



International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews

Journal homepage: www.ijrpr.com ISSN 2582-7421

The Silent Strength of Bhamati: An Analysis of Female Agency, Strength, and Patriarchy

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DOI : <https://doi.org/10.55248/gengpi.6.0425.1683>

ABSTRACT:

This story "Forgotten wife" examines how Sudha Murty's mythical tales personify the idea of women's emancipation. The study examines how Murty's stories portray several facts of womanhood, including female agency, strength, the role of women, and comparison with analytical representations of women, based on interpretations and analysis of the stories. Murty frequently combines the lives of modern female characters to show their tribulations and victories in a patriarchal culture. By taking inspiration from these mythological female characters, Murty not only reclaims ancient narratives but also The Daughter from a Wishing Tree, and demonstrates how her storytelling serves as a vehicle for promoting female empowerment, encouraging women to embrace their identities and assert their agency in various spheres of life. In addition to reclaiming traditional narratives, Murty also encourages contemporary readers to recognize and harness their own potential by drawing inspiration from these mythological female characters

KEYWORDS : Female Empowerment, Strength, Knowledge, Mythology

INTRODUCTION:

Sudha Murty recounts several tales of Indian mythological women who exhibit courage, resiliency, and wisdom in diverse ways in The Daughter from a Wishing Tree. The tale of Bhamati, the spouse of the esteemed scholar Vachaspati Mishra, is one example. Bhamati symbolizes a different kind of strength—one that is quiet, persistent, and frequently unacknowledged—than the mythical women who fight valiantly or openly oppose power.

The narrative of Bhamati is examined in this article as an illustration of female strength that defies conventional ideas of empowerment. It explores topics such as silent resistance, invisible labor, and the erasure of women's contributions in patriarchal cultures. Furthermore, it sets her story apart from traditional mythical tales in which women's power is more obviously displayed and openly recognized.

BHAMATI'S STORY: A SYNOPSIS:

In Sudha Murty's The Daughter from a Wishing Tree, Bhamati provides a complex portrayal of female agency, strength, and function. Vachaspati Mishra, a scholar who was totally engrossed in his studies, was Bhamati's husband. She dedicated her life to providing for him, taking care of the home without complaining, so that he could concentrate fully on his education. Vachaspati barely saw her because he was so focused on his work. He eventually recognized her and inquired about her identity years later, after finishing his monumental commentary on the Brahma Sutras. The only thing Bhamati said was that she was his wife and had always supported him. He was so affected that he named his piece Bhamati after her. She had already lived a life of sacrifice without any direct recognition, so this recognition was too late.

FEMALE STRENGTH : SILENT RESILIENCE AND UNSEEN ENDURANCE

Her narrative highlights the intricacies of her life inside a patriarchal system, going beyond the conventional duties assigned to women. An alternative viewpoint on her role, strength, and agency is as follows:

Female Strength: Silent Resilience and Unseen Endurance Despite being mainly unknown to the world, Bhamati's strength is in her capacity to persevere and uphold her devotion to her husband, Vachaspati Mishra. Her strength stems from the silent perseverance of her everyday sacrifices, in contrast to traditional representations of female strength that are based on external assertiveness or action. Rather than being physically strong, Bhamati is emotionally strong. She consistently puts Vachaspati's academic endeavors ahead of her own wants and interests. The fact that she was not recognized during her lifetime is another indication of her tenacity. The emotional strength needed to live in the shadow of someone else's achievement is reflected in the silently endured lack of recognition for the enormous contributions she provides. Her patience, even when she could have cried out or demanded

recognition, is a testament to her inner strength. The idea that strength or power must always be evident or strong is called into question by this type of strength.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN: THE INVISIBLE PILLARS OF SUCCESS

The Success Pillar Not Seen Bhamati's function in the narrative reflects the invisible yet essential responsibilities that many women play in patriarchal countries. Although she exemplifies the stereotypically feminine roles of the obedient wife and caretaker, her influence goes much beyond what these social designations imply. Because she takes care of all domestic duties and frees him up to work, she is the foundation of Vachaspati's success.

She never gets any official recognition during her life, though, thus her role is undervalued. Until Vachaspati's work is published under her name, she is mostly forgotten and her contributions are not acknowledged in her day, though even then, her actual involvement is not quite clear. Her role stands in stark contrast to more conventional heroic myths, in which women are either directly involved in the results or actively participate in the action. Bhamati's impact is more subdued in this instance, and her function highlights the invisible work that is frequently required of women.

FEMALE AGENCY: QUIET BUT INFLUENTIAL DECISION MAKING

Quiet but Influential Decision Although it isn't stated directly, Bhamati's agency is evident in the decisions she makes in spite of the limitations placed on her by her surroundings.

Agency via endurance: Bhamati's decision to stick by Vachaspati and support him demonstrates a potent kind of passive resistance, even if she may not have taken any overt actions that would have challenged her husband or society. Her decision to follow her own path of silent obedience, knowing that it will influence the future, can be interpreted as a subtly assertive move.

Unspoken rebellion: She subtly questions the standards of fame and recognition by staying obedient and silent, prompting readers to reflect on how women's contributions are frequently concealed. Only in retrospect does her agency become apparent, as the book's title redefines it. It is possible to interpret this delayed recognition as a remark on how women's contributions are frequently only acknowledged after their deaths or in hindsight.

Rethinking Empowerment and Agency: Even though Bhamati's life doesn't conform to traditional myths of empowerment, which depict women overtly asserting their power or defying authority, her agency is demonstrated by her silent sacrifice and tenacity.

Silent empowerment: Bhamati's decisions made within the limitations of her environment demonstrate her empowerment. She is a silent power because, despite not being overt or dramatic, her agency nevertheless influences Vachaspati's success.

In summary: In Bhamati's narrative, female strength is about persevering in silence, her role is fundamental but unseen, and her agency manifests itself in her decisions and her resistance while being unacknowledged. This subtle representation emphasizes the complexity of female empowerment by implying that women can have a significant impact via perseverance, patience, and selflessness even in the absence of loud demonstrations or dramatic acts.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

The present literature review explores the intersection of gender, mythology, and feminist reinterpretations, providing the foundation for analyzing Sudha Murty's mythological stories. Sudha Murty's contributions to Indian English literature, particularly her retellings of mythological tales, have been celebrated for their ability to make complex narratives accessible to contemporary readers. However, her emphasis on female agency, empowerment, and redefinition of traditional gender roles remains underexplored. This chapter critically examines existing scholarship on Indian revisionist mythology, feminist literary theory, and Sudha Murty's works to identify patterns, gaps, and emerging themes relevant to the research.

Prativa Ray's *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi* (1995) is frequently acknowledged as a seminal text within the field of revisionist Indian mythology. Initially composed in Odia and subsequently rendered into various languages, the narrative details Draupadi's existence, encompassing her miraculous emergence from fire to her crucial involvement in the Mahabharata, which features the swayamvar and the conflict at Kurukshetra. Central to the story is Draupadi's profound relationship with her sakha, Krishna, who serves as her unwavering guide and protector through every trial. The narrative emphasizes her struggles, particularly the humiliation during the dice game, where Krishna alone intervenes to save her from disgrace, while the Kuru elders remain silent. Notwithstanding emotional and familial challenges, such as the marriage of Arjuna to Subhadra, Draupadi is made a symbol of endurance, inner strength, and dignity. She is remade in the narrative regarding her identity and authority as an enduring icon of feminist strength within Indian mythology.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* offers a retelling of the Mahabharata from Draupadi's perspective, presenting a deeply personal and introspective view of her life. Known as Panchali, Draupadi and her brother Dhrishtadyumna were born of fire, destined for greatness. While Panchali had aspirations to study politics, military strategy, and administration, societal expectations confined her to domestic roles as directed by her father. The relationship between her and Krishna—that is, her mentor and confidant—is the very center of this story, revealing feelings, troubles, and strength in her and how she influenced the making of the Mahabharata—by way of her curse, with which author hints the indirect linking of Kuru's downfall in the Kurukshetra's fight.

A COMPARISON WITH TRADITIONAL MYTHOLOGICAL REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN

There are a number of notable differences between Bhamati's account and conventional legendary tales, particularly in the representation of female autonomy, strength, and role. Bhamati's narrative symbolizes the unseen strength of women whose efforts are disregarded or undervalued, whereas traditional mythology frequently focuses on heroic, visibly active women or goddesses who defy convention.

Female Power: Overt versus Covert Female power is frequently portrayed in traditional mythological studies as forceful behavior, such as goddesses fighting demons, warrior queens commanding armies, or women doing penance to win the favor of the gods. The strength of characters such as Draupadi, Sita, or Parvati is usually apparent, public, and frequently associated with supernatural abilities or direct conflict with male figures. In the Ramayana, Sita exhibits strength via her ability to endure exile and the test of fire (Agni Pariksha), even if she is a passive character in several ways. Her moral rectitude and devotion to her husband serve as a backdrop for her strength. Bhamati's strength, however, is more subdued and inward. She is strong because she sacrifices, keeps quiet, and perseveres, unlike mythological heroes who flaunt their power in public. She doesn't participate in overt acts or public demonstrations, but her silent encouragement allows her spouse to achieve remarkable feats. The conventional representation of female strength in mythology is challenged by this change from active conflict to quiet resistance.

The Function of Women: Centralized vs Peripheral Life Women are frequently portrayed as key characters in traditional mythological studies, either as deities or valiant queens, whose roles have a big impact on how the story unfolds. In their respective epics, women such as Kali, Durga, Radha, and Sita frequently represent strength, virtue, and divinity. Through their decisions, deeds, and interventions, they play prominent parts in these stories, influencing them and moving the plots along. Draupadi plays a crucial role in the Mahabharata. Her personal suffering serves as the epic's moral turning point, and she is not only the Pandavas' wife but also a representation of justice and morality. The moral fiber of the Ramayana and the core of Rama's mission are shaped by Sita's position as the embodiment of chastity and virtue. On the other hand, even though Bhamati made a significant contribution to Vachaspati Mishra's success, her role in the story is mostly incidental. Although she is not visible in the broader framework of Vachaspati's intellectual development, his work would not have been possible without her. She doesn't take part in public activism or play a major role in any legendary tale, thus her role is *unsung*. Although she plays a vital role as the supporting wife, it is not widely appreciated until the very end.

Direct vs. Indirect Power in Agency : Women frequently demonstrate direct agency in classic mythological tales, actively choosing actions that profoundly impact their own or other people's futures. By using her strong acts to vanquish demons, Kali demonstrates her unbridled strength and her capacity to use conflict to alter the course of history. With its roots in her connection with Krishna, where her love and devotion impact Krishna's deeds and construct the divine narrative, Radha's agency is more nuanced. Bhamati's agency, on the other hand, is quiet and indirect. She doesn't take immediate measures to assert her authority or publicly criticize the system. Her decision to help her husband without acknowledgment and her tacit opposition to being ignored are examples of her agency. The invisibility of women's agency is questioned by Bhamati's story, particularly when it is not acknowledged within the parameters of conventional mythical narratives. She chooses to stand with her husband despite the fact that her contributions are being erased, which is a silent act of disobedience through endurance rather than overt rebellion or supernatural intervention.

Philosophical and Moral Teachings: Active versus Passive Virtue Active virtue—the virtue of women who stand up for justice, love, or truth—is frequently emphasized in the moral precepts connected to female characters in classical mythological studies. Draupadi's struggle for justice during the dice game serves as a lesson in retribution, fortitude, and tenacity. Chastity, loyalty, and the capacity to bear hardship in the face of difficulty are highlighted by Sita's virtue. Bhamati's tale, on the other hand, questions these accepted notions of virtue. Her moral lesson centers on the virtue of quiet dedication, the unseen sacrifices of daily living, and the silent strength of endurance. Her willingness to serve in the background without expecting credit or reward is what makes her virtuous rather than actively rebelling. In a society that frequently ignores such virtues, her tale presents a strong case for the value of selflessness.

In summary: Bhamati's persona stands in stark contrast to how women are typically portrayed in mythology. Bhamati's story emphasizes the unseen, silent contributions that women make and challenges the idea of empowerment and acknowledgment, whereas traditional mythological studies frequently concentrate on overt deeds, obvious strength, and public agency. Her tale provides a potent counter-narrative to the conventional mythological heroine, serving as a reminder of the value of valuing all types of agency and strength, particularly those that have historically been disregarded or undervalued.

GENDER DYNAMICS AND PATRIARCHY : THE ERASURE OF WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTION

Bhamati's story from Sudha Murty's *The Daughter from a Wishing Tree* is one of many literary works that critically examine gender dynamics in opposition to oppression or a patriarchal society. The narrative provides a thoughtful analysis of how gendered norms and patriarchy impact women's lives, especially the sometimes unseen and unappreciated roles they perform in society. Through the prism of how patriarchy hinders female empowerment, limits agency, and marginalizes female experiences, this investigation can be comprehended.

Traditional Society's Patriarchy and Gender Expectations: Women are viewed as secondary citizens or caregivers whose efforts are frequently disregarded or underappreciated in patriarchal societies, which are characterized by men holding the majority of the power. As the devoted wife of a distinguished academic, Bhamati plays a vital part in this situation, although her presence and impact are imperceptible. This lack of exposure is a reflection of the gender dynamics in many patriarchal institutions, where women's work, whether it be domestic, emotional, or intellectual, is not valued unless it directly advances men's objectives. Women's major roles in patriarchal societies have typically been limited to the home, where they serve as spouses, mothers, and caregivers, while males are expected to pursue intellectual interests and participate in public life. The gendered assumption that

women should subtly assist men without taking credit is thus embodied in Bhamati's function. She continues to support her husband without questioning her role since she feels it is her responsibility as his wife.

The Agency of Bhamati: Quiet Resistance Despite the restrictions society has set on her, Bhamati's persona can be interpreted as challenging patriarchal standards in her own unique way. Her perseverance and silence serve as a kind of passive resistance to a system that does not value her contributions. Despite having limited external agency, she defies patriarchal notions that women's labor should go unrecognized by choosing to remain and support her husband without seeking recognition. Women are frequently expected to stay in the background and allow men to claim credit for the outcomes in patriarchal societies. However, Bhamati's tacit approval of her husband's achievement weakens the system. Despite being posthumous, the fact that Vachaspati Mishra's work is titled after her at the conclusion of the story indicates that her contributions have been overlooked. This dynamic might be interpreted as a subtly critical examination of patriarchy, demonstrating how women's work can contribute to the advancement of society without being recognized or valued.

Women's Contributions Are Erased: A Mirror of Patriarchal Domination Erasing the contributions of women is a fundamental component of patriarchal tyranny. Throughout history, the accomplishments of men have frequently eclipsed the intellectual labor, sacrifices, and attempts of women. Bhamati's life is a clear example of this erasing. Her participation is only acknowledged at the very end, and even then, it is filtered through her husband's name and work, even though she played a crucial part in his achievement. A serious problem with patriarchal systems is highlighted by the delay in recognition: women's achievements are frequently only appreciated when viewed via a male perspective. This illustrates how patriarchy shapes narratives since only those in positions of authority, usually men, can determine what is important or deserving of recognition. Bhamati's silent sacrifice highlights how women's voices are silenced and how they are marginalized in both intellectual and cultural histories.

Women's Place in the Home vs Their Status in the Public Eye : Women's responsibilities in patriarchal society are typically limited to the home, where they manage the family, raise the children, and provide for their husbands. Despite being crucial to society's operation, these roles are rarely acknowledged in the public sphere and are therefore underappreciated. On the other hand, men virtually entirely control public domains of intellectual, political, or economic influence. This gender gap is embodied in Bhamati's story. Although she plays the private role of assisting her husband in his academic endeavors, her own intelligence and accomplishments are not taken into consideration. This is comparable to the experiences of several women throughout history, whose names have been obscured or forgotten despite the fact that they may have played a significant role in forming society, culture, and knowledge.

WOMEN'S SILENCE : OPPRESSION OR EMPOWERMENT

A Two-Sided Sword Women's silence is frequently enforced as a control mechanism in patriarchal society, stifling their agency and voices. But quiet can sometimes be empowering, as Bhamati's experience demonstrates. Bhamati's decision to refrain from demanding praise or interfering with her husband's job demonstrates how women may still be strong even when they are silenced by establishing their own worth with patience and selflessness. It is possible to read Bhamati's silence as a critique of established gender roles, a sort of resistance to a system that denies women a voice, even when it appears to support such roles. Bhamati rejects the patriarchal notion that women should continuously look for approval or attention by remaining silent. Her peaceful power over her own fate, even in the face of a system that consistently ignores her contributions, defines her agency rather than resistance.

Her quiet could be interpreted as a sign of submission on the one hand, supporting the notion that women belong in the background and males should take center stage. According to this reading, Bhamati's tale illustrates how patriarchal structures teach women to accept their fate of being invisible. Silence, however, can also be a source of power. Despite not looking for approval, Bhamati influences Vachaspati's success. Her narrative casts doubt on the idea that authority must always be assertive or combative—it can occasionally be found in forbearance and tenacity. This dual viewpoint makes us reevaluate empowerment: can peaceful perseverance be just as powerful as rebellion, or is rebellion always necessary for true strength?

CONCLUSION:

Bhamati's tale offers a potent critique of female autonomy, tenacity, and the way patriarchal cultures erase the contributions of women. Even though she deviates from conventional ideas of empowerment, her quiet strength provides a different viewpoint on what it is to be strong. Her function as the invisible engine of Vachaspati's success is representative of a reality shared by many women whose efforts go unappreciated. Vachaspati recognizes her effort by naming his work after her, but this belated acknowledgment raises a larger social problem: why must women's sacrifices only be justified after the fact? We are prompted to reconsider conventional notions of female strength by Sudha Murty's portrayal of Bhamati's story. It reminds us that invisible perseverance is equally important and questions the notion that strength must always be loud and obvious. More significantly, it demands that women's contributions be acknowledged more widely, not only in mythology but also in daily life.

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