

The Myth of Mohini and Ardhanarishvara: A Queer Reading

Authors : Anindita Roy

Abstract : This paper offers a queer reading of the myth of Mohini and Ardhanarishvara in Indian mythology to explore the transformative capacity of gender performativity with a view to focusing on the notion of female and male as harmonious contributors in culture and nature. The qualitative study of these two narratives ponders on the issues of dualism in Indian mythology. These myths approach different queer experiences in different ways - the first, an incarnation of Vishnu into Mohini by body swapping and the latter, the myth of Ardhanarishvara in which one sacred body upholds two different biological identities together- male and female. Emphasizing on the transformation of sex, the present paper re-reads how these queer-transformations can become transformative in the society. The study is explained in three parts. The first one focuses on the two select myths to explore the idea of gender as performance and the concept of queer ecofeminism where nature/culture, heterosexuality/queer female/male dualism exist in a paradigm. The second segment analyzes whether these myths destabilize or promote the access of queer and the experience of 'other' in the society and resistance against domination. The third section inquires to rethink the whole world about the value and hierarchy of men over women, heterosexuality over queer, culture over nature to call for a recovery of the female/male, nature/culture principles as complementary. What the paper intends to investigate is if and how gender transformations in religious myths have the capacity to transform personal and social notions and practices of different hierarchies.

Keywords : dualism, Indian myth, queer, transformativity

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