amish Tripathi's *Shiva Trilogy*, Sati's agency is evident in every aspect of her character, including her death. Although her self-immolation is not part of this narrative, her death in the trilogy mirrors the thematic significance of her traditional sacrifice. In the third book, *The Oath of the Vayuputras*, Sati confronts the Nagas alone, knowing the risks involved. Her choice to protect her people, even at the cost of her life, underscores her autonomy and moral courage. Her death is not a passive event but a deliberate act of defiance against injustice and betrayal, emphasizing her strength and principles.

Fire, in the context of Sati's self-immolation, carries profound symbolic meaning. Traditionally associated with purification and transformation, the fire of Sati's sacrifice represents her liberation from a world that fails to uphold her values. It is an act of spiritual transcendence, through which she rises above the constraints of her earthly existence. This symbolism is further reinforced in her rebirth as Parvati, where she returns as a divine being fully aligned with her purpose and identity.

Sati's death is not just a personal assertion of agency but also a catalyst for change. Her self-immolation forces those around her, particularly Shiva, to confront the consequences of societal injustice and arrogance. Shiva's grief and rage following her death lead to the destruction of Daksha's yajna and the eventual transformation of societal norms. Sati's act of agency, therefore, has far-reaching implications, inspiring both individual and collective introspection and change. Modern interpretations of Sati's death resonate with contemporary audiences by framing her sacrifice as an empowering choice rather than a tragic inevitability. This reframing challenges traditional notions of female passivity in mythology, presenting Sati as a figure of strength and autonomy. Her death becomes a statement of resistance against oppression and a testament to the power of self-determination.

Conclusion

The exploration of Sati's character in Amish Tripathi's *Shiva Trilogy* and *Devon Ke Dev... Mahadev* highlights her evolution as a symbol of agency, resilience, and transcendence. Both narratives reframe her traditional portrayal, emphasizing her autonomy and moral courage in challenging societal norms and asserting her individuality. Sati's journey, from defying societal prejudices to her ultimate act of self-determination, reflects timeless themes of empowerment and self-realization. By reimagining her story, these modern retellings enrich the discourse on gender, identity, and mythology, offering a nuanced perspective that resonates with contemporary audiences and underscores the enduring relevance of mythological narratives.

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