

## Marginalized: [Transgender] SHIKHANDI

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### Abstract

Trans-genders roles, contributions, sacrifices, achievements, anger, agony, desire and objectives are not less than others. The significance of Shikhandi cannot be devaluated, underestimated or neglected due to any of the reasons. My study of 'Shikhandi' as Trans-gender is to re-establish the participations of this marginalized section. A thorough study of the character will surely enhance and add certain attributes to the stereotyped thought process of the existing world. As it is evident that the Mahabharata has been recognized as one of the oldest, largest and most popular epics of the world. It has been acknowledged as one of the most significant epics out of two-The Ramayana and The Mahabharata. The epic has immense religious and philosophical significance in india as well as outside. It consists of a mass of mythological and didactic material.

Keywords: Trans-Gender, Trans-Man and Trans-Woman.

## Introduction

The Mahabharata has been recognized as one of the oldest, largest and most popular epics of the world. It has been acknowledged as one of the most significant epics out of two- The Ramayana and The Mahabharata. The epic has immense religious and philosophical significance in india as well as outside. It consists of a mass of mythological and didactic material. It narrates the conflict, struggle, tension, conspiracy and battles of between two groups of cousins - The Kaurava and The Pandava. The story of the Mahabharata is known by the majorities of Hindus all over the World. The purpose of study and examination of SHIKHANDI- a typical character of the epic is to understand the very purpose behind its creation and its impacts on the readers and believers.

The construction of Mahabharata differs from version to version. In one of the oldest versions, it contains 2, 00,000 verses with long prose passages. It has over 1.8 million words. It was composed in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE or even earlier. It is believed that it was narrated by a student of Vyasa. The epic is divided in 18 parvans or sections. The Bhagwat Gita is the most popular part of the Mahabharata.

The Word epic has been derived from the Ancient Greek term “epikos” meaning a ‘poetic story’. In literature, an epic is taken as a long narrative poem narrating the life and deeds of a heroic person of incomparable and unparallel valor, bravery, wisdom and character. Epics are found in almost all literatures of the world. Sanskrit has been considered as the oldest language of the World. This is regarded as the mother of all modern Indian languages. The richness of Sanskrit language is reflected through a large number of epics narrating the life and deeds of God, Goddesses or some special character or characters.

## Transgender

The term 'transgender' was coined by John F. Oliven, a Psychiatrist of Columbia University, USA in his work 'Second Hygiene and Pathology' in the year 1965. The term 'transsexual' is misleading. It was defined by various scholars including Virginia Prince, an American transgender activist. Up to 1975, both trans-gender and trans-people were used as umbrella terms. During the decades of 1990s and mid 2000s, the term was used to denote female to male (FtM) for men who transitioned from female to male and male to female (MtF) for wherever who transitioned from male to female. However, these terms are now obsolete. Instead of these terms Trans-men and Trans-women are used now-a-days.

As far as the image and character of Shikhandi is concerned, it has been highly interesting, complex, challenging and symbolic for the readers and even audiences. As per the available sources, he was born as a baby girl to Draupada the king of panchala. His name was Shikhandini. Draupada was the son of king Prishata. Panchala was located in the Ganga-Yamuna Drab of the upper Gangetic plain. It had been an ancient kingdom of northern India during 900 BCE to 500 BCE up to late Vedic Age. The kingdom was allied with the Kuru Kingdom. Later it was absorbed into the Maurayan Empire.

Available sources do not confirm the family details of Draupada. Majority of the sources agree with having three children Shikhandi, Dhristadyumna and Draupadi. The conflict between Draupada and Drona leads to revenge. Both were the disciples of Rishi Bhardwaja. Rishi Bhardwaja was the father of Drona. During close friendship, Draupada promised Drona to provide half of his kingdom. Once he ascended the throne, he refused to acknowledge Drona. In anger, Drona takes revenge through his brave disciple Arjuna and other Pandavas. Draupadi became the wife of Pandavas and Dhristadyumna took the revenge of his father's humiliation by beheading Drona in the battle of Kurukshetra in Mahabharata.

Past Life of Shikhandi

Different versions of Mahabharata narrate the previous birth of Shikhandi as Amba. Amba was the eldest daughter of the King Kashi. She was taken by force by Bhishma along with her sisters Ambika and Ambalika as punishment to the Kingdom of Kashi for not inviting Hastinapur to the ceremony. Bhishma forcibly brought these sisters to Hastinapur and handed over to Vichitravirya the crown Prince of Hastinapur. Vichitravirya married only Ambika and Ambalika because Amba refused his proposal for her love for Salwa. When she was sent to Salwa with profound respect, Salwa rejected her. After this, she insisted Bhishma to marry her to maintain Kshatriya Dharma.

Unfortunately, Amba's appeal was declined by Bhishma due to his vow of Celibacy. She kept trying to take her revenge. She worshipped Lord Shiva and finally Lord Shiva gave a boon to cause Bhishma's death. Lord Shiva told her that her future incarnation would be the main cause of Bhishma's demise. Eager to finish Bhishma, she killed herself and kept killing herself till she was incarnated into satisfactory situation. It is mentioned that before Kauravas' and Pandavas' war in the Kurukshetra, she was reborn as Shikandini, the daughter of king Draupada. However, another version of Mahabharata also narrates that Shikhandi was the incarnation of a rakshasa (demon).

#### Shikhandi's Gender

So far as the available records are concerned, Shikhandi is male but born female. He is a eunuch. Earlier, the character was female and his name was Shikhandini. The story of Shikhandi is highly interesting. The epic composed by C. Rajgopalachari narrates that when Shikhandini was young as the daughter of Draupad, he discovered the garland of ever-blooming blue lotuses hung on the palace gate. She put the garland around her neck. Seeing this, Draupad banished her daughter from the Kingdom to protect him from the wrath of

Bhishma. It is said that he performed austerities (Tapashya) in the dense forest and transformed into a male named Shikhandi.

Another version of Mahabharata narrates different story of Shikhandi. Draupad was eager to have an heir and wandered into the forest to have that. There he met Shikhandini. When he picked up her, a heavenly voice was heard. The instruction was to raise Shikhandini as a man. Later he was married to the Prince Dashvna. When the gender was revealed she left the palace and escaped into a forest. She met a Yaksha who exchanged his gender with her.

The third story, related to the birth and gender of Shikhandi, reveals that Amba is reborn as child Shikhandi. However, on gender basis he was sometime whole as a woman and sometimes a eunuch. With the boon of Lord Shiva, Amba transformed or reborn Shikhandi remembers all the details of her past life. It is also mentioned in some of the early version that Shikhandi was Amba reborn and a straight female. As the Kingdom of Panchala was free from gender discrimination, she got the opportunity to become a warrior.

The complexities of the story of Shikhandi or Shikhandini reveals following facts:

- I. Gender concept.
- II. Attraction for male child.
- III. Sense of Interiority on Gender basis
- IV. A Kingdom without gender discrimination.
- V. Role of gender in the battle.
- VI. War ideology or principles.

The result of Shikhandi's participation in the battle of Mahabharata leads to the death of Bhishma. Bhishma recognizes Shikhandi as Amba and he refused to fight against a woman. Arjuna one of the Pandavas and brother-in-law of Shikhandi used her as an instrument to defeat and kill Bhishma in the battle.

## Death of Shikhandi

The death of Shikhandi has remained as confusing, complex and doubtful as his life. According to a version of the Mahabharata, Shikhandi was killed by Shakuni, Ashwatthama and Dusshasana. He died on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the battle of Kurukshetra. He was severely injured by Shakuni and left for heavenly abode after the death of Bhishma keeping oath as Amba. Another source narrates that he was killed by Ashwatthama on the 18<sup>th</sup> day of battle of Kurukshetra. It is said that he was killed in a sword battle with Ashwatthama.

The death of Shikhandi has not been given due importance in any of the versions of the Mahabharata. His death was given importance in relation to the death of Bhishma. However, he played crucial role in the battle of Kurukshetra proving himself the cause of the death of Bhishma. His support and sacrifice to Pandavas are unparalleled and incomparable. Had he not supported Arjuna in the battle of Kurukshetra, it would have been almost impossible to defeat Bhishma, the gallant. Bhishma's obedience to the ethics of the battle took his life.

## Conclusions

Despite confusions and controversies regarding birth, gender, deeds and death, Shikhandi has been one of the most significant and challenging characters of the Mahabharata. Let Shikhandi be a Trans-gender or Trans-woman, he appears to me as part and parcel of the Royal Family and War-Fare. Shikhandi is not alone. There are other characters in almost all the versions of the Mahabharata.

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