



THE INDIAN REVIEW OF WORLD LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

A Peer-Reviewed And Indexed Bi-Annual Online Literary Journal

<http://worldlitonline.net/>

ISSN: 0974 - 097X Vol 17. No. II July - December 2021



Mythology and Women Empowerment in Usha Narayanan's *Awaken the Durga Within*

Dr.T.Kanchana Devi
Asst Professor, Dept of English
Shri.S.S.Shasun Jain College for Women
Chennai, Tamil Nadu, INDIA

Abstract

The timeless tales from Hindu mythology are not only exciting but provide realistic solutions that would help us alter our mindset and exceed limits. Usha Narayanan's *Awaken the Durga Within: From Glum to Glam, Caged to Carefree (2018)*, helps us identify the Shakti that resides in every woman. The stories rendered from mythology assist women to affirm themselves at home and at workplace as well. We have enormous roles and options amidst us. We would become empowered if we choose the perfect role models and infer the stories of the goddesses in our day to day life. Usha Narayanan has incorporated the kernels of wisdom that she has learnt from Bhagvad Gita in the book. The valuable lessons needed for our life are retold in tales wrapped in mythical characters. Freedom and fulfilment is indispensable for us. At times, women are unable to trace the immense Shakti present within due to the struggle undergone to find a place for herself in this world. We need to find this abundant power and tap them to believe in ourselves and become an inspiration for others. The book acts as every woman's guide to reclaim her power and happiness. The stories portrayed reveal the powers of Goddesses. It aids women to realize their strength and emerge stronger with new hope.

Key words: mythology, journey, strong, reclaim, empower

INTRODUCTION

Our Indian mythology is unique and has different stories that have passed from one generation to another. Indian myths are found in epics like Mahabharata and Ramayana, the Puranas etc., Many of the beliefs and myths are the oldest and have had many retellings. Our mythology has rich history, mysterious characters and reverberating stories that are repeated over period. These myriad of stories are both recreational and educational as well. They are in abundant and convey maxims and rules to lead our lives. A goddess is highly revered in the Hindu Mythology. Each individual in our society should be given their due only based on their capabilities and not on their gender. Our rural India and its folk practices have always revered goddess-worship which goes before even the worship of male god. They were represented by natural environments such as rocks, ant hills and trees and thus signify their nearness to the natural surroundings. Though revered highly in the form of goddess, a woman often is considered weak and powerless. Many modern writers retell these tales from mythology not just for a mere story telling but in order to use it for conveying ethics and desires to the society. Usha Narayanan in her *Awaken the Durga Within: From Glum to Glam, Caged to Carefree (2018)*, helps us to identify the Shakti that resides in every woman. The objective of this research paper is to analyze, explore and celebrate women empowerment in the work of Usha Narayanan.

Which Goddess Are You?

Usha Narayanan gives sacred dimension to the goddess stories from the mythology. She identifies women empowerment through the female mythological characters. The demon Mahisha had sought the boon of immortality from Brahma after performing a fierce tapasya for 10,000 years. He asked, 'Let my death not come by the hand of man, Deva, or by the powers of the Trimurti-Brahma, Vishnu or Shiva. Let death come to me only through a woman.' He thought that women are weak and powerless and would not be able to kill him. Hence, he would be as good as immortal. He then went on a rampage with his savage demon commanders, decimating the armies of mighty kings to become the overlord of the earth. To destroy him, the three gods combined their powers and created a woman to kill him. From this brilliance was formed a beautiful yet fearsome woman who was tall as the sky and had eighteen arms. She was Durga-the Invincible One. She killed the fierce asura commanders while her lion expanded its form and swallowed her foes whole and tore off their heads. Mahisha came forth himself to confront her but grew weak with desire when he set eyes on her luminous beauty. He turned into many forms but goddess Durga sent forth her glittering Sudarshana Chakra and it sliced off Mahisha's head from his body. The invincible Mahisha had been destroyed by the glorious Shakti, the mother of the universe, and the world was at peace again.

Usha Narayanan presents another story to reiterate the concept of Shakti in us. Goddess Sati was born to Daksha. As years passed, her mind was fixed on the great three-eyed god who lived on the mystic, snow topped mountain of Kailasa. Shiva though initially refused to marry Sati finally agreed to marry her for the sake of his devotees. He became an eager suitor and asked Daksha for her hand in marriage. When Daksha hesitated, Brahma commanded him to accept Shiva's request. Daksha was unhappy as he did not like the son-in-law who lived in cremation grounds, surrounded by ghouls and goblins. He performed a great yagna to which he invited all the gods and sages, but excluded Shiva and Sati. Sati confronts Daksha as AdiParashakti, angrily destroys those who had dishonoured her and Shiva and her soul leaves the body. Meanwhile the demon Tarakasura gets a boon from Brahma that he should be killed by no one except Shiva's son. AdiParashakti again incarnates on earth and marries Shiva as Parvati. She reveals to the world about those transcendent power hidden under Shiva's macabre forms. Thus, the stories of goddesses liberate us and give us the warrior-like energy.

Through Feminist Lens

In a patriarchal country like India, women are not much empowered and are always held back by their own family or society. We are often instructed to be an ideal girl to obey our parents, husband and later our children. Even the little education and the job that they are employed, do not increase their status and not bring much difference in their lives. The book by Usha Narayanan, is a guide with simple language and steps that assists every woman to assert themselves at home or at workplace to reclaim their life. The book presents us the interesting stories of goddesses from Hindu Mythology that is known to us. It suggests practical solutions that can be adopted without negotiating on our own principles. On reading these stories, it enables every woman to realise the Shakti within her and thus helps in transforming their minds and walk the extra mile. It help us hold back our fears and explore our inner strength and take control of our life to earn due respect. We can relish the rewards only when we make choices that appeals right to us. The real spirit of feminism lies in exhibiting the options and rights given to us. Usha Narayanan thus retells myths and also expresses her views through feminist lens. When it is said that it is cultural norm to worship husband, Usha asks, "*Even by their logic, if a husband is a god, does it not make the wife a goddess?*" (8). She asserts that goddesses are never inferior to gods. Still, many communities underrate women and expect them to be stereotypes. While the tales in mythology portray many strong male characters there are just handful of strong female characters in it. They are not equally portrayed as strong as a man but as ideal or even negative sometimes. As depicted in Puranas, Shakti-the foremost of all deities creates Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. Our ancient stories present more instances that goddess were more revered than god. Unlike the previous decades, more opportunities and roles have

opened up for women in this evolving society. To stand up on our own legs, we need to choose the tales of these goddesses that empowers us.

Divine Feminism

Feminism is not just a movement but a daring self exploration to look beyond our accustomed statements. The divine feminism can promote love and beautify the world. It embodies all the qualities within and embraces both that is beautiful and terrifying. While there are goddesses of wonderful beauty and softness, there are also goddesses with fangs and arms bristling with numerous frightful weapons. The energy displayed by these goddesses is seen in each one of us in natural environment, politics, business, corporate and culture. When we understand this and engage with these elements personally, it turns on concealed powers in our own consciousness and eventually transforms us. Worshipping these goddesses not only tunes us holy but also reveals the hidden forces outside and we can witness this transformation happen. We indeed have goddess energy in our personality. While some are visible, some occur from various circumstances of our lives. Mediating with these goddesses help us discover and mould constructive qualities. The wisdom, beauty of inner self, courage is many times invisible to us. Often we feel disconnected from the world unable to look into the enormous sources of this power. The book '*Awaken the Durga Within*' is an opportunity to open ourselves to the energies that run through the pages. The goddesses referred are embedded in a rich tradition and philosophy. Reading about these goddesses in her various expressions identify our qualities that we have wished for. Women become divine when her unrecognized and undeveloped energies are realized.

Feminine Strength

A softening heart is needed to prosper though it has innumerable powers. Only then the balance sought will be achieved. Goddess Parvati's story is a metaphor on how feminine strength transforms the entire world. Both knowledge and love is necessary to become whole. Parvati speaks convincingly of Shiva's immeasurable glory to sages. She reveals his transcendent power to the world. The eternal bond they share tells the world that a man is united with his female half and throws light on an ideal couple who are rational and caring as well. Parvati is not just a beautiful woman but also a wise soul with the wisdom of Vedas and Upanishads. Parvati embodies both power and love and shows us how to flourish retaining our self-esteem. The story of "Durga-the Invincible One and "the slayer of Mahishasura" exhibits that fearless and confident women are the creators of their own desires. The eighteen arms of Durga represents that woman are capable to play multifarious roles to survive and safeguard her family, society, nation and the world. The story represents a woman's courage to stand against the evils around her.

Women Empowerment

Women empowerment is the process for women to redefine gender roles that allows them to acquire the ability to choose that has been restricted from such ability. Mythology is sacred and tells us our origins and enriched with women empowerment concepts. It reveals all the quests we have that is philosophical and beyond human understanding. It is a manifestation of our needs, wishes and agonizing struggles too. Our culture and tradition are in fact deep rooted in it. Since the ancient ages goddesses are an undeniable part of mythology and give the spirit of courage, love and safety. Many goddesses have unflustered power and imbibed with inspirational stories that help us overcome obstacles. They have discovered their power and reading about them empowers us. The goddesses presented in the chapters of the book portray what we look for in our lives. Their stories of courage and confidence guide us in our day to day life. We have indeed descended from these strong figures unaware of the strength we possess. Indian mythology might have few women goddesses but their stories are powerful and significant in epics. The ancient poets spun the tales of these gods and goddesses encompassed in conquests and conflicts just like our human beings. They wanted to show us that though there are different situations and emotions when we stand up with a clear vision we will achieve. We have to be smarter by facing both the

internal and external conflicts. We should remember the power we have and respect ourselves as an achiever. Fixing our rights and being strong on our stance is significant for us. We have the right to be happy no matter what happens in life. Applying the ideologies like ‘choosing to get ahead, speaking up for what we need and ignoring the comments that belittle us’ will take us closer to success. Since women empowerment plays a crucial role in their well-being, family and in the development of nations they should choose freedom entailed in responsibility and liberation combined with wisdom.

Conclusion

India is a vast land with diversified cultures and heritages which are being reflected through Indian literatures. They had created strong impacts on the life of every individual. The two great epics The Mahabharata and the Ramayana, and the Upanishads are being treated not only as mythologies but also retold or rewritten with multiple interpretations by numerous writers. The stories of the various goddesses in these enlighten and inspire us, help us invoke the Shakti within us and reclaim our power and happiness. Since Usha Narayanan uses simple language, readers have an inclination to her. The divine Shakti takes forms of goddesses and personify with energies needed for our survival and realization. Thus the objective of this research paper is met by discovering women empowerment in the work of Usha Narayanan.

WORKS CITED

Narayanan, Usha. *Awaken the Durga Within: From Glum to Glam Caged to carefree*. New Delhi: Rupa Publications India Pvt Ltd, 2018. Print.

Pattanaik, Devdutt. *Indian Mythology: Tales, Symbols and Rituals from the heart of the Subcontinent*. Vermont: Inner Traditions, 2003. Print

devdutt.com/articles/nine-forms-of-durgas

Kempton, Sally. *Awakening Shakti*. Mumbai: Jaico Publishing House, 2015. Print.