

MYTHS WOVEN IN HER NAME



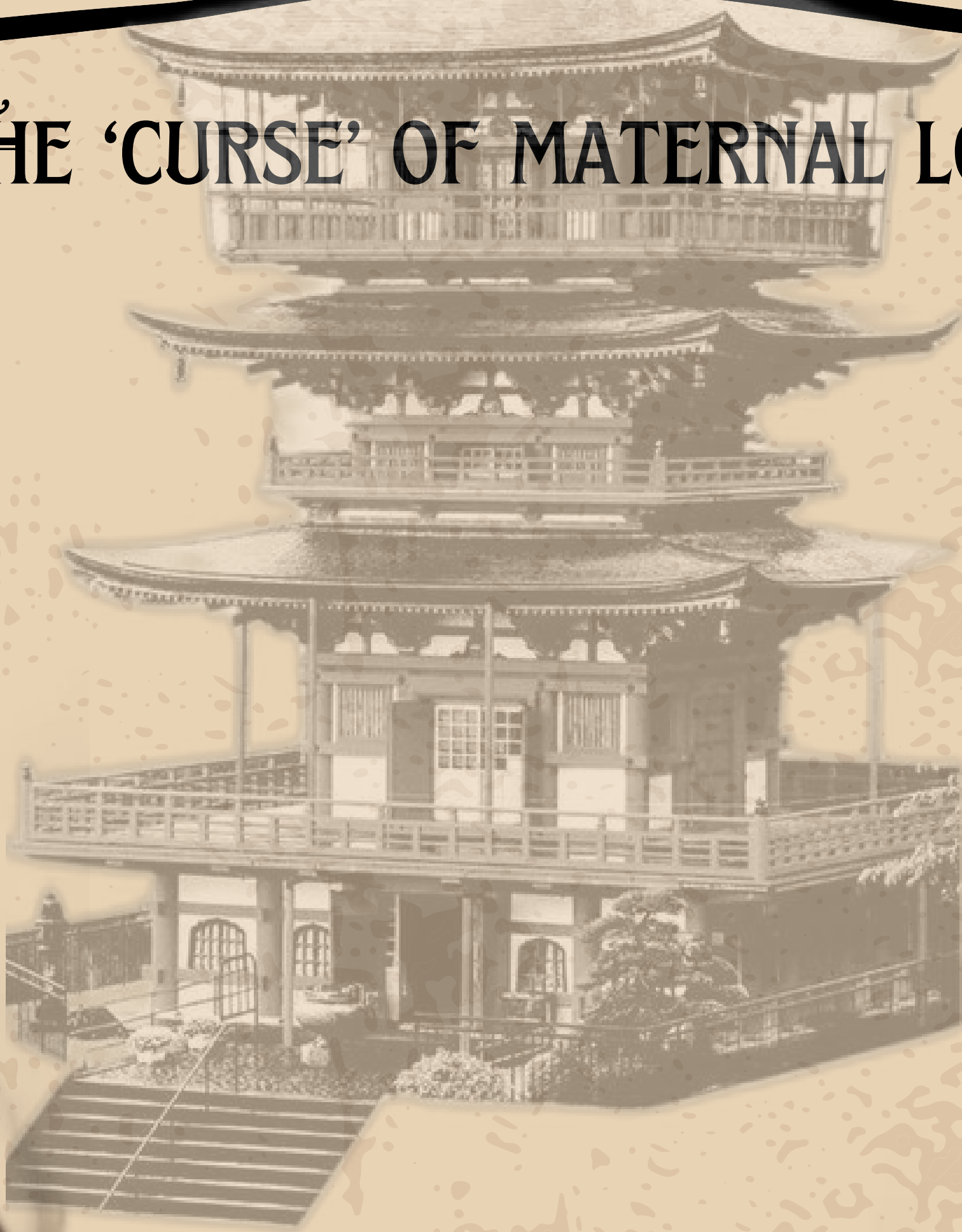
FEMPIRE. EDITION 2



JAPANESE
FOLKLORE

UBUME 産女

THE 'CURSE' OF MATERNAL LOVE



UBUME 産女

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ORIGIN OF UBUME

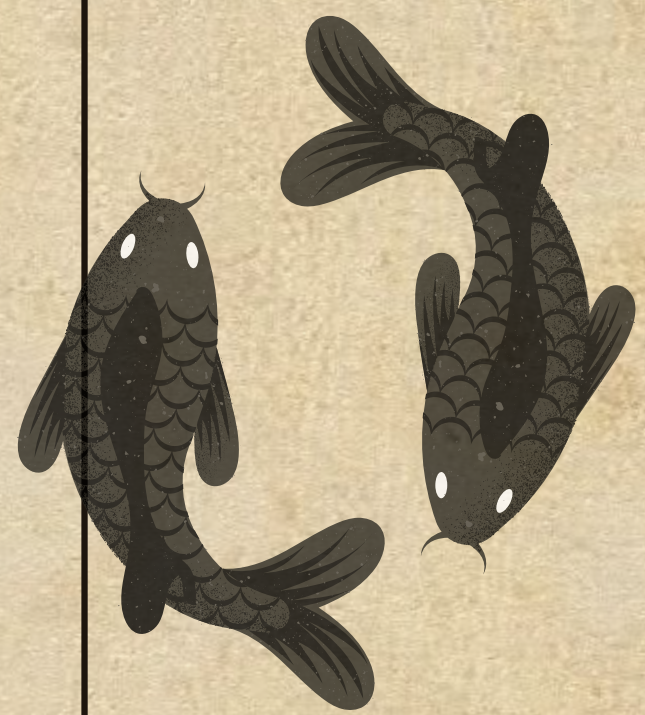
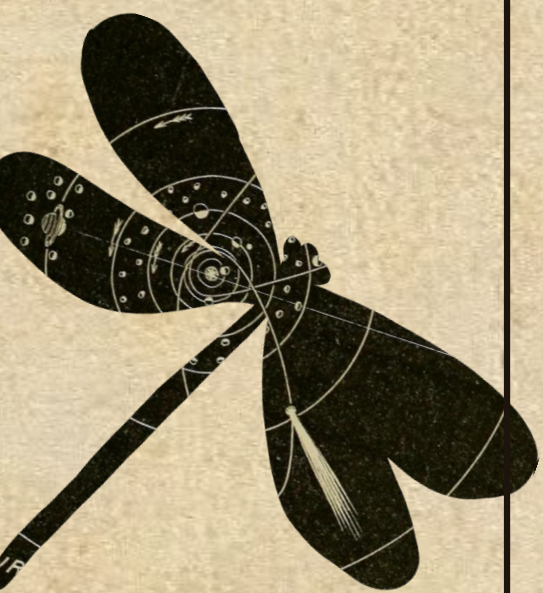
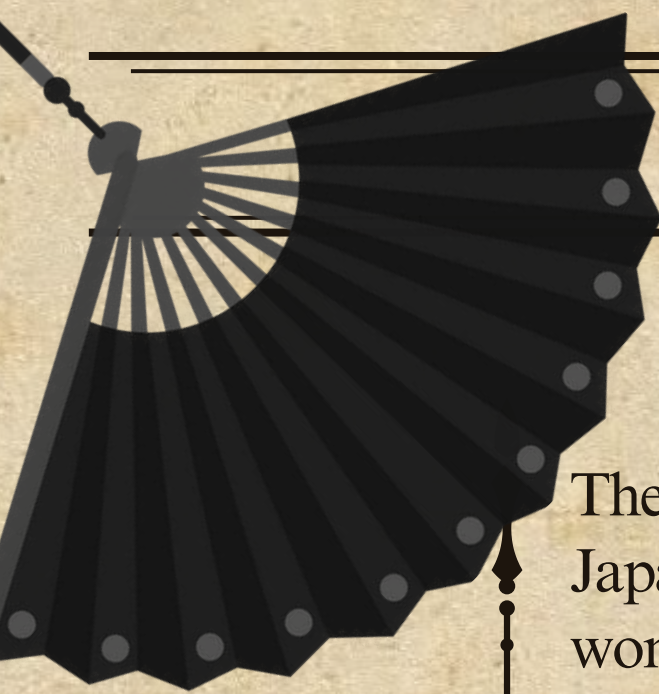
There are many mythologies in Japanese culture associated with women. These urban legends range from themes of vengeance to the duality of human nature. They feature a diverse array of female figures, from benevolent goddesses to malevolent entities. One such figure is Ubume, a being born of sorrow, love, and death. The very essence of Ubume unveils a beautifully tragic tale of a mother's eternal love for her child.

Ubumes arise from specific circumstances—the deaths of mothers caused by childbirth or those occurring while protecting their children. An Ubume, when spotted, has been described as a pale, ghostly woman who appears to be carrying a baby, her face tear-stained. These women are often seen dressed in a torn white kimono, which is considered funeral attire in Japanese culture.

At first glance, she doesn't seem threatening and appears to be a disoriented, grieving woman who has strayed from her path and is lost. Folklore recounts numerous instances where Ubumes have appeared to the living in crowded areas such as crossroads, temples, or rivers. She is often seen approaching travelers, begging and pleading with them to hold her baby. The "baby" feels light at first but gradually turns into a massive rock, growing heavier and heavier by the minute as the woman vanishes into thin air.

Another tale observed by townsfolk describes her appearing at stores to buy baby items like candy and clothes. She pays with coins engraved with strange, unfamiliar symbols.

Soon after, these coins turn into leaves and disappear. In many stories, an Ubume is said to watch over her child, often lingering as a protective presence to shield the child from harm. Her main use of her powers is to attract kind-hearted people to her child. She is frequently seen leaving her baby at the steps of a local temple before vanishing.

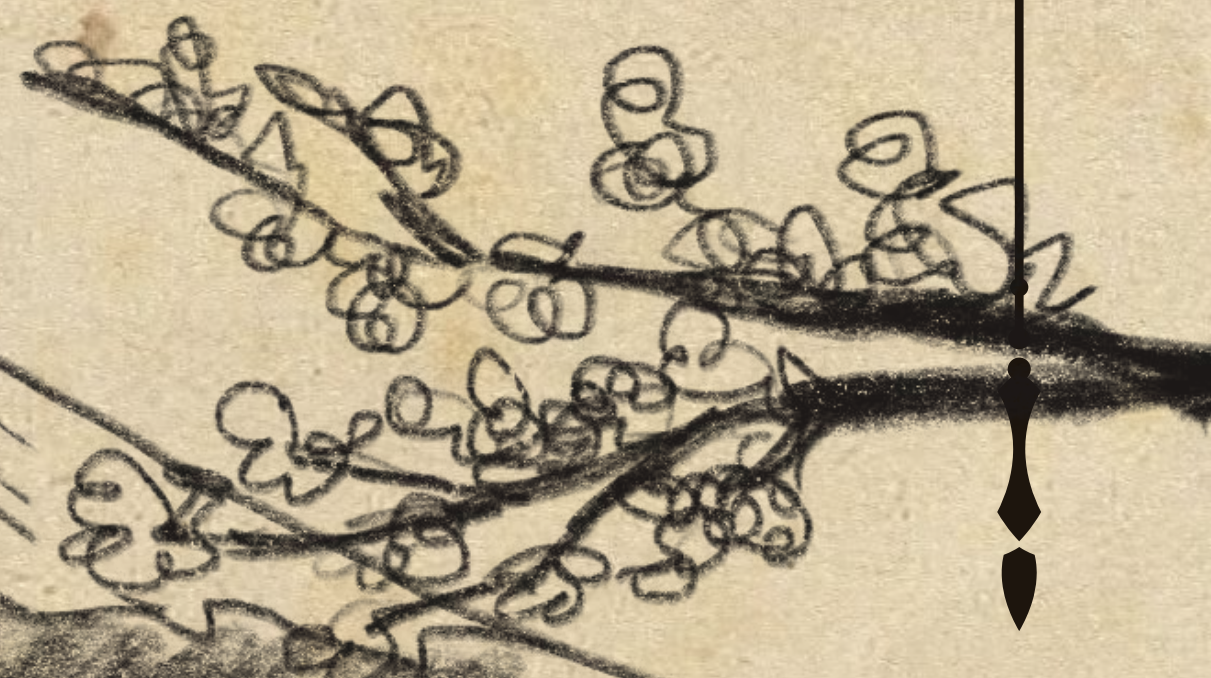
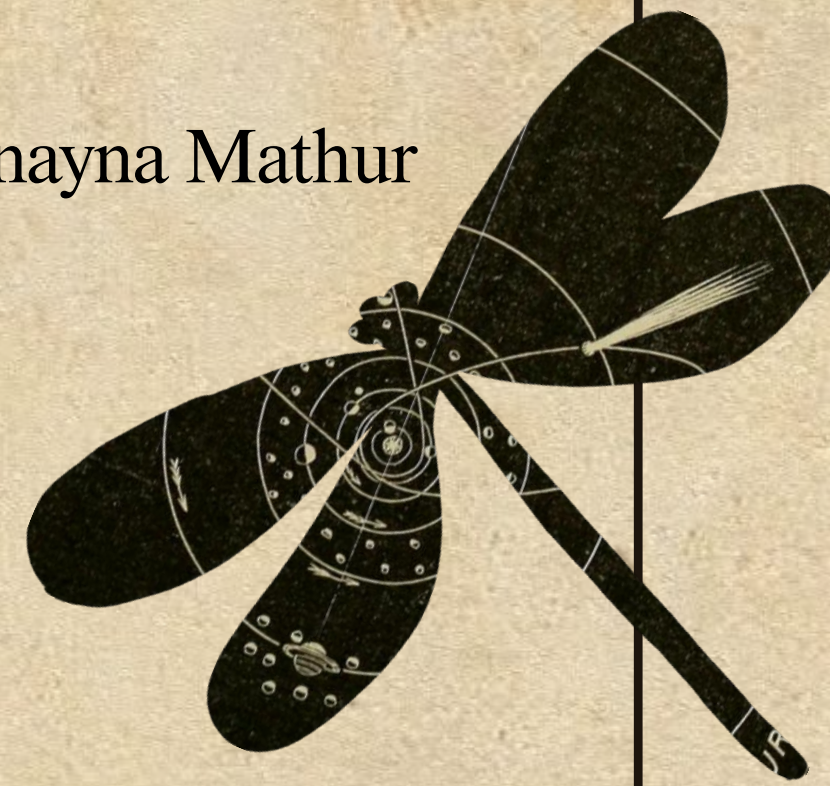


When observed closely, one could say her actions are rooted in love, desperation, and worry for her child, rather than cruelty or resentment toward the townspeople. This mythology embodies a theme of grief, portraying a mother's instinct to protect and care for her child—even from a world apart, quite literally. It reflects the pain of an unfulfilled role of motherhood and eternalizes a mother's love—the lengths to which she is willing to go for her child.

Ubume symbolizes the eternal spirit of maternal love, showing that not all urban legends are born of fright and terror.

This urban legend of Ubume serves not only as a chilling tale but also as a mirror reflecting the cultural values and emotional depths of Japanese society. It blurs the line between the spiritual and the emotional, emphasizing how folklore can give voice to suppressed grief and unresolved loss. Through Ubume, the collective consciousness confronts the fragility of life, the fears surrounding childbirth, and the sorrow of untimely death. Yet, rather than casting her solely as a ghost to be feared, the narrative allows empathy to emerge. In doing so, it humanizes the supernatural and turns horror into heartbreak—reminding us that legends like Ubume endure because they speak to something universal: the relentless, unyielding force of a mother's love.

By Sunayna Mathur



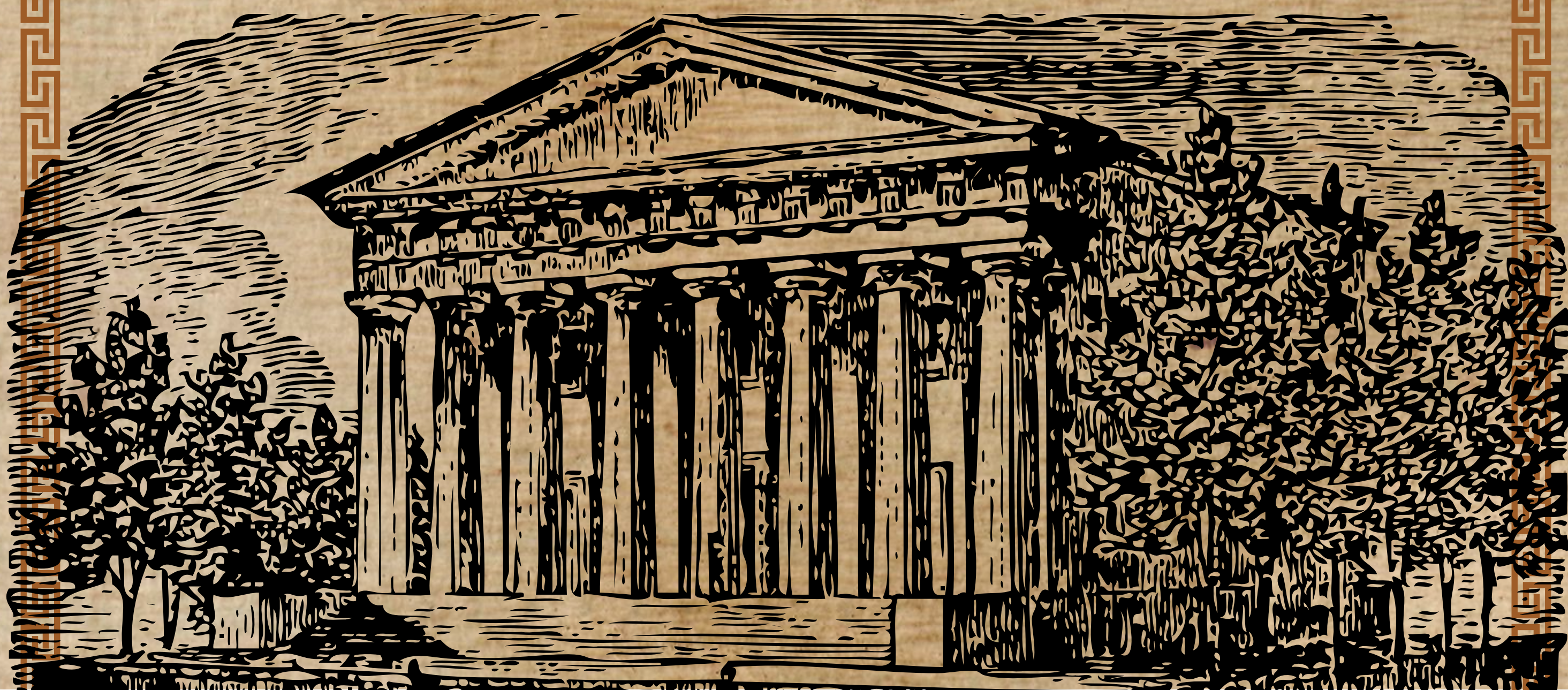


FROM
ASHES
AND
AEGIS

Mythology, defined as “the body of myths belonging to a culture” according to the American Heritage New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy, is not only an important part of culture but also reflects human nature. In Ancient Greece, the portrayal of women as deceitful and manipulative reflects the seclusion and oppression faced by women in real life. Gender segregation was supposed to emulate elite society, which led to more oppression as people wanted a high standing in their community.

Various ancient texts reflect this patriarchal nature, with Pandora seen shameful for releasing pain and suffering into the world and Aphrodite as disgraceful and manipulative for flaunting herself. We have heard so many stories where women are treated as subordinate to men, purposefully oppressed and treated with contempt.

However, there are so many stories where women not only fight for themselves but take on the so-called ‘male’ attributes. The story of Atalanta follows the tale of a Greek huntress and one of the only female heroes. She was abandoned at a mountain by her father who wanted a son but with divine intervention she managed to survive and was nursed by a mother bear and raised by hunters. She became a follower of Artemis and joined the Argonauts, later hunting the infamous Calydonian Boar where she drew first blood. She was known to be incredibly strong and could run ‘like lightning’. Soon after she became famous, she reunited with her father who asked her to get married and she said she would accept anyone who beat her in a race. Though many tried and failed, Hippomenes (otherwise known as Meilanion) succeeded with the help of Aphrodite and married her. She was described as a genderbent Adonis in terms of beauty and was remarkably skilled at archery. A true bicon.

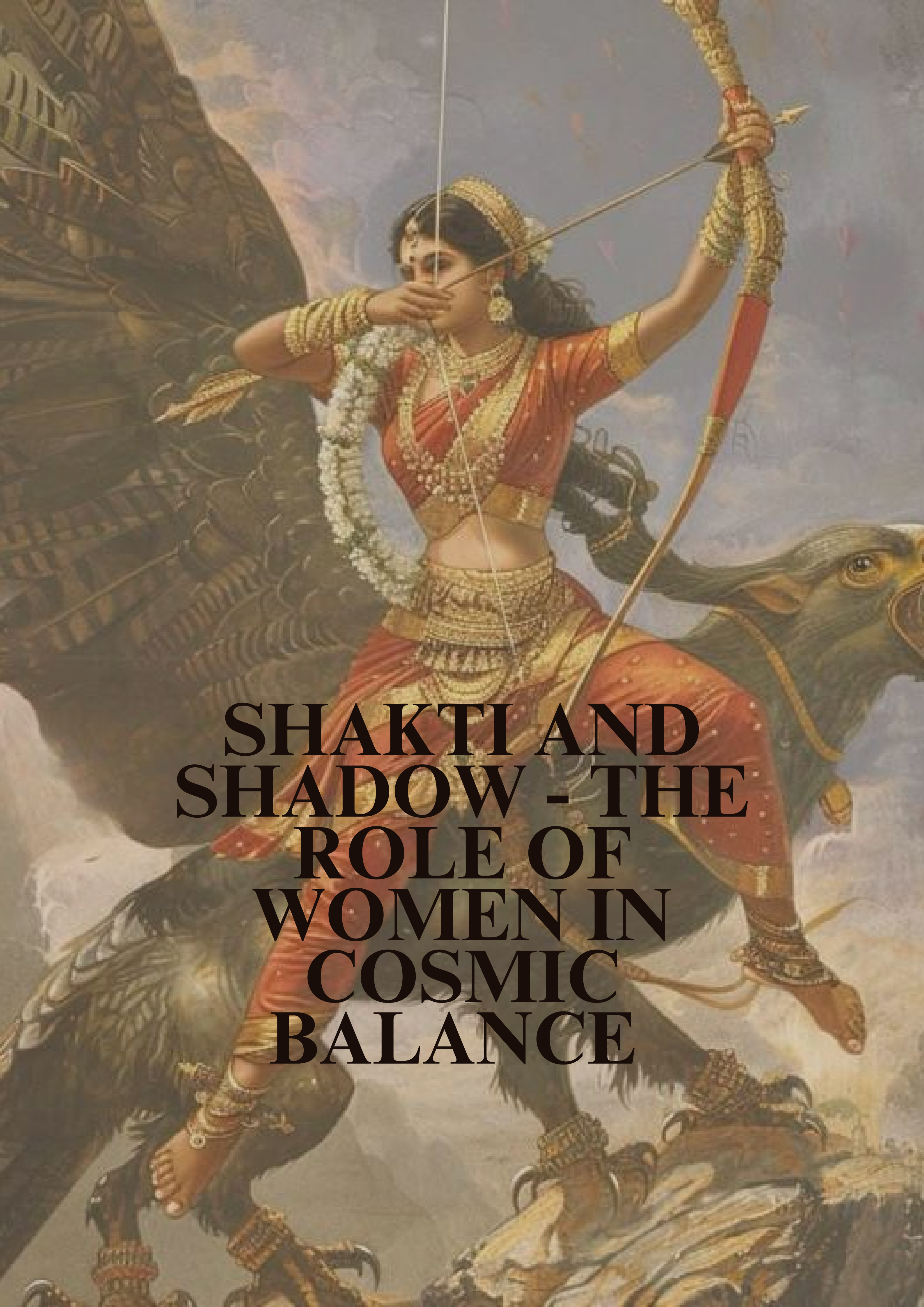


Another woman who defied misogyny and took revenge on those who wronged her was Clytemnestra. She was determined to avenge the death of her daughter, who was killed by her husband - Agamemnon. She slayed him in his bathtub with an axe and didn't run or hide but fiercely marched to her people claiming 'justice has been served'. She is described as a lioness- protective of her children, bold and bloody. The feud between Clytemnestra and her husband began when he left for the Trojan war. On the way, Agamemnon's ship stopped sailing due to the wrath of Artemis and a priest said that he should offer his daughter as sacrifice, which he did immediately. For the 10 years that Agamemnon was away, Clytemnestra plotted her revenge with the help of her lover Aegisthos, a long lost cousin of Agamemnon who was back for vengeance (Agamemnon had killed his brothers). Soon Agamemnon returns with Cassandra - the Trojan princess as his slave and Clytemnestra kills them both. The cycle of blood does not stop there though, as their son Orestes avenges his father's death (urged on by his sister - Electra) by killing both Clytemnestra and Aegisthos. Even in death though, Clytemnestra sent furies to torment her son for choosing his father over his mother. To be fair though, Agamemnon wasn't so innocent either, from sacrificing his own daughter to terrorizing slave girls and destroying a city. It was simply poetic justice that a woman did the deed.


While Ancient Greek mythology often mirrors the patriarchal values of its time, it also offers powerful counter-narratives through the stories of women who defied societal norms. Figures like Atalanta and Clytemnestra stand out not just for their strength and agency, but for challenging the roles imposed upon them. These mythological women remind us that even in cultures steeped in gender bias, stories of resistance, resilience, and rebellion have always existed—stories that continue to inspire and resonate to this day.

By Jasvi Doshi



A traditional Indian painting depicting the goddess Durga. She is shown riding a bull (Nandi) and holding a bow and arrow, symbolizing her role as a warrior goddess. She is adorned with elaborate gold jewelry and a red sari. A large eagle is visible in the background, and the scene is set against a cloudy sky.

**SHAKTI AND
SHADOW - THE
ROLE OF
WOMEN IN
COSMIC
BALANCE**

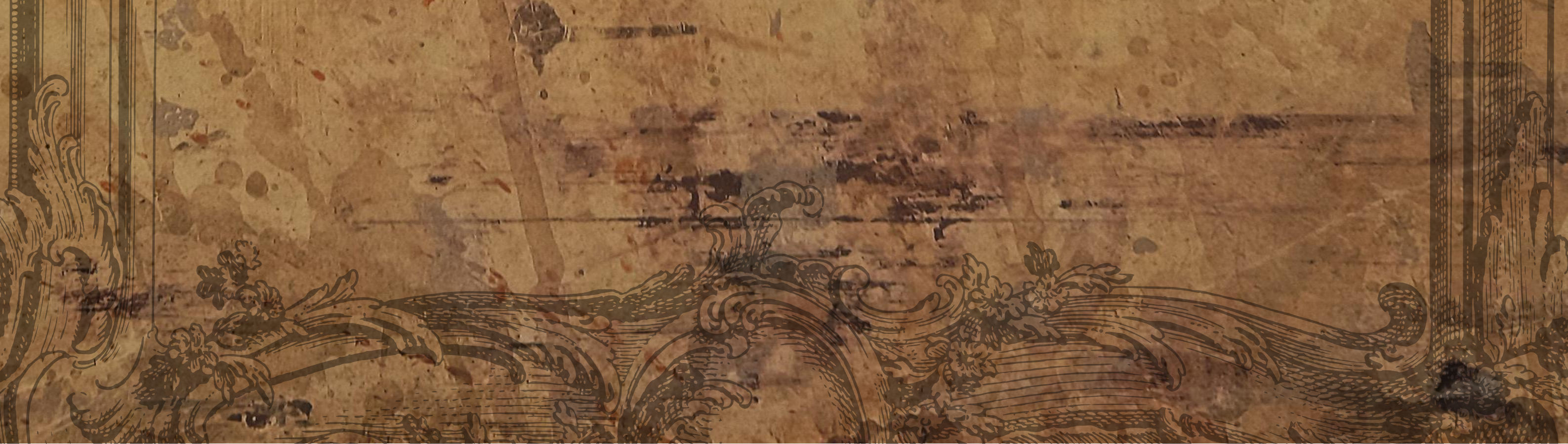


"Devi is the creator of the universe. She is the universe itself. She is the foundation of all being."

– Devi Mahatmya, Chapter 1

We see women play almost every role in Hindu mythology. nurturers, temptresses, sages, consorts and warriors, depicting different aspects of the divine femininity, and forming a complex tapestry of female archetypes.

At the heart of Hindu mythology lies the primordial cosmic energy, and feminine principle, called 'Shakti'. Shakti animates the universe and is the personified life force that is celebrated in a female form and is seen as the complementary counterpart of the creator itself. The forms of Shakti vary, similar to those of the women we see in our lives. Durga, the slayer of Mahishasura, is worshipped as a warrior goddess, representing feminine power in its most autonomous and assertive form. Kali, fierce and unrestrained, epitomises raw and unbridled power as well as time, destruction and change. Lakshmi is the sustainer and is symbolic of wealth and prosperity, and Saraswati is the deity of wisdom and learning, adding more aspects to the divine form. We see the more domestic, and relational Parvati, the supreme wife and mother. These goddesses remind us that male divinity cannot act without female form.



Other than goddesses, we also see female sages and Bramhavadinis- women who pursued Vedic study and spiritual realization, like Gargi Vachaknavi, who challenged the sage Yajnavalkya on metaphysics in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, as well as, Maitreyi, the mentioned sage's wife, who rejected material wealth for the pursuit of the ultimate reality.

Characters in the epics such as Sita maa and Draupadi provide contrasting roles in our notion of femininity. Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of women in Hindu mythology is the duality in their depictions. They are seen as Maya (illusion) and as Moksha (liberation), temptation and salvation. We see them as mothers and warriors, both objects of devotion and sources of dread.

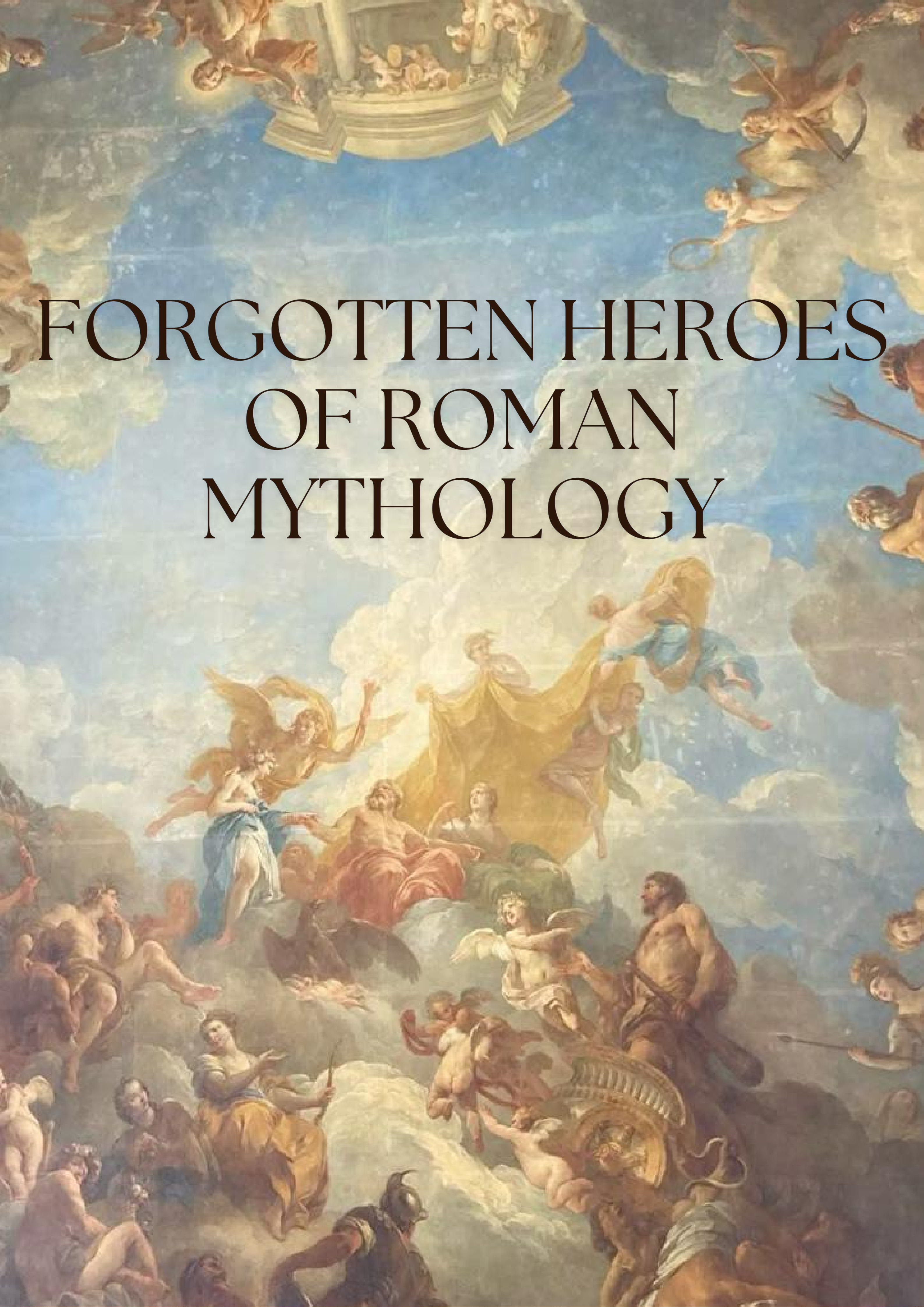
This duality reflects the broader Hindu metaphysical view of the world, where opposites complement each other instead of being antagonistic. Yet, in the social translation of these learnings, the empowering feminism often gives way to patriarchal norms, with goddesses placed on pedestals, whereas their real life counterparts face control and restriction. In the scriptures we see ideals that society must focus on embodying in their treatment of womankind.

"Yatra naryastu pujoyante ramante tatra devatah."

"Where women are honored, there the gods rejoice."

– Manusmriti 3.56

By Mishka Barve



FORGOTTEN HEROES OF ROMAN MYTHOLOGY

Tanaquil the queen with political acumen

In ancient Rome, women though not presented with a platform though they played a major role in changing the trajectory of Roman civilisation.

Tanaquil using her strategic and brilliant mind pulled the strings behind the scenes and laid the foundation ensuring her husband the throne. Her efforts and control over politics was overshadowed throughout history by focusing on the male figures in her life, often without acknowledging Tanaquil's intelligence. She believed her husband would be a great king but will not be given the opportunity due to the fact that he was the child of an immigrant so she arrived to Rome with her family. She used her prophetic background to influence the monarchy. After that, she realised that her son-in-law was meant to be king so she tactfully denied the death of her husband and made the people believe that he was sick instead and temporarily handed over the royal duties to their son. After gaining people's trust her son-in-law officially took over the throne. Tanaquil was a very important figure in the Roman mythology and played a crucial part without any recognition

Claudia Quinta – The Roman Matron Who Saved Rome

Claudia Quinta's story is rooted with the goddess Cybele in Rome. It is believed that while carrying the sacred image of the goddess the ship was stuck at River Tiber and could not be carried ahead, the romans feared that this was a sign of the goddess being displeased with them. During this time Claudia Quinta bravely stepped forward and single handedly freed the ship. She was praised for her courage as a hero. People believe that her devotion and purity pleased the goddess and protected everyone from her anger

Lucretia – The Catalyst for the Fall of the Roman Monarchy

Lucretia was noble woman who was crucial figure in bringing about the change from roman monarchy to roman republic. Lucretia was a reputed woman who was raped by son of the last Roman king, Sextus Tarquinius.

With the shame of the tragedy that happened to her, she demanded justice. As her last attempt to protect her honour she took her own life, thus creating an outrage in the society making it a major turning point in dismantling the roman monarchy

By Ebaa Chougle



WHEN THE WAR CHOOSES YOU



In Norse mythology, the Valkyries were divine shieldmaidens in the service of Odin, the All-Father. They chose the bravest fallen warriors who would dwell in the afterlife in Valhalla. They do not wield swords, but they decide who dies by them while hovering over the battlefield like storm clouds with wings. The choosers of the slain. Yet, even in myth, a woman's power is conditional.

In Renaissance art, they are often depicted as beautiful and benevolent winged maidens carrying swords and round shields. But this is a very romantic image when compared to how they were described in the Viking Age. In Norse sagas and Viking histories, Valkyries are beautiful, but also bloodthirsty. They revelled in the gore of the battlefield, entered the fray themselves to ensure the outcomes of wars, and even feasted on dead bodies.

Early Norse texts such as the Poetic Edda and Prose Edda portray Valkyries as liminal beings, straddling the mortal and the divine. In some tales, they appear as shining figures on horseback; in others, they are raven-like harbingers of doom. Their powers extended beyond death—many were gifted in *seidr*, the feminine-associated magic of prophecy and shapeshifting. Far from being mere sidekicks to gods or men, Valkyries held a terrifying autonomy. They determined who would die, yes—but more critically, they decided who was worthy of dying.

And here lies the central irony of their mythic role: to be sentenced to death by a Valkyrie was not a punishment—it was a divine promotion. The slain they selected were escorted not to oblivion, but to Valhalla. Death, when chosen by a Valkyrie, was a ticket to eternal luxury. In a world ruled by glory and blood, the Valkyries were the final arbiters of meaning. And yet, their own identities remained shrouded, often anonymous, and always in service of someone else's legacy.

Despite their commanding presence on the battlefield, Valkyries in Norse mythology are a walking paradox of femininity: divine agents of death in one moment, passive servers of mead in the other. In the Prose Edda, they are depicted as hostesses in Valhalla, serving mead to the warriors who they once dictated the destiny of. The ironic shift is a microcosm of society and its tendencies to domesticate powerful female figures. The act of serving mead only holds ritual value but reduces them to supportive roles in the overall narrative, only working towards glorifying their male counterparts. The depiction of them as a 'war maiden muse' is a trope that reduces them to simply a narrative device to move along the stories of the 'real' heroes; the men.

Their romantic lives, too, are a double-edged sword. Valkyries often embody their autonomy by falling in love with mortal men, but love rarely ends well for them. They offer their romantic interests protection, foresight and even the chance to cheat death. Brynhildr is a perfect example of the tragic fate of Valkyries in romance: Brynhildr defied Odin by saving a life he had marked for death. As punishment, she was stripped of her divine status and cursed to sleep in a ring of fire until a man brave enough to pass through it claimed her as his bride. The cost of her autonomy? Love. But even that comes at a price. The man she awakens for ultimately betrays her. She is tricked, humiliated, and manipulated into marrying another. Her love, once a source of strength, becomes the reason for her downfall.

Though central to the mythic cycle of death and destiny, most Valkyries are anonymous, an indistinct host of winged women hovering over the battlefield like storm clouds. Only a handful (Sigrún, Brynhildr, Sváva) are remembered by name. The rest blur into a single collective image: gleaming armor, wind-blown hair, spectral steeds. This lack of specificity has made them powerful symbols but also easy to flatten, erase, or reshape.

In recent years, Valkyries have been reclaimed as symbols of feminine and gender-fluid power, reinterpreted through modern feminist and queer lenses. Their blend of strength, magic, and otherworldliness resonates with contemporary themes of identity and autonomy. Pop culture, like Marvel's portrayal of Valkyrie as a bisexual warrior and the eventual kind of Asgard, has helped reframe them as complex, self-possessed figures rather than mere servants of fate.

Reclaiming the Valkyrie means confronting the reality that these figures were never meant to empower women in the first place. But like so many symbols handed down through time, they can be broken open and rebuilt. What was once a tool of fate can become a banner of defiance.

By Trisha Sharma



THE FEMININE
LEGACY OF THE
NILE



ANCIENT EGYPT

In ancient Egyptian mythology, goddesses like Isis (magic and motherhood), Hathor (love, music and fertility), and Bastet (home, fertility and protection) held prominent roles, reflecting the elevated status of women in Egyptian society. These powerful deities embodied core values such as motherhood, fertility, magic, and protection. Their revered positions in mythology paralleled the real-world influence held by women in Ancient Egypt.

Women in ancient Egypt were regarded as equals to men in most aspects, apart from certain occupations. While men were considered the heads of households and the state, women managed domestic life and played vital roles in maintaining the stability of society. They worked as artisans, brewers, doctors, musicians, scribes, and even held positions of authority.

Among the most notable women in Egyptian history were Queen Hatshepsut, Queen Nefertiti, and Cleopatra, each of whom left a profound legacy.



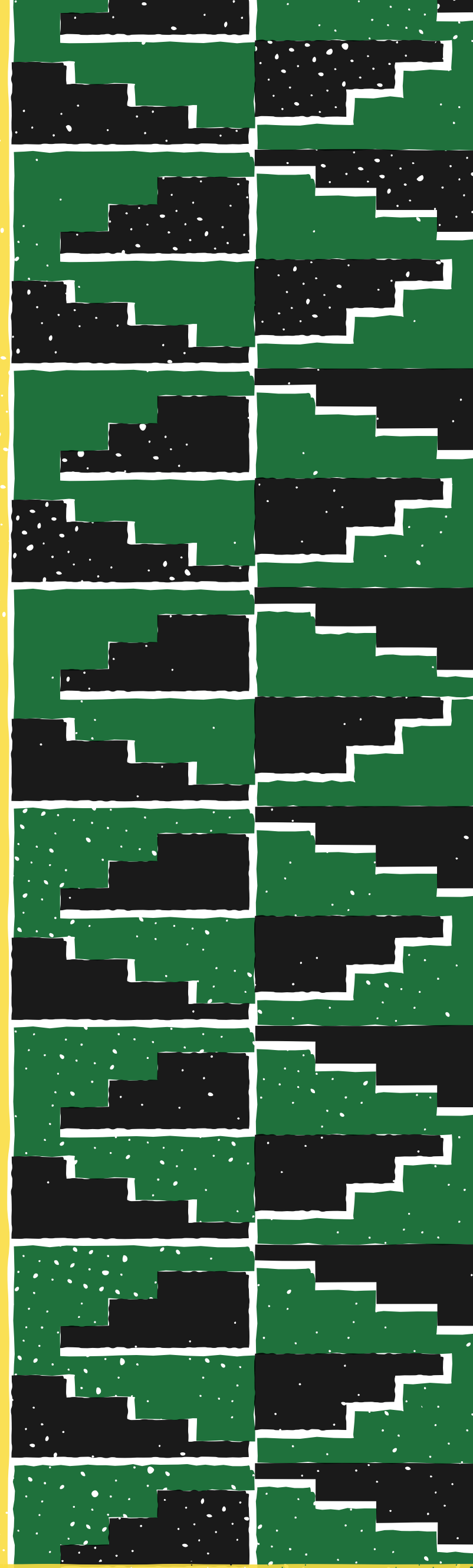
Among the most notable women in Egyptian history were Queen Hatshepsut, Queen Nefertiti, and Cleopatra, each of whom left a profound legacy.

- Queen Hatshepsut ruled as a pharaoh for nearly 20 years, one of the few women to do so. She is remembered for her prosperous reign marked by ambitious building projects and a famous trade expedition to the Land of Punt. To reinforce her legitimacy, she was often depicted as a male pharaoh in statues and reliefs.
- Queen Nefertiti, also known as Neferneferuaten-Nefertiti, was the wife of Pharaoh Akhenaten and a major figure during the Amarna Period. Together, they promoted the worship of the sun god Aten. Some scholars believe Nefertiti may have ruled as a co-regent or even a pharaoh under the name Neferneferuaten, highlighting her significant political and religious influence.
- Cleopatra VII, the last active ruler of the Ptolemaic Kingdom of Egypt, reigned from 51 to 30 BCE. A descendant of Ptolemy I Soter, a Macedonian Greek general under Alexander the Great, Cleopatra was known for her intelligence, charisma, and political acumen. Her alliances and relationships with Julius Caesar and Mark Antony played crucial roles during the decline of the Roman Republic. Cleopatra's legacy endures through art, literature, and film, symbolizing both beauty and power.

These figures demonstrate that in both mythology and history, women in ancient Egypt wielded remarkable power and influence—shaping religion, politics, and culture in ways that continue to captivate the world today.

By Mahek Soni

A PROPER AFRICAN WOMAN



Mythology and its creatures are used in human life to explain the creation of the world, the realisation of life and death and the continent's history. After Europeans started colonising and inhabiting Africa, cultural groups like the Bantu people migrated to other regions of the continent. As they moved and settled into new homelands, they passed down their myths and legends to convey their history. These stories were passed down orally, generation to generation. Women were the greatest element of these myths; goddesses or deities and orishas rule over various elements and are a part of the cultural beliefs of the peoples of the Yoruba, Dogon and Kuba communities. These deities or orishas are some of the well-respected among the different cultural groups. Among the Yoruba people, Ajé Shaluga is revered as the orisha of wealth and prosperity.

Nana Buluku was a supreme goddess in West African Vodun, believed to be the creator of the universe. According to Dahomean mythology, she has also been said to have given birth to the moon and sun goddesses. Yemaya is considered one of the most powerful African goddesses. The legend of her story is that she formed the oceans when water broke while giving birth to her first child. All these goddesses are associated with the creation of nature and life, which is ultimately reflected in the many women who have descended from the African continent, listening to those legends of power and perseverance as they carry their own histories.

Women in Africa have been subjected to oppression and unflinching pain for ages, for generations, and yet these women have defined resilience as we know it, from being in the ghettos of slavery and inhumane medical experiments to creating their space in every part of the world. The previous president of Kenya, President Moi, had constructed the notion of 'a proper woman', with the end goal of her life being marriage. But the question lingers as to how women are defined by others while being culturally worshipped as goddesses of creation.

By Oorja Doshi

The image features a dark red background with a large white oval frame. Inside the frame, the text "BEYOND STEREOTYPES" is written in a dark red, serif font. The frame is decorated with traditional Chinese motifs: red lanterns with tassels are positioned at the top and sides, and stylized red flowers and yellow clouds are placed at the bottom corners. The bottom of the image is decorated with a pattern of white, stylized waves.

BEYOND
STEREOTYPES



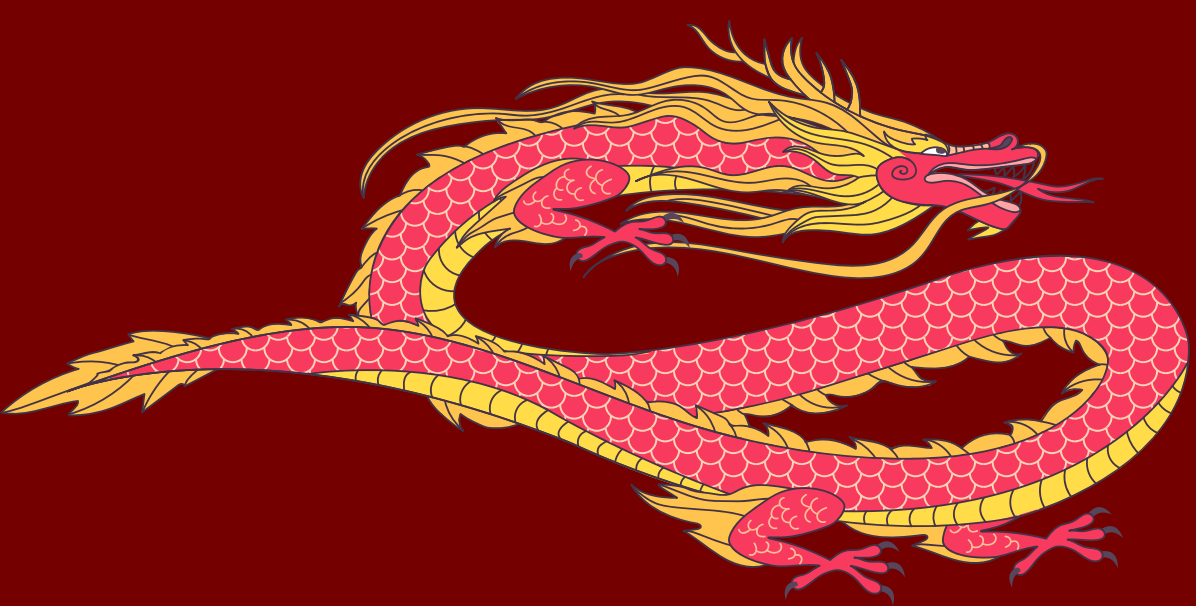
The portrayal of women in Chinese mythology is different from the rest of the world as it places women at the forefront of the story. Women are depicted as creators, warriors, lovers, and protectors

The concept of the “mother of mankind” aligns with Nuwa, who is the epitome of divine femininity, she nurtures and protects by fixing humanity’s broken sky and molding it from clay. This story depicts how women restore harmony and balance in all spheres and this is the reason she is called the mother of mankind.

Xi Wangmu has been central to Chinese mythology for centuries. She lives in the magical Kunlun mountain palace and is recognized as the guardian of immortality who distributes life-granting peaches. She is a symbol of wisdom and cosmic order.

Another such story is that of Mazu. Due to her courage as a human girl who protected sailors, she was given the title "Goddess of the Sea.". In Chinese lore, she is known as the protector of sailors and calmer of stormy waters. She is also known as The Empress of Heaven.

Chinese mythology is not only inspiring but also shows women from a myriad of perspectives and proves that women are multidimensional beings and not unidimensional as shown in so many stories around the world. These stories have empowered women through the ages and continue to do so.



By Pari Dedhia

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