

STATUS OF WOMEN AS REFLECTED IN THE MYTHOLOGY OF GARUDA

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Indian mythology is the source of art, art historians mostly depend on sources coming from the puranas itihasas agamas and silpasastras in their interpretation of Indian art. These sources also after clues to bring out the sociological notions of the past. One of the problems much discussed in Indian history is the status of women through the ages. The puranas and art historical evidences offer ample scope to study certain issues which have persisted in Indian tradition. This article examines the mythology of Garuda in order to throw some light on the status of women.¹

Garuda and Hanuman are two demi-gods of the Hindu pantheon who want to the rescue of women when they were in trouble. Hanuman is the attendant of Sri Rama of the solar Family who befriended the hero and offered his services to him along with that his monkey clan, headed by Sugriva and Jambavan.² After the abduction of Sita by Ravana, Rama, and Laksmana went to Kiskindha mountain where he met Hanuman, when Rama Southern direction and was of great help to Rama recovering Sita from the clutches of Ravana.³ Similarly Garuda offered his services to his own mother, Vinata, to redeem her from Slavery. The story of Garuda is told in the Garuda Purana Ramayana and Mahabharata.⁴

The story is that there was a powerful rsi called Kasyapa. He had married all the daughters of Daksha Praja Pati.⁵ of whom two were great. They were Vinata and Kadru. Vinata was the beloved of Kasyapa. Kadru could not tolerate the privileges enjoyed by her rival and so hatched a plot to bring her under control. Vinata was blessed to have two powerful sons and Kadru 100 nagas 'Snakes'.⁶ Both of them are said to have laid 102 eggs, of which Kadru hatched quickly and the Snakes came to life. But in case of the eggs of Vinata even after 500 years the eggs did not hatch. So in a hurry Vinata broke open an egg. An immature baby came out of the egg and he was Aruna who became the Charioteer of Surya, the Sun God. He cursed his mother to become a slave for having caused his immature birth. After 500 more years the other egg broke open from which Kadru, the kite, came out. Kadru was jealous of Vinata who had won Kasyapa's favour. So Garuda played a trick with Vinata and engaged her to a competition. She was to ask Vinata a question and if the latter's reply was wrong. She had to be Kadru's slave, Vinata agreed. Kadru asked her what the colour of the divine horse. Uccaihssrayas was the horse which emerged from the ocean when the Ksirabhdhi

"Ocean of milk was churned.⁷ It was white in colour. But the snake – sons of Kadru's hung themselves on the horse and made it appear like black. Vinata said the horse was white but when viewed by both the sisters. It appeared black: So vinata had to be Kadru's slave and lead her life in servitude.

When Garuda came to age, he asked his mother. The reason for her bondage. The story was told to him. Garuda approached his Senior-mother and asked her what he can do for her in order to redeem his own mother from slavery. Kadri told if Garuda brings the amrtakhalasa pot of ambrosia from Indraloke "world of Indra".she will set free vinata. Garuda being powerful bird. Flew to the world of Indra and got the amrtakhalasa after successfully fighting with indra the king of gods. Kadru's aim was to offer the amrta to her snake – sons so that they could attain Immortality. Indra knew this and did not like it so he stopped Garuda on the way and told him about the tricks of Kadru Garuda advised Indra to snatch the Khalasa from the snakes after it had been handed over to them Garuda gave the Khalasa to Kadru and got his mothers relief of immediately the advised the snakas to consume the amtra after a ritual bath. The snakes placed the amrtakhalasa on a bed of grass and went to have their bath . At that time Indra came to the spot and flow a way having taken the khalasa in his possession.

The mythology of Garuda offers various clues to the process of various clues to the process of enslavement. To begin with a son born to a mother (Aruna and Vinata) himself curses his mother to be a slave. It is due to frustration because he had been taken out of the womb (in the egg) i maturely which lead to certain Physical handicap. A women is enslaved by a woman (vinata by kadru). A mother is rescued by her own son (vinata and Garuda). A woman relieves a woman from slavery after getting tips (kadru and vinata).

Similar stories of the enslavement of women are not wanting in Indian literature. Haris candra, for example when forced out of his kingdom. Sells his wife a slave and himself adopts the way of life skin to that of his wife.⁸ The enter family of a royal king undergoes the hardship of a slavery , though ultimately rodeened.

In all these mythologies the status of women is involved. In case of the Mather of Garuda though. She was the honourable wife of a powerful sage. She is subjected to bondage by her own sister on sinister grounds. It gives clue to the fact that within a house hold one women could enjoy privileges and the other undergo the ordeals of bondage. It as well takes place in the Ramayana where Dasara tha's favourite queen. Kavsalya who is mute and disqualifies the legitimate claims of 'Sri Rama to be the crown-prince. This disgrulitication renders injustice not only to kausalya but also the wife of Rama, sita, who prefers a voluntary excommunication following the footsteps of her husband

In all these cases the chief cause of an injustice done to a woman is through a woman.⁹ when a woman herself could not do justice to a woman where comes the question of the status of woman. The primary factor in all these cases being a termagant woman. the mute man (e.g) kasyapa and Ravana the latter was again instigated by a woman, his sister surpanakha.¹⁰ Is only the second factor in a drama of the injustice rendered. In contemporary times also inseveral cases of the dowry – murders (forcing a poor daughter –

in- law to be consumed by the flames of kitchen) women play a vital role as it has been reported time and again in the mass media so it women suffer, their own sex is party involved in the criminal proceedings. It has been ably supported by the mythology of Garuda and his mother vinata. In case of Ravana he was advised by his council and members of the royal family (e.g. vibhisana) not to follow the wrong path by doing injustice to a woman. But kasyapa though a great rsi the source of all righteousness fails to control kadru and rescue vinata. Perhaps he was kept mum by the influence wielded by woman (kadru) who was an anti woman. The simple lesson is that women should be conscious of their status and retain it by any means not to be overrun by a man or woman.

Notes and References

1. P.Chandramohan, Garuda in medieval art of South India (Ph.D . thesis The Tamil University) Thanjavur.2001.
2. For details of Hunuman see Raju Kalidos. Pancamukha- Anjaneya in canonic Literture and Art East and West Vol.41: 1-4.pp.133-51.Naples 1991.
3. See the Kiskinda – Kanda of the Ramajana for more details.
4. For details of mythologies see P. Chandramohan. Op. Cit. S. Nagas Garuda the celestial Bird, New Delhi. 1992.
5. Prajapati 'Lord of mankind' were Progenitors of the humand race in Hindu mythology.
6. Nagas (Snakes) and Garudas (birds) wore bitter enemies. The Latter devour the former.
7. Churning the ocean of milk is an important mythology by which the heavenly nectar, the amrta was obtained. For details of the myth. See Raj'u Kalidos, Visnu's mohini. Incarnation... (East and west. Vol. 34. 1 -3. Pp. 183- 204: Rome 198.
8. For details see the Ariccantirapruanam in Tamil.
9. Kaikeyi in the original story is induced by another woman, the hunchbacked, manthara (T. Kuni) Kuni in Tamil tradition is the embodiment of all wickedness as is Sakuni, the male, in the Mahabharata.
10. For more details of the ethical issues in the Ramayana See R.K.K. Rajarajan. Sitapurnam: Changing thematic idioms in Sanskrit and Tamil. Professor Helmut Nespiral Felicitatio Volume. Berlin 2001.