



Gender, Power and the Sacred

A FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF CROSS-CULTURAL
MYTHOLOGICAL NARRATIVES

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Gender, Power and the Sacred

**A Feminist Analysis of Cross-Cultural
Mythological Narratives**

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Preface

The book is the culmination of an academic journey that has been deeply personal, intellectual, and transformative. At its core, this work seeks to interrogate the intricate and often overlooked ways in which mythological narratives have historically constructed, reinforced, and transmitted gender ideologies. By examining key mythological figures such as Venus and Mars from Roman mythology, Aphrodite and Ares from Greek traditions, and divine pairs like Shiva-Parvati and Zeus-Hera, this study explores how myths serve as socio-cultural texts that mirror, endorse, or challenge prevailing patriarchal norms.

This interest in mythology was born not merely out of literary fascination but from an early exposure to religious and cultural storytelling, which shaped our understanding of femininity, masculinity, and power. As we progressed in our studies in English Literature, we found that these ancient stories—while steeped in fantasy and divinity—are profoundly human in their portrayal of relationships, morality, and identity. What especially struck us was how female figures were simultaneously revered and restrained, glorified and objectified, silenced and sexualized. This contradiction became the intellectual spark that led us to question the ideological structures embedded within myth and to pursue a deeper feminist analysis of these recurring archetypes.

The methodology of this book is interdisciplinary, drawing from feminist theory, classical literature, psychoanalysis, visual studies, and gender studies. Thinkers such as Simone de Beauvoir, bell hooks, Judith Butler, Laura Mulvey, and Sandra Gilbert have served as critical beacons, helping us navigate through centuries of mythmaking and myth-breaking. Their insights have allowed us to frame myth not just as storytelling, but as a form of cultural instruction—an instrument of societal control as well as subversion.

Throughout this work, we have attempted to highlight the double standards imposed on mythological women—those branded as seductresses, victims, or divine wives—and to juxtapose these portrayals with those of their male counterparts, often idealized as warriors, kings, or gods. Chapters dedicated to Venus and Mars, and later to Zeus and Hera, do not only analyze the symbolic power and conflict embedded in their tales but also examine how contemporary feminist scholars and artists reinterpret these characters today. By bringing ancient texts into conversation with modern theoretical frameworks and artistic reinterpretations, we aim to demonstrate that mythology is not static; it evolves in meaning depending on who tells the story—and how.

This book is not only an academic investigation but also a personal act of resistance. As young women navigating societal expectations, we often found parallels between the mythical women we studied and the real women around us—silenced, judged, worshipped, or punished for their choices and bodies. Writing this work became a way of reclaiming these voices, of understanding the mechanisms of power that continue to echo from ancient temples to modern classrooms, from epic poetry to political discourse. It is our hope that readers—whether scholars, students, or lovers

of myth—will find in these pages both critique and compassion, both deconstruction and possibility.

We are also indebted to the many feminist scholars and storytellers whose work inspired us to look beyond surface interpretations and read between the lines of myth. Their courage to question tradition gave us the confidence to explore, challenge, and contribute to this evolving field of literary and gender studies. A heartfelt thanks goes to our peers and friends who listened patiently as we shared fragments of ideas, wrestled with conflicting theories, or simply questioned everything late into the night.

Most importantly, we dedicate this book to every girl who was told that her story didn't matter. May we continue to read, rewrite, and reclaim our myths.

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Introduction

Myths, Power and Gender

Myths have long been shaping the human understanding of identity, morality, the universe, and societal organization. Among their most important contributions has been the construction of gender roles and identities. Myths, be they from ancient Greece, India, or Scandinavia, are templates for society that not only define the enigmatic but also reinforce the social hierarchies. One of the most ancient and longest-lasting of social constructs, gender derives its rationale, symbolism, and legitimacy from these mythic tales. Feminist theory has also criticized how myths have historically excluded women and advocated patriarchal values. Feminist texts like those of Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler maintain that myths don't just reflect gender roles, but rather produce and reproduce them. De Beauvoir's idea that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" points to the performative nature of gender—a theme developed by Butler in her theory of gender performativity. They both demonstrate that myths are in the middle responsible for writing men's and women's acts and expectations. This dissertation will explore the crossroads of myth, power, and gender from a feminist critical approach. It examines how the myths create and reinforce gender identity, roles, and relations and how myths affect contemporary constructions of gender. Not only does the research examine the construction of femininity but also the construction of masculinity since they are co-constructed in myth.

The research investigates common power, agency, and control themes—characteristics that are the foundation of most myth systems. Mythic power is gendered, and the male gods and heroes are usually seen to be dominant, forceful, and logical, while the females are passive, emotional, or deadly. The gap has permeated into the norms of society and still influences how gender is experienced in implicit and overt manners. In addition, myths serve as templates for social expectation. Through repetition and re-fashioning over centuries, myths have imposed gender ideals that promote male dominance and naturalize the subordination of women. Patriarchy, as institutionally legitimated in such myths, is not only tolerated but cherished. Feminist analysis resists such entrenched meanings and attempts to determine the embedded prejudices. A critical component of this project is its examination of feminist interpretations of mythic myth. In literature, visual arts, cinema, and academic writing, feminist authors and scholars have rewritten canonical myth, providing interpretations which remake women characters and subvert hegemonic readings. Far more than an exercise in imagination, this reauthoring is a politics with power that resists the hegemonic order.

This dissertation is multidisciplinary in approach, using feminist theory, comparative mythology, cultural studies, and literary criticism. It looks at myths across different cultures, Greek, Indian, Norse, and Judeo-Christian traditions, to identify common patterns and individual deviations in gender representation. By adhering to the historical, cultural, and ideological significance of mythic narratives, this book enables us to gain greater insight into the ways in which myths continue to form gendered reality. It also highlights the feminist strength of revision as an agency of subversion in turning around oppressive paradigms and building grander

narratives. By so doing, this research seeks to answer fundamental questions: How are gender myths constructed? How do such constructions empower or disempower people regarding gender? How have feminist voices re-claimed and re-shaped these stories? What relevance do such mythic gender constructions hold in contemporary times? Because myths still influence literature, media, and public discourse, an analysis of their role in constructing gendered identity is not just timely but also required. The power of myth lies in its ability to establish group consciousness—by re-writing and re-telling myths, feminist scholarship provides space for more equitable and empowering gender knowledge.

Theoretical Framework

In order to critically examine the nexus of myths, power, and gender, it is crucial to know the sophisticated theories on which this research is based. Feminist theory, being one of the main lenses used, gives the ground space to demystify the patriarchal systems of mythic discourse. This chapter gives the main feminist theoretical input that underlies this argument, along with relevant knowledge from mythology and cultural studies. Simone de Beauvoir's influential book, her 1949 treatise *The Second Sex*, revolutionized the study of gender in literature, philosophy, and society. Woman is not a biological product but a social construction, de Beauvoir contended. To paraphrase her,

"One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman,"

she underscored the socially constructed nature of gender roles and the social role in defining and enforcing them. In the case of this research, De Beauvoir's focus on the symbolic and cultural construction of femininity is key to an investigation into how myths go about building up the notion of "woman." Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity draws on De Beauvoir's thoughts. In *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler shattered the binary perspective of gender and proposed the concept that gender is not a fixed identity but a performed act that takes place through habitual practices. She goes on,

"There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to be its results."

Myths, according to Butler, do not merely reflect social norms—they assist in enforcing them by providing characters and narratives that proscribe gender performances. Mythical beings become archetypes for model gender behavior, which individuals are then forced to imitate. Luce Irigaray contributes to this theoretical foundation with her critique of phallogentric language and representation. In texts such as *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Irigaray examines how female identity and sexuality are always represented in terms defined by male discourse. She asserts,

"Woman has sex organs more or less everywhere... she is therefore not obliged to choose between them."

Myths, in this context, become instruments that silence or distort female experience. Her call for a new, feminine language aligns with feminist reinterpretations of myths, which aim to revoice the female subject. In addition, intersectionality, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, is important in understanding how gender in myth never exists singly but overlaps with other dimensions of identity such as race, class, caste, and sexuality. In Crenshaw's words,

"Because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism,"

any analysis that fails to address this complexity cannot answer to the lived reality of most individuals. Myths in any given culture normally reflect the common ideology of a specific time and region, making it necessary for intersectional examination. For example, Indian epics reflect gender roles as well as religious philosophies and also indicate caste relationships.

The research of Roland Barthes in "Mythologies" also supports this study. Barthes considers myth as a communication, a way by which ruling ideologies are universalized. For him,

"Myth is a type of speech. a system of communication, a message."

Myths, for him, de-symbolize historical facts and turn them into absolute truths. This process conceals the power relations in the workplace and constructs oppressive systems to look normal or even better. The idea of myth as ideology helps to expose how gender norms are internalized within seemingly innocuous narratives.

The feminist myth criticism school, founded by critics such as Adrienne Rich, Hélène Cixous, and Clarissa Pinkola Estés, has centered on the necessity of reclaiming lost or repressed female voices in myth. Rich's concept of "re-vision"—reading texts from a new, critical perspective—is particularly well-suited. She asserts,

"Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival."

It requires a re-reading of myths that uncovers the richness and agency of women characters.

Finally, the efforts of postcolonial feminist scholars are important in recognizing the role of colonial narratives in reconfiguring native myths. Writers such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak describe how the myth was used during colonization to function to legitimize control. In her essay

"Can the Subaltern Speak?"

Spivak describes how it is hard to reclaim the voice of subordinated people, writing,

"The subaltern cannot speak,"

unless one deconstructs the dominant text. Uncovering pre-colonial readings is able to reveal alternative gender constructions that threaten patriarchy and imperialism.

As a general rule, the chapter frames the theoretical systems deployed in the dissertation. From dialogue between an eclectic array of feminist theorists and writers, research stands within an open and expansive intellectual tradition. Such theories facilitate subversive reading of myth texts and facilitate the recovery of gender diversity and women's agency within myth.

Representations of Masculinity in Mythology

Masculinity, as depicted in mythic narratives, has often become synonymous with power, dominance, reason, and heroism. These representations have served as cultural templates that govern and reinforce ideals of male conduct in society. This chapter examines the construction of masculinity in various mythic traditions and discusses how such representations contribute to the

reinforcement of patriarchal values. Ideal male conduct in Greek mythology is portrayed by heroes like Zeus, Hercules, and Odysseus. The god-king Zeus is customarily imagined to be a skilled ruler who isn't disobeyed. His conquests, whether political or erotic, establish his identity as ruler male. Hercules, renowned for valour and physical strength, is the epitome of manhood whose male virtues are being challenged and found in a string of labors. Odysseus, the clever and wise one, is the rational and calculating face of manhood. Such a character is admirable, and his virtues become desirable norms for men to follow. Similarly, in Hindu mythology, gods such as Rama and Krishna are perfect masculine embodiments. Rama, the Ramayana's hero, is dharma (morality), faithfulness, and honor personified. His unshakeable adherence to virtue, no matter the personal cost, is a model of masculine stoicism. Krishna is, by contrast, the essence of suave charm, quick wit, and supernatural might, often using his wit and charisma to overcome adversaries. Both characters are deeply embedded within the cultural imagination as archetypes of ideal manhood. Norse mythology presents a heroic type of masculinity as well. Odin, the all-father, is wise and powerful, and Thor, the god of thunder, is strong and courageous. These gods wage battles, make strategic decisions, and use their power in manners that celebrate masculine heroism. Their stories are replete with acts of conquest and courage, further reinforcing the idea that masculinity is closely linked to power and aggression.

This repeated portrayal of masculinity as heroic, rational, and dominant is not an accident. According to Judith Butler, these narratives are a part of the performativity of gender because they offer archetypes to be emulated by men. The mythic heroes embody a gender script where physical strength, emotional control, and domination are valued. These values are then internalized and reproduced in cultural, political, and domestic arenas. Besides, the construction of masculinity in myth also usually relies on domination or exclusion of femininity. Male heroes tend to be legitimized by saving, conquering, or overcoming female characters. Not only is this what constructs the masculine, but it also constructs the feminine as a site of vulnerability, temptation, or chaos that must be contained or mastered. In the majority of myths, male characters are also depicted as protectors and providers, reinforcing the gendered division of labor. This role is naturalized and idealized by repetition in stories. But this picture also imposes strict requirements on men, limiting emotional expression and promoting violence as a solution to disputes. From a feminist viewpoint, it is important to critique these representations and examine their significance. What are the implications of a culture valorizing a masculine ideal based in domination and control? How do men who fail to or cannot meet these ideals fare? Deconstructing these mythic portraits allows us to start to lay bare the limits and risks of traditional masculinity. Feminist reinterpretations have started to deconstruct such representations. Contemporary literature and media rewrite male mythological characters in more complex and vulnerable forms, opening up possibilities for alternative masculinities. Such reinterpretations suggest that masculinity does not exclusively need to be defined through strength and authority but also through empathy, cooperation, and emotional nuance. In short, masculinity in myth has traditionally been defined in ways that support patriarchal values and preclude other forms of gender expression. Analyzing these portrayals from a feminist viewpoint, this chapter reveals the deeply entrenched ideologies that condition our understanding of manhood and highlights the necessity of more pluralistic and expansive portrayals.

Representations of Femininity in Mythology

Femininity in myth has been represented through a double focus—either as passive, nurturing, and virtuous, or as threatening, seductive, and disruptive. These dual constructions have the effect of defining and circumscribing female roles in myth and, by extension, in society. This chapter examines how femininity has been represented in various mythological traditions and discusses the cultural implications of these representations.

In Greek mythology, goddesses such as Hera, Athena, Aphrodite, and Artemis represent aspects of femininity, but often in limiting stereotypes. Hera, the queen goddess, is defined most often by her role as wife to Zeus, often described as jealous and vengeful—traits that support patriarchal stereotypes of excess female emotion. Athena, though wise and strategic, is masculine in virtues and loved for being a virgin and spurning traditional feminine roles. Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty and love, is the erotic and is reduced constantly as an object for male desire. Artemis, though independent and warrior-like, is also committed to virginity, eschewing maternal or romantic feminine roles women were traditionally assigned.

These accounts point to the limited archetypes presented to women in myth. Women are either celebrated for chastity and fidelity or demonized for sexuality and independence. This two-way structure revives the virgin/whore complex—a cultural paradigm that continues to influence attitudes toward women.

Indian mythological female goddesses are both powerful and contradictory. They are worshiped as powerful and capable of destroying evil through icons like Durga and Kali, but also must be motherly, nurturing women. Sita, from the Ramayana, is worshiped as pure and loyal, but her story also shows the feminine roles of sacrifice and submission. Her trial by fire and ultimate exile reveal the conditional acceptance of female virtue and the immense pressure on women to uphold family and societal honor.

These tales position women as moral paradigms or warning signs. As feminist theorist Adrienne Rich comments, they work to "fit women into the institution of motherhood and suppress their autonomy." Mythic femininity turns into a mechanism of social control, confirming gender hierarchy through glorifying submissive and sacrificial virtues.

Frigg and Freyja too, in Norse mythology, demonstrate complex but restrictive portrayals. Frigg, Odin's spouse, is associated with home and foresight, while Freyja, who is the love, fertility, and war goddess, holds territories traditionally reserved for men and women. Even great goddesses are, however, pushed to the periphery of male-dominated myths, their stories affirming masculinity heroism as the ultimate paradigm.

From a feminist perspective, such depictions emphasize the symbolic diminishment of women into roles described in terms of relation to men—to wives, mothers, lovers, or seductresses. Helene Cixous argues that myth has been used in the past to "write the female body out of existence" because it tends towards male-normative narrative. Myths are thus used to become vehicles for the entrenchment of marginalization against women.

But feminist reimagining's have challenged these portrayals. Writers such as Anita Diamant (in "The Red Tent") and Madeline Miller (in "Circe") have given mythic women's voices back,

assigning them complexity, depth, and agency. These reinterpretations shift the story from male adventure to female experience, placing interiority and resistance front and center. As Cixous has it, "Woman must write herself. into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement."

Moreover, scholars have emphasized the cultural specificity of such representations, highlighting that femininity is not an intrinsic category but one culturally constructed that is heterogeneous over time and space. Intersectional analysis can make transparent how race, class, caste, and sexuality further shape the figure of women in myth.

In short, mythic femininity has long been circumscribed by patriarchal ideals that reduce women to symbolic roles. Through feminist critique and creative reinterpretation, these stories are being reimagined to highlight female agency, complexity, and strength. Power and agency in mythic narrative and their intersection with gender are the topics the next chapter will address.

Power, Agency, and Mythological Archetypes

Power and agency are key concerns of mythology, affecting not just characters and the stories they reside in but also the social values gleaned from them. Myths have instituted norms around who is powerful and how they exercise power for centuries, typically reinforcing and reflecting gender hierarchies. This chapter explores how mythological narratives construct and construct power, that is, how mythological narratives grant or deny agency to characters via gender.

Male heroes and gods fill the space in classical mythology. Zeus, Odin, Vishnu, and patriarchal gods hold ultimate power, usually as the bringers of justice, creators of order, or forces of chaos. Their power is not challenged and is usually absolute, establishing a model for male power in the human world. Female characters, however, are typically shown to wield power only in limited or domestic spheres, or their power is made out to be dangerous and requiring containment.

To take one example, in the Greek myth of Medusa, her transformation from beautiful maiden to monster by Athena—having been raped by Poseidon—is a retaliatory deflection of power. Instead of punishing Poseidon, the myth punishes Medusa, silencing female trauma and reinforcing male power. The feminist philosopher Julia Kristeva interprets such myths as an expression of a larger cultural logic to repress and control feminine power: "What is repressed returns as the abject."

Similarly, in Hindu mythology, power is also given human form by goddesses like Kali and Durga, who are fierce, destructive, and protective. Though these women seem to symbolize strength and agency, their narratives are often framed by male cosmologies. Their own existence is often motivated by male failure—thus, their power is restorative rather than revolutionary. They maintain the status quo, rather than disrupt it.

This controlled exercise of feminine power in Norse mythology finds expression in the Valkyries, who choose the dead for Valhalla but are under the control of Odin. Except for their otherworldly nature, their autonomy is only as a role in a male-conceived structure. Feminist scholar Carol Pateman argues patriarch power operates by exercising itself through appearances of inclusion of women in systems of power while actually maintaining male dominance.

Lilith's mythology offers a radical counterpart. In some Jewish mystic traditions, Lilith is the first wife of Adam who refused to be submissive and left the Garden of Eden. Her rejection of patriarchal submission transformed her into an evil demon in later works. Feminist theologians have reclaimed Lilith as a symbol of resistance and autonomy, challenging the typical identification of feminine power with disorder or evil.

Contemporary feminist reimagining's recover these characters and retell myths to center women's experiences and agency. Naomi Alderman's "The Power" is an imagining of a world in which women develop the ability to discharge electrical shocks, totally upending gender relations. Fictional as it is, this reversal criticizes the way power works as a social construct and opposes the naturalization of men's domination.

Mythical archetypes such as the hero, trickster, and creator also carry implicit gender assumptions. Joseph Campbell's "hero's journey," for instance, keeps women out of the hero's position, assigning them helper or reward roles. Feminist critics such as Maureen Murdock have developed alternative models, such as the heroine's journey, which is self-discovery, healing, and spiritual integration.

Intersectionality is also crucial to understanding how power operates in myth. Figures like Draupadi from the Mahabharata or Persephone from Greek mythology reveal how race, caste, age, and marital status mediate female agency. Draupadi's public humiliation and resistance reveal the complexities of honor, sexuality, and voice within patriarchal frameworks.

Briefly, mythology has traditionally situated power in a gendered framework with a masculine-centered priority and feminine agency monitored or demonized. Feminist critique and re-visioning can realign these narratives toward more balanced representations of power. The next chapter will analyze how mythology continues to construct gendered roles in contemporary society and culture.

Mythology and Contemporary Gender Roles

Mythological narratives, though ancient, continue to shape contemporary gender roles through their extensive influence on literature, media, religion, and social behaviors. Myths convey cultural ideals regarding femininity and masculinity and often serve as the unconscious master plan for contemporary gender roles. This chapter explores how mythological paradigms influence contemporary constructions of gender and how feminist critique functions to deconstruct and reorder these myths.

One of the most direct influences of mythology on contemporary gender roles is through religious practice and scripture. Gender roles in much of the globe are founded on scripture stories and the roles assigned to male and female deities. For instance, in Hindu society, the image of Sita as the ideal wife—obedient, self-sacrificing, and pure—has become the ideal of femininity in South Asian culture. Similarly, Christian iconography's Virgin Mary stands in awe because of chastity, humility, and motherly love—ideals that remain to hold up women in great esteem.

The reinforcement of such archetypes restricts women's lives in both the public and private spheres. In Simone de Beauvoir's "The Second Sex," "Myths are among the most powerful tools for keeping women in a state of subjection." Such feminine archetypes develop a norm against

which many women feel obliged to measure themselves, while deviations from such norms are often met with disapproval or sanction.

Masculinity is also characterized by mythic ideals. The hero archetype—brave, self-reliant, emotionally in control—is still dominant in modern storytelling and ideals of men. Superheroes, action heroes, and even politicians are likely to embody this mythic masculinity, reinforcing a limited definition of male strength that excludes vulnerability or emotional expression.

Modern media, including film, television, and literature, are likely to borrow heavily from mythic structures. From the use of Norse mythology in Marvel's Thor to young adult retellings of Greek myths, mythological narratives are constantly recontextualized and retold. Some applications replicate, instead of subverting, conventional gender roles, while others subvert them. For example, Madeline Miller's "Circe" retrieves the voice of a demonized witch and reimagines her as a symbol of female empowerment and self-determination.

Advertising and popular culture also reiterate mythic gender norms. Women are routinely portrayed as nurturers, seductresses, or moral guides, and men as leaders, protectors, or rebels. These stereotypes are reiterations of entrenched mythic binaries and affect people's understandings of themselves and others. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity explains how habitual cultural representations are internalized and performed in everyday life.

Education, jurisprudence, and political argument are not insulated from the impacts of mythic gender roles. In most cultures, gender disparities in leadership, authority, and ability continue unabated, largely justified by a reference to precedent. The mythic stories driving these precedents give them appearance and a look of legitimacy as well as perdurability. Feminist theory calls for demystifying such stories to pave the way for more inclusive and equitable constructions of gender.

Resistance of these popular myths can be seen in feminist art, literature, and activism. Feminist artists, poets, and writers reinterpret mythological figures to challenge normative gender categories and celebrate alternative selves. LGBTQ+ reconstructions of myth, for example, offer liberatory paradigms of gender that refuse binarisms.

Overall, mythology is critical to the formation of contemporary gender roles in that it implants symbolic norms within cultural consciousness. Traditional myths, which generally reinforce patriarchal notions, are complemented by feminist re-tellings with potential for revolution. Through reconsideration and re-telling of such myths, contemporary society is moved toward more expansive and just notions of gender. The next chapter will present case studies which demonstrate this process of mythic re-imagination and gender transformation.

Case Studies in Feminist Reinterpretation of Myth

This chapter provides examples of how feminist reimagining's of myth critique patriarchal legend and reclaim empowerment for silenced voices. These cases include literature, theatre, the visual arts, and new media, each suggesting a different path by which figures from mythology might be reinterpreted to further feminist ends.

1. Madeline Miller's "Circe" (2018)

Miller's novel reimagines the life of Circe, Homer's supporting character in "Odyssey," centering her voice. Instead of portraying her as a manipulative enchantress, Miller probes Circe's identity crisis, power, exile, and motherhood. The novel reimagines Circe as a figure of strength and growth, propelling her from a peripheral mythic figure to a fully realized character. By doing so, Miller disassembles traditional depictions of feminine power as destructive or manipulative.

2. Kavita Kane's "Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen" (2013)

Indian writer Kavita Kane's book retells the Mahabharata from the point of view of Karna's wife, Uruvi. While Karna is portrayed as a tragic hero, Kane's book draws focus to the silent agony and ethical issues of Uruvi. The story, through her eyes, questions the patriarchal norms that ostracize women and idealize male honor. Kane's book highlights the need to retell mythic tales from a feminine perspective to reveal underlying inequalities.

3. Visual Art: Judy Chicago's "The Dinner Party" (1979)

A foundational feminist installation artwork, "The Dinner Party" consists of a table setting for the goddess Ishtar, along with other mythic and historic women. Every setting uses symbolic embroidery and ceramics to honor female power and sexuality. Chicago's work turns around patriarchal stories on their heads by emphasizing the creative and sacred power of the feminine.

4. Theatre: "The Penelopiad" by Margaret Atwood (2005)

Atwood's play retells Penelope's tale from "The Odyssey," speaking out on her and her twelve hanged maids' behalf. This feminist reimagining subverts Odysseus's heroism and silencing and exploitation of women in myth. Atwood uses humor and irony to highlight the injustices of classical tales.

5. Contemporary Media: Wonder Woman and the Amazon Mythos

The 2017 film "Wonder Woman" replays the myth of the Amazons, a tribe of female warriors, in a plot where female power is not threat but hero. Even though still within a mainstream superhero genre, the film interacts with feminism as it is concerned with themes including justice, empathy, and resistance to patriarchal war thinking.

These case studies illustrate the variety and richness of feminist work with myth. They illustrate the means by which reinterpretation can empower contemporary audiences, challenge critical thinking, and introduce new paradigms for gender. The last chapter will summarize these conclusions and outline the broad implications of feminist myth criticism for literature, gender studies, and cultural transformation.

About the Book

This work presents a comprehensive feminist analysis of mythological narratives and their role in constructing, reinforcing, and transmitting gender ideologies throughout history. Drawing from diverse cultural traditions, the book examines key mythological figures including Venus and Mars from Roman mythology, Aphrodite and Ares from Greek traditions, and divine pairs such as Shiva-Parvati and Zeus-Hera, revealing how these ancient stories function as socio-cultural texts that both mirror and challenge patriarchal norms.

The study employs an interdisciplinary methodology, weaving together insights from feminist theory, classical literature, psychoanalysis, visual studies, & gender studies. Influenced by pioneering thinkers like Simone de Beauvoir, Bell Hooks, Judith Butler, Laura Mulvey, and Sandra Gilbert, this work frames mythology not merely as entertainment but as a form of cultural instruction—an instrument of both societal control and potential subversion.

Central to the analysis is the exploration of double standards imposed on mythological women, who are simultaneously revered & restrained, glorified and objectified. The book juxtaposes these complex female portrayals with their male counterparts, often idealized as warriors, kings, or gods, while examining how contemporary feminist scholars and artists reinterpret these characters today.

More than an academic investigation, this work represents a personal act of resistance and reclamation. By bringing ancient texts into conversation with modern theoretical frameworks, it demonstrates that mythology is not static but evolves in meaning depending on who tells the story and how it's interpreted, offering both critique and possibility for understanding gender dynamics across cultures and centuries.

About the Author



Dr. Vanya Srivastava is an Assistant Professor at Integral University, Lucknow, specializing in English Literature with expertise in cross-cultural studies and gender analysis. She holds a Ph.D. from the University of Lucknow, focusing on Bhutanese literature, & is UGC NET qualified. Her research spans South Asian literature, feminist studies, and comparative mythology, with publications in SCOPUS-indexed journals examining oral literature, Buddhist feminism, and contemporary gender discourse. Dr. Srivastava has organized international conferences and faculty development programs, serving in various academic leadership roles. Beyond her scholarly work, she is an accomplished theater artist, recipient of the "Best Actor Award" from the


National School of Drama, Delhi. Her unique combination of academic rigor and creative expression informs her interdisciplinary approach to literature & cultural studies, making her a distinctive voice in contemporary feminist literary criticism.




Ms. Nikita Verma is a dedicated English Literature student at Integral University, Lucknow, with a passionate interest in feminist literary criticism and mythological studies. Her academic journey has been marked by deep engagement with questions of gender representation, cultural narratives, and the intersection of ancient mythology with contemporary feminist discourse. Through her coursework and independent research, she has developed expertise in analyzing how traditional stories shape and reflect societal attitudes toward women and power dynamics. Ms. Verma's scholarly approach combines rigorous textual analysis with contemporary theoretical frameworks, particularly drawing from feminist and gender studies

perspectives. Her work demonstrates a commitment to reexamining canonical mythological texts through a critical lens, challenging traditional interpretations & uncovering the complex ways these narratives continue to influence modern understanding

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