

SYMPATHY FOR SHAKCHUNNI

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She is a witch, an icon and a meme: I'm talking about Shakchunni, the slightly hunched and unusually tall green witch who we found scary as children and funny as adults. But as I watched Thakurmar Jhuli again as an adult, I came out feeling a little sorry for the witch. And if you really think about it, you realise that the story of the cackling green witch is a bit sad.

WHAT MAKES SOMEONE THE WAY THEY ARE?

In the scene where the Bou Ma goes to get the cow, she mentions what she has heard about Shakchunni from other people. Shakchunni deserves to be seen as innocent until proven otherwise. Rumours or myths shouldn't define who she is. Upon watching the whole episode, we do however know that the things Bou Ma heard was in fact true and that Shakchunni isn't

faultless: she uses deception to trick the man she loves into thinking she is the woman he married, she then imprisons Bamun Thakur's wife in a tree without taking into consideration how she might feel and lastly, we aren't told if she ever planned on taking her out of that tree.

All these paint her as a villain, but upon closer inspection we realise that there is a lot we haven't asked about Shakchunni. For one, we must remember



that we know nothing of Shakchunni's past. All we know is she obtains what she wants by unethical means. We don't know if she was born this way or became this way. If she did become this way, was it because she received a punishment for committing a crime or was she a victim of misplaced rage directed at her by a more powerful entity like Medusa was? Was there anyone to teach her what was right or wrong, and if there was, did the person in charge of educating her tell her that this was the way to attain what they desired?

BEING TREATED DIFFERENT FOR LOOKING DIFFERENT

Shakchunni has all these amazing powers ranging from fully transforming her appearance to exactly match that of another person to shrinking people to releasing fire to rotating her head 360 degrees. Her dribbling, as everyone knows, is out of the world. All this makes me wonder if maybe she looked better, she might have been admired for them instead of loathed and feared. Moreover, was her face the only thing that stopped her from getting Bamun Thakur? Was she ridiculed for how she looked or is she considered beautiful among her own people? As we know from her own words, she doesn't find herself unattractive. But maybe she knows that Bamun Thakur and other human beings won't accept her in her real form and this is so normalised that she herself has accepted this; she doesn't even try to change it.

We now know that we are conditioned in various ways to like certain features. Shakchunni may look grotesque to many because of what we are used to, and not used to, seeing. As a result, even if we see her doing something nice like helping an old person or playing with children, we might still be horrified of her because of her physical appearance.

RIGHTS FOR PEOPLE WHO DON'T FIT CATEGORIES WE'RE USED TO

In many cases, human beings don't have a history of accommodating people or even ensuring the basic rights of people who don't neatly fit into their idea of what is socially acceptable. Shakchunni isn't "normal". In fact, she isn't even hu-

man, but she is sentient and seems to love and hurt the same way we do, and that should be reason enough to empathise with her. The way the ojha fights her may not have been considered acceptable if she was a human being.

LONELINESS

She seems to live in a tree all by herself, and while we know she doesn't have a romantic partner, she also seems to completely lack friends or family. As a result, there's no concerned friend to tell her she is making a mistake and also no one to help her carry out her antics. If Shakchunni was the protagonist of a rom-com, it would be a sad one without any supporting cast. Not that she isn't enough by herself but extended periods of loneliness can be detrimental to a person's mental health. Add to this that she has no one to share the pain of her unrequited love with so all these negative feelings stay bottled up inside of her.

IS VIOLENCE EVER JUSTIFIED?

Shakchunni's fight with the ojha ends with Shakchunni being encased in a pink and blurry circle and her pleading with the ojha to stop throwing the fireballs at her. Many found this scene comical. But unlike things such as the slap bet in How I Met Your Mother which seemed painful but ultimately not serious, Shakchunni's fight with the ojha doesn't seem as harmless. In Shakchunni's case, she ends up crying. There must be a better solution than attacking a lonely witch who just wanted to be Bamun Thakur's wife but used her superpowers to harm and deceive people in the process.

The situation is resolved poorly: he tells her to leave the village after she loses in the fight. Not only do we not know if she ever really changed (who uses a broken branch of a neem tree as a sign?), we never get to know if another method such as talking some sense into her would have helped. Better solutions are needed for someone frustrated, upset and potentially harmful like Shakchunni. Violence, even against a witch with superpowers, isn't the answer.

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