

FEMALE WARRIORS FROM INDIAN MYTHOLOGY

Ms. Vagishwari S. Gore

Associate Professor, Dept. of English
Smt. P. N. Doshi Women's College, Ghatkopar

Abstract

Mythology is an important part of every culture. Myths are stories about the relationship between the gods and humans. They deal with important issues such as the creation of the world, the nature of good and evil, and even the afterlife. Mythology has become part of our present day culture. Indian mythology has its unique place in the world literature. Indian mythology consists of four Vedas, Upanishads, 18 puranas and the two great epics, the Ramayan and the Mahabharat. Our culture eulogizes the great heroes, great warriors Lord Shiva, Lord Ram, Lord Krishna, Arjun, Bhim, Bhishm, Dronachary and many others. Indian society being patriarchal focused more on portrayal of women characters like Sita, Savitri, Ahilya as loving, devoted wives, and epitome of chastity and purity, creating an impression of women being weak and subordinate. But on the other hand, in India a woman is worshipped as Shakti, the destroyer of evil. Indian mythology has no dearth of women warriors. This paper focuses on the great female warriors, the mythical women characters, Vishpala, Kaikeyi, Satyabhama and others from Indian mythology who played a very crucial role in the battles along with their warrior consorts and proved that a woman is a creator and destroyer both.

Keywords: Mythology, Culture, women warriors, Shakti.

INTRODUCTION

Mythology is the study and interpretation of sacred tales or fables of a culture known as myths. Myths are a part of every culture in the world and are used to explain natural phenomena, such as the sunrise and sunset, the cycle of the moon and the seasons, or thunder and lightning storms. . Myths express the beliefs and customs of a certain culture.. Myths tell the stories of ancestors and the origin of humans and the development of different civilizations, w the gods, and heroes with super-natural powers.

According to Oxford Dictionary, "Myth is a traditional story, especially one concerning the early history of the people or the explaining a natural or social phenomenon and typically involving supernatural being or events."

According to Encyclopedia Britannica, "Myth a symbolic narrative, usually of unknown origin and at least partly traditional that ostensibly relates actual events and that is especially associated with religious belief. It is distinguished from symbolic behavior (cult, rituals) and symbolic places or objects .Myths are specific accounts of gods or superhuman beings involved in extraordinary events or circumstances in a time that is unspecified but which is understood as existing apart from ordinary human experience."

Both the definitions stress upon one point that myths are stories that explain some natural events which involve super heroes.

Indian mythology is a rich tradition of stories about deities and mythological figures. Indian myths are recorded in Hindu texts such as the Vedas, the *Puranas*, and the two great epics – the Ramayan and the Mahabharat. Indian Mythology is one of the richest elements of Indian Culture, which enriches it further and makes it a unique one in the world. Through generations, different stories in Indian mythology have been passed from generation to generation which has enriched the cultural values of Indian society.

Indian religion and mythology are closely interwoven and cannot really be separated. Mythology is part and parcel of every Indian's life. All the rituals, customs, traditions have been deeply rooted in mythology. Indians practice Philosophy in day to day life. Indian Mythology is stored in scriptures in the form of stories. These stories, form the backbone of Indian mythology.

In most of the age old myths, women were portrayed as passive, subordinate in the families to their men or patriarchs, unable to express their talent and true capabilities. Women were seen predominantly from the male perspective – docile, delicate, obedient, beautiful, loving and caring and so on and so forth. Women were portrayed as inferior to men both in terms of strength and intellect.

But we do find stories of martial women in the Indian mythology. In Indian scriptures and traditional narratives there have been references to female warriors. Vishpala, who is mentioned in the oldest Indian scripture, Rigveda. Kaikeyi from the Ramayan, Chitrangada, Ulupi, Satyabhama, Shikhandini from Mahabharat and Durga and Kali from the Puranas..

The legend of Vishpala is mentioned in the first mandala of the Rigveda. She was a formidable warrior renowned for her indomitable spirit and unwavering determination. Vishpala was an orphan girl. She was raised in an Aashram by the Sages, where she learned martial arts from her gurus. She was married to king

'Khelraj'. The king of Astikanir. Both Khelraj and Vishpala were great mighty warriors trained in various martial art forms. They ruled happily for many years. But once Astikanir was attacked by enemies. King Khelraj and his army marched for the battlefield. Queen Vishpala too decided to join the battle and fight shoulder to shoulder with her husband to save her country. Vishpala alongside Khelraj fought with bravery. She fought and killed many enemies. During this battle, one of her legs got amputated. Still, she continued fighting but later was stopped and taken to medical care. She prayed to the twin gods, 'Ashwini Kumar'. As per Hindu mythology, 'Ashwini Kumar' are the doctors of the gods. Ashwini Kumars granted her a boon in the form of an iron leg. So Vishpala was the first known human in the world to have a 'prosthetic' leg. She took part in the battle again. She killed many enemies single-handedly and won the war.

Maharani Kaikeyi, Emperor Dasharatha's second wife, was known to be a very skilled warrior. Once Indra, the king of devas, requested Dasharatha to help the devas in the war against the asuras. Dasharatha rode to Devalok, accompanied by his wife Kaikeyi, to help Indra fight against the asuras. We all know the story that during the battle, Kaikeyi prevented the wheel of her husband's chariot from slipping off by putting her little finger into the gap left behind by the bolt. She drove his chariot in battle and saved his life. King Dasharath was pleased with her valour and granted her two boons.

Chitrangada, wife of Arjuna, is another female warrior from Indian mythology. Manipur was a kingdom in India during the *Mahabharata* period. It was ruled by a king named Chitravahana. He had a daughter named Chitrangada. For many generations, there was only one heir in his dynasty. Since Chitravahana did not have a son, he brought up his daughter, Chitrangada, like a son, trained her in warfare and rule. Chitrangada was well-versed in warfare and acquired the skills to protect the people of her land. She was trained in martial arts and archery, horse riding and political decision making. Arjuna married Chitrangada and they had a son named Babruvahana. She raised him as a single parent, trained Babruvahana in the ways of the kingdom, warfare etc. She was helped by another single mother Ulupi, another wife of Arjuna. Babruvahana grew to be a fine young man and a mighty warrior.

Ulupi was a Naga princess, She was a well-trained warrior. Ulupi met Arjun and fell in love with him when he was in exile. She bore him a son named Iravan. She played a major role in the upbringing of Babhravahan, Arjuna's son with Chitrangada.

Satyabhama was the daughter of Yadav King Satrajit. She was an archer and expert in wartime tactics. A demon king Narakasura defeated Indra and abducted 16,000 women, and imprisoned them in his palace. He stole the earrings of Aditi, the mother of the gods. Aditi was related to Satyabhama. She narrated her ordeal to her. When Satyabhama heard of Narakasura's ill-treatment of women and his behaviour with Aditi, she was furious. She approached Krishna and convinced him that Narakasura must pay for his wrong-doings. Krishna attacked Narakasura, accompanied by his wife Satyabhama. She led an army against Narakasura. A terrible battle was fought between Krishna and Narkasura, Narakasura used several divine weapons against Krishna, but Krishna easily countered all those weapons. Narakasura had received a boon from Brahma that he could be killed only by his mother. Satyabhama, was the incarnation of Bhudevi - the mother of Narakasura. Narakasura tried to kill Krishna with a trident, Krishna pretended to swoon. When Satyabhama saw her husband's life in danger, she got furious and attacked Narakasura and slayed him. As per other version of the story, Satyabhama attacked him and then Krishna killed Narakasura with his Sudarshan chakra.

Shikhandini, a character from Mahabharat, was the rebirth of Princess Amba. She was born as a daughter to the king Drupada. Drupada raised her as a boy (as he was told by Shiva that she would eventually be transformed into a man). She was trained in archery, martial arts, war-techniques and fought to avenge herself for past wrongs in previous birth by Bhishma. Shikhandini fought in the Kurukshetra war for the Pandavas along with his father Drupada and brother Dhristadyumna. She was the one who became the cause of Bhishma's death. In other accounts, Shikhandi is born a male, but grew up as a transgender because Shiva gave her the ability to remember her past life.

Durga is commonly known as Mahishasur-mardini for slaying the half-buffalo demon Mahishasura. Durga is a warrior goddess, mentioned in various Puranas but specially in Markandeya Purana and devi Bhagvat. Kali is another important goddesses of Hindus. She is a very powerful goddess. She killed the two demons Chanda and Munda. So she is known as Chamunda. Kali helped Durga in her battle with Raktabij. Raktabij, was a demon who was undefeated because of his ability to reproduce himself from every drop of his blood that reached the ground. Countless Raktabija clones appeared on the battlefield. Kali consumed every drop of blood before it fell on the ground until Raktabija bled out and also ate all his clones.

CONCLUSION

These formidable female warriors from Indian mythology were empowered women and they inspire inner strength, courage, and virtue. Despite the presence of societal prejudices, these women had steadfast resolve to

fulfill their duty. The unwavering courage and perseverance displayed by these legendary women serve as a reminder to male dominated society that strength and courage are not based on gender.

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