



ŚIVA AND SHIKHANDI: THE GENDER QUEERNESS IN HINDU MYTHOLOGY

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Hindu mythology dates to the time of the Ṛg Veda, the oldest sacred religious text, which was probably composed between 1500 and 900 B.C. The *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, *Puranas*, *Epics*, *Agamas*, *Bhakti* literature and *Tantras* with differing interpretations on mythology could trace the root of Hinduism. For over thousand years these scriptures have been the cosmic womb of creations of various literature and art forms. Truly speaking Hindu mythology visualized the more happening and modern concept, Queerness before 2000 years. Traditional Hinduism seems to proclaim to the world that queerness is as old as the mountains.

The vast traditions of Hinduism would tell the tales of gender queerness. Ancient scriptures like *Narada-smṛiti* and *Kamasutra* discuss queerness in detail. Epics like *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* has many queer tales to tell us. Yet one cannot completely brush them aside as mere

imagination; can be seen as stimulated shift marked by fear of oppression, individual behaviour and conflicts, in established norms or social order of given time and place.

While leaving old prejudices in the realm of sexuality, this paper seeks to question the belief ‘*ars erotica*.’ Queerness: is it all about multiplying pleasures or to be viewed as ethical concerns?

Queer Theory: A glance

Queer theory is not a singular or systematic conceptual or methodological framework, but a collection of intellectual engagements with the relations between sex, gender and sexual desire. Queer can be used as a derogatory noun or adjective for homosexuality or effeminacy. It can also be used to describe something that is not ordinary. It is a ‘contractedness of gender and sexual identities and categorizations.’

Ardhanārīśvara



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Hindu mythology depicts Śiva as *Ardhanārīśvara*, who included Parvati in his body. This form of Śiva is the most popular hermaphrodite deity. While Parvati became Śiva's left half, he had his right half. The male side is represented in masculine features while female side is represented in feminine features including attire and jewels. As Foucault argued this queerness is not a simple extension of a biological process, but a cultural product. This physical arrangement attracts non-normative forms of sexuality. For religiously conservatives this is an act of purpose (incarnation). However it is interesting to notice that this image deciphered as a form of God not Goddesses. Directed from their nature this unsexing becomes a fulcrum of argument, what constitutes male or female? However he -in -she seems to decode the concealment of selfhood in 'celebrated queerness'.

Shikhandi

Shikhandini, Drupada's daughter was a born female, but Drupada who wanted a son and was promised one by Shiva. Drupada considering his daughter as son raises her as son. Shikhandini grew up believing herself as a man. She was married too. Later she

becomes a man to satisfy his wife. Perhaps this story of sex change speaks about queer space experienced by the couple, Shikhandi and his wife. We can supposedly infer that gender was not regarded as "primary identification" here in this tale. In Judith Butler's words, "intelligible," ancillary traits and behaviors must divide and align themselves beneath a master division between male and female anatomy. Devdutt Pattanaik, Indian Mythologist argues that 'Shikhandi is a female-to -male transsexual, as her body goes through a very specific change genitally.'

Hindu mythology has fascinating tales of queerness which were indeed reflections of individual impulses rather than norms of a society. Ancient sacred scripts like *Manusmriti* and *Dharma Shastra* speak about the third gender (*Tritiya Prakriti*). Ancient laws and the queer space provided to an individual in the society, everything speaks how the ancient Indian society had celebrated the queerness. In Foucault's observation, sexuality is not a natural feature or fact of human life but a constructed category of experience which has historical, social and cultural, rather biological origins. However, it is still



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challenging to enter and explore into the full complexity of a vast culture that dates back to different time and space. Having conceived Indian theology in Indian mind, perhaps it should be the most significant challenge to explore queerness with those of Western modernity. Besides it would be a deception to reproduce the very substance of number of strands of this queer critique and argument only on the basis of constructed Queer theory.

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