

Sati, Women, and Narratives

Transcendental congruence in the tales of *Savitri* and *Satyavan* and the *Bihula-Bishahri Gatha*

Sonal Pandey¹

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Abstract

The current study intends to highlight the transcendental congruence between the narratives of *Savitri* and *Satyavan* from the epic Mahabharata and the *Bihula-Bishahri Gatha*, a local cult from Bhagalpur (Bihar). Although these two narratives belong to two antagonistic traditions yet there exists striking similarities between these women-centric tales. These narratives shed an interesting insight on gender relations and patriarchy in the society. In the given tales, both the protagonists idealise strong selfless love and devotion towards their husbands by saving them from the clutches of death and emerging as saviours. As per the Sanskrit Hinduism marital ties are held sacred and indissoluble and widowhood is looked down upon. Both Savitri as well as Bihula risk their own lives to revive the lives of their respective husbands. The legend of the Savitri has given birth to the pan-Indian cult of Vat Savitri in which married women observe fast and pray for the longevity of their husbands' lives while the Bihula-Bishahri legend exists as a local cult-ritual in Bhagalpur (Bihar) which is observed by the married women of the agriculturalists and indigenous communities. Besides, the narratives emphasise on the merits of *karma* (actions) over the *bhagaya* (destiny) idealising hard work and perseverance. Summing up, these narratives have been used to strengthen male dominance projecting women as their accomplices, emancipators, or rescuers reinforcing the reins of patriarchy.

Keywords: Oral Retellings, Cultural Pluralism, Folklore, Transcendentalism, Gender, Narratives.

1.0 Introduction

India is country of diversity with multitude of castes and creeds. Diversity of ethnic communities has given rise to rich corpus of cultures and traditions in the country. The Indian cultural repertoires in terms of arts, history, philosophy, literature, science, technology, and so on are par excellence and comparable to none. The renowned historian Vincent Arthur Smith (2014) has rightly claimed that India is an ethnological museum of the world. The presence of ethnically diverse communities with unique traditional legacies

¹ Assistant Professor, Postgraduate Department of Anthropology, Tilka Manjhi Bhagalpur University Bhagalpur-7. Email: sonalpandeyanthropology2022@gmail.com

make India a multicultural entity marked by cultural plurality. Although different cultural elements bestow unique identity to each ethnic group yet there exists marked syncretism among these communities making India a transcendental entity.

During the nineteenth and the twentieth century, early Indologists started categorising the Indian cultures along the dichotomy of the civilization and the cultures (Upadhyay & Pandey 2002). The presence of literary corpus indicated a higher stage of culture while the bulk of oral traditions was put into the bracket of inferior culture. The former was categorised as civilization while the latter was categorised as cultures which was later conceptualised as the Great and the Little traditions by Robert Redfield in 1955 (Redfield 2018, also see Redfield 1953 and Singer 1980). The great traditions represented the formal, written and literary traditions while the little traditions stood for the informal, oral, and non-literate traditions. The cultural domain of the urban elites and written traditions was classified as the great traditions against the little traditions of the reflective few of the folk or the common masses passed down through generations mainly by retellings or transmitted orally or in oral forms. Although the scholars speculated that there was interaction and flow between the two traditions yet they were apprehensive of the direction of the flow. They believed that the elements from the great traditions permeated into the little traditions and vice versa proselytising the unidirectional movement of the cultural traits (Marriott 1955:207).

The ethnocentric colonial scholars always placed written traditions at apex of the pyramid looking down upon the little traditions (Upadhyay & Pandey 2002). This compartmentalisation was also used to determine the antiquity of the cultures. The direction of parochialisation and universalisation (Marriott 1955) was used to establish chronological age for the two cultures. The older culture was regarded as the lender while the younger culture was marked the borrower of the cultural traits. This methodology was relevant for smaller countries like Mexico but it completely failed in the case of geographically vast and heterogeneous country like India. Compartmentalisation of the traditions is methodologically erroneous as it negates the processes of migration and diffusion of cultural traits and the impact of reform movements. Culture is intrinsically fluid and dynamic; hence it is difficult to demarcate the direction of flow of the cultural traits.

Transcendentalism evolved as reform movement in the nineteenth century in New England in America where a group of scholars were trying to liberate their spirituality, religion, and philosophy from the yoke of colonial preconception (Selvi 2017). Against the unitary approach of the colonists which focused on literary tradition, the reformists looked for wholesomeness in the various traditions in a country by unifying oral and written traditions; their approach was also basically unitary in nature but differed from the colonists. The reformists believed that the written and oral traditions reflect their worldviews hence, instead of fragmentation they must be analysed as a unified whole. Although these traditions may differ in their origin, chronology or ideology yet there exists marked commonality between these two traditions reflecting the shared belief systems of the inhabitants. Hence there exists marked similarities in the myths, legends, and narratives in a country (see Behera & Gautam 2025 and Behera 2024). As the myths, legends, and narratives are fluid and continuous permeating geographical boundaries the lens of transcendentalism seemed more suitable to highlight parallels among them (Behera & Gautam 2025 and Behera 2025).

Co-existence, interaction and contact have played an important role in catalysing transcendental congruence across the geographically vast countries like India (Behera 2024). In contemporary context, none of the culture could claim itself as exclusive and unique, and free from outside influence. A plethora of factors such as migration, diffusion, assimilation, and acculturation have collectively shaped the ideas, customs, and social behaviours of a particular group or society as present today. Hence, commonalities among the myths, legends, and narratives among different ethnic groups are not uncommon.

Historically, different communities such as castes, tribes, and others have been interacting with each other in a myriad of ways. This exposure to alien groups mutually influenced each other's material as well as non-material traits inducing several parallels between them. This commonality between the two cultures may be present in the form of shared customs, rituals, values, myths, or narratives. Since cultures do not exist in vacuum and there has been lot of borrowings among them, one can notice marked convergence in different cultural elements.

In this backdrop, the current study intends to study transcendental congruence between the narratives of *Savitri* and *Satyavan* from the Mahabharata and a popular lore of *Bihula-Bishahri* from Bhagalpur (Bihar) region.

2.0 The legend of *Savitri* and *Satyavan*

The princess Savitri is the only child of the King Ashwapati. Savitri is perfect epitome of beauty with brains. As she grows up into marriageable age, the King invites suitors from all directions to prove themselves worthy of his daughter. However, none could fulfil the King's conditions laid down to prove to be a worthy suitor; and all are out rightly rejected. Dejected and tired of finding a match for her, the King asks Savitri to find a worthy husband for herself. She leaves the palace and embarks on her journey for a worthy husband. She meets a woodcutter Satyavan in a forest and falls for him. Satyavan is a son of King who lost his kingdom to ill fortunes hence he worked as a woodcutter trying to meet his both ends. Doomed by the destiny, Satyavan was cursed with premature death within a year of his marriage. Everyone advises Savitri to reconsider her decision but she does not budge and is adamant to marry him. Reluctantly, King Ashwapati consents to the marriage and Savitri happily gives up all royal comforts to live in the forests with her impoverished husband (Pattanaik 2010).

According to the prophecy Satyavan died exactly after a year. Rather than cremating him, Savitri decides to follow the God of death Yamaraja towards gates of heaven. Walking tirelessly across plains, hills, and mountains; carrying the corpse of her dead husband Savitri follows the Yamaraja. Nonchalantly Yamaraja keeps moving ahead and is amazed to realise that Savitri has been pursuing him trekking the difficult terrain. He rebukes her and asks her to return and cremate her husband's body. Savitri still does not give up and is adamant to follow Yamaraja to revive her husband's life. Overwhelmed by her steadfastness and perseverance Yamaraja grants her three boons except her husband's life. For the first boon, she desires that her father-in-law should regain his lost kingdom and wealth which is immediately granted. As Savitri was the only child of her father, she asks that her father be blessed with a son against the second boon. For the third or the final boon, Savitri asks Yamaraja to bless her with motherhood from Satyavan's progenies. Inattentive Yamaraja grants her third boon too and moves ahead. A little while later he notices Savitri following him again. Confused Yamaraja reminds Savitri that he

has granted all her boons so she must return. She modestly reminds him of his third boon of bearing Satyavan's children which could not be accomplished without Satyavan; hence Yamaraja must revive Satyavan to fulfil his own words. Baffled by her intellect and determination Yamaraja finally gives up and restores the life of Satyavan. Finally, Savitri and Satyavan are united again and they live happily ever after.

3.0 The legend of *Sati Bihula* and *Bishahri*

This story has been derived from the several retellings of the local inhabitants during an ethnographic study in Bhagalpur district of Bihar. Located amidst the cross roads between the river Ganga and the hillock of Mandar hills, the region has been inhabited by the diverse ethnic groups ranging from the Sauria and Mal Paharia tribes to more complex agricultural communities. The region abounds in pluralistic religious-spiritual practices ranging from the animism, and the animatism among the Sauria and the Mal Paharias to the Shaivaite and the Vaishnavite cult of the upper caste Hindus.

The narrative is about the origin of Behula Bishahari ritual. Bishahris are believed to be five daughters of Lord Shiva as their birth links with his *leela* (divine play). Local myth says that Lord Shiva would often visit Sonadah tank near Champapuri in the current city of Bhagalpur. One day during his ritual bathing five strands of his hairs falls into a pond which immediately turns into five lotuses. Lord Shiva takes these flowers to his abode, but warns his consort Goddess Parvati to stay away from these flowers. Little while later out of curiosity Goddess Parvati touches these flowers which immediately turn into five female serpents who are later known as Jaya, Aditi, Padma, Maina, and Maya. The sisters go to Goddess Parvati and say that Shiva and Parvati are cause of their birth, and as such they claimed their parenthood. Goddess Parvati rebukes them and reprimands that she can never beget snakes. The sisters are offended and immediately avenge themselves by biting the Goddess Parvati. Goddess Parvati immediately falls unconscious and dead.

Lord Shiva when learns about this encounter between the Goddess Parvati and his foster daughters, he instantly reproaches them of misusing their power and asks them to revive Goddess Parvati. The sisters apologise and the eldest Jaya serves *Elixir Nectar* from her Amrit Kalash (nectar pot) and brings back Goddess Parvati to life. In fact, as the legend goes, each sister is endowed with unique power. Jaya Bishahri possesses the power of magical remedy or the antidote for snakebite. Whenever any one of the other sisters, Aditi, Padma, Maina, and Maya bites somebody poison is neutralised by the elixir nectar of Jaya. But the sisters are collectively known as the *Vishahri /Bishahari* in Bhagalpur.

After bringing back Goddess Parvati to life, the Bishahri sisters pay salutations to Lord Shiva and demand that as they are the descendants of Lord Shiva, they should also be revered as the deities. Lord Shiva is well aware that the sisters are arrogant and not fit to maintain the divine status. He gets scared that the sisters might misuse their powers and hence in order to deflect their call he asks them to visit Chando Saudagar of Champanagar for the first invocation.

Chando Saudagar is a rich merchant in Champanagar district (present day Bhagalpur). He was an ardent devotee of Lord Shiva. Lord Shiva told them that if Chando agrees, Bishahri sisters would be worshipped all over. The Bishahri sisters plead Chando Saudagar to accept them as a deity. Being a dedicated worshipper of Lord Shiva, Chando out rightly rejects the plea of the Bishahri sisters. Even after lot of persuasion and

manoeuvre, he refuses to worship anyone except Lord Shiva. Dejected and humiliated, the sisters decide to avenge themselves. They kill all his six sons and destroy all his wealth in a shipwreck. Chando, however, is not moved and continues to worship Lord Shiva with more devotion. By Lord Shiva's grace his wife Sonika gets pregnant again and bears a son named Bala Lakhendra restoring his family lineage. Bishahri sisters visit Chando afresh and requests him to accept them as deity. However, he is not moved and humiliates them that he cannot worship frog and insect eaters. This severely enrages the Bishahris. They threaten to kill Bala Lakhendra too on his wedding night and vanish.

With the passing of time, Lakhdendra grows up into a handsome youth and reaches marriageable age. Proposals for his marriage start pouring in from several wealthy and renowned families of the town. Apprehensive of the death threat by the Bishahris, Chando Saudagar wants only a meritorious maiden who could save his son from the fury of the Bishahris. Keeping this in mind, in one of his journey he reaches Ujjaini. While passing by a pond his quest for a worthy daughter-in-law comes to an end. He sees a beautiful maiden, full of youth and rigour, taking her bath. The girl is Bihula. While bathing, by chance a few drops of water from her hairs fall upon an old woman nearby who is filling her pot to offer to the deity during her daily rituals. Enraged by her frivolous behaviour, the old woman immediately curses Bihula to widowhood. Shocked Bihula immediately apologises. Bihula implores forgiveness from the old woman pleading that she did not deserve such a severe vengeance of widowhood for the act which is unintentional. But the old lady does not yield. Angry Bihula then takes a vow that even if she would lose her husband, she would revive his life through her merits of *Satitva*. Impressed with her determination, Chando Saudagar immediately requests Bihula to marry his son Bala Lakhendra and informs her of the impending danger. Bihula happily concedes and the wedding rites are solemnised.

Before the wedding Chando entrusts Vishvakarma, the mythological God of Architecture to prepare a strong fortress for his son Bala Lakhendra and daughter-in-law Bihula impenetrable by any reptiles. Vishwakarma prepares a house of iron and bamboo without any crevice. The Bishahri sisters visit Vishwakarma and asks him to leave a passage for them warning him of dire consequences. Scared of the Bishahris' wrath, Vishvakarma succumbs but is afraid of being caught by Chando as the latter has declared that he would check the house with the help of smoke. The sisters assure him that before the trial one of them would get inside and cover the cavity saving him from Chando. After the wedding rites, the couple is escorted by Chando and his guards to their safe house. Throughout the night, the huge security remains vigilant outside the fort. At night, Bihula asks Bala to go to sleep keeping guard on him. She remains alert and cautious watching Bala thoroughly. During the last quarter of the night Bishahris enter into the palace, bite Bala to death and thus succeed in accomplishing their mission. There is huge outcry in the citadel.

Devastated Chando Saudagar summons his men to prepare for the last rites of his son. Bihula, however, is determined to bring back her husband Bala to life with her righteousness and merits. Bihula requests Chando to stop the last rites and let her visit the heaven to bring back her husband's life. All her folks advise her against it and ask Bihula to accept the fact that Bala is dead and no dead person returns to life. However, Bihula does not budge and is insistent on going to the heaven to revive her husband. Reluctantly, Chando permits her. Elated Bihula requests Vishvakarma to prepare a huge boat resembling the royal palace to carry the dead body of her husband Bala. A local gardener

Lahsan Mali adorns the boat with illustrations from Bala and Bihula's lives. Thereafter, Bihula begins her journey towards the Devlok (heaven). She encounters enormous difficulties throughout her journey before reaching the Devlok. Starting from the Gokul Ghat of river Champa, Bihula travels across several ghats such as Semapur, Vaagasaini, Jaurighat and finally reaches the Netula Ghat junction that leads to the Devlok. By the time, Bihula reaches the Netula Ghat the dead body of her husband decays; so she collects his bones in her shawl and descends from the boat.

At Netula Ghat, Bihula meets a washerwoman named Netula who cleans the laundry of the Devlok. Bihula narrates her ordeal to Netula and requests her to help enter gates of heaven. Netula is moved by her story and promises to help Bihula enter the Devlok at an opportune time. Bihula moves into Netula's house and starts assisting her in the task of laundry. One fine day as Netula is busy with some other task she asks Bihula to cater to the laundry. The laundry is much clean and shinier and the deities are impressed with the task. They enquire Netula about the shiny laundry who discloses that this laundry is done by Bihula. Impressed with the task, they invite Bihula to the Devlok. Elated Bihula visits the deities who ask her whereabouts. She immediately briefs them her story and requests them to restore the life of her dead husband. The deities explain her that death is irreversible and the dead cannot be brought back to life. Lord Shiva gets furious as he learns about the deeds of his foster daughters Bishahri(s). He asks Bihula to seek any three boons except her husband's life. For her first boon, Bihula requests him to revive the life of the dead brothers of her deceased husband. For her second boon, she wishes to regain the lost wealth of her father-in-law Chando. Lastly, she wishes to be the mother of hundred sons.

Lord Shiva grants all her boons expecting her to leave the heaven. But she does not move and remains standing still. Confused by her response, he asks Bihula to leave but she stays motionless. Upon further enquiry she draws Shiva's attention to his third boon. She humbly reminds him that his blessing of motherhood is not possible with her husband Bala. Bihula tells that she is a Sati (a righteous woman), so she can never cohabit with any other men except her own husband. Hence, to keep his words Lord Shiva must restore the life of her dead husband Bala. Tricked by Bihula's wit finally Lord Shiva yields to her all desires. Lord Shiva immediately summons Jaya to feed her elixir nectar to Bala to neutralise the impact of snake venom. Hence, through her spirit and determination, Bihula is finally able to bring back the life of her deceased husband Bala.

In reciprocation, she requests her father-in-law Chando to offer oblations to the Bishahri sisters to oblige them. He finally concedes but on one condition. Since his devotion for Lord Shiva is unshakable he agrees to offer oblations with his left hand. Chando Saudagar commissions a grand temple for the Bishahri sisters. Henceforth, every year Bishahri puja is celebrated in the month of *Savan* (*Shravan*-corresponding to July-August) on the fifth (panchami) day of the lunar calendar in the Champanagar district Bhagalpur (Bihar). At the end, the Bishahri sisters become happy and bless Bihula with immortality of marital ties and eternal glory. They grant two special rewards to Bihula. They declare that Bihula and Bala are inseparable even by death. Since Bihula is a sati she will never succumb to widowhood and would leave this mortal world along with her husband only. They blessed her that she would also be revered along with the Bishahris for virtues righteousness. Hence, the whole narrative is collectively referred to as *the Bihula-Bishahri Gatha* which is popular locally in Bhagalpur and adjoining districts.

4.0 Transcendental parallels between the two narratives: the legend of Savitri and Satyavan and Bihula Bishahri Gatha

The legend of Savitri and Satyavan belongs to the eighteenth chapter of the classical epic of Mahabharata while the Bihula Bishahri Gatha is a local legend which has flourished through the oral retellings or little traditions. Although these two narratives belong to two antagonistic traditions, oral and written, yet there exists striking similarities between them. Overtly there exists thematic congruence between the two narratives along with the plot. In both the stories, the female protagonists Savitri as well as Bihula married two persons despite the curse of premature death and risk of widowhood. Satyavan as well as Bala Lakhendra are destined to die premature death but this does not deter the female protagonists from marrying them. Both the women are determined to alter their husbands' fate through their perseverance and hard work. Both the women are projected as fearless and unswerving who do not weep and mourn after the death. Instead they follow their husbands even after their death confronting even the deities. As the story unfurled both the women tricked the gods in course of obtaining the boons and were able to win and revive the lives of their respective husbands. These women are not only brave and venturesome but also intelligent and witty.

The legend of Savitri and Satyavan is celebrated as the ritualistic festival of Vat Savitri in several states of India such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Odisha and Western states. It has evolved as a part of pan-Indian Sanskritic festival observed by married women for long life of their respective husbands (Kane 1958). Vat or the banyan tree symbolises longevity and is believed to be the dwelling place of Lord Vishnu, and hence women fast and pray this day under the banyan tree for the immortality of their marital ties. Eulogising Savitri as the saviour of her husband women pledge to protect their spouses from all hazards. In contrast, Bihula-Bishahri gatha is a local cult popular among the agriculturalists and other indigenous communities. The Bhagalpur district is located amidst the middle Gangetic Valley and is known for its myriad snake species. The region abounds in the non-venomous as well as venomous snakes including the Russel Viper (Khan 2024). The threat of the snake bite was common among the agriculturalist and other indigenous communities which aggravates during the rainy season (Sinha & Pandey 2008). Agriculture being the prime source of livelihood indigenous population often confronted snakes especially during this period. The threat of snake bites loomed larger among the lower castes or tribes throughout the ecological zone. This fear of snakes culminated in the ritualistic process of serpent worship in Bhagalpur as well as in adjoining states such as Jharkhand and West Bengal. Hence, the venom and anti-venom features of Bishahris made them popular outside the folds of Sanskritic Hinduism as this festival is more popular among the agriculturalists and the indigenous inhabitants. The Bihula-Bishahri cult is analogous to the Mansa cult prevalent in the adjoining states of West Bengal, Jharkhand, Assam and Bangladesh (Thakur 2017).

It may be conveniently claimed that the Bihula-Bishahri gatha might be a parochial form of the legend of the Savitri and the Satyavan as the latter belongs to the literary tradition. However, in the case of the two narratives it is difficult to determine the direction of the borrowings as the Bihula Bishahri gatha not only comprises the myths or narratives but is practised through the visual narrative in the form of popular folk art known as Manjusha Paintings (Sinha & Pandey 2008 and Thakur 2017).

Figure No.1 The anthromorphic representation of the five serpent sisters or the Bishahris



Source: Manoj Kumar Pandit, Manjusha Kala Prashikshan Kendra, Bhagalpur

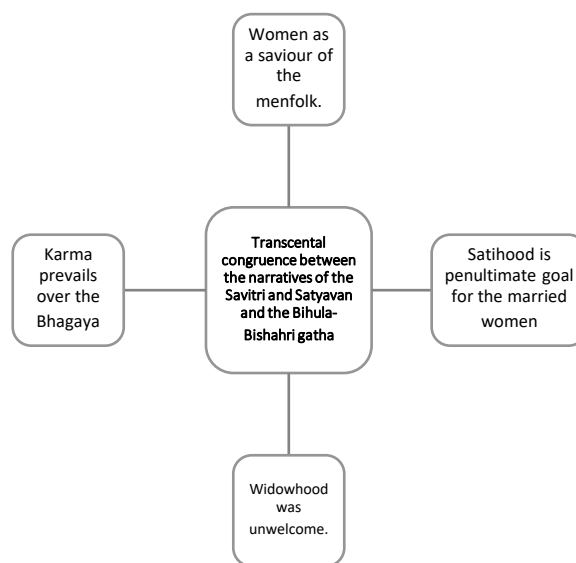
Figure No.2. Bihula carrying the corpse of her dead husband Bala Lakhendra towards the Devlok



Source: Manoj Kumar Pandit, Manjusha Kala Prashikshan Kendra, Bhagalpur

Manjusha painting is a narrative art form indigenous to the Bhagalpur district of Bihar. It is the art of making and decorating baskets and illustrating them with the themes from the folk ballad. In Manjusha art, human figurines are presented in angular shapes resembling X. The human faces are drawn in a style where only one eye is apparent. The eyes are big and prominent. Males are illustrated with long, curvy moustaches and a stick in their hands while females are visualised with curly long hairs, two circular images instead of breasts, narrow waists and lots of ornaments (Sinha & Pandey 2008 and Thakur 2017). Other vital motifs of the paintings are the sun, the moon, the elephants, the Champak flower, the fishes, and the trifoliate leaf of wood apple, etc. Paintings are drawn with natural water colours comprising red, green, and yellow (Kumari 2022).

Figure No.3. Conceptual framework representing the transcendentalism between the narratives of Savitri and Satyavan and Bihula-Bishahri



Source: Author

Before weaving organic analogy between the two narratives one must understand what is a narrative? A narrative or story in its broadest sense is anything told or recounted (Denning 2019). A story is basically a representation of a journey and is usually marked by a beginning, a middle, and an end. Most of the stories usually begin “*Once upon a time....*” located in a certain time and geographical context. Often the story unfolds through songs, dialogs, and speeches in prose as well as verse. The plot of the story is woven around some characters which may be real or fictional. These characters may include but are not limited to human beings, mythological creatures, animals and so on. Initially, it was believed that stories just served the purpose of entertainment or amusement. Gradually it was realised that apart from enjoyment, stories also influenced individuals’ cognition. Stories have a larger role in shaping the cognitive process of the brain. Being embedded in the local cultural ethos, stories convey societies’ culture and history shaping the cognitive dimensions of its members (Andrew, Dull & Donahue 2009).

Comparative analysis of the two narratives shed an interesting insight on gender relations and patriarchy in the country as conceptualised in figure 3. The first commonality between these two women-centric tales is that both Savitri as well as Bihula are hailed as a saviour or rescuer who saves their husbands from the biggest hazard of

death. They both undertake an arduous and difficult journey to revive the lives of their deceased husbands defying even the deities with their selfless devotion. These female leads conform to the prevalent masculine hegemony normalising male dominance and patriarchy. This idea of women as an emancipator is popular in the women-centric tales. In the majority of the accounts females have been conceptualised as the accomplice of the male protagonist by saving, rescuing or reviving their life to suit the norms of patriarchy (Ramanujan 2009).

Another commonality in both the stories is their preponderant emphasis on monogamy, the practice of marriage between single male and a female (Madan & Majumdar 2019). Agriculture was the primary means of sustenance in the alluvial rich Gangetic Plains of the Ganga and Yamuna. Before the introduction of modern machineries such as tractors, harvesters, threshers, etc. the yield was low and hence the monogamous set-up was conducive to this kind of intensive subsistence economy. Unlike the wealthy and rich landlords who practised polygyny, monogamy deemed more conducive to the poor and the marginal farmers. Since the ownership of agricultural land was concentrated among the handful feudal lords most of the agricultural farmers worked on the rented lands diminishing their final income. Hence, monogamy became a popular norm conforming to the economy. To instil the norms of monogamy among the masses women with single husbands were treated as righteous and sacred. Commitment and devotion towards single male became a new normal for good and meritorious women. Monogamous females were idealized and celebrated as chaste and virtuous. This obsession with monogamy eventually might have given rise to the evil practice of the Sati-pratha or the practice of the immolation of the wives along with their deceased husbands. Married women were idealised to an extent that women without a husband was held unworthy of life and forced to sacrifice herself at her husband's pyre. Hence widowhood was despised and women avoided it at all costs even at the risk of their own lives as illustrated in the given tales.

Besides, both the narratives preponderantly emphasise on the merits of *karma* (actions) over the *bhagya* (destiny). Satyavan as well as Bala Lakhinder were destined to premature death; however, their wives overturned their destiny through their actions. The concept of *bhagya* has cross cultural relevance across Indian subcontinent. According to astrology it is the position of planets and constellations in the ninth place of the zodiac diagram which determine the life events of an individual. *Bhagya* (destiny) in Indian philosophy is a result of cumulative activities or deeds (Behera & Gautam 2025). Depending upon the nature and intention of their conduct in the current or past births individual may be rewarded or punished manifesting as good fortune or bad fortune. As per the Sanskrit Hinduism premature deaths are believed to be the outcome of bad conduct etched in destiny. However, both the female protagonists are able to rewrite *the bhagya* of their husbands through their *karma* (actions) suggesting that persistent hard work and determination could easily supersede the bad fate.

Summing up, there exists transcendental congruence between two narratives reflecting the popular worldview and philosophy. It could be easily deduced that though the given narratives belong to two antagonistic traditions yet their underlying motives have been to strengthen male dominance and patriarchy. Idealising monogamous females, these narratives have served to promote monogamy and control the autonomy and authority of the women. The metaphor of Sati has been idealised to instil selfless love and commitment towards the husbands. Since independent and assertive women are threat to monogamy, subservient females devoted towards their husbands are admired and idealised subscribing

to the norms of patriarchy. In the given tales, both the protagonists exhibit strong selfless love and devotion towards their husbands by saving them from the clutches of death emerging as a saviour. Both the protagonists have been idealised as devoted and dutiful wives for whom death along with their husbands is more acceptable than widowhood. Echoing the popular Indian belief system, both the narratives also emphasise on the merits of karma (action) over the bhagaya (destiny) idealising hard work and perseverance. These narratives have been used to strengthen male dominance projecting women as their accomplices, emancipators or rescuers reinforcing the reins of patriarchy.

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