



I'm Pretty Sure God is a Feminist

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Abstract

This essay talks about the emergence of feminist views from as far back as when Gods roamed the Earth. It hypothesizes that feminism not only originated in but is promoted by the entire body of work - mythology - that is often considered propagator of the word of God. With examples from Hindi mythological stories like Ramayana and Mahabharatha, the essay analyzes

the treatment of Feminism and the interpretation of the same in modern culture.

Keywords

Feminism, Modern Views, Mythology, Interpretation

Feminism (*n*), the advocacy of social, economic, and political equality of the genders, is one of the 'buzzwords' that keeps going in and out of fashion. The legionnaires of this movement now include big names in Technology, Entertainment and Literature, too. But did you ever stop to think who the biggest fan of feminism probably is? Yes, you got it right. God.

Whether you belong to one religion or the other, you must believe in a higher power. Stories about this higher power have shaped and formed mythology and influenced our histories for eons. But in each of these stories, I see the influence of feminism: a spark burning bright and strong. I'm sure you're confused by now. Most of the activists of today tend to rally around shedding traditional religious beliefs that are typically touted to be originators of chauvinistic behaviour – and they are not wrong in a way. Some traditional practices that derive their origins from mythology do tend to be far from feminist. Take a beat here though and ask yourself this: Who is to blame for this?

When we read a story or listen to one, we don't take away the story but our interpretation of it. It's like playing a game of Chinese Whispers that stretches across generations and goes on for centuries. Obviously, some of the messages will be garbled. Some messages are, hands-down, incorrigible. But why focus on the negative? The raw desire for equal treatment of all human beings has rung true throughout history and mythology.

Take the divinization of female characters in Hindu mythology for example. We have an ordinary old woman, Sabari who seems to be waiting to meet Lord Ram from eons. She has

been treated poorly and has had to live as an outcast all her life due to her supposed low birth. But what, does Valmiki say, happens when Sabari's long cherished desire comes true? Lord Ram not only elevates her to the position of a mother but humbly eats fruits that she had previously tasted. At the face of it, this story highlights Sabari's devotion for Lord Ram and the subsequent rewards she reaps. Dig a little deeper and we can see a lot more. A strong, popular king who was worshipped and idolized as a God by his subjects sets an example by bowing to an old, mistreated woman by treating her as an equal. This not only sets aside any caste-related discrimination but also celebrates feminism in an age where women were socially and culturally supposed to be treated as inferior to men.

What do you think it means when Goddess Durga was sacrificed by King Kamsa just before the birth of Lord Krishna? Did you stop to wonder why Kamsa's character is written to be so terrified of Durga as a newborn child that he killed her? The power of women was no joke even then. Not only does Goddess Durga go on to mock Kamsa for his cowardice, after his cruel culling of her mortal form, there is a mention in some versions of the story that Lord Krishna acknowledges her crucial role in his survival at birth and subsequent accomplishments.

Aside from the obvious examples of strong female lead characters such as those of *Draupadi*, *Ganga*, *Kunti*, *Shikandini*, *Sita*, *Kaikaiyee* and many more in the *Mahabharatha* and the *Ramayana*, there are many examples of women in Hindu mythology who are not only treated as equals but are revered as leaders. Perhaps, where the confusion lies about how any of these anecdotes really relate to feminism is in the retelling of these characters' life stories.

Most of these characters, like every normal person today, have had their fair share of ups and downs. They have been princesses and queens living in resplendent palaces. They

have been wronged and impassioned with the desire to attain justice. They have been warriors and leaders driving other characters towards the ultimate *nirvana* as each story moves forward. But in narrating life's treatment of these characters, by the socio-cultural context, there is an unfairness that echoes through and makes it appear as though the very concept of equality was alien back then. This is where I disagree.

The authors of these epics, taking inspiration from their higher power, depicted the world as it really is: full of all sorts of ideologies and colourful characters. They also wrote in life-defining incidents, sometimes abrasively. Who told us, though, that these incidents reflect an age that was less woke and had never heard of *feminism*? My interpretation of these events and the subsequent reaction of each heroine is very simple. Sometimes, a writer such as myself, needs to use a tool to highlight some emerging revolutions. A character needs to hit rock bottom, needs to have a wake-up call. Would you read a story where nothing ever happened, nobody ever learnt a thing, and everybody was always happy? What would you learn from such a story, besides how to be bored?

So, the bottom line appears to be very simple to me. The object of mythology, as something that was used to spread the word of God to us humans, has always been to educate and ignite minds. After all, the message of a story depends on the lens through which it has been read. Mythology does this well by covering a myriad of issues and highlighting equality and freedom of choice, by outlining the struggles of strong male characters such as *Yudhisthira*, *Arjuna* and *Bheema*, by narrating the stories of women who not only supported but sometimes drove them.

So, to me personally, the word of God, which is what we hear from mythology and history, calls out the unique strengths each of us possess, irrespective of our gender and how, if

treated equally, the tapestry woven by our life stories will be all the more beautiful.

So, yeah, in a nutshell, I'm pretty sure God is a feminist.



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Pooja is an aspiring author and a techie. She pursued her first love, writing, as a student journalist while working with the celebrity editor, Chetana Belegere at the popular infotainment magazine, "The Students". She has been published in popular newspapers like The Hindu as a child poet, and since then, freelanced as a Short Story Writer with California-based web magazine.

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