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# Women, Oral Traditions, Sexism and Patriarchy: A Feminist Rethinking Approach to Balaram Das's *Laxmi Purana*

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### Abstract

The *Laxmi Purana*, inscribed by the fifteenth-century Odia classic poet Balaram Das, provides a pioneering feminist chronicle that not only challenges deep-rooted patriarchal structures but also challenges caste hierarchies through the medium of oral tradition and religious narratives. This paper provides insight into how this classic oral folklore plays a vital role as a tool for highlighting the resistance against dominant gender and caste ideologies while being transmitted primarily through rituals and religious practices performed during the month of 'Margasira' in Odisha, popularly known as *Manabasa Gurubara*. The narrative builds up on Goddess Laxmi's fearless denial of Lord Jagannatha, her husband and Lord Balabhadra, her brother-in-law, who barred her from crossing into the temple after she paid a visit to the home of Shriya, a woman who belongs to a disadvantaged class group, thus breaking the age-old social limitations. Lakshmi's non-compliance to undergo the said 'purification ceremony' before re-entering the temple amplifies female self-possessiveness and reflects her equalitarian belief, while her strategic decision of withholding prosperity from the gods until they acknowledge their moral failure illustrates feminist hostility against male hegemony. The oral transmission and religious celebration of the text, through decades of worshipping

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norms, by women during 'Thursday rituals' creates a categoric feminist discourse that empowers women and encourages autonomy; through the ritualistic recitation of the *Purana*, economic independence, themes of self-respect and the right to challenge oppressive norms are foregrounded.

*Keywords:* Oral tradition, feminism, casteism, rituals, patriarchal authority, sexism.

The *Laxmi Purana*, is an Odia scripture, written by fifteenth-century Odia poet Balaram Das (one amongst the Panchasakha group or the five great poets, during the Bhakti age, who had also infamously translated the *Bhagavad Gita* and *Ramayana* into Odia) offers a groundbreaking feminist plot that challenges marrow-deep patriarchal systems in the body of society; critiquing caste hierarchy through oral traditions and folklores. This paper attempts to examine how this classic oral folklore serves as a pathway to practice resistance against dominant gender norms and caste ideas while being handed down mainly through rituals held during the month of 'Margasira', known as *Manabasa Gurubara* in Odisha. The narrative centres on Goddess Lakshmi's act of defiance against her husband, Lord Jagannatha, and her brother-in-law, Lord Balabhadra. After visiting Shriya, a woman from a caste considered lower in society, the two brothers forbid Laxmi to enter the temple and ask her to go for the purification ritual, for the re-entry into the temple, which Goddess Laxmi strongly objected and stood firm in her decision, which directs to an assertion of female autonomy and equality. Followed by holding back prosperity from the deities for a long twelve years, until they recognise their wrongdoing towards Laxmi.

For ages, this oral recitation of the story, in the month of Margashira's every Thursday among the women, brings into being a shared space for feminist dialogues and collective sensitisation. Through these ritualistic performances of this *Purana*, the text foregrounds some philosophical premises, such as the right to stand against discriminatory structures, financial autonomy, and self-esteem to come to the forefront. Though the tale unravels within a system shaped by male authority, it fearlessly challenges restrictive conventions and openly interrogates both gender and caste stratifications by allocating a role to Goddess Laxmi, the divine figure but portraying her as a quintessential human figure who sternly opposes the social injustice. Balaram Das has portrayed Laxmi as the

embodiment of feminist defiance to patriarchal authority. This particular composition, through its colloquial language and rhythmic structure, surpassed the upper-privileged literature and became embedded in the oral and performative traditions of ordinary people. Part of the Odia literature, but goes beyond the bounds of regional boundaries by advocating casteism and gender disparities that are deeply rooted in the medieval Indian religious and social orders. The whole divine setting *Laxmi Purana* hints at the subtle disproportions that are engraved on the societal orders by making it a powerful early expression of indigenous feminist thought within Indian literature.

The text initiates with the central female protagonist Laxmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity, who was highly pleased with the devotion and gratitude of an outcaste woman, Shriya and stepped out to bless her. After she returned, she faced a strict rejection from her beloved when she claimed that she had no intention to be purified and then Lord Jagannath declared the verdict that she had to leave her marital home, which is a symbolic denial of the social and religious forces that put women into subjection. By insisting on her independence, Laxmi not only interferes with the powers of her husband but the overall ideology, according to which women are subordinate. This rebellious gesture can be attributed to the feminist claim that gender equality is needed to destroy the systems of domination that strip women of agency.

The text is not merely a mythological tale confined to divine settings. It remains actively woven into Odia culture through regular rituals and oral traditions that keep its relevance alive. In Odia homes, especially on Thursdays during the month of 'Margasira', women partake in drawing sacred *Jhoti* (ritual art) patterns and reciting the *LaxmiPurana* as acts of devotion and gratitude to the goddess continues to live vibrantly in Odia households through ritualistic and oral performances that sustain its cultural significance even today. The narrative is not simply a myth set in celestial realms, but these rituals go beyond religious observance and represent unity, empowerment, and a sense of collective identity among women. By engaging in these practices, women continually reinterpret Laxmi's acts of defiance, symbolically aligning themselves with her pursuit of respect and equality.

It is the continuity of oral and ritualistic transmission of *Laxmi Purana* that it will be a living text that will be redefined by feminine voices and experiences of women of different generations. In this process, oral traditions are very important to spread the spark among women. They work to make literature a communal cultural memory, which has the capability of empowering women to oppose oppression and to define themselves. *Laxmi Purana* is an attempt to fill the gap between the sacred and the mundane, myth and social reality, by being conveyed orally and performed in action. It also enables women as not only the carriers of the tradition but also the decoders and reproducers of the meaning.

The *Laxmi Purana* challenges two deeply entrenched systems of sexism, oppression and casteism through a narrative that appears, at first glance, mythological and devotional. Feminist theory provides a critical framework for examining the text as a means of resistance that arises from within a patriarchal framework. Patriarchy, as interpreted in feminist discourse, is a system of social organisation in which men hold authority and power over women in religious, political, domestic and economic spheres. In the conventional Hindu society, male supremacy is strictly woven in every possible ways, women have no choice by own rather to follow them wholeheartedly in the name of *Pativrata Dharma*. Under which she has to do everything that flatters the husband, much without any further interrogation.

Within this cultural framework, Lakshmi's defiance becomes evidently radical. Her refusal to undertake purification and her refusal to abandon her marital home represent a symbolic rejection of the religious and social constraints placed upon women for generations. By insisting on her independence, Laxmi not only interferes with the powers of her husband but the overall ideology, according to which women are subordinate. This rebellious gesture can be attributed to the feminist claim that gender equality is needed to destroy the systems of domination that stripped women of agency.

Furthermore, the text can be interpreted as a critique of the casteist hierarchy that legitimised and authenticated discrimination-based exclusion in religious and social life. Laxmi's decision to visit a woman from a lower caste challenges the purity-pollution dichotomy

that has historically diabolically marginalised certain communities. Laxmi upholds an egalitarian and spiritual vision that undermines the discriminatory foundations of ritual purity and the supreme duty of women. This egalitarianism, articulated through divine intervention, becomes a powerful statement on the social realities of the time and serves as an early articulation of caste and gender equality within an indigenous context.

In the context of Odia culture, *Laxmi Purana* assumes an even deeper significance. Odisha, known for its strong tradition of goddess worship and promotes shaktism, placing the feminine divine at the centre of religious life. However, society honours female deities, but in the real world, women are forced to be obedient and docile towards the family and society. But regardless of cultural respect for goddesses, actual women have been placed in subservient positions in the patriarchal world. This is a conflict between the divine glorification and social misery of women; it is one of the main contradictions which *Laxmi Purana* reveals in its core.

By examining *Laxmi Purana* under the light of feminism, it is possible to articulate how the feminist consciousness that prevailed in pre-modern India existed way before the feminist movements were formally expressed in contemporary India. It can be associated with a regional type of feminism that arose within the cultural and spiritual structure of the Indian society, which did not originate in the West. This native feminism acknowledges the experienced lives of women within their socio-religious shapes and forms the experiences into resistance and resilience. The oral transmission of the Purana further enhances its feminist attributes. Oral storytelling has long enabled women to safeguard their histories and voices in societies where reading and writing were predominantly male domains. By reciting and passing down the Purana, women not only preserve but also shape collective wisdom. As such, the text becomes a shared platform where women's acts of worship, endurance, and challenge are recognised and affirmed.

In this sense, *Laxmi Purana* challenges the conventional dichotomy between feminism and religion. It demonstrates that religion, often perceived as an instrument of patriarchy, can also serve as a site of reinterpretation and resistance. Lakshmi's defiance is

not a rebellion against faith but a redefinition of divine as well as justice. Her voice resonates with the voices of countless women who seek to reconcile spirituality and norms with equality. Thus, *Laxmi Purana* stands as both a political statement and a cultural artefact. It embodies the complexity of women's lives, their enduring quest for selfhood and their negotiation with power. It continues to inspire reinterpretations and feminist readings that posit it within broader discourses of caste, gender and social justice.

This paper undertakes a feminist analysis of *Laxmi Purana*, focusing on themes of oral traditions, women's agency, patriarchy and sexism. It seeks to answer critical questions such as how the text reflects indigenous forms of feminism, how it exposes traditional gender roles within a religious framework and how it documents the history of women's empowerment and oppression. By focusing on the ritual and oral dimensions of the text, this study demonstrates that oral traditions are not merely preservers of culture but are also dynamic pathways of liberation. Viewed from a feminist perspective, *Laxmi Purana* stands as ongoing evidence of women's fortitude, endurance and ethical leadership. The text uncovers the early development of feminist thought within South Asian literary traditions, highlighting that efforts toward gender justice have been deeply rooted in India's own culture and spirituality. Beyond recounting the tale of a goddess who stood up against unfairness, it continually inspires women across generations to question and resist the boundaries placed upon them.

Balaram Das's *Laxmi Purana* occupies a unique space in the literary, societal and devotional landscape of Odisha, functioning simultaneously as a cultural artefact, religious text and a site of feminist critique. The narrative foregrounds a goddess who speaks her will, defies patriarchal authority and aligns herself with marginalised women, thereby subverting both gender and casteist hierarchies. A close textual reading reveals how the *Purana's* events, characterisation and narrative strategies work in tandem to critique discrimination, patriarchy and sexism, while amplifying women's agency. When analysed through feminist and literary theoretical frameworks, the text emerges not only as a devotional narrative but also as a powerful assertion of social justice and gender equity.

At the heart of this *Purana* is the episode where Laxmi enters the home of Shriya, a woman considered untouchable. By stepping across established caste lines, Laxmi directly confronts the prevailing social and ritual conventions of that era. The disapproval expressed by Jagannatha and Balarama, who reject Shriya's purity and criticise Lakshmi, highlights the deep-seated patriarchal and caste-based hierarchies within traditional religious customs. Lakshmi's confrontation with Jagannatha directly critiques male authority and the gendered expectations imposed upon women: "Laxmi said to Jagannatha, 'You claim to uphold dharma, yet you deny the sanctity of women who labour and live with dignity. How can righteousness reside in such arrogance?'" (Das 24). This dialogue exemplifies how Laxmi challenges the patriarchal notion that women's virtue is conditional upon male permission and approval. By asserting her ethical judgment, she resists the expectation of wifely submission and obedience, highlighting the *Purana's* critique of gender-based hierarchy and hegemony.

From a feminist lens, Lakshmi's defiance can be read through Chandra Talpade Mohanty's concept of culturally specific feminist agency. Mohanty emphasises that women's resistance must be understood within their socio-cultural contexts rather than universalised frameworks of oppression (Mohanty 65). Lakshmi's defiance does not reject tradition outright; rather, it reinterprets ethical and devotional norms from within, asserting justice over ritual orthodoxy. Her actions exemplify what Mohanty calls "radical agency within tradition," foregrounding the possibility of feminist resistance in deeply patriarchal contexts.

The narrative structure of *Laxmi Purana* also enhances its subversive potential. As an orally transmitted text, it allows for performance, interpretation and adaptation by women across generations. Oral narratives, as Ruth Finnegan observes, are inherently participatory and fluid, enabling marginalised voices to negotiate and reshape dominant discourses (Finnegan 47). Women in Odisha recite the *Purana* during Manabasa Gurubar rituals, blending devotion with critique. These performances transform domestic and communal spaces into sites of moral authority, wherein women symbolically assert their ethical and social agency.

Lakshmi's solidarity with Shriya introduces an intersectional dimension to the *Purana's* critique of oppression. By aligning with an untouchable woman, Laxmi contests both gender and caste hierarchies, anticipating frameworks of intersectionality articulated by scholars like Kimberlé Crenshaw. The text problematizes patriarchal definitions of purity and pollution: "Laxmi touched Shriya's hand without hesitation, and the house of Jagannatha grew cold and barren until he learned that true worth is not measured by birth but by action" (Das 28). Through this act, the *Purana* underscores that spiritual and moral authority is not the exclusive domain of higher castes or men. The narrative reconfigures power structures and societal norms by prioritising ethical conduct over hierarchical status, creating a space for women and marginalised groups to assert their value.

Simone de Beauvoir's notion that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (Beauvoir 283) provides another interpretive framework. Laxmi actively constructs her identity, refusing the passive role traditionally assigned to women in both religious and domestic contexts. She demonstrates that womanhood is defined not by obedience or subservience but by moral and autonomous action. The *Purana* foregrounds women's agency at the centre of social and ethical order, critiquing the patriarchal notion that women's worth is contingent upon their compliance with male authority.

The ethical tension between Jagannatha's authority and Lakshmi's defiance also illuminates the patriarchal logic underpinning religious and social hierarchies. Jagannatha's initial refusal to acknowledge Shriya's worth represents a moral blindness sanctioned by patriarchal norms. The ensuing deprivation in his household dramatises the consequences of excluding women and marginalised communities from moral recognition. This narrative moment critiques a system in which male authority is normalised, yet dependent upon female labour and ethical guidance: "The household of Jagannatha knew famine and despair, for the goddess's absence revealed that the prosperity of men is inseparable from the justice and presence of women" (Das 32).

The text's attention to domestic and ritual spaces further underscores its feminist potential. Women's engagement with the

*Purana* through ritual performance transforms these spaces into sites of resistance. As Gloria Goodwin Raheja observes, women's oral performances frequently constitute "counter-discourses" that subvert dominant patriarchal ideologies while appearing to conform to them (79). By performing Lakshmi's narrative, women assert moral authority and question gendered hierarchies within their households and communities. The *Purana* exemplifies how oral tradition can function as a medium for feminist critique and empowerment, bridging narrative, ritual and social praxis.

The linguistic and stylistic strategies of *Laxmi Purana* further enhance its feminist resonance. The text employs a vernacular idiom accessible to women, who were historically excluded from Sanskrit education. Its lyrical and repetitive structure aids memorisation and performance, ensuring oral transmission across generations. This accessibility aligns with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's argument that subaltern agency must operate within culturally intelligible frameworks (87). By using the vernacular, Balaram Das democratizes sacred discourse, allowing women to appropriate religious narrative as a form of empowerment.

Several textual moments specifically critique sexism and the subordinate social position of women. For instance, Laxmi reproaches Jagannatha for restricting women's participation in ritual and domestic decision-making, "You call yourselves the lord of the house, yet every task, every fortune, every virtue is sustained by women's hands. How can you claim mastery when you deny them voice and choice?" (Das 30). This statement directly challenges patriarchal assumptions that men are the natural arbiters of household, social and spiritual authority. The narrative emphasises that male authority is contingent upon women's labour, loyalty and ethical action, revealing systemic gender inequalities that remain relevant in contemporary feminist critique.

The *Purana's* portrayal of Shriya also highlights gendered oppression intersecting with caste discrimination. Her social marginalisation and the simultaneous undervaluation of her ethical and spiritual capacity illustrate the dual oppressions women face in patriarchal and casteist systems. Lakshmi's intervention validates Shriya's worth and demonstrates a proto-intersectional ethical

framework: “The goddess proclaimed, ‘A woman’s birth does not define her value, nor her caste her virtue. It is action and heart that measure worth’” (Das 29). This pivotal scene within the text strengthens the *Purana’s* bold challenge to both gender and caste oppression. It places women’s ethical strength above the hierarchical norms imposed by society, showing the story’s nuanced awareness of how these issues intersect long before such ideas were formally named. Additionally, the *Purana* questions the widespread belief that women’s subservience is justified by tradition or divine authority. Lakshmi’s unwillingness to endure unfairness or conform to strictly patriarchal expectations reflects a form of feminist defiance rooted in local tradition. Through her resistance, the religious story becomes a means of social commentary, empowering women to confront injustice even as they participate in devotional rituals.

The textual analysis of *Laxmi Purana* also reveals how patriarchal oppression is embedded in language, ritual and social expectation. For example, the repeated emphasis on ritual purity and the denigration of untouchable households serve to enforce male-dominated moral authority. By subverting these norms, Laxmi exposes the arbitrariness and violence of patriarchal and caste hierarchies: “Purity is not in walls or water, but in deeds and conscience. Those who oppress and humiliate women and the lowly are impure in the eyes of dharma” (Das 31). This proclamation aligns with feminist theory, illustrating that ethical and spiritual authority need not mirror social hierarchy. Women’s moral and spiritual agency is presented as a corrective to male-dominated structures, demonstrating the *Purana’s* enduring relevance as a feminist text.

Examining the text through both textual analysis and feminist theory reveals its complex challenge to patriarchy, gender bias, and sexism. Lakshmi’s rebellious stance, her ethical support for excluded women and the *Purana’s* oral transmission together suggest an ideal of social and gender fairness. The narrative confronts male dominance, questions established social structures, and affirms women’s moral and spiritual autonomy, while still maintaining its importance as a devotional and cultural text. When considered alongside the perspectives of feminist thinkers like Mohanty, Beauvoir, and Spivak, *Laxmi Purana* stands out as a religious text with

radical feminist dimensions, motivating women's empowerment and resistance in Odisha and beyond.

The *Laxmi Purana* of Balaram Das endures as one of the most radical and reformist compositions in Odia literature. While it originated as a devotional text centred on the goddess Lakshmi, it transcends its ritual context to become a profound commentary on women's agency, patriarchal domination and caste oppression. Through the lens of feminist criticism, the *Puranas'* oral and textual layers reveal how women in both myth and lived experience negotiate the boundaries of authority and redefine the ethics of justice, compassion and equality. In reinterpreting *Laxmi Purana* from a feminist perspective, this study has shown how the narrative constructs an alternative moral order that privileges ethical integrity over ritual purity, solidarity over hierarchy and justice over obedience.

At the heart of the *Purana's* revolutionary and transformative message lies Lakshmi's act of defiance, her refusal to accept Jagannatha's patriarchal decree and her alliance with Shriya, an untouchable woman (referred to as 'chandaluni' in the folklore). This episode becomes emblematic of resistance not just to gender subordination but also to systemic caste discrimination. Lakshmi's assertion that "true devotion resides in righteousness, not caste" (Das 24) epitomises a vision of spirituality that unites ethics and equality. Her defiance rejects the theological justification of patriarchy, exposing it as a moral and social construction rather than a divine truth. In doing so, the *Purana* reimagines divinity itself as inclusive and justice-oriented.

This progressive reimagining of female divinity contrasts sharply with the depiction of women in traditional Hindu epics. While revered figures such as Sita and Draupadi commonly symbolise endurance, purity, and moral suffering within male-dominated frameworks, *Laxmi* rejects passive suffering and silent acceptance. Rather, she boldly speaks out, takes decisive action, and reshapes the ethical landscape. Her assertiveness signifies a move from divine compliance to divine opposition. Consequently, the *Laxmi Purana* offers a new model in which female divinity is the

source of ethical authority, turning submission into defiance and devotion into a form of moral activism.

The folk and oral tradition of *Laxmi Purana* plays an essential role in sustaining, propagating and amplifying this feminist consciousness. For centuries, Odia women have recited, participated and performed the *Purana* during Manabasa Gurubar rituals, embedding it within the rhythms of domestic and communal life. These recitations constitute acts of collective memory and cultural agency. As Ruth Finnegan notes, oral traditions allow marginalised voices to reframe dominant narratives (Finnegan 47). In the case of *Laxmi Purana*, women's oral recitations become both devotional and political acts, ritual performances that celebrate divine femininity while simultaneously questioning social hierarchies. Through repeated performance, women internalise Lakshmi's defiance as a moral ideal, transforming a religious ritual into a symbolic act of feminist empowerment.

Lakshmi's act of accepting Shriya emphasises the interconnected nature of oppression by breaking down barriers between the divine and mortal, the privileged and the marginalised, and the pure and impure. By offering her blessings across caste lines, Laxmi enacts what contemporary feminist scholars like Kimberlé Crenshaw call intersectional resistance, acknowledging that gender issues are inseparable from class, caste, and social hierarchies. The story in the *Purana* illustrates that true liberation for women requires addressing the wider structures that shape societal life. Lakshmi's moral alliance with Shriya thus foresees a broad feminist awareness that crosses traditional divides of caste and class.

The *Purana* reveals the patriarchal systems woven into both religious and social orders. Jagannatha's role as both husband and deity symbolises male supremacy embedded within family and spiritual institutions. His demand for Lakshmi's submission portrays the patriarchal belief that a woman's value is tied to obedience. However, his eventual collapse, marked by hunger, suffering, and moral blindness, demonstrates the consequences of excluding women, both spiritually and materially. The renewal of wealth and well-being when Laxmi returns represents more than divine harmony; it signifies a fundamental shift in ethical priorities that

affirms women's moral importance and calls for the dismantling of hierarchical oppression. This perspective aligns with feminist scholars like Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, who argue for reclaiming women's voices within religious conversations. Rajan views religion not merely as patriarchal but as a fertile ground for feminist reinterpretation. *Laxmi Purana* embodies this by not rejecting faith but by redefining it, turning acts of devotion into powerful critiques of inequality and presenting a vision of spiritual feminism centred on compassion for the marginalised.

The text's normative, linguistic and performative aspects further reinforce this feminist vision. Composed in Odia rather than Sanskrit, the Purana democratises religious knowledge and disrupts the monopoly of male priestly authority. Its vernacular idiom enables women, who were historically denied formal education, to recite, access and interpret the divine narrative. This accessibility, as Gayatri Spivak suggests, allows subaltern voices to "speak" within their cultural frameworks (87). Women's recitations of *Laxmi Purana* thus become acts of reclaiming both language and knowledge, ensuring that sacred authority is no longer the exclusive domain of men or elites.

In the broader context of Indian feminist thought, *Laxmi Purana* can be seen as an early articulation of indigenous feminism. Long before the advent of modern feminist theory, it presents a discourse that situates female autonomy within faith and moral action. Chandra Talpade Mohanty's notion of feminist agency within cultural tradition finds perfect resonance here: Lakshmi's rebellion operates within the language of dharma, not against it. Her defiance is not rejection but redefinition, an ethical reordering that transforms tradition into a medium of justice. The goddess thus becomes a cultural archetype of feminist resistance rooted in indigenous spirituality rather than Western secular frameworks.

The continuing relevance of *Laxmi Purana* lies in its capacity to challenge persistent sexism and patriarchy within contemporary contexts. In modern Odisha, women still invoke Laxmi during domestic rituals as a symbol of prosperity and virtue, but increasingly, she also represents moral independence and self-worth. The narrative has inspired folk songs, performances and

reinterpretations that emphasise women's solidarity and ethical strength. Its message that devotion without justice is hollow resonates deeply in a society where gender and caste inequities endure under new forms.

From a literary standpoint, *Laxmi Purana* also demonstrates the power of oral literature as a repository of subaltern voices and drives home the very concept of equality. The text's transmission through storytelling and ritual ensures its evolution across generations, allowing new interpretations to emerge in response to changing social realities. This dynamic adaptability, characteristic of oral traditions, keeps the *Purana* alive as both a spiritual and political text. It reminds us, as Walter Ong observes, that orality fosters not static preservation but creative transformation (36). In each recitation, women reinterpret Lakshmi's defiance, reaffirming that ethical resistance remains a living, communal act.

In conclusion, *Laxmi Purana* stands as a timeless testament to the intersection of humanity, compassion, faith, feminism and social justice. Its critique of patriarchy and sexism, expressed through the divine narrative of Lakshmi's rebellion, transforms a ritual text into a moral manifesto. By integrating oral tradition with feminist ethics, the *Purana* constructs a theology of equality where devotion becomes indistinguishable from resistance. Lakshmi's voice is firm, compassionate and unyielding, embodying the essence of feminist spirituality: the assertion that justice is sacred and that divinity itself demands inclusivity. There is a dire need to bring back the true essence of feminine agency and the importance of equality, which can be drawn from the literary and sociological continuity that the *Purana* has to offer, beyond the boundaries of Odia literature, norms and tradition.

Essentially, the *Purana's* power lies in its enduring relevance and foregrounding a sense of equality. In a world still shaped by patriarchal hierarchies, Lakshmi's act of crossing the boundaries of caste and gender serves as a metaphor for all struggles against exclusion and subordination. Her solidarity with Shriya reminds us that liberation is collective, not individual; ethical, not ceremonial. The *Laxmi Purana* thus continues to inspire not only devotion but also dissent, urging readers, religious practitioners and listeners to

envision a society where morality is measured not by obedience or purity but by humanity, compassion, equality and justice. Balaram Das actively sabotages the societal prohibitions and also destabilises gendered and caste-based hierarchies by delineating Goddess Laxmi as both a social and a divine reformer. Ultimately, the *Laxmi Purana* stands as a testimonial to indigenous feminism and reflects the richness of medieval Indian literature in addressing issues of sexism, casteism and patriarchal authority long before such notions ingrained prominence in modern feminist discourse.

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