



Representation Of Transgenders In Hindu Mythology In India

Ms. Duheeta Joshi

Prof. Jitendra Nayak

Prahladrai Dalmia Lions College of Commerce & Economics

ABSTRACT

This study is an attempt to understand the representation of transgender in the ancient Indian text. These genders are popularly recognised as 'Third Gender' in India. Transgender had their presence in ancient texts in various forms. Hindu community worshipped these Hindu deities associated with gender diversity, such as *Ardhanarisvara* (the androgynous form of Shiva and his consort Parvati) and many more. The study focuses on understanding how the transgenders were represented and their portrayal in Hindu mythology. The study aims to understand how the concept existed in the ancient times and to study different roles played by transgenders in Hindu mythology. The study is based on qualitative research. The data for the study will be collected through secondary sources such as books, journals, articles, and videos, etc.

Keywords: Transgender, Third gender, Hindu, Mythology, India

INTRODUCTION

In today's 21st century we see development as an integral part of our society. From infrastructure to the thoughts of people everything seems evolving slowly and steadily but when it comes to the representation and sustainance of transgenders there are still various stigmas and stereotypes associated with it. From their birth to their survival the lives of transgenders are full of struggles. Where we see transgenders in every corner of the world, the perspectives differ on many grounds. In Indian society, they are looked down upon and rarely gain respect.

In 2014, when the Supreme Court recognised a transgender person's right to self-identification as male, female or the third gender and further in August 2016, the government introduced the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2016 in Lok Sabha ("The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2016") it paved the way for the transgenders the right to identity and livelihood. The 2019 Act allowed transgender persons to be

recognised and have a self-perceived gender identity, it opened the gates for the transgenders to demand respect and their basic rights in the society (“Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 - South Asian Translaw Database”). However, many other areas such as medical, education, and employment need to be developed for transgenders even today. The presence of transgenders dates back to the olden times where the ancient scriptures and hindu mythological texts have made special mention of the third gender in which kings and devas who are worshipped even today have taken forms of transgenders. Still transgenders are treated with disrespect and are deprived of their basic rights. The study aims to understand and analyse the form of transgenders which exists from the age of vedas and puranas to the present day.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

There have been many theories and articles talking about the concept of transgenders vividly but a few articles have defined the precise roles of transgenders.

The researcher has referred to the journal article on ‘Transsexualism in Hindu mythology’ to understand the roles of transgenders in Hindu mythology such as transgenders in Ramayana, Mohini, Arjuna as Brihannala, Shikhandi, Gopeshwar and Aravan.

To give a detailed understanding on the transformation of Lord Shiva as Gopeshwar, the researcher focused on analysing the story of Lord Krishna and Lord Shiva by referring to the content on ‘Gopeshwar Mahadev Temple Vrindavan’.

To understand the role of transgenders in vedas and puranas the researcher delved deeper in understanding the various forms by referring to the online content on ‘The third gender in Vedas and Puranas’.

To discuss how transgenders were portrayed in Hindu Mythology the researcher has referred to an online Youtube video by Devdutt Pattanaik on ‘Decoding Hinduism with Devdutt Pattanaik’.

The research paper also involves some references of the laws related to transgenders which are taken from the online site titled ‘TRANSGENDER PERSONS (PROTECTION OF RIGHTS) ACT, 2019 (INDIA)’ and ‘What are the Rights of Transgender in India’.

OBJECTIVES

To understand how transgenders were represented in Hindu mythology in India

To analyse how transgenders are portrayed

To study the different roles played by transgenders in Hindu mythology.

METHODOLOGY

The study focuses on understanding the representation of transgenders in Hindu mythology through various Indian texts. The study is based on qualitative research and employs secondary sources of data collection which involves online articles, journals and videos.

SCOPE OF STUDY

The study primarily focuses on the representation of transgenders in Hindu mythology and their existence from the old era. The study aims to understand the roles played by transgenders in Hindu mythology. The purpose of the research is to understand how the concept of transgender belongs not just to western culture but has been a part of Indian culture and its scripts for a long period of time. The study has specifically discussed some key roles which have been existing in the Hindu mythology as third gender with the power each of these characters hold.

LIMITATIONS

There was limited access to the original Indian mythological scriptures so the researcher had to rely on the secondary data collection methods such as articles, journals and videos. The researcher intended to interview a few subject experts but as the area of study is dynamic and depends on the beliefs of people, as the word mythology means a collection of myths dealing with Gods, Public or Heroes the researcher heavily relied on the written form of data for facts.

FINDINGS

In today's fast-paced world where everything seems to change radically, mythology is a source of information for a lot of people and serves as an evidence or a tool to take a glimpse in the world of vedas and puranas. Mythology talks about the ancient stories existing from ages. It is a mirror to the society which shows its true form and its origin. Our actions also known as 'Karma' in Sanskrit are dominated by how we are, how we behave and how we existed in our past lives. Many people for generations together have been believing and following mythological stories considering them to be true in today's era. People have been worshipping deities and experiencing positive changes. They have been learning more and more about such stories from hindu mythology for which they couldn't be a part of. Hindu Mythology has taught many valuable lessons through stories of Ramayana, Mahabharata, Krishna and much more. Hindu acknowledges diversity and it acknowledges in nature (prakriti) there are different kinds of sexuality in nature. Sankiriti decides what is an acceptable and unacceptable instrument and it fluctuates. When talking about transgenders they are referred to through different terms in Sanskrit such as Pandaka, Klibba, Napunsaka, Pedi and much more (Pattanaik #). The characters in the story are worshipped and hated for the same reason leading to some thought-provoking debates on news channels, political parties and panel discussions even today.

The vedas believe there exists three genders purusha- prakriti (man), stri- prakriti (lady) and tritiya- prakriti (third gender). The third- gender now comes under LGBTQIA where L stands for Lesbian, G stands for Gay, B stands for Bisexual, T stands for Transgenders, Q stands for Queer, I stands for Intersex and A stands for Asexual. Gender is a wide concept which encompasses numerous types that differ on the grounds of sexuality and identity. Talking about the ancient era, there have been transgenders and they have a significant part in tradition which is studied in this exploration. The first aspect of the third gender comes from the union of man and a woman known as 'Ardhanarishwara' which is the union of Lord Shiva and Parvati. It came from the idea when Goddess Parvati wanted to be with Lord Shiva at all times. Vaikuntha- Kamalaja (Lakshmi- Narayana) is a partial man and partial woman representation of Vishnu and Lakshmi. Vaikuntha- Kamalaja was to

represent that Vishnu is one with Lakshmi. Both these forms suggest that in life both man and woman are inversely essential.

Mohini: The second aspect talks about 'Mohini'. Mohini means enchantress. The Mahabharata describes the first appearance of Mohini when devas and asuras churned the ocean with the assistance of 'Kurma' the avatar of Vishnu, as a tortoise to acquire amrita (the elixir of immortality). It was when Lord Vishnu became female to she acquired amrita from the ocean, also known as samudra manthan'. The reincarnation of Mohini had to separate the fight between devas and asuras and give the amrita to the devas. He also became Mohini to kill the demon Brahmāsura, who was terrorising others.

Ramayana: When Lord Ram was exiled, many men and women accompanied him at the outskirts of Ayodhya. Along with the men and the women, even transgender people joined him. After a while, Ram ordered all the men and women to return but did not address the transgenders. On that note, transgender people waited for Lord Ram at the same place. When Lord Ram returned from Ayodhya, he saw Hijras sitting outside. He asked, "Why are you waiting outside?" The transgenders then said, "You asked all the men and the women to return to Ayodhya but did not mention the third gender, we are neither male, nor female.". Hearing this, Ram felt bad, and he declared that in Ram Rajya, everyone is welcomed. This suggests that the Lords and a king like Ram respected transgender people wholeheartedly (Pattanaik #).

Gopeshwar: As per the popular belief, Lord Krishna and Sri Radha Rani, along with the gopis, were performing Raas Leela on the night of Sharad Purnima, when Lord Shiva expressed his desire to be a part of the same to substantiate the bliss of Raas Leela. Lord Shiva, being a man, was not permitted to do so and was stopped by Vrinda Devi. Determined to partake, Lord Shiva started soliciting and planning on Goddess Radha, who gave him authorization to join Raas Leela after getting induced into Sakhi Bhav. Lord Shiva took a dip in the holy Yamuna sluice and surfaced as a beautiful miss, after which he was allowed into the Raas mandal. Being a devotee of Lord Shiva himself, Lord Krishna recognised the womanish guise of him and named her Gopeshwar. It's also believed that the lingam at the Gopeshwar temple was the one worshipped by the Brij Bhoomi gopis to attain Lord Krishna as their husband ("Gopishvar Mahadev Temple Vrindavan (Timings, History, Entry Fee, Images, Aarti, Location & Phone)")

Arjuna-Brihannala: Because Arjuna turned down Urvashi, an apsara (heavenly lady), she cursed him to remain a eunuch for the rest of his life. The fact that Arjuna, a mortal, could not be seduced by Urvashi infuriated her. Once Arjuna had spent a year in disguise as Brihannala, he made the decision to become a eunuch. Moreover, Indra lowered the curse to a year of Arjuna's choosing. He used to instruct King Virat's daughter and her friends in dance and music in the guise of Brihannala. Aware of his true identity as King Arjuna, Virat extended his daughter's hand in marriage, but Arjuna declined, citing his status as her mentor and the fact that she was his daughter. Thus, becoming an eunuch or a transvestite helped Arjuna hide from the Kauravas (*Transsexualism in Hindu Mythology*)

Aravan- The Progenitor: Aravan was the son of Arjuna and Ulipi, a "snake" princess, in the time of the Mahabharata. In Tamil, Aravan means "son of snake." Goddess Kali offered Aravan's death in order to

guarantee the Pandavas' victory. The only requirement was that Aravan spend his final night as a married man, but since they knew he would be executed the next day, none of the women wanted to marry Aravan. Then, Lord Krishna married Aravan after taking the form of the stunning Mohini. The Hijras of Tamil Nadu refer to themselves as Aravanis for this reason. Every year, transwomen in Koovagam, Tamil Nadu, have an 18-day celebration during which they dress like Aravan's wives and grieve for his passing.

Shikhandini to Shikhandi: In Mahabharata, Shikandi was born as a woman (called Shikhandini) but exchanged her gender with a Yaksha and became male. Initially Bhishma refused to fight Shikhandini as he was born as a woman but later Shikandi, the male, was permitted to fight Bhishma. The gender exchange was not permanent. The Yaksha who exchanged his gender with Shikandini regained his male form when Shikandi died (Krishnan).

CONCLUSION: With the society progressing towards better ideologies and striving to bring a positive change, there have been certain steps taken by the state government to improve the condition of transgenders such as NALSA Judgement of 2014 which recognised genders apart from male and female. We have Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act which states it is illegal to sexually harass any transgender. Today, transgenders are entitled to vote, have the right to marry and identify themselves to any gender of their choice, they are entitled to own property and claim a formal identity to their passport (“What are the Rights of Transgender in India”). Despite a massive change in the legal system of the country, transgenders face oppression and there is a need for a change in the thoughts of people. Many people are oblivious to the fact that transgenders is not a western concept; it has been existing in India for a long period and needs to be recognised and appreciated for its rich culture and history no matter how better we progress.

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