

= LGBT themes in Hindu mythology =

LGBT themes in Hindu mythology involve Hindu deities or heroes whose attributes or behavior can be interpreted as lesbian , gay , bisexual or transgender (LGBT) , or as having elements of gender variance and non @-@ heterosexual sexuality . Traditional Hindu literary sources do not speak of homosexuality directly , but changes of sex , homoerotic encounters , and intersex or third gender characters are often found both in traditional religious narratives such as the Vedas , Mahabharata , Ramayana and Puranas as well as in regional folklore .

Hindu mythology has many examples of deities changing gender , manifesting as different genders at different times , or combining to form androgynous or hermaphroditic beings . Gods change sex or manifest as an Avatar of the opposite sex in order to facilitate sexual congress . Non @-@ divine beings also undergo sex @-@ changes through the actions of the gods , as the result of curses or blessings , or as the natural outcome of reincarnation .

Hindu mythology contains numerous incidents where sexual interactions serve a non @-@ sexual , sacred purpose ; in some cases , these are same @-@ sex interactions . Sometimes the gods condemn these interactions but at other times they occur with their blessing .

In addition to stories of gender and sexual variance that are generally accepted by mainstream Hinduism , modern scholars and queer activists have highlighted LGBT themes in lesser known texts , or inferred them from stories that traditionally are considered to have no homoerotic subtext . Such analyses have caused disagreements about the true meaning of the ancient stories .

= = Gender variance of deities = =

Many deities in Hinduism and Indian mythology are represented as both male and female at different times and in different incarnations or may manifest with characteristics of both genders at once , such as Ardhanarishvara , created by the merging of the god Shiva and his consort Parvati . The name Ardhanarishvara means " The Lord whose half is a woman " . This form of Shiva represents the " totality that lies beyond duality " , and is associated with communication between mortals and gods and between men and women . Alain Danielou says that " The hermaphrodite , the homosexual and the transvestite have a symbolic value and are considered privileged beings , images of the Ardhararishvara . " . A similar merger occurs between the beauty and prosperity goddess Lakshmi and her husband Vishnu , forming the hermaphroditic or androgynous Lakshmi @-@ Narayana .

In the Bhagavata Purana , Vishnu takes the form of the enchantress , Mohini , in order to trick the demons into giving up Amrita , the elixir of life . Shiva later becomes attracted to Mohini and spills his semen on the rocks which turn into gold . In the Brahmanda Purana , Shiva 's wife Parvati " hangs her head in shame " when she sees her husband 's pursuit of Mohini . In some stories Shiva asks Vishnu to take on the Mohini form again so he can see the actual transformation for himself . Stories in which Shiva knows of Mohini 's true nature have been interpreted to " suggest the fluidity of gender in sexual attraction " .

Pattanak writes that those focusing only on homoeroticism miss the narrative 's deeper metaphysical significance : Mohini 's femininity represents the material aspect of reality , and Mohini 's seduction is another attempt to induce Shiva into taking an interest in worldly matters . He cites another story to show that only Vishnu has the power to " enchant " Shiva : a demon tries to kill Shiva by taking the form of a woman (placing sharp teeth in " his " vagina) . Shiva recognizes the impostor and kills the demon by the placing a " thunderbolt " on his " manhood " during their act of " lovemaking " .

In the later , Puranic story of the origin of God Ayyappa , Vishnu as Mohini becomes pregnant from Shiva , and gives birth to Ayyappa , who he @-@ she abandons in shame . Pattanaik writes that rather than Mohini becoming pregnant , Ayyappa sprang from Shiva 's semen , which he ejaculated upon embracing Mohini . In another version , the Pandyan king Rajasekhara of Pantalarn adopts the baby . In this version , Ayyappa is referred to as ayoni jata , " not born from a vagina " , and later Hariharaputra , " the son of Vishnu and Shiva " , and grows up to be a great hero .

According to Tamil versions of the Mahabharata , the god Krishna ? an incarnation of Vishnu ? also

took the form of Mohini and married Aravan . This was in order to give Aravan the chance to experience love before his death , as he had volunteered to be sacrificed . Krishna remained in mourning in the Mohini form for some time after Aravan 's death . This marriage and death of Aravan are commemorated annually in a rite known as Thali , during which Hijra (Indian " third gender ") take on the role of Krishna @-@ Mohini and " marry " Aravan in a mass @-@ wedding , followed by an 18 @-@ day festival . The festival ends with a ritual burial of Aravan , while the Hirjas mourn in Tamil style : by beating their chests in ritual dances , breaking their bangles and changing into white mourning clothes .

= = Gender variance in heroes = =

Changes of sex and cross @-@ dressing also occur in myths about non @-@ divine figures . One such figure is Shikhandi , a character in the Mahabharata . He was originally born as a girl named ' Shikhandini ' to Drupada , the king of Panchala . In a previous lifetime , Shikhandini was a woman named Amba , who was rendered unmarriageable by the hero Bhishma . Humiliated , Amba undertook great austerities , and the gods granted her wish to be the cause of Bhishma 's death . Amba was then reborn as Shikhandini . A divine voice told Drupada to raise Shikhandini as a son ; so Drupada raised her like a man , trained her in warfare and arranged for her to marry a female . On the wedding night , Shikhandini 's wife discovered that her " husband " was female , and insulted her . Shikhandini fled , but met a yaksha who exchanged his sex with her . Shikhandini returned as a man with the name ' Shikhandi ' and led a happy married life with his wife and children . During the Kurukshetra war , Bhishma recognised him as Amba reborn and refused to fight ' a woman ' . Accordingly , Arjuna hid behind Shikhandi in order to defeat the almost invincible Bhishma . In the Javanese telling , Srikandi (as she is known) never becomes a man , but is a woman equal to men , and is the wife of Arjuna . After his death , Shikhandi 's masculinity was transferred back to the yaksha .

Arjuna himself is an example of gender variance . When Arjuna refused her amorous advances , the nymph Urvashi cursed Arjuna ; he would become a " kliba , " a member of the third gender . Krishna assured Arjuna that this curse would serve as the perfect disguise for Arjuna during his last year of exile . Arjuna took the name Brihannala and dressed in women 's clothes , causing the curse to take effect . Thus Arjuna gained entry into the city ruled by king Virata , where he taught the arts of music , singing and dancing to the princess Uttar? and her female attendees . Doniger describes Arjuna 's cross @-@ dressing disguise as a source of comedy in the story , with references to his " hairy arms " . In the Padma Purana , Arjuna is also physically transformed into a woman when he requests permission to take part in Krishna 's mystical dance , which only women may attend .

The story of Ila , a king cursed by Shiva and Parvati to be a man one month and a woman the next , appears in several traditional Hindu texts . After changing sex , Ila loses the memory of being the other gender . During one such period , Ila marries Budha (the god of the planet Mercury) . Although Budha knows of Ila 's alternating gender , he doesn 't enlighten the ' male ' Ila , who remains unaware of his life as a woman . The two live together as man and wife only when Ila is female . In the Ramayana version , Ila bears Budha a son , although in the Mahabharata Ila is called both mother and father of the child . After this birth the curse is lifted and Ila is totally changed into a man who goes on to father several children with his wife .

= = Patrons of LGBT and third sex people = =

Numerous deities have been considered patrons of third @-@ sex or homoerotically @-@ inclined people . This patronage can originate in mythological stories about the deity , or from religious practices and rituals . For example , Conner and Sparks argue that the goddess of fire , love and sexuality , Arani , has been linked to lesbian eroticism via rituals in her honor : for example two pieces of wood perceived as feminine , called the adhararani and utararani , are rubbed together , simulating a spiritual lesbian interaction .

Bahuchara Mata is a patron goddess of the Hirja . In popular iconography she is often shown riding

a rooster and carrying a sword , trident and a book . Various stories link Bahuchara to castration or other changes in physical sexual characteristics , sometimes as the result of her aiming curses against men . Bahuchara is believed to have originated as a mortal woman who became martyred . In one story , Bahuchara is attacked by a bandit who attempts to rape her , but she takes his sword , cuts off her breasts and dies . In another story , Bahuchara curses her husband when she catches him sneaking to the woods to engage in homoerotic behavior , causing his genitals to fall off and forcing him to dress as a woman .

Stories also link Bahuchara to gender variance after she becomes divine . One myth concerns a king who prayed to Bahuchara for a son . Bahuchara complied , but the prince grew up to be impotent . One night Bahuchara appeared to the prince in a dream and ordered him to cut off his genitals , wear women 's clothes and become her servant . Bahuchara is believed to continue to identify impotent men and command them to do the same . If they refuse , she punishes them : for their next seven incarnations they will be impotent . This myth is the origin of the cult of Bahuchara Mata , whose devotees are required to self @-@ castrate and remain celibate .

Samba , the son of Krishna , is also a patron of eunuchs , transgender people and homoeroticism . Samba dresses in women 's clothes to mock and trick people , and so that he can more easily enter the company of women and seduce them . In the Mausala Purana , Samba , dressed as woman , is cursed after being questioned about " her " supposed pregnancy . As a result of the curse , Samba , although remaining male , gives birth to an iron pestle and mortar .

= = Same @-@ sex sexual interactions = =

Homosexual or bisexual activity also occurs between gods , although such interactions are most usually considered purely ritualistic , or have purposes other than sexual pleasure . Agni , the god of fire , wealth and creative energy , has same @-@ sex sexual encounters that involve accepting semen from other gods . Although married to the goddess Svaha , Agni is also shown as being part of a same @-@ sex couple with Soma , the god of the moon . Agni takes a receptive role in this relationship , accepting semen from Soma with his mouth , paralleling Agni 's role in accepting sacrifices from Earth to Heaven . Orthodox Hinduism emphasises that these are " mithuna " , ritual sexual encounters , and Agni and his mouth represent the feminine role .

Agni also accepts semen in myths of the conception and birth of Karttikeya , a god of male beauty and battle . Numerous versions of Karttikeya 's birth story exist , many having a conception from only male input , although heterosexual sex or desire also plays a part . However , Parvati is credited as Karttikeya 's mother due to her having sexual intercourse with Shiva , causing him to ejaculate . Ganga is Karttikeya 's mother in other versions , accepting semen from Agni and carrying the unborn child . The male progenitor is sometimes Shiva , Agni , or a combination of the two . In the Shiva Purana and the Ramayana , the gods fear the outcome of Shiva and Parvati 's " unending embrace , " and interrupt their coitus . Shiva then appears before the gods and declares " now let him step forward who will accept the semen I discharge " . At the prompting of the gods , Agni captures Shiva 's semen in his hands and swallows it . In these stories , Parvati and Shiva condemn Agni 's actions , calling them " wicked " or " improper . " In the eleventh century text Kathasaritsagara , however , Shiva forces the reluctant Agni to receive his semen . The semen causes a burning sensation in those that ingest it , prompting Agni to divest it into wives of a group of sages , under Shiva 's advice . The sages ' wives in turn drop the semen into the Ganges river (the Ganga) , where it flows to the shore from which K?rttikeya springs . In the Mahabharata , K?rttikeya is also the son of Agni , who ejaculates into the hands of one of the Kritikas (the Pleiades) , who in turn throws the semen into a lake , from whence K?rttikeya is born . In some myths , Agni ejaculates onto a mountain that was itself made from Shiva 's divine semen , making K?rttikeya the child of the two gods , according to an interpretation by Markandeya in the Vana Parva .

Mitra and Varuna , are gods of great intimacy and often mentioned together in Vedic literature . These Adityas preside over the universal waters wherein Mitra controls the ocean depths and lower portals while Varuna rules over the ocean 's upper regions , rivers and shorelines .

In Vedic literature , Mitra and Varuna are portrayed as icons of affection and intimate friendship between males (the Sanskrit word mitra means ? friend ? or ? companion ?) . They are depicted riding a shark or crocodile together while bearing tridents , ropes , conch shells and water pots . Sometimes they are portrayed seated side @-@ by @-@ side on a golden chariot drawn by seven swans . Ancient Brahmana texts furthermore associate Mitra and Varuna with the two lunar phases and same @-@ sex relations : ? Mitra and Varuna , on the other hand , are the two half @-@ moons : the waxing one is Varuna and the waning one is Mitra . During the new @-@ moon night these two meet and when they are thus together they are pleased with a cake offering . Verily , all are pleased and all is obtained by any person knowing this . On that same night , Mitra implants his seed in Varuna and when the moon later wanes , that waning is produced from his seed . ? (Shatapatha Brahmana 2 @.@ 4 @.@ 4 @.@ 19) Varuna is similarly said to implant his seed in Mitra on the full @-@ moon night for the purpose of securing its future waxing . In Hinduism , the new- and full @-@ moon nights are discouraged times for procreation and consequently often associated with citrarata or unusual types of intercourse .

The Bhagavata Purana (6 @.@ 18 @.@ 3 @-@ 6) lists Varuna and Mitra as having children through ayoni or non @-@ vaginal sex . For example , Varuna fathered the sage Valmiki when his semen fell upon a termite mound , and Agastya and Vasistha were born from water pots after Mitra and Varuna discharged their semen in the presence of Urvashi . This account is similar to Gay couples having children through surrogate mothers in modern days .

Some versions of the Bengali text Krittivasa Ramayana contain a story of two queens that conceived a child together . When the famous king of the Sun Dynasty , Maharaja Dilipa , died , the demigods become concerned that he did not have an heir . Shiva appeared before the king 's two widowed queens and commanded , " You two make love together and by my blessings you will bear a beautiful son . " The two queens execute Shiva 's order and one of them conceived a child . The child was born boneless , but by the blessings of the sage Ashtavakra , the child was restored to full health . Ashtavakra named the child " Bhagiratha " ? he who was born from two vulvas (bhaga) . Bhagiratha later became one of the most famous kings of India and is credited with bringing the Ganges River down to earth through his austerities .

The elephant @-@ headed , wisdom god Ganesha 's conception has numerous versions . Some sources consider him to be the progeny of Shiva and Parvati , although conception occurs outside the womb . However , most versions consider him to have been produced purely through the actions of Parvati , who in the Shiva Purana fashioned him from clay to protect her from Shiva 's advances while she was bathing . However , when Ganesha blocks Shiva , he is beheaded and later restored to life by Shiva . In a 13th @-@ century Kashmiri text , Jayadratha 's Haracaritacintamani , Ganesha 's birth is the result of Parvati 's menstrual blood being washed into the Ganges , where they are swallowed by Parvati 's elephant @-@ headed handmaiden Malini , who in turn gives birth , giving Ganesha an all @-@ female origin . Courtwright considers the birth to be " less auspicious " due to the lack of male input and use of bodily fluids such as sweat or menstrual blood , but Ruth Vanita points out that Hindus consider Ganesha 's birth auspicious , and that the use of non @-@ procreative bodily fluids is considered sacred and purifying in many Hindu rituals .

= = Sangam literature = =

Sangam literature use the word ? Pedi ? to refer to people born with Intersex condition , it also refers to antharlinga hijras and various types of Hirja . Likewise , the famous sangam period characters of King Koperunchozhan and Pisuranthaiyar are another example for same sex love . They are said to have not seen each other at all and yet shared love and regard for each other , so much , that they die at the same time at different places . ? For instance , the friendship between King Pari and poet Kabilar is shown as something more than just friendship . There are lyrical undertones suggestive of the intimate relationship they had . But since there are no explicit representation , one can only postulate a possibility .

= = Critical analysis = =

Hindu traditional literary sources say little about homosexuality directly . Homoeroticism in traditional texts is often masked by adherence to strict gender and caste rules . Critical study is further hampered by the lack of Sanskrit words for modern conceptions (such as homosexuality) , although words for specific same @-@ sex sexual acts exist . Timothy Murphy writes that LGBT themes are often ignored by " heterosexist scholars " , and even early investigations into sexual minorities in Hindu culture failed to analyse stories or artwork depicting same @-@ sex sexual acts between mythological beings . Murphy describes the study of LGBT topics in Hindu culture as " still in their infancy " .

Goldman writes of transsexualism in Hindu literature : " Few cultures have accorded this phenomenon so prominent a place in the realms of mythology and religion as has that of traditional India . " Goldman considers the numerous myths concerning gender change to be a manifestation of patriarchal cultures desire to control the sexuality of women , but writes that many myths " project a positive valuation of women and femininity " . Changes in gender may be caused by a god or through the use of magic , in order to deceive others or to facilitate a romantic encounter . A change in gender may also occur spontaneously due to changes in a person 's spiritual or moral character , either in a single life , or through reincarnation .

According to the Encyclopedia of Love in World Religions , queer theorists and activists have reinterpreted ancient texts " searching for alternative voices " that demonstrate the diversity of gender models and sexualities in Hinduism . These scholars include Gita Thadani , who attempted to uncover lesbian subtext in ancient Vedic and Sanskrit texts in Sakhiyani : lesbian desire in ancient and modern India , and Ruth Vanita , who attempts " to locate spaces of same @-@ sex intimacy in vernacular texts " in Same @-@ sex love in India : readings from literature and history .

Some LGBT interpretations of popular stories and characters have been controversial . Gane?a : Lord of obstacles , Lord of beginnings , applied psychoanalytic approaches to Hindu stories . The book stated that Ganesha 's trunk represented a flaccid penis and his love of sweets indicated a desire to perform homosexual oral sex . The deductions of this book , and similar application of psychoanalysis to the study of Hinduism , has been questioned by Western and Indian academics including Antonio De Nicholas , Krishnan Ramaswamy , S.N.Balagangadhara , Saraha Claerhout , who have stated that the book is based on mistranslations and psychoanalytic misinterpretations . The book became infamous in India , triggering protests and resulting in a public apology from the publishers and withdrawal of the book in India .

The scholarship of Wendy Doniger , which focuses on interpretation of Hindu texts through psychoanalysis , is similarly controversial and has been criticised . Doniger has been described as " being rude , crude and very lewd in the hallowed portals of Sanskrit Academics . " Doniger 's works that feature LGBT interpretations of Hindu myths include the books Siva : The Erotic Ascetic , Tales of Sex and Violence , and Splitting the difference : gender and myth in ancient Greece and India . Michael Witzel , a Professor of Sanskrit , said that Wendy Doniger 's knowledge of Vedic Sanskrit is severely flawed . Nicholas Kazanas , a European Indologist , has also criticised Doniger 's works and wrote that Doniger seems to be obsessed with only one meaning of myths : the most sexual imaginable .

= = = General = = =

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