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Sociological Analysis of the Sati System: A Reflection of the Mahabharata and the Pret Kalp of the Garudamahapurna in Gender Perspective


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Abstract

Sati (wives burning alive with the dead bodies of their husbands on the pyres as their deceased husbands' bodies are burnt down in the burning ghat) system was performed as norms and rules of the society in the patriarchal socio-cultural structure in the past era. This research has been focused on exploring the Sati system in terms of the women's roles in the death ritual of the historical period of *The Mahabharata and Pauranic* era of The Pret Kalpa of The Garudmahaapurana. There is no possibility to visit the historical period of society. Each piece of knowledge and literature has been socially produced. The literature reflects the socio-cultural relationship of that period of society.

Method: This research has gathered historical data using the historical content analysis method and expert interviews. Similarly, secondary data has been collected through the articles, published in various journals of related issues. The content analysis method was applied to analyze the data using the qualitative research design. The legacy of Sati transcends its historical confines, catalyzing ongoing conversations about gender equity and human rights in a contemporary context. Exploration of the sati system through the ancient scriptures like The Mahabharata and The Preta Kalpa of The Garudamahapurana has given the knowledge of how gender issues have been shaped, guided, and passed on and on from generation to generation to the present social and cultural practices. The data have been analog to the theoretical assumption of patriarchy.

Keywords: death ritual, gender, Mahabharata, Pret Kalpa of The Garudamahapurana, Sati system, sociological analysis

Sociological Analysis of the Sati System: A Reflection of the Mahabharata and the Pret Kalp of the Garudamahapurna in Gender Perspective

The Sati system, a historical practice in certain parts of Nepal and India, involved the self-immolation of a widow on her husband's funeral pyre. This ritual was rooted in patriarchal values and was often viewed as an act of ultimate devotion and honor. However, it also reflected the severe social restrictions placed on women, who were often seen as the property of their husbands and subject to societal pressures. While Sati has been documented as far back as the 4th century, it gained prominence during the medieval period. It continued into the 19th century until it was officially banned by the British colonial government in 1829 (Nussbaum, 2000) in India and by Chandra Shamsheer in 1928 in Nepal. The Sati system highlights the complex interplay between gender, tradition, and colonial intervention, serving as a lens through which to examine the broader status of women in historical and contemporary contexts. In this sense, the reflection of sati system means the process of drawing the disparity of men and women still being practiced in the socio-cultural structure derived from ancient civilization to the present modern society's link how the gender roles and responsibilities have been differentiated in the patriarchal society of the modern era.

Sati (wives burning alive with the dead bodies of their husbands on the pyres as their deceased husbands' bodies are burnt down in the burning ghat) system was performed as a norms and rules of the society in the patriarchal socio-cultural structure in the past era. Sati system has been connected with the gender roles and duties of women and men. The patriarchal social structure got formed in a male dominated society and females were regarded as the objects for serving the men and the women's lives used to be meaningful as long as their husbands were alive (Adhikari, 2020c). The male dominated society created the social structure of binary opposition of men and women. Sati was taken as the dignity and status

of the male dominated society. It got developed with the civilization of human beings. Though it has not been found in the practice at present, it has been explained in the ancient scriptures. For understanding and knowing gender roles, it has become essential to comprehend the sati system of the ancient scriptures. The sati system has been found in the form of narration and peaching in the social practice even today. Though it has not been found the exact date when the sati system got started, it has been often found narrated in The Preta Kalpa of The Garudamahapurana and The Mahabharata as the ancient scriptures of teaching the society in the form of the death rituals. The sati system and the gender roles have interconnected, and it has discriminated between men and women. However, the gender analysis cannot be limited to a binary view of men and women. According to Butler (2015), gender is defined by performative roles rather than by physical characteristics. This suggests that the roles associated with gender are shaped by how individuals perform within their socio-cultural contexts. Butler argues that a woman's identity is influenced by the societal roles she adopts. Similarly, Patton (2007) supports Butler's perspective in discussions of gender. However, the topic of gender encompasses various dimensions and complexities, making it impossible to reduce to a single narrative. Individuals, regardless of gender, fulfill multiple roles within social institutions, and these performances contribute to their gender identities.

In other words, the Sati system, a historical practice in which a widow self-immolated on her husband's funeral pyre, has deep roots in Indian culture and mythology. This practice, often shrouded in notions of honor and duty, can be examined through various literary and religious texts, including the epic *The Mahabharata* and *The Preta Kalpa* of *The Garudamahapurna*. These texts not only reflect societal attitudes toward women and their roles but also highlight the complex interplay between mythology, morality, and social customs in ancient India. By exploring the representation of the Sati system within these texts, we

can gain valuable insights into the sociocultural fabric of the time and the implications of such practices on gender roles and societal structures. *The Mahabharata*, a cornerstone of Indian epic literature, offers a rich narrative that delves into themes of duty, honor, and the often-tumultuous position of women within a patriarchal society. In contrast, *The Preta Kalpa* of *The Garudamahapurna* provides a theological perspective on various rituals and beliefs, including those surrounding death and the afterlife. Both texts serve as crucial resources for understanding how the Sati system was perceived and justified in ancient Indian society. This exploration sheds light on the broader sociological implications of such practices and encourages critical reflection on contemporary interpretations of gender and tradition. The Sati system has been a focal point of scholarly inquiry, drawing attention from various disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, and literary studies. Scholars such as Kaur (2010) have examined how ancient texts contribute to the social constructs surrounding women's identities, particularly in the context of widowhood. Kaur argues that the Sati system was not merely a personal choice for women but rather a reflection of deeply ingrained societal expectations and pressures.

The Mahabharata offers a multifaceted portrayal of female characters, most notably the figure of Draupadi, whose narrative encapsulates the struggles faced by women in a male-dominated world. According to Shukla (2015), Draupadi's experiences highlight the oppressive structures that dictate women's lives and choices, including the concept of Sati. The text illustrates how societal norms often relegated women to the status of property, whose worth was tied to their husbands. In *The Preta Kalpa* of *The Garudamahapurna*, the discussion surrounding death and rituals is framed within the larger context of dharma (duty) and karma (Adhikari & Adhikari, 2024). Sharma (2018) noted that this text presents the Sati ritual as an act of ultimate devotion and loyalty, thus reinforcing its acceptance within certain strata of society. Sharma emphasizes that the

religious underpinnings of Sati created a dichotomy where the act was revered as noble while simultaneously perpetuating the marginalization of women.

Furthermore, Ghosh (2019) highlights the role of myth in shaping societal attitudes toward gender. In her analysis, she suggests that the narratives within *The Mahabharata* and *The Preta Kalpa* of *The Garudamahapurna* contribute to the construction of an idealized femininity that valorizes self-sacrifice. Ghosh's work reveals how these texts perpetuate the notion that a woman's ultimate duty is to her husband, thus normalizing the practice of Sati as an expected response to widowhood.

Despite the historical context of Sati, contemporary feminist scholars argue for a re-evaluation of these narratives. Jain (2020) contends that modern interpretations of these texts must challenge the glorification of Sati and instead focus on the lived realities of women affected by such practices. Jain calls for a critical examination of the texts that considers the implications of Sati on women's agency and autonomy, thereby situating their voices within the broader discourse of gender studies.

In short, the Sati system as reflected in *The Mahabharata* and *The Preta Kalpa* of *The Garudamahapurna* offers a rich field of study that intersects literature, religion, and sociology. The complex representations of gender roles in these texts illuminate the societal norms that have historically dictated women's lives, urging a critical reflection on how these narratives shape contemporary understandings of gender and tradition. However, Jain, Ghosh, Sharma, Shukla, and Kaur have not done the proper research of sati system in reflection to the gender roles and responsibilities and hence this research has attempted to fulfil the remaining gap for the comprehension of the gender issues of the modern era being connected with the ancient, historical context and also with the transformation of the civilization from the ancient era to the present era accordingly.

Objective and Method of Research

This research focuses on exploring the *Sati* system in-terms of the women roles in death ritual of the historical period of *The Mahabharata* and *Pauranic* era of *The Pret Kalpa of The Garudmahaapurana*. There is no possibility to visit the historical period of society. Each of the knowledge and literature has been socially produced (Adhikari, 2020a; Adhikari, 2020b; Adhikari, 2024). The literature reflects the socio-cultural relationship of that period of society (Adhikari, 2021 & Adhikari, 2022). We can draw out the social facts of that period through the historical content analysis of the literature (Adhikari et al., 2024a; Adhikari et al., 2024b). Hence, to achieve the objective, this research has gathered historical data using the historical content analysis method and expert interview.

Similarly, secondary data has been collected through the articles, published in various journals of related issues. The research has chosen to use the qualitative research method to collect historical data, a method that Adhikari & Acharya (2020) and Adhikari et al. (2024e) have highlighted for its effectiveness in qualitative research and uncovering theoretical origins. Adhikari & Khadka, (2020), Adhikari et al. (2024f) and Adhikari et al. (2024g) have also utilized this qualitative research approach for gathering historical data. This study follows the same path to gain historical insights into the social structure concerning women roles and Sati system within *The Mahabharata* and *The Pauranic* period. The content analysis method is a major method to analyze the data in qualitative research design (Adhikari, 2020d; Adhikari et al., 2024d; Adhikari et al., 2024). All of the data has been analyzed through the content analysis method. It is the drawing the related stanzas and lines from the original texts, *The Mahabharata* and *The Garudamahapurana* respectively. The evidence taken from the primary texts have been analyzed critically in the context of the sati system.

Theoretical Orientation

Gender role disparities are predominantly linked to the concept of patriarchy, a system characterized by hierarchal and unequal power dynamics. Reinforcing societal stereotypes of masculinity and femineity that further perpetuate the unequal power dynamic between genders. Walby (1990) describes patriarchy as a male-dominated family structure, a social and ideological construct that positions men as superior to women. Patriarchal societies promote the idea of motherhood, encompassing the nurturing, education, and upbringing of children within the family. In other words, women's roles, their identities as well as their due values have not been recognized in the patriarchal system of the socio-cultural structure.

Discussion, Findings and Analysis

The analysis has been carried out on the basis of different thematic subtopics from both *The Mahabharata* and *The Preta Kalpa* of *The Garudamahapuran* in drawing the sati system and the gender roles respectively.

Women as the Sati (self-burning alive with the dead body of the husband) in *The Mahabharata*

Sati, burning alive with the burning of the dead body of the husband, was a common practice in the era of *The Mahabharata*. Karve (1969) has narrated about the event of Madri, the wife of Pandu, who had burnt herself with her husband's dead body by providing the responsibilities for taking care of her two sons, Sahadev and Nakula, to Kunti. Sati system was seen as a devotion of the wife towards her husband and its practice by the society at that time could be related to the duties of the married women i.e., 'Stridharma'. The law of it can be traced to *The Manu Smriti* and the society of *The Mahabharata* is seen practicing it but the wives becoming objects to burn themselves alive with their dead husbands is not mentioned in *The Manu Smriti* and the concept of getting remarried was forbidden for the widowed women, it was seen as her duty to join

her dead husband (Dhand, 2007 & Dhanda, 2009). But Vemsani (2021) contradicts on the practice being a choice of either joining their dead husbands like Madri and Shouri's wife or living like Kunti as a *Sanyasa* in *The Mahabharata* society and it was an option rather than a law of the society as Hawley (1994) argued. However, whether it is choice or compulsion, Sati system was practiced by the widowed women in the context of *The Mahabharata* as the following image reflects the real sati system carried out practically in the era of *The Mahabharata*.

Firstly, Madri burned herself with Pandu because of the curse given to him by Rishi Kindama i.e., his death was caused by Pandu's bow in hunting while the Rishi was copulating in the forest (Debroy, 2014, Sambhava Parva, 110). Pandu passed away according to the curse of the Rishi. After this event, it was a choice for Madri either to go in Sati or not but she realized that her husband died due to her cause of copulating with him as it was the curse of the Rishi, she chose to join Pandu in the funeral pyre (Sambhava Parva, 91). However, the case of Rukmini joining Krishana in the form of sati is not mentioned after the death of her husband while Satyabhama becomes a Sannyasa and enters the forest as atonement as it is mentioned in Hawley's (1994, pp 52). Though there was no rule to go in Sati, it was a common practice in *The Mahabharata* period.

Similarly, after Shouri's death, his four wives Devaki, Bhadra, Rohini and Madri joined him after his death as their husband's companion to the other life. According to Hawley (1994) the practice was limited to the kshatriya's tradition because The Padma-mahapurana prohibited the Brahmin women from joining their dead partner to the fire and the supporters to be guilty of manslaughter (Bhramhatya). So, it must be due to the choice, the four wives had joined with the dead body of their husband to be burnt alive as the system of Sati.

So, the practice was not mandatory even though it was practiced by the kshatriya widows and it was not any rule for other caste's widows to go to Sati

with the dead husband. The wives of the warriors are mentioned to go to Sati with their dead husbands.

Women's Devotion to Husbands

Women were dedicated to their husbands in *The Mahabharata*. Karve (1969) has explored how women were faithful to their husbands by giving the example of Draupadi and Subhadra to their husband, Arjuna. Likewise, Subedi (2018) has mentioned that king Drupad had organized the Swayamber ceremony for the marriage of his daughter. He announced, who would be able to pick up the "Dhanush" (heavy arrow or bow) that brave person would marry his daughter Draupadi. Arjun had succeeded in that performance and Draupadi had provided him the garland of Swayamber. According to the blessing of mother Kunti, all Panch-Pandavs (Yudhistir, Bhim, Arjun, Nahakul, and Sahadev) had treated Draupadi as a common wife of Pandavas. Apart from Draupadi, Pandavas had other wives too. Bhima had married Hidimba, and Arjun had married Shubhdra as their wives. But Draupadi equally responded, believed, and respected five husbands. Similarly, all five brothers- Panch –Pandavas had always faith in Draupadi as their wife.

Likewise, Dhritarastra was blind. He had married Gandhari who was not blind. But she became ready to cover her both eyes like a blind person to build up a respectful and faithful relationship between husband and wife. Subedi (2022) has added that husband and wife had mutual respect and a believable environment in the socio-cultural structure of *The Mahabharata* period. The socio-cultural structure was based on a patriarchal system although the marital relationship was guided by mutual understanding (D.P. Subedi, Personal communication, June 26, 2022). The role of Draupadi as the faithful wife of the Pandavas despite having other wives of them has proved that she had faithful relationship as the wife of Pandavas. It has displayed that women characters have been treated as weak,

feeble, faithful to their husbands, dedicated to their husbands and they have been regarded as the objects of the service to the men.

Women being Blinded for the Life of the Heaven through Sati

Women have been blinded by luring them to have the life of the heaven next to the earthly life. Women would deserve the life of heaven for many years after the earthly life if they go Sati with their dead husbands together. Such concept has been given in ninety-one stanza of *The Preta Kalpa* in chapter four of *The Garudamahapurana*. The stanza Ninety-one has stated that a woman who ascends the pyre of her dead husband together and follows up her husband together even after his death, she dwells in paradise or she stays in the heaven for a period of equal to the number of hairs on the body. In other words, such a woman lives in the heaven three and half crore years (Vedavyasa, 2012, Garuda, 91 stanza). This stanza has inspired the women to go to Sati with their dead husbands and to dwell in the heaven for a long period of time after this earthly life. It naturally functions as the seed of motivation to the innocent women who do not have the knowledge of philosophy of life. It has not provided the value and importance of life of the women after the death of their husbands on the earth. But the entire *The Garudamahapurana*, not only *The Preta Kalpa*, does not say anything to the husbands to burn alive with the dead wives together on their pyres. In this sense, it has discriminated between the male and the female in *The Preta Kalpa* of *The Garudamahapurana*.

Woman as a Tool through Sati

Woman's life has been taken as the tool of bringing salvation and liberation of all kinds of the sins of earthly life of her husband after the earthly life. Such idea has been provided in stanza ninety-two of *The Preta Kalpa* in chapter four of *The Garudamahapurana*. The stanza has argued that just as the snake charmer takes out the snake forcefully from the hole, in the same way, the woman who goes to Sati with her dead husband's pyre together, she takes out her

husband from hell and she enjoys with him in the paradise (Vedavyasa, 2012, Garuda, 92 stanza). This stanza has compared women with the snake charmer to take out all kinds of the sins of their husbands' earthly life by going to Sati and taking their deceased husbands out from the painful life of the inferno and taking them in the heavenly zone next to the life of the earth. In this respect, women's lives have been regarded nothing more than the tools of liberation of all kinds of the earthly committed sins and their punishment in the hell. Women are emotionally inspired to dedicate to their husbands and even motivated them to enjoy the life of the paradise with their husbands even in the life next to the earthly life.

Woman Favoring of Celestial Nymphs via Sati

Woman has been lured to dwell in the eyes of the celestial nymphs by adopting the Sati system. Such idea has been explained in stanza ninety-three in *The Preta Kalpa* of *The Garudamahapurana*. The stanza has ignited women to go to Sati by stating the idea that the woman who ascends the pyre of her dead husband goes to heaven directly. In that situation, she is praised by the celestial nymphs and such woman enjoys with her husband in heaven for a long period of time. This time is called fourteen Indras' rule in paradise successively (Vedavyasa, 2012, Garuda, 93 stanza). This stanza has put the concept of dwelling in heaven to the women with their husbands together by going to Sati with their husbands' pyres together. If women do so, then they do not only obtain the opportunity of ascending to the heaven but they also become the most favorite in the eyes of the celestial nymphs. Such women are lured to go to Sati even to gain the especial praise, love, and care of the heavenly nymphs as the dutiful, honest, and holey women in performing the right rituals for the sake of Dharma. Moreover, such women have been encouraged to go to Sati for dwelling in the paradise as long as fourteen Indras-Gods -would be ruling in the heaven one after another. In such case, the women do not mind to go to Sati to win the favor of

celestial nymphs. It has claimed that the women have to sacrifice for the sake of their husbands but it has not said that men too have to sacrifice for their wives if they die earlier to men. This Sati system has created gender disparity and inequality. Both male and female are equal as human beings but males have gained superiority in position to females. Burning alive with the dead husbands together on their pyres does not seem to be imaginable and such wild and savagery cannot even be envisioned in the modern civilized society of today though it was practiced in the ancient time.

Woman's Sati as Purgation of Man's Sins

Woman has been encouraged to go Sati for the purgation of man's sins in the stanza of ninety-four in fourth chapter in *The Preta Kalpa* in *The Garudamahapurana*. The stanza has asked woman to participate in Sati system for the purification of all kinds of the sins committed by her husband. It has stated that even if the man has murdered a Brahmin or a companion or any other person of noble conduct, the man's sins is purified by his wife who ascends in his pyre together when he is dead (Vedavyasa, 2012, Garuda, 94 stanza). This stanza has emotionally compelled the women to sacrifice their lives in Sati for the sake of their husbands' purgation of all kinds of sins of killing noble persons like Brahmins, friends, or of any one of noble manners deserving individuals. In other words, if the wives do not go to Sati with their husbands, then all the known and unknown sins committed by their husbands cannot be purified and their husbands' ought to go to suffer various kinds of the punishments after earthly life. In this respect, women have been psychologically prepared to participate in the Sati system for the welfare of their husbands' lives in the next to the earthly life. This kind of system has segregated the role of male and female in the socio-culture structure of those people who have deep trust in the doctrine of *The Preta Kalpa* of *The Garudamahapurana*. In this context, the question arises that if the wife ascending on the pyre of dead husband purifies all the sins of her husband, then

why not husband's ascending on the pyre of his wife purifies the sins of his wife who has committed sins in her earthly life. What can it be called if it is not injustice, inequality, and disparity of gender between male and female in the socio-cultural structure of *The Preta Kalpa* in *The Garudamahapurana*? This Sati system has revealed that women are the scapegoats for the better life and purification of all kinds of misdeeds and sins of males.

Woman's Sati as Prosperity

Woman has been defined of turning into the most prosperous one in the paradise if she follows the Sati system in stanza eighty-five in the fourth chapter in *The Preta Kalpa* of *The Garudamahapurana*. It is natural dream of gaining prosperity either in this earthly life or in the next life of the earth. The stanza has claimed that a woman who enters the burning fire of her dead husband's pyre and burns down together with her dead husband, then she prospers in the heaven as Arundhati was prospered (Vedavyasa, 2012, Garuda, 95 stanza). This stanza has ignited women to sacrifice their lives with the cremation of their husbands on their pyres by the inspiration of turning them into the most prosperous ones in the paradise. The legend of the most prosperous one, Arundhati, has been drawn as the analogy of how prosperous the women happen to be if they sacrifice themselves with their dead husbands on their pyres in the cremation. So, the Sati system has been used as the cause of becoming prosperous one in the heaven in the next life. It is also nothing more than inspiring women to participate in Sati system with the death of their husbands.

Woman's Sati as Release from Woman

Woman has been encouraged to get released from the pain, suffering and struggleful life after the earthly life. For this reason, woman is asked to take part in the Sati system as it has been explained in stanza ninety-six in fourth chapter in *The Preta Kalpa* of *The Garudamahapurana*. It has claimed that until and unless the woman burns herself after her husband's death, she will never be released

from the bond of her sex (Vedavyasa, 2012, Garuda, 96 stanza). This stanza has captured the women's psychology of never getting the life of woman again in the next life. It is believed that women do not want to gain the life of women after the earthly life, in the next life. So, it has inspired women to go Sati with their dead husbands and to get released for ever from the life cycle of women again and again. This concept has also regarded that women do not have to get rebirth in the form of the women again in their next lives and it means that the life of the women is not as good as that of the men.

Woman's Sati as Purgation of Three Families

Woman's Sati system has been regarded as the cause of purgation of three families both from the side of her mother and three families from the side of her father. This idea has been described in ninety-seventh stanza in the fourth chapter in *The Preta Kalpa of The Garudamahapurana*. This stanza has narrated that a woman who burns herself on the pyres of her husband together and dies with her husband purifies the three families on her mother's side and three families on her father's side respectively (Vedavyasa, 2012, Garuda, 97 stanza). This stanza has made women curious and conscious to purify the three generations of mother's families and three generations of father's families from their sins. It has motivated women to do good deeds for the generations of three families from mothers and three families of father's sides. It has made women ready to burn down with their dead husbands in the same pyres for the purification of generations of generations by adopting Sati system.

Sati as a Rule to all Types of Women

Sati has been taken as a rule to all types of women to burn down on the pyre with their dead husbands. This principle has been stated in stanza hundred in fourth chapter of *The Preta Kalpa of The Garudamahapurana*. It has argued that a woman who is pregnant and a woman who has got infant from Brahmins to Chandalini of all types of women are obliged to burn down together with on the

pyres of their husbands as the equal rule to women (Vedavyasa, 2012, Garuda, 100 stanza). This stanza has advocated to all kinds of women either she is pregnant or she has got an infant or she is of Brahmin or of Chandalini or of upper class or of lower class must burn down with their dead husbands' pyres together. It has focused that no women have the rights to spare their Sati system because the women do not have their lives as their husbands have passed away. Hence, it has emphasized the Sati system as a rule to all the women. It has explored the gender disparity of male and female. Females are asked to go Sati with the death of the males but males have been regarded as superior to females since they do not need to go for Sati for their dead wives as women are forced to go.

Conclusion

The exploration of the Sati system through the lenses of *The Mahabharata* and *The Preta Kalpa* of *The Garudamahapurna* reveals not just a historical practice but a complex tapestry of sociocultural norms, gender expectations, and philosophical underpinnings. These texts serve as powerful mirrors reflecting the struggles and sacrifices imposed on women within a patriarchal framework. They illuminate how deeply entrenched beliefs about duty, honor, and devotion can shape the lives and identities of individuals, often to their detriment. In *The Mahabharata*, the character of Draupadi embodies the conflict between agency and societal expectation, symbolizing the plight of women caught in the crossfire of tradition and personal autonomy. Her narrative compels us to question the glorification of Sati and the societal structures that enforce such tragic choices. *The Preta Kalpa* of *The Garudamahapurna* provides a theological justification for these practices, embedding them within the religious narratives that shape moral and ethical understandings of life and death.

The portrayal of women in the context of the *Sati* system, as reflected in ancient texts such as *The Mahabharata* and the *Preta Kalpa* of the *Garudamahapurna*, offers a complex and multifaceted lens through which to

examine the intersection of gender, culture, and religious symbolism in ancient India. These texts provide deep insights into the role of women, not only as figures of personal devotion and sacrifice but also as symbols of moral and social control in patriarchal societies. In the *Mahabharata*, one of the most significant and widely studied epics in Indian literature, the portrayal of women reflects both their exaltation and victimization in a patriarchal order. Women like *Draupadi* and *Kunti* play central roles in the narrative, often symbolizing strength, suffering, and sacrifice. Yet, in many parts of the text, they also exemplify the harsh realities of gendered expectations. *Sati*, as a religious act, is symbolized through figures such as *Draupadi*, whose tragedy at the hands of male characters resonates with a deeply ingrained societal narrative: the notion that a woman's fate, identity, and honor are bound to the actions of the men in her life. *Draupadi's* eventual symbolic death is entwined with a subtle critique of patriarchy and the multiple layers of trauma that women endure. Her role in the epic is a paradox: she is both a symbol of resistance and resilience and an object of male domination and ownership. Thus, *Sati* in the *Mahabharata* comes to represent the intersection of personal sacrifice, social expectations, and the oppressive norms placed on women. Her self-immolation is not only a physical act of devotion but also a symbolic representation of the deep-rooted sacrifices that women are expected to make in the name of familial and social honor.

The *Preta Kalpa* in the *Garudamahapurna* introduces another dimension of understanding women's symbolic role within the larger framework of *Sati*. The *Garudamahapurna*, a key text in the Hindu religious canon, discusses various aspects of life and death, and the passage that addresses the practice of *Sati* is particularly revealing in its gendered perspective. The *Preta Kalpa* reflects upon the soul's journey after death, and women who committed *Sati* were often regarded as performing an act that could lead to spiritual liberation, both for themselves and for their husbands. This is significant because it highlights the

role of women in the preservation of social and religious order and their spiritual value, which was paradoxically tied to their mortality. While the *Garudamahapurna* depicts the act of *Sati* as a religiously virtuous act that may cleanse the soul of both the woman and her husband, it also reveals the exploitation of women's agency within religious orthodoxy. Women, in this context, are revered only insofar as their acts of devotion serve a higher moral and social cause. The practice is enshrined in religious texts, but the autonomy and desires of women are subsumed in the idea of sacrifice. It highlights the ideological subjugation of women under the guise of spiritual elevation, positioning them as mere instruments of ritual rather than as individuals with rights or desires of their own.

From a critical gender perspective, the representation of women in these texts reflects a profound tension between spiritual reverence and societal subjugation. The *Sati* system, both as an act of ritualized sacrifice and as a symbol of religious devotion, underscores the extent to which women's bodies and lives were instrumentalized within ancient patriarchal systems. Critical theorists like Judith Butler, Michel Foucault, and Gayatri Spivak offer lenses through which we can interrogate these texts for their underlying power structures.

The gender is not a fixed identity but a repeated set of actions and behaviors. In the context of the *Sati* system, women's self-sacrifice can be viewed as a performative act of devotion that was culturally constructed, but it also reinforces the ideological structures of patriarchal domination. The act of *Sati* is not only a gendered act of devotion but also a reinforcement of patriarchal norms that define women's worth through their relationship to men.

Foucault's notion of biopower and the regulation of bodies is also pertinent here. Women's bodies, especially in death, become the sites of political and religious control. The act of *Sati* serves as a powerful example of how power manifests through the regulation of life and death, especially concerning women.

Women's sacrifice becomes a tool of social discipline, highlighting the ways in which patriarchal society exercises control over women's bodies and their autonomy. Gayatri Spivak's postcolonial critique, particularly her work on the subaltern, can be used to understand the silencing of women in these texts. The subaltern woman, in this case, is positioned as a subject without voice or agency. Even in death, women are symbolized as fulfilling roles set by societal norms, rather than as active agents in their own right. The texts of the *Mahabharata* and the *Garudamahapurna* reveal the deep entanglement of women's bodies, identities, and fates with religious, social, and patriarchal systems. While these texts provide cultural and religious justifications for the practice of *Sati*, they also offer opportunities for critical theorization. By examining these ancient narratives through the lens of modern gender theory, we can understand the ways in which women were both revered and subjugated, their agency often reduced to symbolic acts of self-sacrifice. The system of *Sati* encourages a rethinking of how such narratives shape our understanding of women's roles in history. It challenges the ways in which the feminine ideal has been used to justify oppressive systems and highlights the importance of reclaiming women's agency not only in religious discourse but also in the retelling and reinterpretation of these ancient texts. In this light, the symbolic act of *Sati* can be seen as both a reflection of deep-seated gender inequalities and a point of resistance, where the very notion of self-sacrifice forces us to question and critically examine the value of women in society.

In the process of reflecting on these texts, we recognize the need for a nuanced interpretation that acknowledges both the historical context and the lived experiences of women. As modern readers, we must confront the implications of these narratives in contemporary society. The Sati system, while ostensibly a relic of the past, resonates in ongoing discussions about gender, autonomy, and cultural practices. Ultimately, the study of the Sati system through these texts invites a

broader dialogue about women's roles in society—past and present. It urges us to dismantle the romanticized notions of sacrifice and loyalty that have historically constrained women's identities. By critically engaging with these narratives, we can pave the way for a future where women's voices are not just echoes of the past but are empowered to challenge, redefine, and reshape societal norms. Thus, the legacy of Sati transcends its historical confines, serving as a catalyst for ongoing conversations about gender equity and human rights in a contemporary context. Exploration of the Sati system disparity through the ancient scriptures like *The Mahabharata* and *The Preta Kalpa* of *The Garudamahapurana* has given the knowledge how the gender issues have been shaped, guided and passed on and on in generation to generation to the present social and cultural practices. The data have been analogue to theoretical assumption of patriarchy.

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