



Knowledgeable Research (KR)

ISSN: 2583-6633 | CODEN: KRABAU

International Open-Access Peer-Reviewed Refereed Multidisciplinary Journal

<https://knowledgeableresearch.com>

Spl. 01, Issue 04, July, 2026

Received: 13/06/2026 | Accepted: 24/06/2026 | Published: 31/07/2026

Prakriti VS Prastuti: How Indian Mythology Embraces Fluid Identities as Nature, Rejecting the Colonised Narratives of Viewing Queer as Derogatory

¹Hridya Shrivastava* (Student MA English Literature)

University of Delhi

²Dr. Santosh Shrivastava (Assistant Professor)

Head, Department of English, JC Mill Girls' College

Abstract:

*Ecofeminism is a way of thinking and acting that shows how the mistreatment of women and the destruction of nature come from the same root: patriarchal ideas that see both as things to control and use. French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne first used the term "ecofeminism" in her 1974 book *Le Féminisme ou la Mort*. She argued that men's control over women's bodies and reproduction was causing environmental problems like overpopulation. The movement grew stronger in the 1970s and 1980s through the work of thinkers like Ynestra King, Susan Griffin (*Women and Nature*), Carolyn Merchant (*The Death of Nature*), and Vandana Shiva. These writers pointed out "dualisms" in society—such as man vs. woman, culture vs. nature, reason vs. emotion—that put men and human control above everything else. This same thinking supports sexism, colonialism, capitalism, and damage to the environment. Ecofeminism has two main early types: one spiritual and cultural that celebrates women's closer ties to nature through care and intuition, and another socialist or materialist, that focuses on economic systems and class. Critics sometimes call it essentialist (suggesting women are naturally closer to nature), but most Eco-feminists today stress that these links are shaped by society and history, not biology. They also highlight intersectionality & focus on how gender connects with race, class, and colonialism. Today, ecofeminism is very relevant because of climate change, biodiversity loss, and ongoing gender inequality. Women, especially in the Indigenous communities, suffer the most from environmental damage even though they contribute least to it. The authors of this paper have sought to explore newer ideas of queer ecofeminism within Indian mythology. Using the critical lens of Ecofeminism for understanding the structural parallels between the subjugation of women and the degradation of the natural world, the authors aim to see it as a framework for future research and policy that embraces these holistic alternatives to navigate the complexities of the Anthropocene and foster a world where the flourishing of nature and all marginalised beings is recognised as a single, inseparable goal.*

Keywords: Words: Ecofeminism, women, environmentalism, nature, Anthropocene.

***Corresponding Author:**

Hridya Shrivastava

Email: hridyashrivastava@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION:

For ages, people of India have looked at queer identities from a derogatory point of view. The people of the queer community have been disregarded and not considered a respectful part of society. Their identities were made into jokes without any thought given to the consequences that could follow for the people from the community itself, and the insult that ensues. They were even denied rights and were hence made to live in undignified living conditions until their rights were recognised by the government of India. And even when their identities got officially recognised, they still go through the same humiliation. The people of the country alienated the people of the queer community without the realisation that these identities are a part of Indian culture. The queer and fluid identities have found a mention in the mythological texts, and some of them even get worshipped. Moreover, the culture connects the queer identities to nature, calling them natural, which dismisses the idea of them being against the natural being of genders. The Indian people also do not realise that it was the colonial powers that made them look derogatory, so that they could divide the people of the country and keep their rule intact.

This paper is an attempt to relocate queer identities as natural and a part of Indian culture, as it tries to separate the aspect of shame from the identities.

The research here follows a multilayered analysis of the idea presented in the paper, where it requires associating the queer identities with the Indian culture and showcasing how they are considered to be a part of nature. Moving ahead, the research has to discuss what ecofeminism is and the Indian idea of the theory, with a focus on the ideas contributed by Vandana Shiva. And this will be followed by an explanation regarding how the idea the paper is presenting is related to the ecofeminism in Indian contexts.

For the first step of the research, where the idea in the paper is to be connected to the Indian culture, the primary texts will include the mythological texts that refer to queer identities in general and also the ones studied in the paper. The queer identities studied in the paper include Ardhnareshwar, which is a divine form of half-god Shiva and half-goddess Parvati. The other character studied is Mohini, who is a form of the god Vishnu, and it is considered a fluid form. And the third character the paper aims to analyse is

Shikhandi from the Mahabharat, who represents the transgender identity. these

These texts will put the queer identities within the Indian culture, as they trace them back to the roots of the culture. To put an emphasis on the idea discussed, the verses from the texts that describe these identities will be used to explain the idea in the language of the mythological texts.

The relocation of queer identities would be done using ecofeminism, which connects the suppression of women with the destruction of the ecosystem. While the theory is mostly used in terms of studying women and women-centric literature, queer studies are also a branch of feminism itself; therefore, the theory could be applied here as well.

The theory of ecofeminism is mostly concerned with linking feminism and environmental protection, but in the Indian context, genders have always been looked at as a part of nature. Hence, ecofeminism in the Indian context studies mythological texts or the works of fiction, which are retellings or allegories of the mythological texts. Here, the mythological characters would be studied using the theory of ecofeminism given by Vandana Shiva. Her ideas connect the problem of ecological depletion with colonial rule, and the dehumanisation of

queer identities is also linked to colonial rule. The two ideas, indeed, get theorised similarly; therefore, the ideas by Vandana Shiva would be a suitable framework for this study.

Another thing the paper tries to establish is how the colonial government wanted the Indian culture to be erased, and the queer identities got marginalised as a result of their plan. For the purpose of explaining the idea, the text by Babington Macaulay has been used. *The Minutes to Indian Education* by Macaulay focuses on the Indian education system and how it needs to be replaced by the British system of education. At the same time, it also refers to his idea of destroying Indian culture as well. That then becomes an essential proof of the claim that the colonial powers intended to reduce Indian culture to nothing. With the help of these sources, the authors of the paper would establish how essential queer identities have been in Indian culture and have been considered natural until the colonial government changed the narrative. While ecofeminism is used to study female characters of different works of fiction, this paper has tried to look at the queer representations using the theory, which makes it slightly different from the studies done previously.

‘Vikṛtiḥ evaṁ prakṛtiḥ’ (*Rigved*), the ancient text which collects hymns, prayers and vedic teachings also states that diversity is the way of nature, with the verse mentioned above. This quote comes from the *Rigveda* and explains how diversity in human forms is a part of nature. While not directly, this hints at the various forms of gender identities and claims them to be a part of nature, also suggesting that queer identities are natural. Additionally, other Indian mythological and ancient texts support the existence of more than two genders and other fluid identities. This further proves that queer identities have been part of Indian culture since the beginning of time and have been just like the two genders more widely considered normal.

It was then that the colonial powers, which made the queer identities look derogatory, attached the idea of shame to them. It is this way that we continued to look at the identities within our culture. This paper is a study of how queer identities have been a part of Indian culture and were dehumanised by the colonisers. It is further trying to relocate these identities within the culture using the lens of ecofeminism, with a prime focus on Vandana Shiva’s ideas on the theory, which gives the paper an Indian outlook. Ecofeminism suggests that the degradation of the environment and that of women are

interconnected, as the same patriarchal forces that are responsible for suppressing women are the same ones that are responsible for destroying the environment for their own benefits.

They then equate women with nature, especially when it comes to destruction. However, in the Indian context, women have been looked at as feminine energies, hence being a part of nature. This is why, while studying ecofeminism in the Indian context, Indian mythological narratives could also be referenced along with the study of the modern ones.

Vandana Shiva, who is an Indian scholar, environmental activist, ecofeminist and a lot more, has written and discussed her views on the theory with an Indian context. She has extensively talked about the theory using Indian mythological references. ‘We are either going to have a future where women lead the way to make peace with the Earth, or we are not going to have a human future at all’ (Shiva), this statement by her is a small peek into her ideas regarding ecofeminism. She also argues that the destruction of the Indian ecosystem is a result of the division of the forest by the Colonial powers, who then used these forests for their own benefit. When the queer characters of Indian

mythology are looked through the lens of ecofeminism, the shame attached to the outlook starts to shift. What one then sees is a natural part of our culture, which the colonial rulers dehumanised.

The queer characters that this paper tries to look at include Ardhnareshwar, who is a divine form of half Shiva and half Parvati. Here, the form is not only a combination of Shiva's masculine energy and Parvati's feminine energy, but also two distinct cosmic powers.

- Kasthurika kumkuma charchithayai,
- Chitharaja pancha vicharchithayai,
- Kruthasmarayai vikrutha smaraya,
- Nama Shivayai cha namashivaya, (Dev Shoppe)

The verse mentioned above is from the Ardhnareshwar stotam, which was written by Adi Shankaracharya. It could be translated to mean that he bows down to both the powers, one of which has her body smeared with musk and the other which has the ashes of the dead on him. This in itself shows how the figure is an amalgamation of different energies, hence making Ardhnareshwar part of nature. The other verses in the Stotam also interpret the form

as not two beings intertwined in one, but two distinct energies combined together.

According to the mythology, god Shiva and goddess Parvati took the form when Brahma was looking for inspiration for starting the process of procreation, so the humans he created could grow in numbers (Massimo Introvigne). While being apart, god Shiv and goddess Parvati represent a woman and a man, and their union, the form of Ardhnareshwar, however, debunks the idea of only two sets of identities and points towards this form as well.

Moving ahead, Indian mythology narrates the story of the time when god Vishnu had to take the form of Mohini. He had to do this to tackle a demon called Bhasmasur, who was given the boon of burning anyone he touches. While not mentioned directly, Mohini could be considered to be a fluid identity where a man takes the form of a woman when it is required for him. Moreover, there are instances in these mythologies where the form attracts males, including gods and demons alike. 'māyayā mohitāḥ kechid vadanti puruṣaṁ purāṇam, anyenānyam abhīpsanto bhramante te 'lpa-medhasaḥ', (*Bhagwad Puran*) the verse explains how the divine forms were mesmerised by the Mohini

form of god Vishnu. Mohini also becomes the reason why Bhasmasur is killed.

Before the aforementioned incident god Vishnu had taken the form so that he could take back the Amrit (a liquid elixir which immortalises the ones who drink it) from the demons and give it to the gods. Both these instances make the form a powerful being, hence not only proving that the fluid identity is a part of nature in the Indian mythology as well but also recognising the beings as someone with power and not powerless beings to be oppressed.

In Indian mythology, we also have Shikhandi, who is a character in the Mahabharata. Shikhandi was a woman in her past life and a masculine figure in her life when the Mahabharat takes place. However, both the Masculine and the Feminine features are combined in this life, which makes Shikhandi's character a transgender representation in Indian mythology.

In her past life, she was a woman called Amba who was abducted by Bhishmpitama while he invaded the kingdom of Amba's father. She then insisted that Bhishm get married to her, as that seemed like a plausible way to save her from the shame of being touched by a man who isn't her husband. Bhishma, however, refuses as he had vowed

never to marry, and that leads to the death of Amba as she determines to take her revenge when the time comes. Bhishma then goes on to be the patriarch of the clan in which the Mahabharata was fought, and he joined the side of the Kauravs. Amba, who was now Shikhandi, joins the Pandav side of the clan and becomes the reason for Bhishma's death, taking revenge for her past life as Amba.

While this is a tale of how a transgender identity was represented in an Indian mythology, it talks about other aspects as well. Shikhandi is a masculine identity with feminine features from a past life. This not only suggests a reference to reincarnation but also nods towards the conjoining of powers. It, hence, connects Shikhandi and the transgender identity with nature. Moreover, it also shows Shikhandi as a warrior, hence making him a powerful representation instead of caricaturising the identity.

In Indian mythology, genders have always been compared to cosmic powers and in all the cases above, the queer identities showcase an amalgamation of two of these powers, making them an integral part of nature. This further proves that these fluid forms of divine powers are also a part of nature, as per the Indian mythology and

therefore, considered natural in the Indian culture.

When the British colonised the country, they aimed to assert complete control. Therefore, other than divide and rule, they also wanted to destroy our culture so that we would not only carry the burden of a drained economy and be enslaved humanity, but would also be their slaves even if and when they leave our country, as we would continue living with the culture they designed for us. This culture would look similar to the one practised by the Indians, but would be the one the Britishers crafted for their benefit.

Lord Babington Macaulay, the former Governor General of India, wrote a text called *Macaulay's Minutes on Indian Education*. In the text, he proposed his ideas on how Indian education should be replaced by the British one so that they could create a class of Indian people to work under them. In the minutes where he proposed a lot of other reforms, suggesting an overall revamp of the Indian education system, he also wrote.

‘We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect.’, (Macaulay qtd.in Raley)

While the quote in Minutes is mostly about education and the education system, this quote points towards the intent of the colonisers. The destruction of the culture then included the divisions they created for the Indians to keep fighting for. They divided us into caste, class, religion, race and even genders. This further led to the formation of the idea that some social divisions are inferior to others. They brought the purdah system, they made female bodies into objectionable objects and did a lot more harm to the gender system and gender roles. And if we continue to specifically look at the aspect of gender, males became superior to all the other genders, including transgender individuals and other queer identities. They even criminalised these identities. And then, that is how Indians have been carrying these divisions forward as a part of their own culture.

When the British rulers left, the discussions over the damage that they had done were put to theories by writers and theorists who each discussed a different aspect of the destruction that was caused. These writers were considered postcolonial writers, and they discussed everything from women's issues, caste politics, human exploitation, economic loss and even environmental degradation that was caused under the rule of the British

government. These all worked and gave rise to different theories, which could be used to explain the extent of the damage that was done. Among all the other theories, ecofeminism came to rise in the Indian context as well. While it was already being used and its different aspects were being discussed in other countries, in India, the theory formed a large part of post-colonial discourse.

On one hand, the colonial rulers were responsible for creating the divide between the genders and making the male superior to the other genders; it was indeed also the ecosystem which bore the brunt. The colonial government divided the forests into different parts, where the larger part was used for their trade, and the smaller part was given to the farmers for cultivation. This division not only resulted in the farmers bearing heavy losses but also in the destruction of forests and deforestation due to the cutting of more trees than were planted.

While the two issues were raised separately by the activists in both fields, the ecofeminists connected the two ideas for discussing it in terms of the Indian context. Vandana Shiva is a scholar and environmental activist who wrote about ecofeminism in India along with her other

ecofeminist ideas. She has also discussed how the colonial forces destroyed the ecosystem of India because they divided the forest for their benefits. Moreover, she made use of Indian mythology, which invariably connects gender with nature. Her ecofeminist beliefs are used to study various women-centric literature, specifically the ones that include mythological references. She has not spoken or written about queer identities, but her ideas are used in the studies. Her idea, which discusses the degradation of Indian forests under colonial rule, is similar to the idea of the dehumanisation of queer identities by the British government.

This paper takes a direct look at the mythological characters and studies their connection with the ecofeminist theories, with a special focus on the ideas presented by Vandana Shiva. By reading the mythological texts and discussing the queer identities within the texts, the paper aims to re-locate these identities as a part of Indian culture and remove the sense of shame from the context. For this purpose, the authors have tried to use the mythological characters to highlight their significance in the culture. Then, the aim is to connect the characters with nature, which then links them with the central idea of ecofeminism. And then combine the two ideas to suggest that these identities are an

integral part of Indian culture. The paper also tries to look at these mythological characters as warriors, cosmic energies and demons fighting divine powers, which attaches a sense of pride, detaching them from the sense of shame.

Vandana Shiva's thoughts on ecofeminism come to use here to put the ideas present in the paper under a theoretical framework. The use of this theory and the study of the queer representations in Indian mythology becomes a path to see the queer identities from a different lens. It also disassociates the shame that was earlier attached to these identities as presented by the colonial forces.

The generations of shame and disregard are impossible to undo, but the paper is an attempt in the process. Rather, this paper could also be seen as a beginning of the attempt. When the people of the country start to look at the identities as a part of the culture, they will accept them within the society, and a safe space will be re-established for them. This paper could therefore be considered a framework which could be used to re-visualise the importance of queer identities in the Indian context. It also provides a new outlook to the reading of the Indian mythologies and the understanding of ecofeminism in the Indian

context, especially the ideas of Vandana Shiva.

The research then makes space for further discussions. These discussions can connect the queer identities with ecofeminism and take the examples of works of fiction or even non-fiction. With this paper, the authors have tried to dig deeper into the roots of Indian culture and hence, tried to analyse the queer identities in the Mythological narratives. Some further research could also study the queer identities in the modern works while using an ecofeminist lens to look at them. There could also be research done on the references to queer characters in other mythologies, and that could be connected with different forms of ecofeminism. This will not only give a way to the study of ecofeminist readings, but the link between the theory and queer studies will also give way to studies of queer identities within ecofeminism as well. This is what will give a new outlook to both ecofeminism and queer studies. While this paper is just a way to provide a new way to look at the Indian queer identities, it could also become a small step towards the opening up of new and broader discourse, which could change narratives and perspectives towards the representation of a certain identity.

In conclusion, the queer identities which have lived years holding the shame of being a derogatory part of the society which was never inherent but given, could be looked at from a changed point of view. It should be understood that these identities have been around since time immemorial and are not new or alien to our culture. The paper has studied the mythological references of the queer identities for the same purpose, where they could be seen as a part of traditional Indian cultures and looked at as a part of society. The shame that the people of the community hold within them for ages could be studied, and a discourse could be engineered on how they are not only a part of the culture but were also considered a part of nature and hence, becomes natural on a historical grounding. What more should be taken into consideration is that the British forces are the catalysts for a sense of shame getting attached to these identities. Therefore, it should also be noted that people of India carry a derogatory image of queer people in India and showcase the fulfillment of the colonial power's strategy of destroying Indian culture, considering that the queer community is also a part of it. As the Indian people continue to consider queer identities as derogatory, they also continue to accept themselves as slaves to the colonial rulers;

hence, this discourse is a way we also cherish our culture again.

REFERENCES

1. Dev Shoppe. "Shri Ardhanarishwara Stotram with Meaning (अर्धनारीश्वर स्तोत्रम्)." *Devshoppe*, 3 Apr. 2017, www.devshoppe.com/blogs/articles/shri-ardhanarishwara-stotram-with-meaning?
2. Massimo Introvigne. "Ardhanarishvara: The Hindu Perfection of the Androgyne." *Bitter Winter*, 22 Feb. 2025, bitterwinter.org/ardhanarishvara-the-hindu-perfection-of-the-androgyne.
3. Raley, Rita. "Macaulay's Minute on Indian Education." *Ucsb.edu*, 2019, oldsite.english.ucsb.edu/faculty/rraley/research/english/macaulay.html.
4. *Rig Ved*.
5. Shiva, Vandana. "Making Peace with the Earth"..
6. Vyas, Ved. *Bhagwad Puran*.