

# Pulling the Strings Together: Women's Hair a Symbol of Power and Danger as Depicted in Indian Mythologies Particularly in the Mahabharata and the Ramayana

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## Abstract

Hair has always been a highly potent metaphor in Indian Myths. Many things have been stated about hair; if we go back to the beginning of civilization on the Indian subcontinent, we ascertain that the Vedic texts, mythical tales, and legendary narratives all profoundly stressed on the symbolism of hair. The epic heroes of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, as well as the Hindu avatars, share this trait. India has a long history of using hair to express ideas. In order to work on the same principle of manifestation of the hair, the paper considers the allegory of hair in Indian sacred texts. In these texts, the perpetual cycles of evolution, retrogression, and resting that underlie hair progression and detaching have been linked with the main source of women's power and danger.

**Keywords:** Hair, Civilization, Hindu Mythology, Symbolic and Cultural Influence, Personal Attribute, Personality Trait.

Human hair has always been a hot topic for moralists to debate while also being a common accessory for fashion and style in all civilizations. The fundamental truth is that our hair serves a role. The hair both symbolizes a physical component of our bodies and expresses how we are feeling emotionally and physically. According to certain narratives, myths are essentially visionary and an expansion of knowledge into unorthodox realities. As described by Raymond Van Over in his work, *Sun Songs: Creation Myths*: The symbols that carry the myth into completion may then be considered evocative signs leading toward a sense of wholeness, a fullness of being. If this is so, then Heraclitus was right when he wrote that "the unlike is joined together, and from the differences results the most beautiful harmony." For ancient mankind was undoubtedly puzzled by the great paradoxes, by life and death, the altering seasons, the apparent death when asleep and the peculiar sense of self-awareness when awake. Obvious questions such as how did life begin? What is death? What are stars, and the black canopy of the night sky? What lay beyond these enormous enigmas? Their myths attempted to resolve such profound and confusing questions, and therefore when reading myths we experience not so much an emotional insight as a sensation of watching something marvelous grow in the mind of early mankind. (1)

Hair is a key component in the formation of societal ideas about the body in many cultures. Numerous social taboos are centred around hair, and hair grooming routines have symbolic and religious connotations. Anthropologists have studied and commented extensively on hair symbolism, particularly

in initiation and marriage rituals, mourning rituals, and magic. Hair has historically been thought of be the seat of the soul, and even after being chopped, it may still retain some of its particular powers. According to some traditions, a connection between the person and the severed hair still exists, giving the owner of the hair the capacity to act.

Hair has been utilised in the creation of rain charms and for therapeutic purposes by cultures who think charms and amulets have protective properties. In some cultures, rites of passage that involve hairdressing or cutting play a major significance for hair. A significant means of communication and self-expression, hair is also a symbol of the individual and of group identity. Hair can represent changes in social beliefs as well as social standards because of how versatile it is as an accessory. Commenting upon hair in his work, "Evidence of Evil", Jacek Nowakowski says:

It is not only part of the human body, it is also a part of the human personality-part of one's identity. How you wear your hair tells a lot about you as a person. Hair is so simple but it is so fundamental. This fundamental nature of hair works as a signifier of human identity and individuality. (68)

Taking into concentration particularly the Hindu mythology, different form of hair has different connotations, like the loose, uncontrolled hair symbolises the untamed, unruly nature whereas well-oiled, combed hair symbolises culture. The goddesses Lakshmi, Saraswati and Durga, these three deities have loose, unrestrained hair. Another illustration is the goddess Kali's unrestrained hair, which symbolises the wild, as opposed to the Goddess Gauri, who is domestic and has well-bound hair, and to whom devotees bring Gajra, a string of flowers used to bind up the hair, in her temples.

Goddess Saraswati, the wife of Lord Brahma and the goddess of water; symbolizes knowledge or wisdom, also known as the deity of language because of her ability to purify things. She is described as the one carrying a vina, a musical instrument and donning white clothes while sitting on a swan. In old scriptures, the goddess is described to have a tiny head and long, slender limbs since Hindu deities all had similar haircuts. Her hairdo displays brushed and knotted hair behind the ears. She is portrayed as having long, black curly hair which is styled with centre parting and a golden crown with three layers of curves and long hair that is slung beyond the shoulders. Thus, the goddess Saraswati's hair stands in for the chakras of life or in other words they represent the centre of energy.

The symbolic colour of Lakshmi is red. Lakshmi is symbolized with the splendour, wearing golden accessories as the goddess of wealth. She is also symbolized with a white elephant and a lotus flower. Early Lakshmi forms hide the hairstyle by covering the head with a crown. Lakshmi forms show connected eyebrows on the face and the mark of bindi on the forehead. Hairs are noted by a horizontal line on the forehead. The long hair style swirling as if it symbolizes rain clouds is characteristic. Lakshmi is always decorated with various accessories after the medieval era.

Parvati, the daughter of Himalayan Mountain is worshipped as the Venus of India. She stands for the universe's feminine force. In the process of becoming the bride of the Lord Shiva, Goddess Parvati was elevated to a major Hindu deity with typically emphasise on her feminine attributes. Black and gold are her favoured hues. According to legend, Parvati transformed her complexion from black to gold in order to appease her husband Lord Shiva. She is depicted as a women with large, rounded accessorised hair which are unbound covered by a veil. Goddess's hair represents her as a mother deity and at the same time demonstrates the submissive nature of women receiving protection from men. The large, sensual form and feminine attributes of Parvati are icons of the modern era.

*Manusmriti* is yet another significant mythology adage that came to light. It's the first Hindu metrical treatise on Brahminical Dharma also known as '*Manav Dharam Shastra*'. The *Manusmriti* is regarded as

the most reliable declaration on Dharma and is considered to be Brahma's word, according to Hindu mythology. The text has come to be identified by Hindus with the first human and the first monarch in Indian tradition due to the assumption that the actual human author of this compilation used the eponym "Manu." The *Manusmriti* is regarded by Hindu apologists as the divine code of conduct, and as a result, the text's depiction of women's status has been understood as Hindu divine law. According to *Manusmriti*, catching hold of the hair in any way is forbidden even in a fight. As mentioned by Buhler in the text:

I should immediately punish anyone who, out of wickedness, dishonours someone by snatching and dragging her by her hair and the punishment would be to cut off both his hands. The reason was that the uncut hair has always been considered as giving great prestige to its possessor. Therefore, handling of the hair, either by a hairdresser or by a clinical trichologist, is to be considered as a special prerogative. (*Manusmriti* 25)

Even in the *Ramayana*, the importance of women's hair is underscored by Sita, Rama's consort, who gives Hanuman, the monkey god, a hairpin as her final gift to let him know that both her honour and his reputation are in jeopardy. Another example from the *Ramayana* is that of Kaikeyi, who stayed in her apartment with messy hair in order to obtain two boons from Dasaratha that were harmful to Rama's interests, Dasaratha's favourite.

Similarly, in the *Mahabharata*, when Draupadi was assaulted by Dussasana, in front of everyone gathered and drags her out into the royal court. Her five husbands, who did nothing to stop her from being publicly humiliated. That very moment she swore in front of the Kurus that she would continue to have untidy hair until the foes received just compensation. Fury is thus represented by Draupadi's loose hair in the *Mahabharata*. Thus, for the next thirteen years Draupadi resolutely refuses to wash or tie her hair. Even today, women are advised to keep their hair tied back because loose, unruly hair not only encourages sexual promiscuity, but also compares them to a broken, humiliated Draupadi.

It is gathered that hair displays distinctive trends from all around the world. In contrast to various countries, India is influenced by a distinctive religion known as Hinduism. Hindu symbols serve as the foundation for contemporary Hindu culture and further helps to investigate the hairstyles of ancient Indian deities. Distinctive deities' hair can be seen in Indian mythology's miniatures and sculptures having distinctive meaning pertaining to their personalities. From second century BCE to the sixth century CE the hair of the Hindu deities have been depicted as spiralling curls, thick, half-closed, line over the eyebrow and lofty. Cultural norms have been greatly influenced by hair. Thus, hair has a symbolic significance of strength, activity, cheer, energy, and success in Indian mythology. Hairstyles associated with femininity, such as braiding, letting down, or trimming, are generally frowned upon. Since ancient times, women have been seen concealing or bunning their hair in numerous storylines. Therefore, hair serves a variety of purposes; hereditary quality is its best attribute; it also acts as a display for personality traits, physical beauty, and social qualities.

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