

Chapter 6: Women in Indian mythology and media representation: Power, patriarchy and reinterpretation

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Abstract: Indian mythology has served as a generative reservoir for narratives circulating across visual and popular media, profoundly influencing collective understandings of gender, morality, and power. [1,7] Female figures drawn from mythological traditions—among them Sita, Draupadi, Durga, Kali, and Shabari—recur across films, television serials, animation, and contemporary digital retellings. Such representations characteristically reflect competing ideological pressures: the tension between patriarchal authority and feminine agency, between devotional idealization and social marginalization. This chapter undertakes a critical examination of how women in Indian mythology are constructed and contested within visual culture, with particular attention to the processes by which media reproduces, negotiates, and transforms mythological femininity. Drawing on feminist media theory and representation theory, the chapter analyses both the conservative portrayals that dominated mythological television serials and early cinema, as well as more recent reinterpretations that have begun to interrogate and destabilize prevailing gender norms. [5,6] By locating mythological women within wider discourses of power, patriarchy, and feminist resistance, the chapter argues that contemporary media has emerged as a vital arena for reimagining mythological narratives and recovering women's voices. The study contributes to gender and media scholarship by foregrounding mythology as a living cultural text continually reconstituted through changing practices of media representation.

Keywords: Women, Mythology, Media Representation, Feminism, Power, Indian Visual Culture

1 Introduction

India's mythological inheritance occupies a position of unusual cultural density, functioning not merely as a collection of sacred narratives but as a living ideological system that continues to inform social values, ethical expectations, and collective self-understanding. The great narrative traditions encoded in texts such as the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Puranas, and numerous regional folk compositions have historically shaped popular conceptions of gender, duty, authority, and moral conduct. Within this broader framework, the representation of women has commanded particular significance: mythological female figures have served across generations as the primary cultural archetypes through which femininity, virtue, sacrifice, strength, and transgression are defined, contested, and transmitted.