

REFLECTION OF MYTHOLOGY IN ODIA LITERATURE: A FEMINIST STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Odisha, a land of vibrant celebrations, is renowned for its rich cultural heritage, ancient temples, and diverse communities. Odia Mythology serves as a unique blend of caste-based, tribal, and religious traditions. Beyond Hinduism, Odisha is primarily united by the Jagannath Culture and the worship of goddesses of Shakti. This tradition views the four varnas—Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra—through a lens of divine integration rather than strict segregation. Influenced by Puranic traditions and local folklore, Odia mythology emphasizes Dharma (the cosmic law of duty) and the complex consequences of one's actions. Furthermore, women in Odia mythology are portrayed in multifaceted roles, blending the divine and nurturing souls. This storied history dates back to the pre-Vedic period (around 500 BCE), long before Sanskrit influence, and was influenced by tribal reverence. However, overtime, the narrative focus shifted toward the domestic sphere. This evolution is most prominent in the transition from women fighting for their inherent rights to being primarily defined by Stree Dharma (the specific duties of a woman) and Pativrata (the ideal of the devoted wife). Through the iconic figures of Maa Laxmi and Mangala, we see a complex interplay: while they are revered as goddesses, their characters also serve as a blueprint for the societal expectations of womanhood—balancing immense inner strength with the constraints of moral and familial duty. This historical progression reached its zenith with the rise of Shaktism with independent protectors like Chandi and Bhadrakali, where moral and cultural values are transformed to fierce characters.

Keywords: Odia Mythology; Jagannath Culture; Women; Stree Dharma; Shaktism; Indian tradition.

1. INTRODUCTION

Literature is an extensive and varied idea which includes imaginative and telling uses of words to share thoughts, feelings, happenings, and realities concerning the way people live. Especially Odia literature holds official status in Odisha and is the language is spoken by approximately 45 to 50 million individuals. The literary tradition of Odisha reflects distinctive heritage, synthesizing Buddhist, tantric, Shaivite, Vaishnava, and folk elements into a cohesive cultural expression. Devotional works reinforced the Jagannath-centred religious culture, while epics like the Sarala *Mahabharata* made Sanskrit classics accessible to common people, fostering regional pride and unity. This literary heritage played a crucial role in the linguistic state formation that led to Odisha's establishment as a separate province in 1936. From early tantric and Buddhist mysticism through medieval bhakti movements that democratized religious participation and challenged caste barriers to modern realism that critiqued colonialism, famine, gender inequality, and social injustice, Odia literature has served as a vehicle for philosophical inquiry, ethical reflection, and cultural resistance. Odia literature has influenced neighbouring Eastern Indian literary traditions while enriching India's multilingual cultural

landscape with distinctive themes of devotion, maritime history (evident in folk narratives like *Tapoi Katha*), and engagement with modernity. The numerous Jnanpith and Sahitya Academi awards received by Odia writers testify to the tradition's significant stature within Indian literature. In an era of globalization, Odia literature continues to address pressing issues of cultural identity, ecological concerns, and diaspora experiences while maintaining meaningful connection to its classical heritage.

Odia Mythology

Odisha is a land of rich cultural heritage and deep-seated social norms, where history is inextricably linked with mythology. The term "myth" refers to the foundational narratives that give shape to a society's worldview, ethics, and art. Odia mythology, specifically, addresses a profound body of legends and folklore originating from the heart of the state. It represents a distinct, syncretic blend of mainstream Hinduism, ancient tribal beliefs, and local folk narratives. This unique cultural fabric is centred primarily around the profound veneration of Lord Jagannath, who serves as the unifying figure between indigenous roots and broader Vedic traditions. Odisha, known as the land of "thirteen festivals in twelve months," celebrates traditions deeply tied to seasonal shifts.

“Varshanam Bharatam Srestham

Deshanam utkalah smrtah

Utkalasya samo desha

Desha nasti mahitale” (Vyasa 39-40)

The above lines taken from the Brahma Purana describe the traditional worth of Odisha reminds us that it is one of the spiritual lands of eastern India. The lines explains that “among all the regions (*Varshas*), Bharat is the best; Utkala (Odisha) is the most famous. There is no land on the surface on the earth equal to Utkala.” Odisha's diverse and complex spirituality is reflected in Odia mythology, which has integrated ancient tribal practices, Vedic scriptures, and various forms of worship such as Vaishnavism (devotion to Lord Jagannath), Shaivism, Shaktism and other regional cult practices, as well as each of the many forms of tribal worship that centre around animism, Shaktism and the reverence for nature, bringing together forms of worship that emphasize devotion and community. The worship of the animistic and the reverence for nature and the spirit of the forest and the spirit of the deity (of mother goddesses); as well as the practices of worship in the community of the Saura and the Kondh of the spirit of the forest and of mother goddesses that were animistic and which were part of the momentum of the Aryan culture of the early centuries of the Common Era.

In Odia stories, gods and goddesses usually come out on top, beating back both mythical monsters and real-life threats. These tales love to highlight how the divine steps in to protect people, and what happens when someone gets too arrogant or fanatical. Right at the centre stands Lord Jagannath, this deeply compassionate, all-embracing god who somehow always survives—even after his temple faces attacks or desecration. Alongside him is Goddess Lakshmi, especially in her form as Vimala inside the Jagannath temple, and a whole lineup of powerful local Shakta goddesses. Take Mangala, for example. People worship her at Kakatpur, and she's all about new beginnings and keeping folks safe. The legends say she's like a caring mother—she shows up when you're in trouble, listens to simple prayers, and grants wishes, even if all you have is a village offering.

Then there's Manikeswari, fierce and protective, especially in Kalahandi and the western districts. Her stories weave in tribal traditions, royal support, and her knack for helping people win tough battles. But the one who really stands out is Samaleswari, or Samalei, from Sambalpur. She watches over western Odisha, her shrine sitting beside the Mahanadi River.

People say she started out as a tribal goddess under a silk-cotton tree, but later the Chauhan kings brought her into the mainstream as the kingdom's main mother figure. She's famous for her protective rage—one legend claims she cursed the invader *Kala Pahada* after he attacked temples, drowning him in the river. That story sticks with people because it shows indigenous faith holding strong against outside threats, and Samaleswari as this fierce, maternal force keeping her community safe and upholding dharma. (Nayak 96-98)

If anyone in Odisha is asked about a villain from their history, the name that comes up first is *Kala Pahada*—literally “Black Mountain.” He was a 16th-century general, working for the *Karrani dynasty* of Bengal, who stormed into Odisha around 1568. That invasion ended the independent Hindu Gajapati kingdom after King Mukunda Deva fell. *Kala Pahada*, whose real name was probably Muhammad Farmuli (Persian sources mention something close to that), was Afghan by origin (Dash, 2021). He led raids across the region, smashing temples as part of his military campaign. The stories say he tried to burn the idols at the Jagannath Temple, but legend insists the sacred *Brahma padartha* survived—thanks to a miraculous rescue. He did major damage at Konark Sun Temple, Lingaraj, and other sites, though some historians now think the stories about total destruction got more dramatic over the years.

In Odia folklore, especially in 19th-century nationalist retellings and texts like the *Madala Panji*, *Kala Pahada* becomes more than just a conqueror. He's almost a tragic anti-hero—a devout Brahmin once called Kalachand Roy or Rajiv Lochan Ray, a true Jagannath devotee. The story goes he fell for a Muslim princess, married her after converting to Islam, but later wanted to return to his old faith. When he showed up at Puri seeking purification, the priests refused him. Betrayed and furious, he turned against his roots, rejecting idol worship and rampaging through temples as payback. Some versions get even darker—he tries to burn the deities or rip out sacred trees, only for goddesses like Samaleswari to curse him with a terrible death, drowning or worse. Over time, the legend painted him as a symbol of religious fanaticism, cultural loss, and what happens when someone loses their identity. But honestly, if anyone ask modern historians, most of this personal betrayal stuff is probably a later invention. It helped people process old invasions and build up stories of Hindu resistance, but the real story is a lot messier.

Some stories in Odia mythology bring in classic villains – like demons and rakshasas from local versions of the *Mahabharata*, for example. These characters stand for all kinds of chaos: greed, jealousy, disorder. They go up against the heroes, making the lines between right and wrong pretty clear. Other tales pull from tribal folklore, with evil spirits messing up harvests or daily life. But in the end, goddesses step in—sometimes through shamanic rituals, sometimes with a well-placed curse— and set things right. What peoples see, again and again, is this idea that faith, humility, and harmony win out over destruction.

Research Objectives

- To explore how Maa Lakshmi, Savitri and Maa Mangala represent womanhood in Odia mythology by shaping the identity, roles and expectations of modern Odia women.
- To explore the cultural difference and linguistic authenticity of Odisha and prove the conception or the misconception thoroughly.
- To assess the relevance and impact of these mythological archetypes on the empowerment and challenges faced by women in modern Odisha.

Research methodology

This paper examines the role of the female figures in Odia mythology and their impact on modern Odia women through a feminist textual analysis. Here is a qualitative study of

Balarama Dasa's *Lakshmi Purana*, Sarala Das's *Chandi Purana*, and Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol* to elaborate on intricate philosophical and spiritual symbols to highlight caste and patriarchal norms, and interpretations of Durga as a mother-warrior deconstructing patriarchal constructs of women in *Chandi Purana*, *Lakshmi Purana* as well as *Savitri* as a symbol of transformative feminine power and resiliency in contemporary world.

Research Questions

- How do Odia mythologies impact Odia women's empowerment, martial harmony, sisterly bonds, agency, self-perception and identity?
- In what way does divine femininity influence Odia women's perceptions?
- How does oral storytelling express the ideals of womanhood?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Ray (1985) *Yajnaseni* powerfully reimagines Draupadi through an introspective first-person narrative as a complex woman enduring deep struggles and sacrifices in a patriarchal society. Objectified as a Swayam Vara prize, forced into a polyandrous marriage without consent, publicly humiliated in the dice game and disrobing episode, and devastated by the loss of her five sons in war, Draupadi nevertheless embodies women's empowerment.

Atwood (1985) in her work *The Handmaid's Tale* shows Offred as a representative of women's struggle, sacrifice, and oppression in the dystopian patriarchal regime of Gilead, where fertile women are reduced to Handmaids valued only for reproduction. Stripped of rights, name, family, and autonomy, she endures ritualized rape, surveillance, and psychological trauma while forced into the role of a breeding vessel. Through her inner narrative and small acts of defiance, she demonstrates quiet resilience and resistance against total subjugation.

Rushdie (1983) explores women characters like Sufiya Zenobia (who embodies repressed national shame and eventually turns into a monstrous force of violence) and others in the tyrannical families suffer deeply under patriarchal, political, and cultural oppression in his work *Shame*. They face forced marriages, loss of agency, domestic control, public humiliation, and the burden of carrying family and national honour on their bodies and reputations.

Angelou (1969) portrays her work *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* as a powerful autobiographical text of female struggle, sacrifice, and empowerment. It chronicles young Maya's coming-of-age as a Black girl in the segregated American South and California, facing racism, poverty, childhood rape, family abandonment, and the weight of gender expectations that make her feel ugly, voiceless, and caged.

Rhys (1966) *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a feminist novella that reclaims Bertha Mason from *Jane Eyre* as Antoinette Cosway, a white Creole woman in post-slavery Caribbean. Through her fragmented narration, it shows her lonely childhood, exploitative marriage to an English husband who renames, gaslights, and imprisons her, driving her to "madness." As a female-oriented text, it portrays madness as a result of patriarchal control, colonial alienation, and identity erasure, giving voice to silenced women and their resistance.

Ezekiel (1965) poem "Night of the Scorpion" presents the mother as a powerful feminine representative of women's struggle, sacrifice, and quiet empowerment in traditional Indian rural society. Stung by a scorpion, she endures twenty hours of intense pain amid superstitious villagers' rituals and her husband's frantic attempts at cure, while the community interprets her suffering through lenses of karma and sin.

Research Gap

Though a number of critics have focused on the feminine, psychological and mythological aspects of the chosen texts, yet there are many more crucial dimensions to be explored. The present study is a bridge between the previous works and the upcoming researches. The following areas are covered in this study to bridge the gap of previously done research.

3. TEXTUAL ANALYSIS**1. Laxmi purana**

In the first part of *Lakshmi Purana* (or Laxmi purana, Lakshmi Puran in Odia), Goddess Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity and the devoted wife of Lord Jagannath, steps out of the magnificent temple of Puri during the sacred hour of her worship on Thursdays. Disguising herself as an ordinary Brahmin woman, she enters the homes of the rich and teaches them the true meaning of the rituals of cleanliness, sincerity, and genuine offerings for her *vratas*. Women in these homes perform the rituals half-heartedly or out of pride of their status. She finally enters the hut of poor and low-caste woman Shriya Chandaluni who lived in abject poverty and social boycott. But she performs the rituals of worship with exceptional purity and cleanses her space of any impurities. She fasts rigorously and offers whatever little she has in genuine devotion and love. Goddess Lakshmi is touched by the genuine devotion of the poor woman and enters her hut, accepts her hospitality, and blesses her abundantly. Through Shriya's eyes, the text celebrates the spiritual superiority and inner strength of marginalized women, showing that devotion, hard work, cleanliness, and moral integrity make any woman worthy of divine grace, regardless of birth or wealth.

When she returns to the Jagannath temple, she is given severe rejection by her husband, Lord Jagannath, and his elder brother, Balabhadra. They label her as "polluted" since she went to the home of an untouchable and took food from them. This is an expression of patriarchal dominance and superiority. Men (even gods) label and condemn the woman for her kind and compassionate deeds. Lakshmi, however, does not tolerate the hypocrisy and disrespect she receives. She leaves the temple and curses the brothers to be hungry and thirsty. They become beggars and wander about for years. She proves that a woman will not tolerate being humiliated by her husband, who is also a god.

In this resolution, the starving brothers ultimately come to their senses. Lakshmi, still in disguise as a low-caste woman, feeds them food, causing them to eat from those who were previously considered impure. Only then do they repent and recognize that all devotees are equal. They then swear to fight against untouchability. Lakshmi returns to the temple on her own terms after redefining the divine household. From a woman's perspective, this story glorifies her as Lakshmi is able to balance her role as a loving wife with her own self-respect, not blindly obeying her husband or any other male, standing up for herself against injustice, and redefining purity as being devoted to her work.

2. Maa Chandi/Durga: From Warrior to Mother

The epic *Chandi Purana* opens with devotional prayers. It begins with invocations to Lord Ganesh and especially to Goddess Sarala (Chandi), whom Sarala Das reveres as his divine mother and guide. The poet identifies himself as "Shudra Mani" and claims Sarala Chandi as the supreme goddess. This narrative starts with a frame story adapted from Odia language and culture. In the Odia version, Sage Shuka tells the story to King Parikshit. (The Sanskrit version of the story is told by Medha, an assistant of Suratha, and Samadhi, a ghost). This reflects Sarala Das's Vaishnavism; while he connects Chandi with the incarnations of Lord Vishnu. The author identifies the Goddess as Sarala Chandi from Kanakpur, a site located in Odisha,

who will be worshiped forever during the Kali Yuga. The Goddess, from a woman's perspective, brings the Divine Feminine closer; therefore, connecting with Odia woman devotee's identity as their protective mother, guide and source of strength during life's many challenges.

The central plot is that the gods, suffering under the yoke of oppression by the buffalo-demon Mahishasura, who had gained heaven through boons and strength, sought relief through appealing to the highest authority. The Trimurti's (Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva) unite their energies to create Durga/Chandi, a radiant, independent goddess created through the collective wrath of the gods but embodying untainted feminine energy/Shakti. In this female-cantered reading of the myth, her creation symbolizes women's inherent power, born not of a male deity but of anger against injustice, symbolizing feminine energy's transformative power when suppressed. She is also presented as independent, beautiful yet fierce, maternal yet warrior-like, shattering stereotypes of women as helpless or domesticated entities.

The epic details Chandi's epic battles against Mahishasura's armies, including his generals like *Chanda*, *Munda*, *Shumbha*, *Nishumbha*, and *Raktabija*. She slays demons with weapons from various gods, multiplies forms (as Mahakali, Chamunda), and drinks *Raktabija's* blood to prevent his regeneration—showcasing strategic intelligence, ferocity, and unyielding resolve. From a female lens, these episodes glorify women's multifaceted strength: nurturing (as mother to the universe), destructive against evil, and intellectually superior in combat. Chandi's laughter amid slaughter and her role as protector of dharma highlight how women can wield power decisively without apology, tearing apart patriarchal frames where females are subordinates or mere consorts.

The climax involves the famous duel between her and Mahishasura, wherein Chandi, in her Durga avatar, tramples and beheads the buffalo demon after a fierce war. This reestablishes order in the universe, with all gods hailing her as the supreme Shakti. In the version by Sarala Das, she is both the fighter and the kind mother, forgiving her devotees, blessing the earth, and being the embodiment of justice. For women readers, this story provides empowerment since the Goddess here is a model of empowerment, not a victim, fighting oppression in her own strength without any help from males.

3. Savitri: A Triumph of Love

Savitri by Sri Aurobindo is an epic that, from the female perspective, exalts the vast inner power, the courage, and the divine strength that every woman possesses. It is the retelling of the ancient story of Savitri and Satyavan from the Mahabharata in a way that transcends the mere tale of the devotion of a wife to become the magnificent representation of the feminine Shakti, the active and transformative power of the Divine Mother, who overcomes darkness, ignorance, pain, and even death to bring light, immortality, and a new divine consciousness to the world. Sri Aurobindo presents Savitri as an avatar of the Supreme Shakti, embodying the eternal feminine principle that bridges pure divine consciousness and earthly creation, challenging patriarchal views by showing woman as the very power of evolution and universal force, not a subordinate or dependent being. This vision elevates womanhood to its highest spiritual level, where she is the invincible force of God, the warrior-mother whose love, will and yogic strength can reshape reality and lead humanity toward freedom from all limitations. The tale opens with King Aswapati, Savitri's father, a noble and devoted ruler who, longing for a child and driven by deep inspiration for humanity's upliftment, undertakes vigorous spiritual practice (yoga and intense *tapasya*) in solitude. Through years of unwavering discipline, he ascends through higher planes of consciousness, experiences profound inner revelations, and directly communes with the Divine Mother. In response to his sincere call, the Supreme Shakti

grants him a boon: she promises to descend to earth as his daughter. Savitri is born as this divine avatar—a luminous princess with an inner blaze of knowledge and unyielding will. As a woman, she develops with profound self-consciousness, following her own path without fear. She loves Satyavan, aware of his impending death, but still chooses to marry him with her full heart and will.

When the day of Satyavan's death finally comes in the forest, Death (Yama) comes to claim his soul. But from the female perspective, this is the most inspiring moment: Savitri does not cry hopelessly, beg, or give up as so many traditional tales of women would have us believe. Rather, she stands as a warrior of light—strong, wise, and powerfully spiritual. She meets Death head-on, engaging him in a battle of words that are full of truth and spiritual power, refusing to give in, and challenging him step by step with her yogic power and spiritual determination. By doing so, she defeats the forces of ignorance, suffering, and death, compelling Death to give in and bringing Satyavan's life back. She brings not only her husband's life back but also the promise of a new world where suffering ceases and the divine consciousness dawns on earth.

In this retelling, Sri Aurobindo depicts woman as the supreme change agent: compassionate and invincible, loving and independent, gentle and powerful enough to conquer cosmic forces. Savitri is a picture of real empowerment, not through force and outer strength, but through inner spiritual flame, self-awareness, dedication, and courage to confront even the darkest of realities. She stands for the possibility in every woman to discover and express her own higher divine nature, to transcend limitations, stereotypes, and former destinies, and to become a harbinger of light, transformation, and a new divine life for all. Her journey highlights how a woman's spiritual *tapasya* (austerity and inner discipline) can make her mighty and invincible, turning her into a “warrior-mother” who challenges fate itself with divine grace and force. This vision draws from ancient Indian ideas of Shakti as the creative power of the universe, showing that women are not just nurtures but the very force behind creation, evolution and victory over darkness making the poem a prophetic call to recognize the in exhaustible powers within feminism.

4. DISCUSSION OF WOMENHOOD IN THE TEXTS

The role and impact of womanhood in medieval and modern Odia and Indian spiritual literature can be profoundly examined through three key works: *The Lakshmi Purana* by Balarama Dasa (15th century), *The Chandi Purana* by Sarala Dasa (also 15th century), and *Savitri* by Sri Aurobindo (20th century). These texts, spanning devotional, epic, and philosophical traditions, portray womanhood not merely as passive or subordinate but as dynamic, empowered, resistant to patriarchal norms, and spiritually transformative. They highlight themes of female agency, resistance to caste and gender hierarchies, divine feminine power, and the potential for women to transcend societal limitations through devotion, willpower, and inner strength.

"*The Lakshmi Purana*," a 15th-century Odia text written by Balarama Dasa, is considered to be one of the most radical early texts in Indian literary history to deal with the concept of womanhood through the idea of resistance and empowerment. The narrative is built around the Goddess Lakshmi as she visits the humble abode of Sriya Chandaluni, a woman from the untouchable Chandal community, to bless her due to the genuine devotion and fasting of the latter. However, when Lakshmi returns to the Jagannath Temple, she is denied entry by her husband Lord Jagannath and brother-in-law Lord Balabhadra on the grounds of being polluted through contact with the untouchable Chandal woman. Lakshmi does not submit to the patriarchal and caste authority of the gods and asserts her independence as she withholds prosperity and food from the gods and calls upon other divine forces to punish their hypocrisy

so that the gods have to endure difficulties until they realize their mistake and the virtue of equality.

Lakshmi: Bold Rebel vs. Constrained Real Women

In the *Lakshmi Purana* written by Balarama Dasa, the character of Lakshmi is portrayed as an independent, self-assured, and moral deity. Lakshmi challenges the divine patriarchy when she fails to comply with the purification rituals set by her husband Jagannatha and brother-in-law Balabhadra after visiting a low-caste devotee. Lakshmi displays rational thinking, emotional strength, and egalitarian empathy as she prioritizes genuine devotion over ritualistic caste loyalty. Lakshmi withholds prosperity as a calculated act of defiance, which shows her self-assurance, calculated thinking, and unapologetic assertion of power while being a good wife at core. On the contrary, real women living in medieval Odisha and India were marked by their subordination in a patriarchal and caste-based society. Women from the upper castes were denied educational opportunities, freedom of movement, and the right to participate in public life. They were expected to be subservient, chaste, and domestic. Women from the lower castes suffered from a variety of problems, including the prohibition of entry into religious spaces, economic exploitation, and a lack of freedom. They were also expected to be strong, to conform to the decisions of males (such as in the matter of arranged marriages), and to accept their roles in a hierarchical society. Through this, Balarama Dasa presents womanhood not as meek obedience, but as a position of moral and spiritual power, which can actually challenge male dominance; Lakshmi represents self-respect, empowerment, and justice, restating stree dharma as honest performance of roles without subjugation, and extolling the virtues of the piety of lower-caste women over upper-caste male dominance. The influence and significance of this text can be gauged from the fact that in Odisha, under the *Manabasa Gurubara* tradition, women read this text every week, thus propagating the message of anti-untouchability, self-empowerment, and harmony, making this text a pioneering work in feminism and anti-casteism.

In contrast, *Chandi Purana* by Sarala Dasa, another 15th-century Odia classic retelling the Devi Mahatmya legend, portrays womanhood as the independent power of Goddess Durga/Chandi as a warrior goddess and protective mother. Sarala Das rewrites the cosmic battle between goddess Durga/Chandi and demons like Mahishasura, giving it a local Odia flavour by personifying the goddess as Sarala Chandi of Kanakpur, making her indigenous and accessible to the common man. Durga is depicted as the ultimate Shakti, full of dynamism, destructive power directed at evil, yet creatively nurturing power, incarnating independently as saviour of the world in the face of failure by male gods. She shatters patriarchal constructs subordinating women by leading armies, strategizing victories, and displaying ferocity as a protective mother of the universe. Unlike the submissive feminine role, Chandi is the embodiment of active leadership in a crisis situation, wherein the role of feminine power is not peripheral but central to cosmic renewal. The text, which is written as a shastra for laymen and wherein Sage Shuka tells the tale to King Parikshit, not only focuses on Vaishnava devotion but also emphasizes the supremacy of the goddess, thus confirming the role of divine femininity as being indispensable to societal order.

Chandi: Fierce Warrior vs. Confined Real Women

In the figure of Chandi/Durga as Sarala Chandi in the text of Sarala Dasa's *Chandi Purana*, we see an independent, martial, and maternal figure. She is highly independent and goes to war on her own, without the need for any male support or influence. She is both powerful and protective, and while humanized through the folklore of the region, she is also a powerful force that challenges patriarchal subordination. She is a force of raw power, both destructive and creative, unbound and uncontrolled. In the medieval era in Odisha, the real women were mostly

confined to their homes and were portrayed in society and literature as inferior, subservient, and obedient housewives or supportive women. They did not get the opportunity to exercise martial expressions or decision-making, with societal practices and traditions restricting education to the elite classes, emphasizing the subjugation of women as wives, and devaluing their contributions to agricultural or domestic work. Though there were exceptions among the royalty, the rest had to live through survival and conformity, accepting patriarchal roles and behaviours.

Sri Aurobindo's "*Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol*", on the other hand is a retelling of the story of Savitri and Satyavan, celebrates womanhood in its most sublime spiritual sense. Born as the daughter of the Sun and the incarnation of the Divine Mother or Maha shakti, Savitri comes into the world as the personification of Truth, Light, Love, and boundless inner energy. Confronted by the inescapable death of her husband Satyavan, Savitri performs rigorous *tapasya* or austerity and yogic preparation, and then confronts Yama or Death in a spiritual duel of consciousness, emerging victorious over death through her purity, willpower, divine love, and unshakeable resolve, not through physical combat but through the transforming energy of the soul. In this context, womanhood goes beyond its mundane roles as Savitri is a warrior mother, the embodiment of the realizing Shakti of the Divine, who has the power to free humanity from ignorance, destiny, and death, reflecting the evolutionary progress towards supramental life on earth. Aurobindo critiques patriarchal limitations by making Savitri independent and sovereign, where the divine femininity is the driving force behind global changes and human progress. Savitri's power is not medieval or martial but evolutionary, empowering modern spirituality as the means of transcending all bondage, making women the embodiment of the highest creative power in existence.

Throughout these works, from medieval Odisha to contemporary spirituality, womanhood changes but remains at the core of all: from Lakshmi's courageous stance against social inequality and caste patriarchy, through Chandi's dynamic Shakti in cosmic conflict, to Savitri's final spiritual supremacy, which redeems humanity. They all subvert subordination, glorify innate feminine power as a basis of justice, balance, rebirth, and cosmic evolution, providing timeless empowerment of women's agency in remaking society and the cosmos alike. It shows the power of women in every aspect of life not only for their family but for the whole universe.

5. CONCLUSION

In the mythological and symbolic stories of "*Lakshmi Purana*" written by Balarama Dasa, "*Chandi Purana*" written by Sarala Das, and "*Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol*" written by Sri Aurobindo, the literary and spiritual traditions of Odisha and India, as a whole, offer a complex and multifaceted representation of womanhood as divine, morally steadfast, and transformative. These literary and spiritual works, from the medieval period of Odia bhakti literature to the 20th century philosophical epic poetry, represent women as champions of equality, protection, and spiritual evolution, while addressing the complexities and paradoxes between traditional values of dignity, loyalty, and chastity, and patriarchal and hierarchical values. The literary and spiritual heritage of these works continues to influence the role and status of women in contemporary Odisha and India. In comparison, these works follow a trajectory of feminine representation: like *Lakshmi Purana*'s active rebellion against caste and gender oppression, *Chandi Purana*'s independent warrior spirit and protective motherhood, and Savitri's transcendent spirituality through love and yoga. They all highlight women's role in maintaining prosperity and righteousness and balancing the cosmos. In the modern world, especially in the context of Odisha, these texts have a major impact on women through the cultural and spiritual framework of empowerment in the context of globalization, feminism,

and the continued struggle for women's empowerment. The legacy of Lakshmi Purana lives on in the ritual of *Manabasa Gurubara*, wherein women draw strength from the defiance of Lakshmi to attain empowerment through the assertion of their dignity, non-discrimination, and the assertion of their spiritual rights. Similarly, the legacy of the Chandi Purana lives on in the festival of Durga Puja, wherein women celebrate the fierce feminine and the need for women's empowerment through the invocation of the goddess. In the context of modern-day women's empowerment, the legacy of the goddess lives on in the context of the Savitri of Aurobindo, wherein women are depicted as Shakti incarnate, having the capacity for self-transformation and the upliftment of society from the shackles of patriarchy.

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