

Shakti on Screen: Digital Reimaginings of the Goddess Myths

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Abstract - This paper argues that digital media does not merely reproduce myths but actively reshapes their meanings, functions, and cultural relevance to suit contemporary audience by giving examples from select mythological retellings. Hindu Goddesses symbolize Shakti, the divine feminine energy representing creation, compassion, and protection. Contemporary digital media amplify the extraordinary attributes of Indian goddesses, foregrounding spectacle over relational and ethical complexity found in classical narratives. Ultimately, modern retellings serve as dynamic sites of negotiation between past and present, tradition and innovation. Future studies about Goddess representations similar to these can help creators reimagine mythological figures and narratives within digital landscapes that will ensure the survival of myth as a living, evolving discourse that continues to inform identity, values, and collective imagination without losing the cultural and affective essence.

Keywords-- Digital Era, Digital Feminism, Digital Representation, Goddess Movies, Indian Goddesses, Mythology, Myth Criticism.

I. INTRODUCTION

In an age where screens mediate much of human experience, mythologies too are finding new avatars. Among these, the representation of Goddess myths stands out for its cultural resonance and narrative adaptability. In India, the figure of Shakti who is the supreme feminine power, has been elaborated in centuries of oral, textual, and performative traditions. However, the digital era has ushered in fresh interpretations and visual imaginaries of the Goddess that diverge from the canonical scriptural texts yet speak powerfully to contemporary socio-cultural anxieties and aspirations. Shakti derives from the Sanskrit root 'sak', meaning "to be able" or "to have power." In classical Hindu thought, Shakti is both the cosmic force underlying all creation and the personal deity worshipped in many forms such as Durga, Kali, Radha, Parvati, Lakshmi, and Saraswati. Traditional texts like the *Devi Mahatmya*, *Devi Purana*, *Saundarya Lahari*, *Tantras*, and *Puranas* narrate her exploits, relationships with male deities, and cosmic roles.

However, these mythologies were not static. They evolved through ritual, folk performance, temple arts, and regional storytelling long before screens came into play.

The contemporary digital imaginary continues this evolution, yet with new cultural logics: celebrity culture, fandom, branding, politics of visibility, and global media circulation. While digital representations enrich the imaginative landscape, they also pose challenges. Condensing complex mythologies into digestible episodic narratives may strip layers of philosophical and poetic depth. Mythic content on commercial streaming services inevitably engages market logics, raising questions about authenticity and commodification. Creative liberties sometimes collide with religious sentiments, especially when sacred figures are re-contextualized in secular or speculative settings.

II. FROM TEMPLE WALLS TO TV SCREENS

From the silent era to early sound films, Indian cinema adapted mythological narratives, often foregrounding devotional sentiments and moral lessons. Films like *Sati Savitri* (1933), *Sri Krishna Leela* (1934), and later *Jai Santoshi Maa* (1975) shaped public imagination of female divinity. The success of *Jai Santoshi Maa*, made on a low budget yet achieving cult status—signals the devotional pull of Goddess narratives even before digital proliferation.

The expansion of Doordarshan and private satellite channels in the 1980s–90s brought serialized mythological storytelling to mass audiences. Series like *Mahabharat*, *Ramayan*, and *Devi Mahatmyam* (often adapted in regional languages) canonized specific visual and narrative templates for Goddess myths. These serials helped familiarize audiences with the visual grammar of divinity, ornamented crowns, flowing robes, multiple arms, cosmic backgrounds, and musical leitmotifs. The 21st century brought the internet, smartphones, and global streaming platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Hotstar, and YouTube. These platforms enabled diverse and sometimes experimental representations of Shakti—ranging from devotional content to feminist retellings and even speculative fantasy narratives.

Contemporary South Indian cinema reconfigures the goddess figure either as an urban activist disrupting institutional religion (*Mookuthi Amman*) or as a folk-protective deity embedded within regional cosmology (*Kallanum Bhagavathiyum*), demonstrating the fluid adaptability of Shakti in modern mythological narratives



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III. REINTERPRETATIONS THROUGH FEMINIST AND FEMININE LENSES

Streaming platforms and YouTube creators have also explored Goddess myths through feminist frames. Reclaiming narratives to focus on the agency of Goddesses rather than their roles as consorts or helpers. Retellings emphasize autonomy, righteous anger, and transformative power (e.g., Durga's battle with Mahishasura as a metaphor for patriarchy). Documentaries and short films foreground Goddess worship across regions, highlighting localized feminine deities like Kali, Amman, Bhadrakali, and tribal Goddesses.

These works often critique patriarchal readings of classical myths and use Goddess imagery to discuss contemporary issues like gender justice, autonomy, and spiritual empowerment. A growing trend is the blending of mythology with fantasy genres. Fictional universes inspired by Hindu mythologies that reimagine Goddess figures as protagonists in alternative worlds. These digital narratives use mythic archetypes such as the Warrior Goddess, the Protector, the Destroyer as motifs in stories about inter-dimensional battles, futuristic settings, and reconfigured cosmologies. Such speculative narratives speak to global genre audiences while retaining distinctly South Asian mythic structures.

With advances in CGI and VFX, divine powers are rendered with cinematic grandeur. Cosmic explosions, elemental manipulations (fire, water, lightning), super human portrayals (goddesses shown as highly muscular, demonic) metamorphosize and shifts the affective and cultural essence of the global audience. The film *Adipurush* proved a failure because the film leaned heavily into CGI spectacle, neglecting devotional aesthetics. In epics and Puranic narratives, goddesses such as Durga, Lakshmi, Saraswati, Kali, and Sita are not defined solely by miraculous power or martial prowess; rather, their divinity is articulated through ethical relationships between mother and child, devotee and deity, ruler and subject, husband and wife, teacher and disciple.

Classical texts emphasize dharma, compassion, forbearance, wisdom, and cosmic balance as the core of feminine divinity. However, in contemporary digital spaces ranging from high-budget mythological films and streaming series to video games, motion graphics, and social media reels the goddess is often reimaged primarily as a hyper-visual icon of power.

Computer-generated imagery magnifies weapons, battle sequences, radiant auras, and celestial landscapes, transforming Shakti into a spectacle of light, sound, and movement.

The ten arms of Durga become a rotating choreography of digital precision; Kali's fierce visage is intensified through dramatic animation; Lakshmi's abundance is rendered in showers of luminous gold coins. These representations create awe and immediacy, but they also risk isolating the goddess from the ethical contexts that once grounded her symbolism. Spectacle privileges what can be seen, amplified, and shared, while relational essence embodied in dialogue, moral dilemma, and emotional interiority requires contemplative engagement that digital formats often compress or bypass.

Social media algorithms further reward striking imagery over nuanced theological reflection, encouraging the circulation of stylized devotional art that accentuates grandeur rather than philosophical subtlety. As a result, the goddess becomes an emblem of empowerment or aesthetic magnificence, sometimes detached from the narrative arcs that historically situated her within networks of responsibility and reciprocity. Even when digital media aim to celebrate feminine strength, the emphasis on extraordinary attributes, supernatural combat, cosmic transformation, or apocalyptic force can overshadow the quieter dimensions of care, wisdom, and ethical endurance that classical sources foreground. This shift does not imply a complete loss of sacred meaning; rather, it signals a transformation in how divinity is mediated.

The digital goddess is immersive, immediate, and globally accessible, yet she is also shaped by the logics of visual consumption and entertainment economies. Consequently, contemporary representations tend to magnify the spectacular exterior of Shakti while attenuating the relational interiority that once defined her as mother, guide, and moral axis of the cosmos. The tension between spectacle and essence thus becomes central to understanding how Indian goddesses are being reconfigured in the digital age, where visual amplification often eclipses the ethical and relational frameworks embedded in classical texts.

This technological mediation transforms once static temple imagery into kinetic, emotionally evocative experiences. However, the risk lies in reducing mythic depth to mere spectacle—something that creators must navigate creatively.

IV. CONCLUSION

Shakti on screen represents a vibrant confluence of tradition and modernity. Digital media has not replaced classical mythic traditions but extended them into new aesthetic and cognitive terrains. The Goddess, once confined to temple art, palm-leaf manuscripts, and oral chants, now inhabits cinema screens, YouTube videos, mobile apps, and fan fiction.



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These reinterpretations are not mere retellings; they are cultural dialogues between ancient cosmologies and contemporary worldviews, between devotional sensibilities and aesthetic innovation, between local traditions and global media cultures.

In this space, Shakti emerges not just as a figure of worship but as a dynamic symbol of power, agency, transformation, and feminine spiritual possibility, reminding us that myth lives not only in texts but in the collective imagination of those who view, interpret, and replicate her stories anew.

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