

Opinion

## Karva Chauth: Tradition Meets Romance in Bollywood's Cinematic Universe

*From a wife's sacrifice for her husband's longevity to a shared expression of love, Karva Chauth's evolving meaning reflects both Bollywood's influence and changing gender dynamics*



Jawhar Sircar  • October 20, 2024  0  3 minutes read



 A wife celebrating Karva Chauth with her husband | Anonymous

**O**f all the regional festivals that Hindi movies have popularised throughout India the most, Mumbai's Ganesh Chaturthi and Karwa Chauth are the very top. Bollywood selected Karwa Chauth because it perfectly fit the image of blissful, society-sanctioned, post-marital love and devotion.

The ritual is held on the fourth day of the dark fortnight after Kojagari Purnima, in the month of Kartik of the Hindu lunar calendar — usually around the middle of October. North Indian states like Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan observe the *varṭ*. It does not seem so popular in Bihar and other Hindi-speaking areas of the East. Prayers are directed to Karva Devi, Parvati, and Chauth, while gods like Shiva, Ganesha and Kartikeya are also kept happy, with worship for their blessings.

The term Karva Chauth is made up of two words, 'Karva,' which means an

earthen pot with a spout and 'Chauth' which means fourth lunar day. Women offer water to the moon when it is sighted —with the spouted clay vessel. It is a folk ritual as there are no priests and cumbersome rites. People believe that this festival originated from women praying for the safe return of their husbands who had left home to fight wars or to trade in far-off lands. The core region did, indeed, send out warriors and adventurers.

Mythological tales of completely devoted wives abound— the ancient tale of Savitri-Satyavan is just one. The faithful wife brought back her husband from the jaws of death with her determination and prayers. It's quite like the story of Behula in Bengal. Another story is that of Veervati, who fasted and prayed ever so rigorously for a whole year until the gods brought her husband back to life.

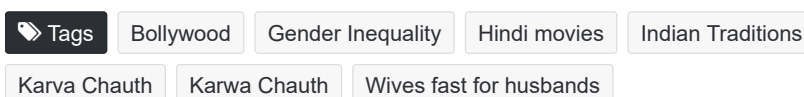
On the evening before Karva Chauth, the mother of the woman sends Bayaa, consisting of clothes, coconut, sweets, fruits and sindoor (vermillion) for her daughter and gifts for the mother-in-law. Even gifts serve as markers of the marital status of Hindu women, like toe rings, anklets, glass bangles, vermillion, bindi/tika and alta, a red border applied around the feet). Women also apply mehendi (henna) on their hands.


The family wakes up before sunrise on the day of Karva Chauth and married women consume a *Sargi* meal of fresh fruits, dry fruits, sweets, chapatis and vegetables offered by the mother-in-law. In the late afternoon, women come together with their respective thalis containing coconuts, fruits, dry fruits, a diya (lamp), a glass of *kachi lassi* (a drink made of milk and water), sweet *mathri* and the gifts that are for the mother-in-law. They encircle the idol of Gaura Maa (Goddess Parvati) and the story of Karwa Chauth is narrated by a wise elderly woman. Then they start to rotate the *thalis* around the circle, the *thali batana* as it's called, and sing folk songs. It is soon time to look at the sky, usually from the rooftop, to catch a glimpse of the moon. This they view through a *chhanni* (sieve) and break their fast only then — after offering *kachi lassi* to the moon and reciting a prayer for their husbands.

The occasion is somewhat lopsided, as it is the wife who has to go through a day-long fast to convey her love and care for the husband and to ensure his well-being and longevity. What is more satisfying is to see

that nowadays many husbands also observe a reciprocal fast — which is quite unconventional, but it conveys the right message. Many feel we should not encourage this patriarchal ritual and feel we should give it up, but others say that if the wife feels she can publicly declare her love for her husband, who are we to interfere? Besides, it is hardly religious any more — it's an all-women's festival, where ladies of other communities also join in for the dressing up, decorations, applying mehendi and other such fun.

It is a fact, however, that unequal rites and rituals that are so full of patriarchal values are on the way out — all over the world — but this Karva Chauth has been given a new **romantic connotation** and a new lease of life by Bollywood.






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