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**An Exploration of Post-Human and Queerness in Devdutt Pattanaik's
*Shikhandi and other tales they don't tell you***

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Abstract:

The world has advanced dramatically through various technology and contemporary adaptations, yet mythical and moral value stories continue to play an important part in post-humanistic and modernistic societies of the 21st century. The greatest two epics of India plays a vital role in literature. Despite being fictional, novels have the power to bring about dramatic life changes. This article deals with feminism, patriarchy, and queerness and how it addresses the post-humanism notion that is centered on the twenty-first century and the present generation. Devdutt Pattanaik tells the stories of Shikhandi and many other characters whose genders are changed and explains about their birth purpose. This article focusses on the characters' queerness and identity problems, as well as the causes behind their gender transitions, and emphasizes their flexibility, fluidity, and social purpose. Queerness and post humanism is interconnected. This article introduces the primary notion of post humanism connected with queerness in this book “*Shikhandi and other tales they don't tell you*”.

Keywords: Post Humanism, Queerness, Patriarchy, Fate, Destiny, Justice, Fluidity, Flexibility.

Introduction:

Dr. Devdutt Pattanaik was born in 1970. He finished his studies at the University of Mumbai. He is the foremost mythologist in India. He is recognized as India's best-selling mythologist. He is well-known for recounting the biggest epics, the Ramayana and Mahabharata, and interpreting them from various angles. We might refer to him as a mythologist who specializes in mythology and religion. His first book, *Shiva: An Introduction*, was published in 2007. His notable works include *Sita, Book of Ram, The Pregnant King, Myth = Mithya, 7 Secrets of Vishnu, 7 Secrets of Devi, and Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of the Mahabharata*. Queer theory is a fascinating disciplinary approach that originated in the 1990s. Its origins are mostly focused on feminist thought, LGBTQ theory, and critical theory. It is a method for challenging and exploring traditional notions of gender, identity, and sexuality. Post humanism, on the other hand, is a segment of postmodernism that originated in the mid-twentieth century in the fields of literature and critical theory. It questions conventional human beliefs, including the premise that humans are the most significant and important species to arise in our planet. The concept of post humanism is adaptable, and it already accepts humans' superiority. It is fluid and dynamic, interacting with animals, artificial intelligence, and nonhumans, and feminism, queer theory, and technological advancements all helped to shape post humanist Feminist philosophers who emerged between 1970 and 1980 had an important part in the development of post humanism in feminism and queer theory. Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* (1985) advocated a post humanist vision that combined human and technological elements. The late twentieth century saw technological developments in the invention of computers, which prepared the door for post humanism. Cary Wolfe defines post humanism as "1 On the other hand, Wolfe points out, his use of the term, which "names the

embodiment and embeddedness of the human being in not just its biological but also its technological world, ‘is exactly the opposite: “post humanism in my sense isn’t post human at all—in the sense of being ‘after’ our embodiment has been transcended—but is only post humanist, in the sense that it opposes the fantasies of disembodiment and autonomy, inherited from humanism itself” (xv). This article provides a literary examination of the themes of post humanism and queerness in the character of Shikhandi and the other characters in the book *Shikhandi And Other Tales They Don’t Tell You*.

Analysis of the Queer Character Shikhandi :

Shikhandi is the central character in the epic Mahabharata. She is significant because she caused the turning point in the Kurukshetra battle. Shikhandi is the reincarnation of Princess Amba. Amba, Ambika, and Ambalika were three princesses who attended their weddings. Bhishma, Hastinapur's defender, interrupted their marriages and abducted them, intending to marry these three to his half-brother Vichitravirya. Amba revealed that she wished to marry Shalva, the king of Salwa. Hearing this, Bhishma let go of Amba. Unfortunately, Shalva rejected Amba, claiming she belongs to another guy. Then Amba went to Vichitravirya to seek justice by marrying her. He rejects her, claiming that once given, a gift cannot be returned. Frustrated Amba then approached Bhishma and sought to marry her. He rejected her by stating that he had sworn a vow of chastity. Amba then went to Parasuram, a great guru, warrior, and Bhishma's instructor, to seek justice. It resulted in a conflict, which Lord Shiva halted and warned Amba that her wish to kill Bhishma would only be fulfilled in her incarnation. I hear this, Amba. To hasten her next life, Amba leapt into the fire and died (41).

Amba was incarnated as the daughter of Drupada, the king of Panchala. She was named as Shikhandi. However, Drupada desired a son, and Lord Shiva had promised him one.

Shikhandi, although being born a woman, was taught skills typically imparted to men. Even she was married to a woman. On their wedding night, her wife discovered that her spouse was not a man. She fled to her father, claiming she had been duped. Shikhandi found out about her birth and felt guilty for her misfortune; she resolved to commit herself in a wilderness. However, a yaksha named Stuna assisted her by donating his masculinity to her for one night, and in doing so, she demonstrated to her wife her own manhood. Kubera, the ruler of the yakshas, was furious at Stuna for lending his manhood. But, as promised, Shikhandi returned to give Stuna the manhood. Kubera was delighted by this conduct and permitted them to preserve Stuna's manhood with Shikhandi till she died. Shikhandi thus transforms into a man.

Shikhandi's queerness is evident in the fluidity with which he transitions from male to female. She is changing from male to woman to meet her own wants as well as the divine intent; it is a fluid transformation. According to queer theory, gender that is not established by biological causes or fixed fundamentals can be fluid, hence Shikhandi's traits reflect queerness as she transitions between genders. Shikhandi's persona causes an alteration of identity. In queer theory, metamorphosis refers to both physical and social changes in society. It led her to slay Bhishma on the battlefield.

During the Kurukshetra War between the Pandavas and Kauravas. Bhishma stood on the Kauravas' side. And he was unbeaten for nine of the war's 18 days. Krishna awakened from this hint and ordered Shikhandi to enter the war on the tenth day. Arjuna beat Bhishma with the assistance of Shikhandi. Through the queerness of Shikhandi, the patriotism can be seen.

Pattanaik quoting the importance of Shikhandi by quoting "Shikhandi plays a key role in the Mahabharata because his arrival marks the turning point of the war. Bhishma dies right in the of the 18-day war on the tenth day making the queerness here not accidental but quiet deliberate."(47)

Shikhandi's narrative illustrates the notion of queerness and patriotism. According to Pattanaik, queer culture has existed since antiquity and Hindu myths contain several references to queerness. Shikhandi's gender is a problematic phrase, and males are regarded as fighters, and we just mentioned that mentioned that post humanism is flexible, which is demonstrated by shifting the genders of Shikhandi and Stuna. Shikhandi's queerness along with his/her flexibility and fluidity, made him/her a fascinating figure. Gender transformation in response to conditions alludes to both queerness and post humanism. In the twenty-first century, it is conceivably to transfer or replace organs using technology.

Post humanistic analysis in the short story of Bhagirath, who is born of two women :

In this short story of Devdutt Pattanaik, King Dilip has two wives but no offspring. He urged the rishis to produce a potion so that his wives would swallow it and bear him children, but he died before the potion was finished. The sages then suggested that one of the queens swallow the elixir and approach the other as a spouse. This deed resulted in the birth of a baby called Bhagirath. But the kid was born with no bones. One day, the deformed sage, Ashtavakra stopped by the palace and saw the infant, so he blessed him with bones, and he became normal and eventually became a powerful ruler. Pattanaik's short tale refers the notion of post humanism. The notion of artificial fertilization is shown in this narrative about Bhagirath, who was born of two mothers. How might a lady give birth to a baby without a man's assistance? And in the twenty-first century, it is feasible to give birth to a baby without the assistance of a man by locating a suitable donor. In post humanist thought, the concept of frozen sperm plays a part in redefining reproduction and deconstructing biological barriers since it was utilized after the king's death. It challenges the idea of the human body as an unchangeable entity. Artificial fertility exceeds the boundaries of biological reproduction, which occurs naturally.

Post humanistic analysis in the story of Urvashi who was born of no woman:

There used to be two hermits and warriors named Nara and Narayana. Under the Himalayan badari tree, they used to practice meditation. Fearful of their strength, Indra, the lord of the devas, dispatched armies of apsaras to seduce them. Nara observed heavenly damsels approaching him. He turned to Narayana. Narayana painted a lovely woman on his thigh with the stem of a mango leaf. A nymph appeared that was more lovely than all of Indira's nymphs. Her name was Urvashi as she emerged from the thighs (Uru in Sanskrit) of Narayana. She went on to become Indira's favorite apsara (88). This idea of heavenly human interaction and hybrid creatures. Posthumanism frequently exceeds human objectives through technical or heavenly means. The term post humanism alludes to change or transcendence. The birth of Urvashi represents a transcendence here. Urvashi is regarded as a hybrid entity from birth. She was created by a heavenly being with the ability to assume human form, which is a post-humanistic aspects. Humans do not follow or acknowledge the conventional categories of human, god, Satan, evil etc. in a post humanistic environment.

The queer question asked by Pattanaik here is : how would Urvashi identify Narayana and Nara who were inseparable ? Could they be two fathers? Will that be acceptable?(89).

The answer is given in the instance of Nara and Narayana, we may observe a post humanistic interpretation of technology and the divine. They were both considered people, yet they followed aesthetic practices. They got godlike abilities and used them to make a woman. This represents the post humanistic idea that an individual's potential is boosted by extrinsic factors.

Queerness is a tool for justice:

In the tale of Aravan, who was the complete man. The Kauravas and Pandavas engaged in a fierce fight on Kurukshetra. They were finally matched. The Pandavas oracles

revealed that human sacrifice was the only way to satisfy the goddess of battle and achieve triumph. Three males were deemed worthy of sacrifice: Krishna, Arjuna, and Aravan. Since Krishna is regarded as divine, and Arjuna were indispensable, the Pandavas decided to sacrifice Aravan. But Aravan wanted a wife before he was sacrificed; marriage entitled him to a cremation and proper funerary offerings. What use is a life when no woman pines for you when you die? he said (102). However, no woman in Earth is eager to marry a man who will die on the wedding day. So Krishna transformed into Mohini and spent the night with Aravan; at morning, he was sacrificed, and Mohini mourned for him like a widow.

Posthumanism frequently views identity as reciprocal, hybrid, and adaptable. Mohini here can take on the shape of female, masculine, human and divine. Krishna's transition into Mohini exemplifies post-humanistic and humanistic ethics. Gender is a fluid category in post-humanism. The analysis of achieving justice from queerness and posthumanism is brought about by different perspectives and view points and provided the door to achieving justice for injustice.

Pattanaik shows the fluidity of Krishna from transforming into women by "The Idea of Krishna, or Vishnu, becoming a woman is a common one. In the images of Krishna, he is often shown sporting a nose ring and a braided plait like a woman. To establish *dharma*, Vishnu takes many forms: animal, human, priest, king, servant, male and female. (104)

Post Humanistic and Queer analysis in the tale Ila, who became a man when the moon waned:

Lord Shiva and Parvati were having intimacy in the wilderness once. To escape the elders' shame, Shiva casts a spell that transforms anybody who enters the forest at that time into a woman. Prince Sudyumna unknowingly entered the forest. The magic transformed Sudyumna into a lady, and his steed into a mare. Sudyumna, understanding the enchantment,

implored Shiva to reverse it. Spells cannot be reversed; however, they can be changed. Sudyumna or Ila would be a man when the moon was waxing, and a woman when it was waning. Sudyumna had little choice but to accept his fate, and he spent the rest of his life swapping genders. He hoped that something wonderful would happen in his life. One day, a nobleman named Bhoodh appeared from the planet Mercury, dropped from the heavens, and approached Ila, expressing his wish to marry her. He began to explain why he wanted to be Ila's spouse. Tara, the goddess of the stars, and Brihaspati, the ruler of Jupiter. But Tara fell in love with Chandra, the moon deity, and eloped with him. A major fight with Indra, the sky deity, forced Chandra to return Tara to Brihaspati. Tara returned, carrying a kid in her belly. The issue arose: whose child is this. Brihaspati stated that it was his child. So did Chandra. Tara did not speak. Everyone was confused. But a surprise happened: an unborn kid from the womb uttered that. 'I am the lover's child not the husband's'. (127). The gods assembled there were impressed with the unborn child's honesty, but not Brihaspati. He condemned Boodh for being born as an intermediate gender. 'Neither a man nor a woman you shall be' (127). So Sudyumna, who was both male and female, wedded Boodh, who was neither. When Sudyumna matured into a man, Boodh became his wife. When Sudyumna matured into a lady, Boodh became her spouse, and the cycle repeated. And they both live their lives like way and they lived according to their curses.

Flexibility, fluidity, and hybridity are key themes in this story's posthumanism ideology. In the notion of fluid embodiment, Ila's identity is defined by external influences, such as lunar cycles. Ila is seen as a transitional area between humans and non-humans, masculine and female. The comparison of Ila's existence to the Cyborg Concept undermines the nature-culture divide. It is not about "man" and "woman," but rather an entity whose identity is formed by cosmic and ecological cycles. Furthermore, Ila's gender transitions are consistent with nonhuman causes, implying that human identity is not static but rather malleable and changing.

According to the queer interpretation, Ila's persona is created to transform identities through flexibility and fluidity. He does not fit into the usual roles that society has established. He embodies the performative and flexible aspect of gender, in line with Judith Butler's concept of gender as a repetitive social performance. Boodh's relationship with Ila is regarded as an emotional and supportive attachment, demonstrating the affection that adjusts to Ila's changing gender. Queer theory serves to contextualize the heterosexual standard worldview. Queerness conveys the notion of desire and identification; if Boodh is drawn to Ila's changing gender, this implies sexual fluidity rather than fixed heterosexuality.

Conclusion:

Devdutt Pattanaik concludes this work *Shikhandi and other tales they don't tell you* by saying it provides fascinating portrayals of queerness via the prism of mythology. Pattanaik retells the old mythology in which themes of masculinity and femininity reveal our true selves. Queer transgender people are not a new phenomena; they have a long history. It appeared in our major epics, such as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Artificial fertility goes beyond the limits of biological reproduction, which happens spontaneously. This article promotes the nature of queerness in human society, as well as post humanism and its application in the human experience. It also encourages a reassessment of human identity. By recounting and examining characters with the flexible indulgence in order to comprehend individuality.

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