

= Mohini =

Mohini ( Devnagari : मोहिनी , Mohini ) is the only female avatar of the Hindu god Vishnu . She is portrayed as a femme fatale , an enchantress , who maddens lovers , sometimes leading them to their doom . Mohini is introduced into the Hindu mythology in the narrative epic of the Mahabharata . Here , she appears as a form of Vishnu , acquires the pot of Amrita ( an elixir of immortality ) from thieving asuras ( demons ) , and gives it back to the devas ( gods ) , helping them retain their immortality .

Many different legends tell of her various exploits and marriages , including union with Shiva . These tales relate , among other things , the birth of the god Shasta and the destruction of Bhasmasura , the ash @-@ demon . Mohini 's main modus operandi is to trick or beguile those she encounters . She is worshipped throughout Indian culture , but mainly in Western India , where temples are devoted to her depicted as Mahalasa , the consort of Khandoba , a regional avatar of Shiva .

= = Etymology = =

The name Mohini comes from the verb root moha , meaning " to enchant , perplex , or disillusion , " and literally means " delusion personified . " In the Baiga culture of Central India , the word mohini means " erotic magic or spell . " The name also has an implied connotation of " the essence of female beauty and allurement . "

= = Legends and history = =

= = The Amrita = = =

The earliest reference to a Mohini @-@ type goddess appears in the Samudra manthan episode of the 5th century BCE Hindu epic Mahabharata . The Amrita , or nectar of immortality , is produced by the churning of the Ocean of Milk . The Deva and the Asura fight over its possession . The Asuras contrive to keep the Amrita for themselves , angering the Devas . Vishnu , wise to their plan , assumes the form of an " enchanting damsel " . She uses her allure to trick the Asuras into giving her the Amrita , and then distributes it amongst the Devas . Rahu , an Asura , disguises himself as a god and tries to drink some Amrita himself . Surya ( the sun @-@ god ) and Chandra ( the moon @-@ god ) quickly inform Vishnu , and he uses the Sudarshana Chakra ( the divine discus ) to decapitate Rahu , leaving the head immortal . The decapitated body becomes Ketu . Rahu and Ketu are both regarded as celestial bodies that assume one 's destiny . The other major Hindu epic , Ramayana ( 4th century BCE ) , narrates the Mohini story briefly in the Bala Kanda chapter . This same tale is also recounted in the Vishnu Purana four centuries later .

In the original text , Mohini is referred to as simply an enchanting , female form of Vishnu . In later versions , Mohini is described as the maya ( illusion ) of Vishnu . Later still , the name of the avatar becomes Mohini from the original phrase describing his deliberate false appearance ( mayam ashito mohinim ) . Once the Mohini legend became popular , it was retold , revised , and expanded in several texts . The tales of Mohini @-@ Vishnu also increased among devotional circles in various regions . The same expanded Mahabharata version of the story is also recounted in the Bhagavata Purana in the 10th century CE . Here , Mohini becomes a formal avatar of Vishnu .

This legend is also retold in the Padma Purana and Brahmanda Purana . In the Brahmanda Purana , however , Vishnu @-@ Mohini simply , after meditation upon the Great Goddess Maheshvari , acquires her form to trick the thieving asuras .

= = = Slayer of demons = = =

Mohini also has an active history in the destruction of demons throughout Hindu texts . In the

Vishnu Purana , Mohini defeats Bhasmasura , the " ash @-@ demon " . Bhasmasura invokes the god Shiva by performing severe penances . Shiva , pleased with Bhasmasura , grants him the power to turn anyone into ashes by touching their head . The demon decides to try the power on Shiva himself . Shiva runs terrified . Vishnu , witnessing the unfortunate turn of events , transforms into Mohini and charms Bhasmasura . Bhasmasura is so taken by Mohini that he asks her to marry him . Mohini agrees , but only on the condition that Bhasmasura follows her move for move in a dance . In the course of the dance , she places her hand on her head . Bhasmasura mimics the action , and in turn , reduces himself to ashes . The legend of Bhasmasura is retold in the Buddhist text Satara Dewala Devi Puvata , with a slight variation . In this tale , Vishnu assumes his female form ( the name " Mohini " is not used ) and charms Bhasmasura . The female Vishnu asks Bhasmasura to promise never to leave her by placing his hand on his head as per the usual practice to swear on one 's head . On doing so , Bhasmasura is reduced to ashes .

In a similar legend related to the birth of Ayyappa , the demon Surpanaka earns the power to turn anyone into ashes by his austerities . The tale mirrors all other aspects of the Buddhist version of the Bhasmasura tale , where he is forced by Mohini to severe fidelity by keeping his hand on his head and is burnt .

The prelude of the Ramakien , the Thai version of the Ramayana , the demon Nontok is charmed and killed by Mohini @-@ Vishnu . Nontok misuses a divine weapon given to him by Shiva . The four @-@ armed Mohini @-@ Vishnu enchants Nontok and then attacks him . In his last moments , the demon accuses Vishnu of foul play saying that Vishnu first seduced him and then attacked him . Vishnu decrees that in his next birth , Nontok will be born as the ten @-@ armed demon Ravana and Vishnu will be a mortal man called Rama . He will then fight him and defeat him .

In a lesser @-@ known tale in the Ganesha Purana ( 900 ? 1400CE ) the wise asura king Virochana is rewarded a magical crown by the sun @-@ god Surya . The crown shields him against all harm . Vishnu as Mohini then enchants Virochana and steals his crown . The demon , thus unprotected , is killed by Vishnu .

Another legend about the demon Araka associates Mohini with Krishna rather than the god himself . The demon Araka had become virtually invincible because he had never laid eyes on a woman ( extreme chastity ) . Krishna takes the form of the beautiful Mohini and marries him . After three days of marriage , Araka 's bonds of chastity are broken , and Krishna kills him in battle . Transgender Hijras consider Krishna @-@ Mohini to be a transsexual deity .

= = = Relationship with Shiva = = =

In the Bhagavata Purana , after Vishnu deceives the demons by his maya female form , Shiva wishes to see the bewildering Mohini again . When Vishnu agrees and reveals his Mohini form , Shiva runs crazily behind Mohini , " bereft of shame and robbed by her of good sense , " while the abandoned wife Parvati ( Uma ) looks on . Shiva is overcome by Kama ( love and desire or Kamadeva , the god of love and desire ) . His " unfailing " seed escapes and falls on ground creating ores of silver and gold . Afterwards , Vishnu comes to his true form and reveals that his maya ( illusory power ) cannot be surpassed even by Shiva . Shiva then extols Vishnu 's power .

The Tripurarahasya , a south Indian Shakta text , retells the story , giving more importance to the Goddess . When Shiva wishes to see Vishnu 's Mohini form again , Vishnu fears that he may be burned to ashes like Kamadeva by the ascetic Shiva . So , Vishnu prays to goddess Tripura , who grants half of her beauty to Vishnu , begetting the Mohini @-@ form . As Shiva touches Mohini , his seed spills , indicating a loss of the merit gained through of all his austerities .

In the Brahmanda Purana when the wandering sage Narada tells Shiva about Vishnu 's Mohini form that deluded the demons , Shiva dismisses him . Shiva and his wife Parvati go to Vishnu 's home . Shiva asks him to take on the Mohini form again so he can see the actual transformation for himself . Vishnu smiles , again meditates on the Goddess , and in place of Vishnu stands the gorgeous Mohini . Overcome by lust , Shiva chases Mohini as Parvati hangs her head in shame and envy . Shiva grabs Mohini 's hand and embraces her , but Mohini frees herself and runs further . Finally , Shiva grabs her and their " violent coupling " leads to discharge of Shiva 's seed which falls " short

of its goal , " suggesting the act was not consummated . The seed falls on the ground and the god Maha @-@ Shasta ( " The Great Chastiser " ) is born . Mohini disappears , while Shiva returns home with Parvati .

Shasta is identified primarily with two regional deities : Ayyappa from Kerala and the Tamil Aiyandar . He is also identified with the classical Hindu gods Skanda and Hanuman . In the later story of the origin of Ayyappa , Shiva impregnates Mohini , who gives birth to Ayyappa . They abandon Ayyappa in shame . The legend highlights Vishnu 's protests to be Mohini again and also notes that Ayyappa is born of Vishnu 's thigh as Mohini does not have a real womb . Another variant says that instead of a biological origin , Ayyappa sprang from Shiva 's semen , which he ejaculated upon embracing Mohini . Ayyappa is referred to as Hariharaputra , " the son of Vishnu ( Hari ) and Shiva ( Hara ) " , and grows up to be a great hero . Another tale says after Surpanaka 's destruction , Shiva wishes to see Mohini and mesmerized by her looks , has union with her resulting in the birth of Ayyappa .

Kanda Puranam narrates about the birth of Shasta identified with Aiyandar . The text tells just before the tale that Vishnu is Shiva 's Shakti ( wife and power ) Parvati in a male form . The legend begins with Shiva 's request and Vishnu 's agreement to show his illusionary Mohini form , that he assumed for the distribution of amrita . Shiva falls in love with Mohini and proposes a union with her . Mohini @-@ Vishnu declines saying that union of two same sex women was unfruitful . Shiva informs Mohini @-@ Vishnu that he was just one of forms of his Shakti . Thereafter , their union resulted in the birth of a dark boy with red locks , who was named Hariharaputra . Further , he was also known as Shasta and Aiyannar .

In the Agni Purana , as the enchanted Shiva follows Mohini , drops of his semen falls on the ground and become lingas , Shiva 's symbols . His semen also generates the monkey @-@ god Hanuman , who helps Vishnu 's avatar Rama in his fight against Ravana in the Ramayana . Shiva Purana says that by the mere glimpse of Mohini , Shiva spurts out his seed . The seed was collected and poured into the ear of Anjani , who gave birth to Hanuman , the incarnation of Shiva . The latter is retold in the Thai and Malaysian version of the Ramayana . Though Hanuman strings from Shiva 's seed , he is also considered as a combined son of Vishnu and Shiva .

The Buddhist version of the Bhasmasura tale continues with Shiva ( Ishvara ) asking the female @-@ Vishnu , who is seated on a swing , to marry him . She asks Shiva to get the permission of his wife Umayangana to take her home . Shiva returns with Umayangana 's consent to find the female @-@ Vishnu pregnant , who sends him back to get permission to bring a pregnant woman home . When he returns , a child is born and female @-@ Vishnu is pregnant again . She requests Shiva to seek approval to bring a pregnant woman with a child home . This happens six more times . Finally , Shiva brings Umayangana with him to witness the miraculous woman . Vishnu then returns to his male form . Umayangana embraces the six youngest children merging them into the six @-@ headed Skanda , while the eldest , named Aiyanaayaka ( " eldest brother " ) remains intact . Aiyanaayaka is identified with Aiyandar .

Mohini plays a lesser role in a Shaiva legend in the Skanda Purana . Here , Vishnu as Mohini joins Shiva to teach a lesson to arrogant sages . A group of sages are performing rituals in a forest , and start to consider themselves as gods . To humble them , Shiva takes the form of an attractive young beggar ( Bhikshatana ) and Vishnu becomes Mohini , his wife . While the sages fall for Mohini , their women wildly chase Shiva . When they regain their senses , they perform a black magic sacrifice , which produces a serpent , a lion , an elephant ( or tiger ) and a dwarf , all of which are overpowered by Shiva . Shiva then dances on the dwarf and takes the form of Nataraja , the cosmic dancer . The legend is retold in the Tamil Kovil Puranam and Kandha Puranam with some variation . This legend is also told in the Sthala Purana related to the Chidambaram Temple dedicated to Shiva @-@ Nataraja .

Another legend from the Linga Purana says that the embracing of love @-@ struck Shiva and Mohini led to be their merging into one body . At this moment , Mohini became Vishnu again , resulting the composite deity Harihara , whose right side of the body is Shiva and left side is Vishnu in his male form . In the temple in Sankarnayinarkovil near Kalugumalai is one of the rarest exceptions to iconography of Harihara ( Sankara @-@ Narayana ) . The deity is depicted similar to the Ardhanari , the composite form of Shiva @-@ Parvati , where right side of the body is the male

Shiva and left side is female . This image 's female side represents Mohini and it , as a whole , symbolizes the union of Shiva and Mohini . The influence of Shakta traditions on Shaiva ones may have led to the development of composite images like Harihara , where Vishnu is identified with Shiva 's consort , or Mohini . Like the Kanda Puranam narrative , the Shaiva saint Appar identifies Vishnu as Parvati ( Uma ) , the female counterpart of Shiva .

= = = Other legends = = =

A folktale tells of the Mahabharata hero Aravan ( who becomes the Tamil god Kootthandavar ) , who was married to Mohini , before his self @-@ sacrifice . Aravan agrees to become the sacrificial victim for the Kalabali ( " sacrifice to the battlefield " ) to ensure the victory of the Pandavas , his father , and his uncles . Before being sacrificed to goddess Kali , Aravan asks three boons from Krishna , the guide of the Pandavas . The third boon was that Aravan should be married before the sacrifice so that he could get the right of cremation and funerary offerings ( bachelors were buried ) . This third boon , however , is found only in the folk cults . To fulfill this wish in the Kuttantavar cult myth , Krishna turns into Mohini , marries Aravan , and spends the night with him . Then after the sacrifice , Mohini laments Aravan 's death , breaking her bangles , beating her breasts , and discarding her bridal finery . She then returns to the original form of Krishna . The legend of the marriage of Aravan and Krishna in his female form as Mohini , and Mohini @-@ Krishna 's widowhood after Aravan 's sacrifice , forms the central theme of an eighteen @-@ day annual festival in the Tamil month of Cittirai ( April ? May ) at Koovagam . The marriage ceremony is re @-@ enacted by transgender Hijras , who play the role of Mohini @-@ Krishna .

= = Cultural interpretations = =

According to mythologist Pattanaik , Mohini is just a disguise to delude the demon Bhasmasura , rather than a sexual transformation in this legend . Mohini is a disillusion , Vishnu 's maya .

Stories in which Shiva knows of Mohini 's true nature have been interpreted to " suggest the fluidity of gender in sexual attraction " . Pattanaik writes while Westerners may interpret the Shiva @-@ Mohini union as homosexual , traditional Hindus do not agree to this interpretation . He also 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 the ascetic Shiva into taking an interest in worldly matters . Only Vishnu has the power to " enchant " Shiva ; a demon who tried to enchant and hurt Shiva in form of a woman was killed in the attempt .

Another interpretation posits that the Mohini tale suggests that Vishnu 's maya blinds even supernatural beings . Mohini is " the impersonation of the magically delusive nature of existence which fetters all beings to the rounds of births and deaths and vicissitudes of life . " Mohini also does not have an independent existence ; she exists only as a temporary delusion , and is absorbed back into Vishnu after serving her purpose .

The legend of the union of Mohini @-@ Vishnu and Shiva may also be written as part of the desire to have a common child of the two cosmic patriarchs of Hinduism .

= = Worship = =

On the fifth day of Brahmotsavam , Venkateshwara is dressed as Mohini and paraded in a grand procession .

In Goa , Mohini is worshipped as Mahalasa or Mahalasa Narayani . She is the Kuladevi ( family goddess ) of many Hindus from western and southern India , including Goud Saraswat Brahmins , Karhade Brahmins , Daivajnas and Bhandaris . The chief temple of Mahalasa Narayani is at Mardol , Goa , though her temples also exist in the states of Karnataka , Kerala , Maharashtra , and Gujarat . Mahalasa has four hands , carrying a Trishula , a sword , a severed head , and a drinking bowl . She stands on a prostate man or demon , as a tiger or lion licks blood dripping from the severed

head . Goud Saraswat Brahmins as well as Vaishnavas from Goa and South Canara identify her with Mohini and call her Narayani and Rahu @-@ matthani , the slayer of Rahu , as told in the Bhavishya Purana .

Mahalasa is also called Mhalsa , the consort of Khandoba , a local incarnation of Shiva . As the consort of Khandoba , her chief temple - the Mohiniraj temple - is located at Nevasa , where she is worshiped as a four @-@ armed goddess and identified with Mohini . Mhalsa is often depicted with two arms and accompanying Khandoba on his horse or standing besides him .

The central icon of the Jaganmohini @-@ Kesava Swamy temple at Ryali , discovered buried underground by the king in the 11th century , represents the male Vishnu in the front , while the back of the icon is the female Jagan @-@ Mohini ( " one who deludes the world " ) or Mohini , with a female hairdo and figure . A Sthala Purana tells that the flower in Mohini 's hair fell at Ryali ( " fall " in Telugu ) when Mohini was being chased by Shiva .

= = Customs and ceremonies = =

Mohini has an important , dramatic role in several mythical works of South Indian drama like Yakshagana and Kathakali . In Kerala , however , where Mohini 's son Ayyappa is popular , the Mohiniattam ( " the dance of Mohini " ) is honored as an independent dance form . Named after the goddess , it is a dance meant exclusively for women and " an ideal example of the erotic form . " The origins of Mohiniattam form are unknown , though it was popularized in the 1850s , but later banned as it was used by " loose women " to attract customers . The ban was lifted in 1950 , after which it has seen a renewal .

The legends of Mohini are also being depicted in other dances , including the modern Kathak . The Sonal Nati , performed in the Saho area of Chamba district , Himachal Pradesh , retells the Mohini @-@ Bhasmasura tale , and hence is known as the Mohini @-@ Bhasmasura dance . It is performed on festive occasions , especially in the Saho fair held in Baisakh in the precincts of the Chandershekhar temple .