

Bisexuality in the Mythology of Ancient India

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Does the term 'bisexual' refer to what one does or what one is? It makes a difference, and Americans seem uncertain as to which is the primary meaning. Bisexuality refers, in common English parlance, primarily to the existential nature of a person's sexual partners; thus the *Britannica Online* defines bisexuality actively, as 'in human sexuality, sexual interest in and attraction to members of one's own and the opposite sex. A bisexual is a person with both heterosexual and homosexual desires.' That is, a bisexual *does* something bisexual. But *Merriam Webster* gives as the first meaning the existential definition, 'possessing characteristics of both sexes, hermaphroditic', and only as the second meaning the active definition, 'sexually oriented toward both sexes'. That is, a bisexual *is* something bisexual, primarily, and only secondarily someone who *does* something bisexual. This subtle distinction takes on more obvious dimensions in mythological formulations, which, in the case of ancient India, easily and happily imagine creatures that are bisexual in the existential sense but must construct highly elaborate plots to allow bisexual relationships in the active sense.

In mythology, androgynes are passive, existential bisexuals, and they come in two forms: splitting (the more prevalent form) and fusing.¹ Sometimes they do both, first fusing and then splitting, or the reverse. The image of a male (for androgynes are often primarily male, not equally male and female) who splits off half of his body in order to make a woman to be his mate appears first in India in the famous cosmogony in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* (1.4.3): 'He was of the same size and kind as a man and woman closely embracing. He caused himself to fall [*pat*] into two pieces, and from him a husband and a wife [*pati* and *patni*] were born. Therefore Yajnavalkya has said, "Oneself is like a half-fragment".² In this instance, existential bisexuality not only does not facilitate active bisexuality but, on the contrary, necessarily limits subsequent sexual activity to heterosexuality. This choice, which seems entirely logical in the text in question, is revealed to be, on the contrary, a limited choice that eliminates other logical possibilities, when we compare this story to one that it closely resembles, the scenario imagined by Aristophanes in Plato's *Symposium* (189–191e), in which the initial bisexual couple does indeed give rise to

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heterosexual human couples but is from the start supplemented by two other mythical creatures that give rise to male homosexuals and female homosexuals. Neither the Indian text nor the Greek text, however, imagines a divine or human individual who is actively bisexual, that is, who has both male and female partners.

Nor does the fusing androgyne fare much better in India. The god Shiva and his consort Parvati are often depicted as an androgyne, 'The Lord Who Is Half Woman' (Arddhanarishvara), but the myths that explain how they came to be fused often describe a quarrel or conflict between them, rather than sexual desire,³ and a famous Sanskrit poem suggests that when they are in this form, Shiva is distressed because he cannot see Parvati (let alone touch her).⁴ Here is yet another way in which existential bisexuals are, by definition, precluded from becoming active bisexuals.

Later Hindu mythology attempts, though in a most roundabout way, to visualize such a possibility. The Hindu gods are more often serially than simultaneously bisexual. Each of the two great male gods, Vishnu and Shiva, is transformed into a female in a famous cycle of myths, and both goddesses and supernatural women become male in certain texts. We might use the modern term bisexual for such deities who are not serially monogamous but serially transsexual. Serial transformation, which in a sense appears to be chronological, first one sex and then another, is really existential: it is an attempt to recover a lost possibility, to express an ambiguity that is present from the start, revealed when it seems to be transformed. Many Hindu myths attest to both the existential *perception* of the self as bisexual (as having a body of one sex and a mind/soul/personality/gender of another) and active bisexual *transformations*, from male to female (MTF) or female to male (FTM).

With these concepts in mind, let us consider a few myths from the great classical Sanskrit compendia of Hindu mythology.

The bisexuality of the male gods, Vishnu and Shiva

In the *Mahabharata* (composed between c. 300 BCE and 300 CE), the gods and demons churn the ocean to obtain the ambrosia, the Soma juice that maintains their immortality, and the demons claim it as theirs. Then, in just three verses (what Americans would call the lite form of the myth), it tells this story:

Vishnu the Enchantress Seduces the Demons

Vishnu took on an enchanting [*mohini*] illusion, the marvelous body of a woman, and he went to the demons. As their minds were bewitched and their hearts set on her, they gave the ambrosia to him in his female form. The goddess who was made of the illusion created by Vishnu gave the ambrosia to the gods but not to the demons. A fight broke out, and Vishnu gave up his incomparable female form and attacked the demons.⁵

Vishnu uses sex to destroy a demonic enemy (an old Hindu trick: celestial nymphs routinely use their wives to destroy individual powerful ascetics).⁶ Vishnu presumably takes on merely the outer form of the demon; he never forgets that he is Vishnu; he retains his male memory and his male essence and resumes his own form after

returning the Soma to the gods. But when the story is retold and greatly expanded in the *Brahmānda Purāna*, about a thousand years after the *Mahābhārata*, Vishnu resumes his Mohini form at Shiva's express request on a second occasion, and although Vishnu still remembers who he really is, Shiva seems to forget that the enchantress is Vishnu:

Shiva rapes Vishnu as the Enchantress

When the demons stole the elixir of immortality from the gods, Vishnu meditated on the great Goddess [Maheshvari], and by concentrating on nothing but her he took on her form: a beautiful enchantress. She seduced the demons and returned the ambrosia to the gods. When the sage Narada saw what the enchantress Mohini had done, he went to Mount Kailasa, the home of Shiva. Shiva asked Narada, 'What has happened to the ambrosia? Who has won it, the gods or the demons? What is Vishnu doing about it?' Narada told him how Vishnu had taken the form of Mohini, deluded the demons, and brought the ambrosia back to the gods. Shiva dismissed Narada and went with Parvati to see Vishnu, unknown to anyone, even his sons Nandin, Skanda, and Ganesha.

Vishnu rose to greet Shiva and Parvati, and Shiva asked Vishnu to show him the form he had taken before, enchanting everyone. Vishnu smiled a little and again meditated single-mindedly on the Goddess; then he vanished, and Shiva saw a gorgeous woman [described in fifteen more or less boilerplate verses]. Immediately Shiva ran after her, abandoning Parvati, who stood with her head lowered in shame and envy, silently. He grabbed her [Mohini] with some difficulty and embraced her again and again; each time she shook him off and ran away, but Shiva grabbed her again, overpowered by lust. From that violent coupling his seed fell upon the ground, and the god Mahashasta was born. The Goddess who enchants everyone disappeared, and Shiva turned back and went to his mountain with Parvati.⁷

Is the 'difficulty' with which Shiva catches and embraces Vishnu/Mohini somehow connected with the fact that Vishnu/Mohini is not really a woman? In this text, composed in honor of the Goddess, whose worship had developed during the many centuries after the brief *Mahābhārata* story, Vishnu does not have to produce the woman out of his own power of feminine illusion, perhaps an expression of his own feminine nature, but is able to meditate on an already existing goddess. This somewhat weakens the original idea that Vishnu himself actually becomes transformed, for Mohini does not go on to have an enduring separate existence; she is absorbed back into Vishnu. But the existence of the Goddess as a separate person gives a kind of feminine reality to the creature, who now actually mimics a real female, and perhaps that is what inspires the author to imagine that she inspires Shiva with lust. The statement that Vishnu 'smiled a little' before agreeing to Shiva's request suggests that he, too, knew that this was one of those boons that the asker quickly comes to regret.

In this and other variants of this myth, Shiva's seed – shed on the ground, with no reference to a male or female partner – gives birth to a child, here called Mahashasta ('The Great Chastiser'), but variously identified as Skanda, Hanuman, Aiyanar, or 'Hariharaputra' ('the son of Vishnu and Shiva'). These later texts may have added the quasi-homosexual episode to the Mohini myth precisely in order to justify the theological lovechild, the quasi-androgyne Hariharaputra, to join Vishnu and Shiva

in sex as well as in sects. Yet, since Vishnu retains his male memory and his male essence, he can be regarded as having male homosexual relations, playing first the active role with the demons and then the passive role with Shiva. In this inadvertent masquerade Mohini is the victim rather than the aggressor – though the text is *very* careful to tell us that the seed fell short of its goal, perhaps implying that no actual sexual act was consummated, that Mohini/Vishnu was never penetrated. Moreover, Shiva himself expressly loses his memory (though not his sex or gender) in one variant of his seduction of Mohini, in which, at the end, ‘When the seed was shed, Shiva realized his delusion, became cool, and turned back from his evil act’.⁸ Is the delusion the loss of control that lets Shiva commit rape, or the loss of the memory of the fact that the woman he is raping is a man, his pal Vishnu? The text does not say. The extreme case of this homosexual agenda occurs in a Telugu variant of the story, in which, when Shiva makes love to Mohini, in the middle of the act Mohini turns back into Vishnu, and Shiva goes on with it⁹ – a very rare instance of a consummated, explicit, male homosexual act (seduction or rape) in Hindu mythology. This ambiguity adds yet another nuance to the more general question of the depth of the transformation.

The bisexuality of Shiva in the Magic Forest

Although Shiva’s motives in raping Mohini seem straightforwardly heterosexual, his own connection with androgyny and bisexuality also facilitates these shifts, and when it comes to transsexuality he is far more active than Vishnu. The story of a magic forest sacred to Shiva and/or Parvati, in which men become women, undergoes numerous sea changes in many retellings. The earliest text that tells this story, the *Ramayana*, gives one reason for the transformation: ‘When Shiva was making love with Parvati, he took the form of a woman to please Parvati, and everything in the woods, even trees, became female.’¹⁰ That is, *first* comes the statement that Shiva turned into a woman, and only afterwards, as a *result* of that transformation, does the rest of the forest change gender. Yet all the subsequent texts that retell this story – and it is retold often – reverse that causal sequence and specify either that Shiva accidentally became female after the whole forest was cursed, or that he alone did *not* become female, being explicitly excepted by Parvati. The idea that Shiva became a woman and still made love with Parvati, explicit in this text, may well have been implicit in all the others that follow, some of which specify neither that Shiva was transformed nor that he was not. The 14th-century Vedic commentator, Sayana, for instance, simply says that when making love with Shiva, the goddess said, ‘Let any man who enters here become a woman’,¹¹ leaving ambiguous the question of whether Shiva himself became a woman while making love with Parvati. The *Brahmanda Purana* is stunningly inconsistent on this point:

Once upon a time, Shanaka and other young boys came to see Shiva, and they saw him making love with the goddess in a hidden place. They all turned back, embarrassed, and the beloved goddess said to her beloved god, to do what he would like, ‘Let any man who enters my ashrama become a woman as beautiful as a celestial courtesan.’ Then all the

creatures, goblins and beasts, became females, sporting with Rudra [Shiva] like celestial courtesans. Rudra became a woman, together with the goblins.¹²

The first part of this passage imagines Parvati generously supplying Shiva with a kind of harem, the whole point of which requires that he remain absolutely male. But then the text says that he, too, became a female. What are we to make of this – or, for that matter, of the paradoxical statement in the *Ramayana* that Shiva himself becomes a woman while making love with Parvati? Are we to assume that he goes on making love to her in that form? Or that he stops? If he continues, this raises the same ambiguity that we considered in the myth of Mohini: if Shiva is merely superficially transformed into a female, but remains essentially male, we might expect him to continue despite the transformation. This interpretation is supported by one Hindu view of gender, the view that when the body changes, the mind and the memory remain the same and that gender is not fluid or superficial but embedded in memory. But if it is a complete transformation, a change of inner essence, Shiva's continued love-making would involve him in a lesbian act, a rare but not unprecedented situation in the Sanskrit literature of Hinduism¹³ and a parallel to those variants of the myth of Mohini in which Shiva continues to rape Vishnu/Mohini when he changes back into a man, in inner essence as well as superficial form. This would support the other Hindu view of gender, also expressed in many of these texts, as fluid and superficial, changing completely when the body changes.

Sometimes Shiva himself becomes female for a different reason:

The gods begged the goddess Kali to rid the earth of demonic kings, and she agreed to become incarnate as Krishna. Shiva prayed to Kali and was given permission to become incarnate as Radha, the mistress of Krishna, in order to make love in reverse. At Shiva's wish, Radha's husband became impotent immediately after marriage.¹⁴

There are two simultaneous negative transformations here, vertical and horizontal: the god becomes both human (vertically worse) and female (horizontally worse, in the Hindu view). Shiva simultaneously changes gender and species, becoming a human woman – not, this time, to make love to his wife homoerotically, but, on the contrary, to remain heterosexual when she has switched her own sex. The implication is that Shiva wants to experience not only the reversal of being female but the reversal of the reversal, that is, to be a woman in the 'reversed' sexual position (reversed from the missionary position), the man's role, on top.¹⁵

The bisexuality of the worshipper of the Goddess Parvati

A Tamil text from the late 16th century imagines a human man who changes to a woman under the combined influence of the goddess Parvati and her agent on earth, a pious devotee:

Two Brahmin boys learned that a certain pious woman named Cimantani would give lavish gifts to Brahmin sages who came to her with their wives, for she imagined the sage as Shiva and the sage's wife as Parvati. With some misgivings, one of the boys dressed up

as a woman; women expert in the arts of adornment came to make him up. They made him breasts out of some other substance, plastered him with kunkum and sandalpaste, hung a pearl necklace around his neck, and fashioned a long braid so black it put night to shame. His eyes they shaded with kohl; stuck earrings in his ears; and draped him in a *sari* that was worth at least as much as the entire cosmos.

In short, by the time they were finished he looked as ravishing as Mohini, the female form assumed by Vishnu. They arrived at the palace of Cimantani, whose eyes were too long to be hidden by her hands. When she saw the young man and his friend, who had taken on woman's form, Cimantani came toward them, offered the guest offering, worshiped them, and invited them to sit down together with all the other Brahmins. While she was ministering to these guests, she took a good look at the faces of the two boys and realized at once that they were, indeed, both males. Although she was a rather compassionate person, she frowned.

Then she hid her face. She always thought of whoever came to her, in whatever guise or mode (*ettirattanum*), as Shiva and Uma. So now, too, holding to the order of the Vedas and the Agamas, she performed *puja* in devotion (*patti*) and fed them all a rich meal of milk, fruit, honey, sweet drinks, rice and snacks, served on golden plates. Then she presented them with fragrant garlands, sandalpaste, flawless clothes and jewels, white camphor, and areca nut. She praised all the Brahmins as Shiva and Uma and then gave them leave to depart.

On the way back, the boy who had dressed as a woman turned into a woman – exactly like the guise he had worn – all because of Cimantani, who had imagined them as Uma and Shiva. 'He' totally forgot that he used to be a man. What is more, he now turned to his companion with the idea of making love, like a woman. The Brahmin lad, still not realizing how fully his inseparable friend had become feminine, turned, a little scornful, to study 'his' face. Not an iota of the masculine was left in it. Amazed, he saw that everything about his friend had melted into a lithe, vine-like grace. Her luminous, budding breasts, smeared with sandalpaste; her long, thick curls, black as night; her face radiant as the full moon and – like fish darting through the moon – the long eyes shooting lethal looks; the red glow of her body, like an unfolding bud; her bangled wrists, delicate fingers, bejeweled belt, the perfection of her loins . . . She smiled and said, 'My dear husband! Listen. I used to be your friend Camavan. Now I'm a woman named Camavati. In fact, I'm your wife. Desire to make love to you drove me to speak. Embrace me. Have a good look with your own eyes. I am a woman. I am *not* a man.' With this, she revealed her whole body to her lord.

He took a good look. He saw, to his astonishment, that no other women in the whole wide world had such a beautiful body as this courtesan. He realized that all this had happened because of the imagination exercised by Cimantani in her heart. He protested and tried to resist her, but she was by now very disturbed by Kama's arrows and far beyond thinking about what was or wasn't right. She took his wrist and raped him, then and there, to her great satisfaction. He, on the other hand, felt no pleasure. In fact, he was deeply distressed. But eventually the two of them married, by the grace of the Goddess.¹⁶

In dramatic contrast with the gods who are transformed into women only temporarily, and with many human men who are cursed to become women and move heaven and earth to be transformed back into men, this Brahmin boy ends up a woman forever, and is apparently perfectly satisfied with this outcome. The thin line that divides transvestism (the transformation of the surface, the gender) from transsexuality (the transformation of the body, the sex) is often breached, and here it is entirely erased: the surface masquerade becomes, through divine magic, a transformation in depth. The text is inconsistent about the memory of the transformed

man: he is said not to remember who he had been, but then he declares who he had been. His partner, too, at first vehemently refuses to accept his friend's sexual transformation but is eventually persuaded, enough to marry her.

The bisexuality of Chudala

A brilliant example of female to male transsexuality, and back again, is the story of Queen Chudala, which is narrated at great length and with many labyrinthine triple crosses in the *Yogavasishttha*, a philosophical Sanskrit text composed in Kashmir between the 10th and 12th centuries:

Queen Chudala and her husband King Shikhidhvaja were passionately in love, like two souls in one body. In time, the queen became enlightened and acquired magic powers, including the ability to fly, but she concealed these powers from her husband, and when she attempted to instruct him he spurned her as a foolish and presumptuous woman. Yet he remarked that she seemed to have regained the bloom of her youth, and he assured her that he would continue to make love to her. Eventually, the king decided to seek his own enlightenment and withdrew to the forest to meditate; he renounced his throne and refused to let her accompany him, but left her to govern the kingdom.

After eighteen years she decided to visit him; she took the form of a young Brahmin boy named Kumbha ('Pot') and was welcomed by the king, who did not recognize her but remarked that Chudala-as-Kumbha looked very much like his queen, Chudala. After a while, the king became very fond of Chudala-as-Kumbha, who instructed him and enlightened him, and she began to be aroused by her handsome husband. And so Chudala-as-Kumbha went away for a while. When she returned, she told the king that a sage had cursed her to become a woman, with breasts and long hair, every night. That night, before the king's eyes, Chudala-as-Kumbha changed into a woman named Madanika, who cried out in a stammering voice, 'I feel as if I am falling, trembling, melting. I am so ashamed as I see myself becoming a woman. Alas, my chest is sprouting breasts, and jewelry is growing right out of my body.'

Chudala-as-Kumbha-as-Madanika slept beside the king every night in the same bed like a virgin, while Chudala-as-Kumbha lived with him during the day as a friend. After a few days Chudala-as-Kumbha said to him, 'Your majesty, I sleep beside you every night as a woman. I want to marry you and to enjoy the happiness of a woman.' He consented to this, and so one day Chudala-as-Kumbha bathed ceremonially with the king, and that night Chudala-as-Kumbha-as-Madanika married him. And so the couple, whose previous state of marriage was concealed, were joined together. They lay down on the marriage bed of flowers and made love all night.

Thus they lived as dear friends during the day and as husband and wife at night. Eventually, she changed from Chudala-as-Kumbha-as-Madanika to Chudala. The king said, 'Who are you and how did you get here? In your body, your movements, your smile, your manner, your grace – you look so much like my wife.' 'Yes, I am truly Chudala,' she said, and then she told him all that she had done. He embraced her passionately, and said, 'You are the most wonderful wife who ever lived. The wife is everything to her husband: friend, brother, sympathizer, servant, guru, companion, wealth, happiness, the Vedic canon, abode, and slave. Come, embrace me again.' Then he made love to her all night and returned with her to resume his duties as king. He ruled for ten thousand years and finally attained release.¹⁷

Chudala wishes to be her husband's mistress both in the sense of lover and in the sense of teacher, schoolmistress. She has already played the first role but is now denied it, and he refuses to grant her the second role.

But the queen wants to get her husband into bed as well as to enlighten him; the story is, after all, not merely a parable of enlightenment but a very human, very funny story. And the text is not so antinomian as to image a consummated male homosexual relationship. Eventually, Chudala manages to enjoy her husband as a male friend by day and as a lover and wife by night, and she does this by getting him to marry her again. The double woman whom she creates – Chudala-as-Kumbha-as-Madanika – is her real self, the negation of the negation of her femininity. The jewelry that actually grows out of her body is what she would have worn as Queen Chudala at the start of the story, and the description of her transformation – 'I feel as if I am falling, trembling, melting' – is surely a double-entendre for female orgasm. This double deception works well enough and may express her full fantasy: to be her husband's intellectual superior under the sun and his erotic partner by moonlight. But since the two roles belong to two different personae, she wants to merge them and to play them both as her original self. That is, she wants to reintegrate herself and abandon her double, and in the end, she does. The playful juggling of the genders demonstrates both the unreality of appearances and the falsity of the belief that one gender is better than the other; the male and female forms of Chudala are, in a sense, all alike in the dark. Moreover, the woman is wiser than the man, enlightens the man, and so forth. This extraordinary openness to gender bending in ancient India may be an indirect benefit of the rigid social order: since social categories are taken for granted, there is more room for role-playing. But not, when we look closer, all that much room. Chudala has to become a man herself – like a bodhisattva – to teach her husband, and she has to become a woman again to sleep with him. Moreover, the relationship between Chudala and the king is never the relationship of a real husband and wife. She functions like a goddess, giving him her grace and leading him up the garden path of enlightenment, setting up a divine illusion and then revealing herself to him as the gods reveal themselves.

Conclusion

Myths in which gods change their sex are often coded human bisexual or homosexual fantasies. The stories about the gods have their human models and their human moments. To the extent that they are composed by humans and clearly reflect human attitudes, we might, with caution, use them to attempt to formulate hypotheses about ancient Hindu attitudes to homosexual acts, for instance. But myths about transsexual deities are also stories about the way the world is, about the ambiguity of all existence. On that level, they may express a desire that transcends not only appearance but even gender itself, a desire that desires the soul no matter what bits of flesh may be appended to various parts of the body.

In some texts, a male is entirely transformed into a female, with a female mentality and memory (aspects of gender rather than of sex), the situation that we might expect from the fluidity of gender. Yet other texts, probably reflecting the dramatic,

even grotesque, asymmetry between perceptions of people of different genders in actual life in ancient India, seem to reflect the very opposite view, a view of gender as astonishingly durable: the male merely assumes the outer form of the female, retaining his male essence, his male memory and mentality. In the play the *Bhagavadajjuka*, a magician puts the soul of a courtesan into the body of a wandering mendicant and vice versa, and the poet comments: 'The life's breaths of the woman, placed in the body of this Brahmin, will cause a transformation of his essence and his behavior [*sattva, shila*].'¹⁸ Here gender clearly remains distinct from the transformed body: the Brahmin behaves like a courtesan, not like a Brahmin.

When male deities are magically transformed into women but change only their superficial physical genitalia, they do so usually in order to kill a male enemy; this is the case with Vishnu as Mohini. The man retains his male memory, and it is this male consciousness that kills – or, at least, fights. But when the transformation is deeper and the male takes on a female memory, it is this female consciousness that enjoys sex; this is the case with Shiva and Mohini, and in all those myths in which the mind and memory change, too, change their gender when the body changes its sex. This double pattern reaffirms gender stereotypes: males kill, females make babies. But it also suggests that male memory is the killer. Female-to-male transformations reinforce this pattern: the retained female memory makes love, as in the myth of Chudala.

We may also interpret the seduction of a woman by a man, transformed into a woman but retaining his male memory, as a homosexual act. Robert P. Goldman has seen the homosexual scenario at work in certain myths of the transsexual transformation of a man into a woman, which 'takes place as the consequence of a desire to avoid or defuse a potential sexual liaison with a prohibited female seen as the property of a powerful and revered male and/or the desire to be passively enjoyed sexually by such a male'.¹⁹ The repression of a homosexual impulse may account for the violence in so many of these myths: some may be motivated not only by lust but by hatred and the desire for revenge.

But these myths may also express positive homosexual fantasies that until now only psychoanalysts have read in (or into) more realistic stories. Parts of the psychoanalytic hypothesis are substantiated by several different sorts of myths: realistic stories in which men dress as women to seduce other men (like Bhima – with Kichaka – in the *Mahabharata* [4.21.1–7]), and magical stories in which the fantasy is actually acted out by a man who transforms himself into a woman and engages in a heterosexual act with the man (Vishnu as Mohini with Shiva). The most direct variant is also by far the most rare: stories in which men or women, untransformed and undisguised, actually do consummate a homosexual act.²⁰

A homophobic society often inspires a closet homosexuality encoded in texts, which makes it necessary or useful for us to employ a hermeneutics of suspicion if we are to understand them. On a repressed level, available to such a hermeneutics of suspicion, there is a great deal of masked homosexual desire in these myths of transsexuality. The Hindu myths seldom explicitly depict homosexual acts at all, let alone sympathetically. By and large, these are not happy stories, nor charters for the affirmation of a polymorphous, psychopompous Jungian androgyny.

But something far more positive is also going on in the Hindu mythology of bi-

sexuality. Bisexual desire is not an inevitable component of the myths of sex change, but in Hindu texts like the story of Queen Chudala, the change may be effected in the service of heterosexuality and occasionally bisexuality. Some of these myths may be read as tales about bisexual desire rather than homosexual desire *tout court*. The Hindu texts, however homophobic some of them may be, challenge our own ideas about gender; they tell us that the desire for sexual pleasure both with and as members of both sexes is real, though ultimately unrealizable by all but the magically gifted – or cursed. Some of them may express a wish for androgyny and offer, in subversion of the dominant homophobic paradigm, closeted images of a happily expressed and satisfied bisexual desire. The episode of Chudala as the master of enlightenment, and some variants of the magic forests of Shiva and Parvati, epitomize this playful, relaxed attitude toward gender boundary-jumping.

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Notes

1. Doniger O'Flaherty (1980: 292–3).
2. Doniger O'Flaherty (1975: 34).
3. Doniger O'Flaherty (1980: 312–20).
4. *Subhashitaratnakosha* of Vidyakara (1957: 82).
5. *Mahabharata* (1933–69: 1.16–17); Doniger O'Flaherty (1975: 274–80).
6. Doniger O'Flaherty (1973: 87–90).
7. *Brahmanda Purana* (1857: 4.10.41–77); Doniger O'Flaherty (1973: 228–9).
8. *Bhagavata Purana* (1972: 8.12.12–35); *Agni Purana* (1957: 3.17–20).
9. Personal communication from V.R. Narayana Rao, March 1995. See Doniger (1999: 260–5).
10. *Ramayana* (1960–75: 7.87–90).
11. Sayana on *Rig Veda* 10.95. See *Rig Veda* (1890–2).
12. *Brahmanda Purana* (1972: 2.3.60.23–7).
13. *Laws of Manu* (1991: 8.369–70); *The Kamasutra of Vatsyayana* (2002: 5.6.1–4).
14. *Mahabhagavata Purana* 49–58, cited by Hazra (1958–63: 272–3).
15. Doniger O'Flaherty (1980: 116); cf. *Kamasutra* (202: 2.8).
16. *Piramottara kantam* [Brahmottara-kanda] of Varatunkarama Pantiyar (late 16th century). Adhyaya 9. *Cimantani pavanai perra attiyayam*. David Shulman found this text and translated it from the Tamil; I have summarized and greatly condensed his translation. He himself is writing something about this text in the context of a larger essay on the imagination in 16th-century South India.
17. *Yogavasishttha* 6.1.85–108; Doniger O'Flaherty (1984: 280–1).
18. *Bhagavadajjuka Prahasanam* (1978: verse 32).
19. Goldman (1993: 391).
20. *Padma Purana, Svarga Khanda* 16.6–24; translated in Doniger O'Flaherty (1990: 98–100).

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