

Transgender Identity in Pre-colonial and Postcolonial India: A Study in Reversal

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Abstract: In terms of sexuality and gender, Indian culture showed a great tolerance and inclusiveness before the colonial authorities barged into the country. Indian classical texts like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata as well as myths are full of examples of androgynous sexuality, which have been celebrated rather than shunned. With the advent of colonialism and its methods to contain sexuality under heterosexuality, gender also got fixed as either male or female. So there occurred a drastic change in the lives of Hijras in India after colonialism. The recognition of 'TritiyaPrakriti' (Third Nature) was incomplete in postcolonial India despite the celebration of ambivalent sexuality in the classical Hindu Texts, rituals and practices. Whereas westerners feel uncomfortable with the ambiguities and contradictions inherent in such in-between categories as the transvestite, the homosexual, the hermaphrodite and the transgender, Hinduism not only accommodates such ambiguities but also views them as meaningful and powerful. In Hindu mythology, the power of the combined man-woman is a frequent and significant theme. In The Mahabharata, the great Indian epic, we can easily trace ample references of the honoured as well as much celebrated presence of the transgender entity. The character of Sikhhandi comes first in this regard. Sikhhandini who became Sikhhandi is what modern queer vocabulary would call a female-to-male transsexual as her body went through a specific change genitally. Sikhhandi plays a key role in the battle of Kurukshetra because his/her arrival marks the turning point in the war. Shikhandi became instrumental in causing Vishma's death which was a necessity in establishing 'dharma' (the path of righteousness). The story of Arjuna's transformation as 'Brihannala' is one of the most celebrated presences of transgender identity. The objective of this paper is to explore how "tritiyaprakriti" (third nature) which was prevalent and acceptable in the pre-colonial India turned against the 'order of nature' with the advent of colonial rule in India.

Keywords: *TritiyaPrakriti (Third Nature), Heterosexuality, Hinduism, Post colonialism*

In terms of sexuality and gender, Indian culture showed a great tolerance and inclusiveness before the colonial authorities barged into the country. Indian classical texts as well as religious myths are full of examples of androgynous sexuality, which are celebrated rather than shunned. With the advent of colonialism and its methods to contain sexuality under heterosexuality, gender also got contained as either male or female. So there occurred a drastic change in the lives of Hijras in India before colonialism and after colonialism. The recognition of 'Tritiya Prakriti'¹ (Third Nature) was incomplete in postcolonial India despite the celebration of ambivalent sexuality in the classical Hindu Texts, rituals and practices. Whereas westerners feel uncomfortable with the ambiguities and contradictions inherent in such in-between categories as the transvestite, the homosexual, the hermaphrodite and the transgender, Hinduism not only accommodates such ambiguities but also views them as meaningful and powerful. In Hindu mythology, the power of the combined man-woman is a frequent and significant theme.

One of the most important sexually ambivalent figures in Hindu mythology with whom Hijras identify themselves is Shiva, a deity who incorporates both male and female characteristics. Shiva is an ascetic — one who renounces sex and yet he appears in many erotic and procreative roles. As Serena Nanda points out in his celebrated work, *Neither Man nor Woman: The Hijras of India*: In one version of Hindu creation myth, Shiva carries out an extreme, but legitimate, form of tapasya, that of self-castration. (Nanda 30)

The Hindu Triad or Trinity, is made up of Brahma, the creator; Vishnu, the preserver (protector and sustainer of the world); and Shiva, the destroyer. Shiva is the god of destruction and absorption but he also creates and sustains life. Brahma and Vishnu had asked Shiva to create the world, Shiva agreed and plunged into the water for a thousand years. Brahma and Vishnu began to worry. Vishnu told Brahma that he, Brahma, must create, thereby providing him with the female power to do so. Thereafter, Brahma created all the gods and other beings. When Shiva emerged from the water and was about to begin the creation, he saw that the universe was already full. Infuriated, Shiva broke off his 'linga' (phallus) saying that "there is no use of this linga" (Nanda 30) and threw it onto the Earth. His act results in the fertility cult of 'linga' worship, which expresses the paradoxical theme of creative asceticism. The falling to the Earth of Shiva's linga in castration does not render him asexual, but extends his sexual power to the universe. Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty in his celebrated book, *Siva: The Erotic Ascetic* made a noteworthy comment on Shiva's ascetic fertility:

[thelinga] becomes a source of universal fertility as soon as it has ceased to be a source of individual fertility. (O'Flaherty 135)

This very reference bears directly on the position of the Hijras who as emasculated men, nevertheless, have the power to bless others for fertility. One of the most popular forms of Shiva received from *Shiva Agamas*² is that of 'Ardhanarisvara' (half-man and half-woman), which represents Shiva united with his Shakti (female creative power). Shiva is conventionally associated with one wife, Gouri. But in temple literature and oral traditions he is often said to have another secret wife, Ganga who hides in the lock of his hair. Ganga is represented by the perforated pot in Shiva temples above the Shiva-linga. Once asked by Nandi, the bull about his becoming of Ardhanarisvara, Shiva told him the story involving the great sage Bhagiratha. The sage, Bhagiratha, invoked the gods and begged them to let the celestial river, Ganga flow on the earth to help the mortals wash away their sins and to help the dead make a smooth transition to next life. The river goddess Ganga agrees to descend but warns the sage rather pompously that the earth would not be able to withstand the force of her fall. So, Bhagiratha invoked lord Shiva and requested him to break Ganga's fall by trapping her in his mighty locks. Shiva agreed and stood on the highest peak of the Earth and became ready to receive the river-goddess. The haughty Ganga jumped and was shocked to find herself entangled in Shiva's mighty lock. Therefore, her gush reduced to a trickle. When Shiva's consort Parvati saw the river goddess Ganga on the top of Shiva's head, she became furious. Out of rage Parvati vociferates thus: "You call me your wife but let another woman sit on your head." (Pattanaik 167) To placate Parvati, Shiva embraced her until she merged and became the left-half of his body. Hijras (transgender people) say that worshippers of Shiva give them special respect because of this close identification of the Hijras with Shiva, particularly in connection with the ritual of emasculation. Hijras often worship at Shiva temples.

Other deities also take on sexually ambivalent or dual gender manifestations. Vishnu and Krishna (an avatar, or incarnation of Vishnu) are sometimes depicted in androgynous ways. In one myth, Vishnu transformed himself into Mohini, the most beautiful woman in the world. He took this female form to take back the sacred nectar from the demons who had stolen it. In another well-known myth, lord Krishna takes on the form of a female to destroy a demon called Arka. Arka's strength came from his chastity.

He had never set eyes on a woman; Krishna took on the form of a beautiful woman and married him. After three days of the marriage, there was a battle and Krishna killed the demon. He then revealed himself to the other gods in his true form. While revealing himself in front of other gods, Krishna says:

There will be many like me, neither man nor woman, and whatever words will come from the mouths of these people, whether good (blessing) or bad (curses) will come true. (Nanda 20-21)

The hijra community of India often takes pride of their existence through this mythic reference.

In popular culture transvestism is a marker of humiliation. The best way to humiliate a man is to make him wear female attire. "Wear bangles and sit home" (Pattanaik 139) is a common phrase to insult a man. But lord Krishna turns the insult into praise. Krishna lore is full of references of cross-dressing. The story of Krishna wearing Radha's clothes and Radha wearing Krishna's clothes is often called the tale of the 'white cowherd'.³ Every night Radha risked everything to be with Krishna. She used to slip out of her house in the middle of the night, made her ways through the woods to the meadows of Madhuvana on the banks of the river Yamuna where Krishna would play flute and enchant her with his winsome smile and passionate embraces. In her love for Krishna, Radha became sometimes jealous, sometimes possessive and sometimes quarrelsome. She felt that Krishna would never understand her anguish and longing until he could become like her. So, in order to pacify Radha, Krishna decided that one night they should exchange roles. At the appointed hour, Krishna wore Radha's clothes and Radha wore Krishna's clothes. She (Radha) let the flute and he (Krishna) danced around her. Thus, Krishna-lore with many such references of cross-dressing made it possible to a great extent to transform the humiliating notion involved with cross-dressing or transvestism into much revered one. In *The Mahabharata*, Bhima, one of the Pandavas, wore women's clothes to punish Keechaka, the elder brother of queen Sudeshna of Matsya as well as the commander-in-chief of king Virata's armies. Enamoured of Draupadi's beauty Keechaka made sexual overtures towards Draupadi and was punished by Bhima.

The hijras, as human beings who are neither men nor women, call into question the basic social categories of gender on which Indian society is built. This notion of basic categories of genders (male and female) makes the hijras object of fear, abuse, ridicule and sometimes pity. But hijras are not merely ordinary human beings, rather they are conceptualised as special sacred beings through a ritual transformation. While hijras may worship at all Mother Goddess temples as well as at Shiva temples, their major object of devotion is Bahuchara Mata, a version of the Indian mother goddess whose main temple is near Ahmedabad in the state of Gujarat. Every hijra household has a small shrine dedicated to Bahuchara Mata. It is in the name of this goddess that hijras shower blessings of fertility and prosperity on a new born child or a married couple but it is only after the emasculation operation that hijras become vehicles of the Mother Goddess' power. Bahuchara is one of the most important goddess in the Gujarat region and is worshipped by a large part of the population but she is particularly associated with male transvestism and transgenderism. The origin of her worship is told in a legend well known throughout the oral tradition of hijras. Bahuchara was a young maiden in a party of young travellers passing through the forest in Gujarat. The party was attacked by thieves. Fearing that the gang of thieves would outrage her modesty, Bahuchara drew her dagger and cut off her breast so as to offer it to the savage in place of her chastity. This act of self-annihilation led to Bahuchara's deification and the practice of self-mutilation and sexual abstinence by her devotees to secure her favour. Bahuchara is also specifically worshipped by childless women in the hope of bearing a child, particularly a son. The goddess on the rooster, Bahuchara Mata, is invoked in many hijra communities during the hijra's castration ceremony which is termed as '*nirvana*'. It makes the end of one identity and the birth of a new identity. The use of the word '*nirvana*' suggests the act of castration is seen as liberation. In Buddhism, '*nirvana*' refers to breaking from all concepts that bind us and cause suffering.

In *The Mahabharata*, the great Indian epic of Hindu religion, we can easily trace ample references of the honoured as well as much celebrated presence of the transgender entity. The character of Sikhandi comes first in this regard. Sikhandi, the prince Panchal took his birth as a woman Sikhandini but later became Sikhandi after achieving masculinity as a blessing. Sikhandini who became Sikhandi is what modern queer vocabulary would call a female-to-male transsexual as her body goes through a specific change genitally. Sikhandi plays a key role in the battle of Kurukshetra because his/her arrival marks the turning point in the war. Sikhandi became instrumental in causing Vishma's death which was a necessity in establishing 'dharma' (the path of righteousness). Had Vishma not been killed, it would have been impossible for the Pandavas to get victory over the Kauravas. Unfortunately, the war between the Pandavas and the Kauravas reached no conclusion despite nine days of fighting. Bhishma led the Kaurava forces. Describing Bhishma's valour and destructive power, Sanjay said to Dhitarashtra in *Bhishma Parva* of *The Mahabharata*:

...Ganga's son began to consume the ranks of Pandavas with keen shafts by hundreds and thousands. Thy sire Devabrata began to grind those troops like a herd of bulls (with their tread) a heap of paddy sheaves. [Ganguli (Trans) Sec CIV P-258]

It seemed that without killing Vishma, Pandava could never win the battle. To win Pandavas must find a clue to Bhishma's carnage. Yudhistira, the eldest of the Pandavas, asked Bhishma how they would defeat him in the battle. On being asked by Yudhistira, Bhishma replied:

That mighty car warrior, the son of Drupada, O king, whom thou hast in thy army, who is known by the name of Sikhandin, who is wrathful in battle, brave and ever victorious, was a female before but subsequently obtained manhood. How all this took place, ye all know it truly. Brave in battle and clad in male, let Arjuna, keeping Sikhandin before him and attack me with his sharp shafts.

[Ganguli(Trans) Sec CVIII P-27]

The Pandavas acted in accordance with their grandsire's (Bhishma's) exhortation and thus Arjun attacked Bhishma behind Sikhandin and ultimately put Bhishma to death.

The story of Arjuna's transformation as 'Brihannala' is one of the most celebrated presences of transgender identity. The story begins with the Pandavas disguising themselves in order to evade persecution of Duryodhana, the prince of the Kaurava. Had the true identities of the Pandavas been discovered in the thirteenth year incognito (Agwatawas), they would have returned to forest for another twelve years. So, on being asked by Yudhistira about Arjuna's intended disguise in the court of Virata Arjuna replied:

O lord of the earth, I will declare myself as one of the nature sex. O monarch it is, indeed difficult to hide the marks of the bowstrings on my arms. I will, however cover both my ears and conch bangles on my wrists and causing a braid to hang down from my head, I shall, o king appear as one of the third sex, Brihannala by name. [Ganguli (Trans) Sec II p-

3]

Meanwhile, the Kauravas invaded Virata's kingdom to smoke out their cousins while the king and his soldiers were away chasing cattle-thieves. Petrified, the women turned to Virata's young son Uttara who boasted he would drive the invaders away single-handed. As there were no charioteers, Princess Uttara asked Arjuna: "Do thou therefore, o Brihannala, act as the charioteer of my brother." [Ganguli Sec XXXVII P-66] This caused great mirth until the prince realised he had no other option. As the two rode towards enemy lines, Prince Uttara caught sight of the formidable formations of the invading army — the shining spears and the array of trumpeting elephants. Got panicked, prince Uttara leapt out of the chariot and ran towards the city. Brihannala ran after him, caught him by the scruff of his neck and dragged him back.

Brihannala convinced him to fight. Brihannala then took the prince to the forest, collected a massive bow from the secret place and ordered Uttar to take the chariot straight towards the enemy. In ViratParva of the *Mahabharata*, Vaisampayana finely describes Brihannala's mighty approach in the war front with prince Uttara as her Charioteer:

Then Arjuna, endued with great energy, took off the bracelets from his arms and wore on his hands a pair of beautiful gloves embroidered with gold. And he then tied his black and curling locks with a piece of white cloth and seated on that excellent car with face turned to east, the mighty armed hero, purifying his body and concentrating his soul, recalled to his mind all his weapons.

[Ganguli (Trans.) Sec XLV P- 78]

Unlike female-to-male and male-to-female gender transformations that evoke discomfort in modern times, in the story of Samavan from the Skanda Purana⁴ sexual transformation is accepted rather comfortably. Samavan became the wife of his friend Sumedhas. Sumedhas and Samavan were two poor brahmins. They were so poor that no one was willing to give either of them a daughter. They learned of one queen, Simantini, who used to serve lunch and offered rich gift to one Brahmin couple every Monday after worshipping them as the divine couple, Shiva and Shakti (Parvati). So, they decided to obtain the gifts through deceit. Samavan disguised herself as a woman as well as the bride of Sumedhas. Simantini guessed the couple comprising two male persons. Yet, imagining them as the divine couple, Shiva and Shakti, the queen worshipped them. Such is the power of the queen's piety and devotion that Samavan lost his manliness and became a woman named Samavati. Sumedhas was at first surprised but later agreed to marry his former friend. With the rich gifts they received from the queen, the couple set up house and lived happily.

The idea of a king unable to father children and so approaching a hermit who will conduct a yagna to create a potion that will enable his wives to bear his children is common in Indian epics. Traditionally great value is placed on Mandhata's⁵ birth as he is born without association with a woman. It is assumed that as he is not born of womb, he bypasses the passage of death and rebirth. The story of Mandhata's birth is retold not once but twice in *The Mahabharata*. It is then repeated in Puranas. King Yuvanashva of the Ikshavaku clan had several wives but no children. Feeling sorry for him, sages prepared a pitcher of magic water that had the power to make his wives pregnant. When the king Yuvanashva visited the sages, he was so overcome by thirst that he accidentally drank the magic water and ended up being pregnant. Nine months later, he experienced labour pain. As there was no orifice through which the child could emerge, Ashwini, the divine physician was invoked. He cut one side of his thigh and pulled out the baby. Yuvanashva asked "How do I nurse him?" In response Indra, the king of the Devas, cut his thumb out of which milk flowed. It is believed that children suck on their thumb since the time of Mandhata. The child whose mother was a man, whose mid-wives were gods and whose wet-nurse was another god grew up to be Mandhata, a great king.

The other story which is cemented in the memories of Hijras is lord Ram's, the seventh avatar of Lord Vishnu in Hindu mythology, granting those same as them (hijras) a boon that whatever they say will come true. King Dasaratha of Ayodha decided to crown his eldest son, Ram as the King and retire into the forest for a life of contemplation. However, on the eve of coronation, his junior wife Kaikeyi demanded two boons Dasaratha had promised her years ago on the day she had saved his life in the battlefield. The two boons demanded are as follows – Kaikeyi's son Bharata to be crowned as the king of Ayodhya and Ram, the eldest son as well as the legal heir to the throne to be banished in the forest as a hermit for fourteen years. Bound by his word Dasaratha ordered Ram into exile. Ram obeyed his father without question, without remorse or regret. He left the palace accompanied by his younger brother, Laxman and his dutiful wife Sita.

When the residents of Ayodhya became aware of the incident, they were heartbroken. They decided to follow Ram into exile for they loved him so. When Ram reached the river that separated his father's kingdom from the forest, he turned around and said:

Men and women of Ayodhya, if you truly love me, wipe your tears and return to my brother's kingdom. I shall have to go into the jungle alone. We shall meet again fourteen years later.

(Pattanaik 172)

With great reluctance, the men and women of Ayodhya obeyed Ram and returned to the city. Fourteen years later, Ram returned and he was surprised to find a few people still on the banks of the river separating the forest from the kingdom.

Outraged Ram asked why these people did not obey his decree. The people started to wail on hearing Ram speaking so harshly. Ram realized that there was something amiss. On being asked gently by Sita about their long waiting on the bank of the river, the people stopped wailing and spoke:

Do not accuse us of disobedience and disloyalty, lord of the Raghu clan. Fourteen ago you told the men to return to Ayodhya and you told the women to return to Ayodhya. But we are neither men nor women. We are given no instruction. We did not know what to do. So, we waited here for you. (Pattanaik 173)

On hearing their story, Ram was moved to tears. He overlooked them but they had not abandoned him. Overwhelmed by their devotion, he hugged them and said, "come, let us return home together. Never again shall you be invisible." (Pattanaik, 173) Thus, those who are neither men nor women entered Ayodhya alongside Ram to enjoy forever, along with others, the unfettered joys of his (Ram's) rule.

Not only in Hindu mythology but also in core Sanskrit texts such as *Natyasastra* and *Kamsutra* there are instructions regarding the 'third gender'. *Kamsutra*, the sex manual in Sanskrit literature, has instructions for men regarding sexual practices with the 'third gender'. Also in *Natyasastra*, the drama manual in classical India, third gender is placed under the umbrella term 'Prakriti' along with male and female gender. These are the instances of the celebrated presence of the people with ambivalent sexuality or the 'third gender'. Hinduism in general holds that all persons contain within themselves both male and female principles. In his seminal anthropological work, *Sexual Variance in Society and History* Bullough clarifies the concept:

In Tantric school of Hinduism, the Supreme Being is conceptualized as one complete sex containing male and female sexual organs. Hermaphroditism is the ideal. In some of these sects, male (never female) transvestism is used as a way of transcending one's own sex, a prerequisite to achieving salvation. In other Tantric sects, religious exercises involve the male devotee imitating a woman in order to realize the woman in himself. Only in this way do they believe that true love can be realized. (Bullough 1976: 260)

Traditional Hinduism makes specific references to alternative sexes and sexual ambiguity among humans as well as gods. Bullough makes a reference to the four types of categorizations of the third sex: the male eunuchs, called the "water-less" because of their desiccated testes; the "testicles voided" so called because of castration; the hermaphrodite and the "not woman" which usually refers to a woman who does not menstruate. All these categories of persons had the functions of providing alternative techniques of sexual gratification, some of which are mentioned in the *Kamsutra*.

Consistent with the generally “sex positive” attitude of Hinduism, Vatsyana, the author of the sex manual, responded to the critics of oral and anal sex by saying that “in all things connected with love, everybody should act according to the custom of his country, and his own inclination,” asking a man to consider only whether the act “is agreeable to his nature and himself.” (Burton, 1964: 127) Another ancient reference to “third sex” is a prostitute named Sukumarika (“good little girl”) who made her specific appearance in ancient Sanskrit plays. Sukumarika is accused of being sexually insatiable. As a third sex she has some characteristic advantages in her profession:

She has no breasts to get in the way of tight embrace, no monthly period to interrupt the enjoyment of passion and no pregnancy to mar her beauty.(O’ Flaherty 1980: 299)

The western idea that a physical sex is fixed because of his or her genitals is also debunked in Hindu belief. Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty in her essay, “Women Androgynus and Other Mythical Beasts” validate the theory of the hydraulic construction of body in Hindu belief. This view of hydraulic construction of body is parallel to the recent studies on medical texts in Greek and Roman world. In this view, masculinity and femininity definitely depend on the physiology but this dependence itself is unstable. These genders, according to Greco-Roman view, are dependent on the levels of cold and heat in a body. These levels are subject to change even after death.

Thus, the “tritiyaprakriti” (third nature) which was prevalent and acceptable in the pre-colonial India turned against the ‘order of nature’ with the advent of colonial rule in India. There is a sea-gap between their (the transgenders) existence in Hindu epics as well as mythological texts and their present existence in the contemporary society. Hijras in India enjoyed secure lives and worked in wealthy homes before the colonial rule got implemented. The colonial rule created two contingent boxes of genders, male and female and people are supposed to fall within these boxes. As observed by Serena Nanda in *Neither Man nor Woman: The Hijras of India*: “In western culture gender identity is ideally dichotomous: one is supposed to experience one’s self as either a man or a woman.”(Nanda, 115) Nineteenth century was the time when bourgeoisie middle class in Europe were emerging with their discourse on sexuality and in turn how sexuality might form the social order. The foundation of bourgeoisie family was threatened by any one of a different sexuality because it would be non-productive. The socio-political structure which was forming in Britain penetrated to its colonies as well. Shane Patrick Ganon in his thesis describes the precolonial representation of Hijras in India. In his work he includes the account of a French traveller, Jean de Thevenot, who talks about his encounter with the ‘hermaphrodites’ in Surat. He describes the hermaphrodites as wearing “turban on their heads like man, though they go in the habit of a woman” (Ganon 133) Ganon uses this point to illustrate how in pre-colonial India the transgenders used to wear non-gendered clothes. The post-colonial representation of Hijras included words like “disgusting” incorporating moral aesthetics. Hijras were described as the “vilest and most polluted things” (Ganon, 141) and also they are opposed to nature. Also, the inability of the Hijras to reproduce raised the question whether they “perfect” species or not. Ganon uses the account of Francois Balthazar Solvyns’ “The Costume of Hindustan” (1807) and says that the post-colonial representations “categorize them as physiologically abnormal”. (Ganon 138) Also through the use of institutions such as law and administration, these ideas moved beyond the hegemonic framework to the coercive. Then, there were western culture strenuously attempting to resolve sexual contradiction and ambiguities by denial and segregation. Nevertheless, Hinduism appears content to allow opposites to confront each other without resolution, “celebrating the idea that the universe is boundlessly various and... that all possibilities may exist without excluding each other” (O’ Flaherty 1973:318). It is this characteristically Indian ability to tolerate, even embrace, contradictions and variation at the social, cultural and personality levels that provides the context in which the transgender persons can not only be accommodated, but even granted a measure of power.

Endnotes:

1. The idea of 'TritiyaPrakriti' (third gender) first appears in the *Mahabharata* and is elaborated a few centuries later in the *Kamasutra*. The tritiyaprakriti, literally 'third gender' is mentioned in the classificatory chapter of Danielou's translation of the *Kamasutra* (1.5.27).
2. *Agamas* are temple texts, popular especially in South India, composed from 5th to 15th centuries CE. *Shaiva Agamas* are such temple texts related to the hitherto unknown mythological stories of Lord Siva. These stories are clubbed alongside the *Puranas* (Chronicles) and the *Tantras* (Occult Texts) and are differentiated from *Nigamas* or Vedic literature that focuses on the yagna (fire worship). *Nigamas* are Pre-Buddhist and *Agamas* are Post-Buddhist.
3. The story of lord Krishna wearing Radha's clothes and Radha wearing Krishna's clothes is popularly known as the tale of 'White Cowherd'. The phrase refers to the fair complexioned Radha dressed up as Krishna. The story reveals the idea that clothes do not make us who we are.
4. The *SkandaPuranawas* put down in writing between the 8th and 12th centuries CE. In the 16th century, a Tamil poet named Varatanuka Rama Pantiyar retold the story of Samavan's sexual transformation found in the *SkandaPurana*. Readers can see Vettam Mani's *Puranic Encyclopaedia* for further information regarding *SkandaPurana*.
5. The story of Mandhata's birth is retold not once but twice in the *Mahabharata*. The story was first told by Lomasha during the exile of the Pandavas and the next time by Vyasa during the war with the Kauravas. The 'age of Mandhata' refers to an ancient time, a golden age, in many languages in India. Mandhata is an ancestor of Ram and belongs to the Surya Vamsa or the solar dynasty. Mandhata is a-yoni-ja, that is, one who not born of a womb. This invests Mandhata with the special power to bypass the passage of death and rebirth.

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