INDRA AND ZEUS: THE IMPERFECT WOM-ANIZING GODS

Shashi Gupta

Research Scholar

Institute of Liberal Arts and Humanities

Chandigarh University, Punjab

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to cite the similarities between the characters of two mythologies Indian and Greek. This paper shows how these two powerful gods Zeus and Indra misused their powers over women one from ancient India and the other one from ancient Greece.

According to Greek and Hindu mythology, Zeus and Indra are considered the most powerful gods. The Gods of Greek mythology and those of the Vedic texts have striking similarities in backstory, physical description, romantic interests, and epic exploits. Lightning, thunder, and precipitation have all been connected to both. Zeus and Indra both are father figures and guardians with superhuman abilities. However, in terms of immortality, they are similar to humans. They both exhibit feelings of love, jealousy, and fury. Both succumbed to the seductive charms of pious mortal ladies and impersonated their spouses.

Keywords: Mythology, Immortality, Similarities, Power, Women's suppression.

INTRODUCTION

Almost all mythologies have stories of women being "abducted" by Gods as punishment, pleasure, or as conquest. With men's roles in procreation and raising children, patriarchy was formed in its most basic form. Since then, it appears that the men of their clan's power over women's sexuality and "ownership" of them have led to their objectification and, later, the significance of sexual conquest in all human conflict. The magnificent tales of Ancient Greek and Indian mythology are highly sexist and misogynist and appear to not merely indicate but practically justify, the presence of violent sexual violence. Rape culture was evidently present at that time. The rape of women was a recurring motif in Greek mythology. Many rape myths involve in both mythologies. Both the powerful gods Indra and Zeus tried to sexually assault women. Not only these gods did these heinous crimes but other gods like Poseidon raped Medusa and she was later punished for being raped in Athena's temple. Similarly in Indian mythology Ahalya was raped by Indra and was punished by her husband Rishi Gautama for being raped and turning her into a stone. Gautama cursed Ahalya to become a stone because she even being a virgin was expected to distinguish the scent of her husband from another male and her curse was to be absolved only if Rama stepped on her during his exile in the forest.

In the earliest known reference to the story of Ahilya and Indra in the Srimad Ramayana, Sage Vishvamitra tells Rama and Lakshmana the narrative of Ahilya and Indra. Indradev had a noxious obsession with Ahilya. So, he disguised himself as Rishi Gautama and desired a union with Ahilya for which she complied and she was unaware that he was not her husband then Rishi Gautama caught both of them and cursed both Indra and

Ahilya. Similarly, Zeus seduced Alcmene a mortal princess. Alcmene was the wife of Amphitryon. He was the king of Tiryns. Zeus conceived a disturbing plan while her husband was on a military expedition. He disguised as Amphitryon and slept with Alcmene for three nights before she realized he wasn't her husband. Hera was horrified to learn that Alcmene was carrying Zeus' child, so she sent Eileithyia to stop the birth. These stories show how women get punished and are considered responsible for being raped. Even today women are considered to be responsible for their rape. Society blames them by saying it must be their fault only. The above tales also highlighted that it was Zeus and Indra who were at fault but eventually, the victims got suffered by being punished and cursed and the irony is that the curse was to be absolved by a man again if he stepped on her. This shows how male-dominating society suppressed women's desires and rights. Males were the only ones who take decisions about their wives and daughters. This shows the misogynist attitude towards them which is indecorous.

The Origins of rape culture in Mythology

In a rape culture, victims are blamed for their abuse, and sexual violence is seen as usual. It's not just about how women are treated in the criminal justice system when they report sexual assault, but also how cultural norms and institutions protect rapists, normalize impunity, shame victims, and force women to make unreasonable sacrifices to prevent sexual assault. The magnificent tales of Ancient Greek mythology are highly sexist and misogynist and appear to not only approve but practically justify, the presence of sexual violence. Rape culture was evidently present as early as 900 BC. The rape of women was a recurring motif in Greek mythology. Many rape myths involve the Greek God Zeus, who is said to have sexually assaulted various women, including Antiope, Europa, Hera, Leda, and others. Rape culture pressures women to give up their freedoms and opportunities to be safe because it places the duty of safety on women's shoulders and blames them when they fail. The woman is blamed for crossing the *"Lakshman Rekha"*, the symbol of restrictions put on women in the name of "protecting them". And this, even though the patriarchal power structures that foster a culture of rape have been in place for centuries and mostly serve the interests of men. The very patriarchal, sexist, and callous attitudes are shown in how ancient judicial systems and mythologies classified rape. In most cultures, rape was seen less as a sexual crime committed against a specific woman and more as an act of theft or an insult to her "owner" or her virginity. As a result, raping a virgin female was regarded a more serious crime than raping a non-virgin. Furthermore, raping a sex worker, slave, or "unchaste" woman was not deemed a crime in some jurisdictions because it was assumed that she possessed no chastity that could be harmed. The patriarchal framework of Greek ancient civilization put stringent constraints on female sexuality and encouraged women's possessiveness as a social and sexual control mechanism. The ancient Greek social structure created a community in which males were sexually free as participants in public life, while women faced stringent social and sexual boundaries as guardians of the home. They were married young, without being asked, and their primary task related to their reproductive capacity was creating legitimate heirs. Every essential legal decision concerning a woman's life was placed in the hands of her male guardian, usually the father and later the husband.

Influence of these stories in the present time

Each of these stories shows how patriarchal principles appropriate a woman's character to her sexual relationships, reducing her purpose to child-bearing. Most civilizations are so fixated on progeny, chastity, and virginity that restricting women's sexual freedom and this obsession of the society became the norm and continues to even today.

Even in modern times, sexual violence is frequently used to avenge any form of insult or injury. This belief mostly resulted in women being considered as "property." Mythological clichés are frequently subconsciously adopted to justify/normalize assault against women. Often just like the mythological stories of the past, the victim/survivor is reduced to being a symbol of courage, the face of protest, or a popular media subject. Deriving precedents from mythology only, the woman is blamed for crossing the *"Lakshman Rekha",* the symbol of restrictions put on women in the name of "protecting them". This suggests that the woman is "disgraced" rather than mistreated. Destructive modern versions of mythological sexual violence can take many forms, and they frequently impact how young men and women perceive virginity, chastity, and honor, as well as how they form ideas about sexual violence.

Thus, it is clear that women are exposed to sexual assault across cultures, with prevalent narratives either attempting to "victim blame" them or attempting to justify the man's act of violence on some pretext or another. It is time to change and reverse these stereotypes in order to build a less misogynistic and sexist world.

SujoyGhosh's short film *Ahalya*

There are various versions of the narrative, but in all of them, Ahalya is severely punished for adultery. The same epic structure is presented by Sujoy Ghosh but with a new feminist twist and a different ending than the traditional patriarchal and sexist one. The story of Ahalya epitomizes the patriarchal fault lines of our society. The fundamental storyline hasn't changed. The short film Ahalya is groundbreaking because it almost makes amends for the misogyny of ancient scriptures. The key difference between the original and Ghosh's rendition of Ahalya is that, Goutam is not the human incarnation of toxic masculinity but rather a schemer who conspires with his wife Ahalya, who is a seduction schemer, to condemn people who succumb to sexual temptations without regard for moral obligations. Ahalya is the feminist twist that our classics need in the twenty-first century, since while times have changed, crimes and sinners have not, and thus it is up to us to adapt to new circumstances.

CONCLUSION

Thus one can see a close allegory between ancient Greek and Hindu mythology which may point towards some strong resemblance between the two deities. There is no denying that the Vedic super deity Indra and the Greek god Zeus have remarkable resemblance. These parallels do allude to mutual ancestral and cultural ties between Zeus and Indra, and so between Greece and India. The research and analysis in this work are mostly based on writings and stories concerning Indra and Zeus. Both mythologies are revered all around the world. The two significant epics, the Ramayana and the Iliad are the foundations of morality and religion but

these epics have failed to address one important issue- the treatment of women. This reflects that over centuries, women have been suppressed, their rights were neglected as human beings, they were treated as a lower part of society, and their roles were restricted to household duties towards their husbands and kids. In both instances, both Zeus and Indra are featured as the active and aggressive male deities who initiate the act of abduction driven by their superficial and uncontrolled sexual impulse. On the contrary, Alcmene's and Ahilya's descriptions embody a static passivity that enhances their vulnerability as unwilling, surprised victims. Male sexual violence, blaming feminine beauty, and female insecurity of being alone without manly protection are all indicators of current times and components of the larger social idea known as rape culture. This unsettling discovery leads us to the conclusion that both Hindu and Greek myths were used as instruments to normalize sexual violence against women. However, before establishing an opinion on the matter and referring to the ancient culture as rape culture, we should look at other aspects of both mythologies. We can have a greater grasp of the cultural environment in which these myths were articulated and the reasons why these stories justified sexual violence against women.

References:

1. Doniger, Wendy. "The Myths and Gods of India: The Classic Work on Hindu Polytheism from the Princeton Bollingen Series." Asian Ethnology 68, no. 1 (2009): 230-32. Print.

2. Doniger, Wendy. Sita and Helen, Ahalya and Alcmena: A Comparative Study." Vol. 37. no.1 (1997): 21-45. *University Of Chicago.* Web. 14 Apr. 2023. <www.jstor.org/stable/3176562>.

3. Ghosh, Sujoy. "Ahalya." *YouTube*, uploaded by Large short films, 20 July. 2015, <https://youtu.be/Ff82XtV78xo>.

4. Ganeriwal, Yukti. "Indra and Zeus- The Hindu and Greek Rain Gods." *Pratha The Indian School of Cultural Studies* (2020): *prathaculturalschool.com.* Web. 21 Apr. 2023. <https://www.prathaculturalschool.com/post/indra-zeus>.

5. Mamtc. "Alcmene and Ahalya - Victims of masqueraders Zeus and Indran." *Myths and Mythology-The Commons* 8 Aug. 2011: *Blogger.* Web. 12 Apr. 2023. <http://mamtc.blogspot.com/2011/08/alcmene-and-ahalya-victims-of.html>.

6. Narayan, R.K. Gods, Demons and Others. United States: Viking Press, 1964. Print.

7. Priyamvada, Pooja. "Tracing The Origins Of Rape Culture In Mythology." 10 Jun. 2017: *Feminism In India.* Web. 12 Apr. 2023. <https://feminisminindia.com/2017/10/06/origins-rape-culture-mythology/>

8. Söhnen, Renate. "Indra and Women." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* vol. 54. no. 1 (1991): 68–74. *JSTOR*. Web. 21 Apr. 2023. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/617314>.

9. Sharma, Vandana. "Mythological Affinity Between Greek and Hindu Deities." *International Journal Of Creative Research Thoughts* 8.1 (2020): 3299-3304. *Ijcrt.org.* Web. 20 Apr. 2023. <https://ijcrt.org/papers/IJCRT2006457.pdf>.