

## **Representation of The Third Gender In Indian Mythology With Special Reference To Ardhnarishwar, Shikhandi and Mohini**

**Sanyogita S.Kendale**

**KSKW College, Uttam nagar, CIDCO.**

### **ABSTRACT**

The present study intends to analyze the representation of three mythological characters *Ardhnarishwar*, *Shikhandi* and *Mohini* from the perspective of gender studies. There are legendary stories attached to these characters in Indian mythology. The analysis of these stories will find out the way of life, behaviour, place, role, and representation of the third gender in ancient Indian society. The present paper will reconnect the status of the third gender characters in ancient Indian social context to the modern attitude towards the third gender characters. Indian mythology is a treasure of different stories and narratives. There are ample examples of the third gender characters in the Indian mythology. The Hindu mythology makes continuous references to queerness means the idea that questions the concept of masculinity and femininity. There are stories of women who became men and men who became women. There are many words in Sanskrit, Prakrit, and Tamil such as *kliba*, *napunsaka*, *mukhbhaga*, *sanda*, *panda*, *pandaka*, *pedi* that suggests a familiarity with third gender and behaviour.

**Keywords-:** representation, third gender, Indian mythology, myth, legend.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The third gender is a concept in which individuals are classified by themselves and by society as neither man nor woman. It is also a social category present in societies. The idea of the third gender first appeared in the '*Mahabharata*'. It is explained in detail a few centuries later in a book called '*Kamsutra*'. It refers to the people of this category using the feminine pronoun and classifies them as feminine and masculine. The feminine dress as women and are often courtesans. The masculine dress as men and are often massagers. The word hijara, transgender, cross-dresser, and transsexual are often confused. Hijara is a community of male-to-female transgendered people into which one has to be granted entry by a guru. A transgender is a man or a woman who has a deep desire to live in a society as a member of the opposite sex. A cross-

dresser may wear the clothes of the opposite sex for fun or sexual pleasure. A transsexual is a person who feels trapped in his or her own body and wants to change to the opposite sex.

*Ardhnarishwara* comprises an androgynous form of the Hindu deities Shiva and Parvati. The left half *Parvati* is known as *Devi*, *Shakti*, and *Uma*. The character of *Ardhnarishwara* is represented as half male and half female, equally split down the middle. The right half is usually the male *Shiva*. The character of *Ardhnarishwar* represents the combination of the masculine and feminine energies of the universe. It means *purusha* and *prakriti*. *Purusha* means *Shiva*; the male principle of God and *Shakti*; the female principle of God which is inseparable from each other. The union of male and female principles is noble concepts for the root and womb of all creation. The character of *Ardhnarishwar* is a symbol of Shiva present everywhere in nature. There are three legendary stories about *Ardhnarishwar*. The first story included Brahma. The primal lotus bloomed and Brahma came out of it at the beginning of the world. He was all alone so he created his sons through his thought power. These mind born sons refused to procreate then in a vision Brahma saw a being whose left half was female and right half was male. Brahma created a woman from the left half of his body and gave them as wives to his sons to procreate. Thus, this legend explains the origin of the creature having combined qualities of male and female which is the notion of third gender in the form of *Ardhnarishwar*. The character of *Ardhanarishvar* is a sublimation of the third gender by attributing divinity and spirituality. *Ardhanarishvar* is revered in the ancient Indian society having equivalent status to God.

There is a story of *Shikhandi* the *Mahabharata*. *Shikhandini* or *Shikhandi* was in a previous life a woman named *Amba*, the eldest daughter of the King of Kashi *Ambika* and *Ambalika* were her younger sisters. The King of Kashi organized their *Swayamvara* (old Hindu tradition of marriage of princess in which she had a right to make a choice of her husband) *Bhishma* forcefully took *Amba*, *Ambika* and *Ambalika* from their *swayamvara*; as a punishment to the Kashi for not inviting the King of Hastinapur to the *swayamvara*. *Bhishma* defended several kings and flee with the princesses and presented them for marriage to *Vichitravirya*, the crown prince of

Hastinapura. *Vichitravirya* married only two sisters, because *Amba* told *Bhishma* that she loved *Salwa*, as a result of that, *Bhishma* sent *Amba* with grandeur to *Salwa*, the king of *Saubala*. But *Salwa* rejected her because she was abducted by *Bhishma*. *Amba* then returned to *Bhishma* blamed him for her condition and demanded that he should marry her. *Bhishma* also rejected her because he had taken a vow of celibacy. *Amba* enraged at her humiliation, tried to persuade other kings to wage a war with *Bhishma* and compel him to wed her but no one agreed for war against *Bhishma*, the great warrior. *Amba* decided to take revenge so she went to *Parashurama*, *Bhishma's* guru, to seek his help to wage a war with *Bhishma* for her. *Parashurama* could not defeat *Bhishma*. *Amba* then resorted to penance and received a garland of ever fresh blue lotuses from Lord *Kartikeya* and it was foretold that anyone wearing the garland would become the cause of *Bhishma's* death. She went to the *Panchal*, as they were a mighty empire known for its military skill. However, no one was willing to fight for her cause, fearful of great warrior *Bhishma*. *Amba*, in anger, hung the garland on the gates of *Drupada*, the King of *Panchal* and left in agony. *Amba* did severe penance to Lord *Shiva* for a boon to cause *Bhishma's* death. Eventually, her prayers were answered. But, being a woman with no military training, she asked *Shiva* how she would accomplish her task, and he responded that her future incarnation would be the one to bring about *Bhishma's* demise. Eager to bring this about, *Amba* killed herself. *Amba* keeps on killing herself until she is incarnated into a satisfactory situation. It also filled the time gap between her abduction at *Kashi* and the *Kurukshetra* war. *Amba* was reborn as *Shikhandini*, the daughter of King *Drupada*. *Shikhandi* is male but born-female when *Shikhandini* changed her sex; she became *Sikhandi*, a eunuch. (The term eunuch generally refers to a man who has been castrated, typically early enough in his life for this change to have major hormonal consequences.) *Shikhandini* was still a young woman she discovered the garland of ever-blooming blue lotuses hung on the palace gate. *Shikhandini* put it around her neck. *Drupada* saw his daughter wearing the garland, he became fearful of becoming *Bhishma's* enemy, and *Shikhandini* was banished from the kingdom. *Shikhandini* panicked and escaped into a forest, where she met a *Yaksha* who exchanged his sex with her. She performed austerities in the forest and was transformed into a male named *Shikhandi*. The *Yaksha* King sees the *Yaksha* as a girl and curses him that he will remain in the form till *Shikhandi* dies, keeping the sex-swap in place.

*Shikhandi* is a male but transgender, due to *Shiva's* boon that *Amba* will remember all the details

of her past life. King *Drupada* doesn't practice gender discrimination, she is trained to become a warrior and fights in the Kurukshetra War (this being the original reason why *Amba* kills herself again and again, wanting to be born to a culture that will allow her to fight *Bhishma*). In the battle of Kurukshetra, *Bhishma* recognised him as *Amba* reborn, and not wanting to fight a "woman" (or an actual woman, transformed into a male), avoided battling *Shikhandi*. On the tenth day, *Shikhandi* rides in *Arjuna's* chariot, and together, they face *Bhishma*, forcing him to lower his weapons. Knowing that this would happen, *Arjuna* hid behind *Shikhandi* and attacked *Bhishma* with a devastating volley of arrows. Thus, *Shikhandi* was skillfully used as instrument for *Bhishma's* death. *Shikhandi* was finally killed by *Ashwatthama* on the 18th day of battle. Dazed and confused, *Shikhandi* is killed in a sword fight with *Ashwatthama* when *Ashwatthama*, *Kripacharya*, and *Kritaverma* attacked the *Pandava* camp on the night of the final day of battle. *Shikhandi's* character reflected that he was victim of rules and restrictions laid by contemporary society. *Shikhandi's* story clearly points out that people like *Bhishma* whose thinking was prejudiced and orthodox not accepted gender transformation easily. Nowadays society and the government are slowly accepting the third characters and gender transformation as inseparable part of society.

There is a story of *Mohini* and *Aravan* in the battle of the *Mahabharata*. The *Kauravas* and *Pandavas* fought great battle but both were evenly matched. So, oracles on the *Pandavas* side foretold that human sacrifice was the only way to please the goddess of war and ensure the victory. The *Pandavas* decided to sacrifice *Aravan* (*Arjuna's* son). But *Aravana* wanted a wife before he was sacrificed; marriage entitled him to cremation and proper funerary offerings. But no women on earth willing to marry a man destined to die the day after the wedding. So the *Pandavas* turned to *Krishna* who transformed in to beautiful woman called *Mohini*. He married *Aravan*, spent the night with him, and at dawn, he had been sacrificed, mourned him as a widow. This story is the best mythological evidence of gender transformation from male to female and situational acceptance of gender transformation as it is accepted in modern Indian society.

## Conclusion

“Patriarchy asserts men are superior to women, feminism clarifies men and women are equal. Queerness questions what constitutes male and female”. The third gender is not a modern, western or sexual concept. These three stories have underlined the importance and the existence of masculinity and femininity in the Indian mythology. They explained the value of equality and the combination of these energies. Third gender characters are representative of this ancient notion of combination. So our attitude towards them should change.

In Indian mythology, you will find many tales e.g. *Mahadeva* who became a woman to deliver his devotee’s child, *Chudala* who became a man to enlighten her husband, etc. The examples of the third gender taken for consideration in this paper are gender transformation in pre historic era. These characters represented the social status and place of the third gender in Indian mythology.

## References

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## Weblinks

1. [.https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ardhanarishvara](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ardhanarishvara)

2. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shikhandi>