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Preservation and Adaptation: Generational Perceptions of Women in Indian Mythology and Folklore

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Abstract

Myths and folktales form the foundation of Indian society, with every region having its own traditions. Passed down through generations, they teach values, preserve culture, and reinforce social norms. However, the portrayal and representation of women in these narratives has always been questionable — often depicting the so-called “ideal” woman or falling victim various archetypes prevalent in contemporary media. Modern reimaginings often do away with this marginalization, allowing female characters nuance and depth. This study employed a qualitative research design, conducting semi-structured interviews with 12 individuals (6 men and 6 women), with 6 respondents from the older generation (ages 45+) and 6 respondents from the younger generation (ages 16–28). The interviews were audio recorded and then thematically analysed to identify key findings regarding the changes in the portrayal of women in myths and folktales and different generations' perceptions of the same. The two tables generated 23 themes and 78 codes in total. The key findings revealed that almost all participants believed that the changing depictions of women was a change for the better, reflecting newer social values. They agreed that myths and folktales play a major role in shaping perceptions of women and therefore require more accurate and empowering representations. Participants specifically highlighted the need for relatable, meaningful retellings that maintained a balance between preservation and adaptation. This research finds that this balance is essential, making myths and folktales more accessible, easier to engage with, and culturally empowering while also still facilitating the retention of their historical and cultural essence.

Keywords: Folklore, Mythology, Female Representation, Stereotypes, Gender Differences, Generational Gap