

## THE ELEMENTS OF QUEER IN THE INDIAN MYTHOLOGIES: A RETROSPECTIVE OF THE LOST ADVANCEMENTS AND THE PROSPECTS OF HOMING

Ritesh kumar Singh<sup>1</sup> and Dr. Indrajit Kumar<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Department of English, School of Humanities & Languages, Mahatma Gandhi Central University, Motihari, Bihar

<sup>2</sup> Assistant Professor, University Department of English, B.B.M. Koyalanchal University, Dhanbad, Jharkhand  
E-mail: <sup>1</sup>rkumarmgcb@gmail.com

### ABSTRACT

*This study explores and examines the Queer elements in Indian Mythologies and their direct and indirect communion with life and it also discusses the lost legacy of liberal advancement in gender studies. It presents an overview of gender fluidity in the Indian mythologies and how it was concerned with the life context, its isolation, the misinterpretations, and the prospects of Homing. The Indian religion seems very flexible with non-heterosexuality or queerness, as it has been openly discussed in the various sacred texts. The references can be found in the Veda, Purana, Dharma-Shastra, Kama-shastra, Natya-shastra, and so on. Unfortunately, the flexibility of the religion concerning the fluidity of gender and sexualities turned into immoral or adharmic. Over periods, queerness becomes the curse, due to prejudice, gender discrimination, and virtual or vivid psychic abuse. The profound understandings of human nature (Prakriti), which equally values queerness along with the male (Purusha) and the female (Stri) are lost. This study has used the mythical literature that makes us remember that the world is not only privileged to males and females but also the third Prakriti or the third sex. Life is like an arid leaf without the religious and social fulfilments, and the queers are denied of this since long. Queers are not only denied their space in the mainstream but also subjected to emotional and concrete displacements. The void of homelessness is real. The metaphor of home encapsulates the essence of life, without it one just breathes. The desire of having the soul attached to the soil is natural and human. The queerness has a home in nature. The objective of the study is to highlight gender fluidity, its acceptance in Indian mythology, and homing desires.*

**Keywords:** Gender fluidity, Homing desire, Identity, Indian mythology, Religion and Queer.

### Introduction

The orthodoxy has dominated the lives of the common people to an extremity as religion is the superstructure of the community and the culture; whatever is accepted or authorised by it becomes part of Social ecology but the miss interpretation or propaganda-ridden narratives cause harm by the negative utilisations of this very feature. Religious rigidity has always acted as an obstacle in human psychological, scientific & technological advancements. The germination of new thoughts and modification or shift in the existing system has been always a tough task for the religious authorities. There is a great lack of agility; and difficulty in moving on with flexibility. From the days of Copernicus, and Galileo, to modern times, as far as religious rigidities are concerned, not changed significantly. Again, it is very evident that the superstructure of the religion has built on the common cause of civility but still, there are some drawbacks in the very interpretation of the religious sacred texts and the governing documents. Every

being has the right to live with their beliefs, values and anything either personal or social that too with dignity. Scientific and social studies have significantly evolved and it advocates for the Queerness of humans; sexual orientation does not bound to definitions of the gender-like thing. These very advance human aspects have been de-coded by Indians, civilizations ago. The proofs of contemporary advanced understandings of different layers of genders and sexualities can be found in mythological ones and also in the scientifically written texts or the *Shastras*. Unfortunately, due to distorted narratives, such civility and versatility of the religion took a wrong turn; making it difficult for the other spheres of the human who doesn't associate himself/herself with any fixity. The modern Queer theory carries the sameness with the ancient Indian understandings of sexuality and gender. After the 1980s the theories related to gender, sex, sexuality, performance, and performativity, emerged and studies surfaced. Every individual is different and it has its subjective way of living. Queer Literature encompasses not

only the physical, and psychological but also the social and political voices of the concerned (Foucault, 2012). One of the seminal documents regarding these sexual studies is Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, which also discusses the different aspects of gender, sex, and sexuality. Judith Butler raised it even more effectively; she explored the idea of sexual and gender identity. She propounded this as "Social Performance"; in *Gender Trouble*, Butler has not only questioned the construction of identity based on gender but she has also pointed out the social and political constructs (Butler, 2011). Her idea of sexual and gender identity; is the thought of the modern-day world which is indeed remarkable but these things were always there in the Indian consciousness, however, not explored in the scientific objectivity, whatever the reasons were.

### Religion, Life, and the Fluidity

This human body is the supreme creation of the god; every creature is unique and completely different from the others in every aspect. The colours, sex, height, weight, emotional, and psychological settings all are varied. According to Butler, gender and sexual identity are a matter of performance, acquiescence to the social norms, and mystifications about sexuality and gender derived from philosophy, religion, psychology, medicine, and popular culture (Butler, 2011). Her definition encapsulates almost every aspect of Queer cause, but the question is, Is this new? No, it is not, the Indians were familiar with such modern-day notions of gender and sexualities. But, is also evident that a shift in the cultural and religious settings of India doesn't account for it objectively, it lacks documentation and most importantly it fails against the narratives of power. However, still, no matter how bad happens, the correctness of valid things doesn't change rather it is transformed into reliability. The re-reading of the Indian texts concerning the different shades of gender is proving to be a changing agent.

Gender fluidity is one of the best characteristic features of the Indian religions. In the Indian mythologies, several incidents value the third sex and it doesn't hesitate to show this difference in nature to the world (Pattanaik, 2018). It has numerous descriptions of gender fluidities, which are unique in themselves, modern in outlook, and complementary to the Queer literature; the literature on different shades of gender and sexualities.

However; over the periods, the misinterpretation of the original words has created an environment of chaos and religious rigidity. The gender fluidity of Indian mythologies and acceptance of non-heterosexuals were widely misinterpreted and gradually turned into immoral acts against nature. The queerness in the Indian mythologies has been discussed without any guilt and discrimination. There were more than fifty words for non-heterosexual genders and sexualities in Sanskrit, Prakrit, and Tamil: *Napunsaka, kliba, kinnara, Pedi, Pandaka*, etc. are a few of them, which are used as per the nature of the gender and sexualities (Pattanaik, 2018). These references are found in *Veda, Itihasa, Purana, Kama-shastra, Natya-shastra, and Ayurveda*, of the Hindus, as well as in Jain *Agamas* and Buddhist *Pitakas*. Today most are still used in local languages but in a pejorative way. All these words range from different shades of gender and sexualities filled with discrimination under the politics of power. Pattanaik, a renowned mythologist has done an exploration, he has discussed in the contemporary sense, however, under the veil of mythology modern studies are now being done which will defiantly work as a path-breaking formation of accepting attitude in the Indian consciousness regarding gender and sexualities.

"*Tritiya Prakriti*" or "the third sex or queerness" is not a new concept but an ancient entity. In Hindu mythology, God is simultaneously formless, rock, plant, animal, masculine, feminine, and queer (Pattanaik, 2018). Queer examples include Shiva who becomes a milkmaid (Gopeshwara) to dance in Krishna's Raas Leela, Vishnu who becomes a damsel (Mohini) to enchant the gods and demons. There is no 'one' way for all. Different gods, for different people with different tendencies and dispositions. But they are all forms of the same God (Pattanaik, 2018). This is unity in diversity. Such felicity is modern and it needs an advance and liberal construct of the society which is sound with the politics. The gender metamorphosis of Lord Shiva and his consort Parvati as Ardhanarishvara, Arjuna's transition into Brihannala, etc. are addition to it. These Godly powers harmonised the difference between gender and sexualities and they acquired it as per their dispositions.

The transformation of Shiva symbolizes the acceptance of both the powers as equally important alone or altogether. M. Chakravarti in her monumental work *The Concept of Rudra-Siva*

*Through the Ages* has discussed several metamorphoses of Shiva. The prominent one is Ardhanareeswara. One of the 64 manifestations of Shiva, the man, and a woman formed with Parvati constituting the left half of Shiva is Ardhanareeswara (Chakravarti, 1986). The Ardhanareeswara is the concept that Shiva stands for in this aspect, he draws the feminine into himself. He is half man, half woman. A symbol of the *Samkhya* philosophy which talks of *Purusha* (the male energy) and *Prakriti* (the female energy) together makes the cosmic energy.

This metamorphosis not only dismantles the power structure of the gender which is mainly entitled to the “Male”; the gender which claims to be superior to any other gender irrespective of sexuality. Present-day “Feminism” was supposedly theorized in this very metamorphosis. It advocates for the equality of the “Female” gender, the Shiva who is the supreme creator of the world acknowledged the power of the feminine, and gave its due importance, further in the same way this also sets the road for the acceptance of the mixed one i.e. the “*Tritiya Prakriti*” which wears the characteristics of both the genders. These very aspects of gender and sexualities were always present in the Indian socio-political plain, one can imagine how strongly it has been presented and preserved through the metamorphosis of Shiva into the “Ardhanareeswara.” This is not limited to the structure of power but it holds the great cause of nature. Modern medical sciences have proven that the human body carries both characteristics of Male and Female genders regardless of the dominant one; as far as the Queer case is concerned, it is as natural as the male or female and it has nothing to do with the politics of power or superiority, in the eyes of nature each being is equal.

Arjuna’s transition into *Brihannala* is not a mere transformation of the great *Arjuna* into a graceful lady called *Brihannala*, it is another example of Indian acceptability and understanding of the gender and the sexual identities which do not affect the greatness or the abilities of the great Arjuna. The gender or sexual fluidity was not derogatory rather it was regarded as the versatile quality of nature, which does not discriminate.

Another example of Queer acceptance in the Indians can be found in the image of an androgynous character “*Shikhandi*”, which nullifies the superiority of the male gender particularly by restraining the dominance of masculinity. The

studies of *Shikhandi* range from Queer studies to Feminist studies, as he breaks the socio-political and biological stereotypes and prejudices against Queerness as far as gender and sexualities are concerned. Initially, *Shikhandi* was born as a female called “*Shikandini*” to *Drupada*, the mighty king of *Panchala*, and later *Shikandini* transforms into a male, having the qualities of *Tritiya Prakriti* only to be proven as the cause behind the defeat of one of the finest warriors of all time Bhishma (Pattanaik, 2014). This particular scene from the great Indian epic “*Mahabharata*” mainly caters to the question of power and its share in the socio-political decision-making and the breaking of dominance. It goes on to prove the acceptance of Queerness in the ancient times of the country; it is the need of the time that we bring change in our rigid mindsets and try to abolish the discriminatory attitude against the Queer masses.

Indian mythology very artistically and with a subtle aesthetic has depicted the Queer case and enriched the great Indian literature. Religious acceptance of the Queer and non-heterosexuals can bring defining change. To bring socio-political changes in society and also the behavioural changes into the orthodoxy it is the need of the time to highlight gender fluidity and its submergence into mainstream life and the literature.

### Indian Religion and the Different Shades of Gender

Indian religion and the different kinds of genders and the concerning sexualities have been readily found in the communion, it doesn’t cast the men aside from the regular one based on their particular choices and the manifestation of nature in them. The different shades of gender and whatever traits of sexuality they possess were not subjected to social and political discrimination; leave the mortal men, even the God and Goddess did not discriminate. Non-heterosexuality is seen as taboo in present-day society despite several attempts to waive off the hate and prejudice against them; still, it seems like something unachievable but contrary to present-day scenarios the ancient Indian appeared more flexible. Scholar Stephen J. Hunt in his work “*The Queer case of Hinduism: Religious Discourses and the legitimacy of non-heterosexuality*” has discussed this modern feature of the Indian religion. Hunt has traced the legitimacy of non-heterosexuality in ancient India. He has analyzed in parallel to current gender and

sexuality studies. This stresses the acceptance of different shades of gender, gender fluidity, and a variety of Sexualities. The advanced understandings of gender fluidity in the Indian mythological texts are something that the world needs today.

### Indian Sexual Harmony and Queer Homing Desires

The flawless acceptances of the gender transformation initiated by either curses or blessings or by incarnations are proofs of socio-political hegemony as it is evident that without the approval of the social and political classes nothing can stand. In several Indian mythological texts, sexual harmony is observed. Be it the transformation of lord *Vishnu* into an enchanting damsel to destroy the evil or the transformation of *Shiva* into a *Gopi* popularly known as the *Gopeshwar-Mahadev* to be a part of *Raas* of mesmerising beauty, *Krishna*. Lord *Shiva* was impressed and tempted by the unavoidable beauty of *Shree Krishna* that he wished to be a woman with a desire to have *Raas* with *Krishna*. With his, *Maya* *Shiva* does this and for the fraction of time, he experienced the feminine. This symbolises that sexual orientation is not limited to gender. There could be no better example of sexual harmony, not only in Indian literature but also in world literature. However, again the politics of narrative comes in way of the Gender studies. The conservative even today hasn't accepted the advanced nature of Indian religion and like old days, they are a threat to the man who spoke of the change. Kamalini Mukherjee in her scholarly paper entitled '*Exploring the subversive Indian: Sexual dissidence and the "Queer" in Indian popular culture*' has explored the Indian myth and sexual harmony and the elements which are responsible for the dissidence. According to Kamalini the popular Indian culture often appears ignorant, they accept the differentiation but fear to acknowledge the integration, however in the core of the culture there were no such negations, it was for all regardless of their gender, sex, or caste, it was all-inclusive (Kamalini, 2017). Although in popular culture prejudice dominates, however; the respect for the creation of nature overshadows the odds. But as the days pass the prejudice turned into hate and social and political abuse. If we talk about the current scenarios some visible changes are too on a positive note. The Queer case in India has evolved

significantly; more or less the position and representation of Queer masses are getting better and better. This may be taken as the revival of ancient understanding of gender and sexualities but we have a long way to go toward socio-political equality.

The homing desire in the Queer case is rising as the consciousness of the people around is focused towards the acceptance of the Queers in mainstream life, with all the rights which any so-called normal people are enjoying. Indian mythologies have never discriminated against the otherness or the Queers as discussed in the various myth and legends. The Queer masses around the globe are looking for a safe and sound environment to bloom without any guilt and shame. Ancient India gave the rightful space to the Queers in the society without any objections and prejudice, they gain knowledge, learned the art and war tactics, did whatever they wanted, and lived as per their will. The current situation of Indian society is changing significantly and this change is a good one. The government of India has done the needful changes in laws and assured the participation of Queer masses in society. And at the same time, the common people are also showing a sign of change by welcoming and accepting the Queers. The Homing desire is not only limited to Queers but it lies in everyone, every human lurk for the home so the Queers.

### Conclusion

The post-modern era has questioned the very core of the world and it has forced us to question the breakings of the meta-narratives too. Now the world has evolved to a greater degree where the orthodoxy or conservatism is being questioned, now any institution doesn't belong to anyone, like the Renaissances the man is free to choose the best for himself, but in this era, the man goes one step further by accepting the self and whatever he or she is. The Indian religion is very post-modern in itself; it questions the very core and seeks the answers. Here, again we need to ponder why religion thing is so important in our discussion in the post-modern world the legitimacy or authentication of any institution varies from man to man, then why do we keep associating with religion? The answer lies within us, men tend to escape in this ultrasonic fastness of the world and we need something to hide behind, and religion works as a shelter or a destination for our escape from reality. No matter how far we have come, religion still holds the

power to stabilize and influence the minds of men. For a valuable and sensible life, religion works as a comforting agent, it provides sustainability to the mind and the body hence it is essential for wholesome life. If religion provides shelter to any thought or notion or concept, it gets acceptability. The Queer case in the Indian scenario is a little bit more blessed than others as it has a liberal outlook which makes the course of Queer easier. The Indian Queer cases are also aware of the biological mechanism of the human body. The description of gender and sexualities in Indian mythology is modern and advanced. B. N. Raveesh (2013) has best summarised in his scholarly paper entitled “*Ardhanareeshwara concept: Brain and*

*psychiatry*” that Neurohormonal mechanisms are greatly influencing sexual behavior. The modern world has come to understand the concept of “Ardhanareeshwara” as it aspires to resolve the paradox of opposites into a unity, not by negation, but through positive experiences of life. The matching of opposites produces the true rhythm of life. The Indian mythologies have something for everyone, one just needs to look for the things that they need with open eyes. Homes calls the Queers back. The Queer case can find refuge in the Indian religion, the homing desires of the Queers are not confined to their gender or sexualities but it accepts them as one of the parts of the society.

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