

Satyavati: The Enigmatic Woman in Kavita Kane's The Fisher Queen's Dynasty

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Abstract--- *This paper explores the presentation of myth in Kavita Kane's The Fisher Queen's Dynasty (2017). Myth is represented from a different perspective. The story of mythical characters is no more that of Gods and Goddesses, Kane portrays them as flesh and blood human beings. Interestingly Kane's novels portray and bring to the forefront the marginal character of Indian Mythology, such as, Satyavati the female lead in the current study, The Fisher Queen's Dynasty. Using mythology as a background, foregrounding the condition of women in a patriarchal social order, the novelist Kavita Kane highlights the quest of women for their identity as a dominant theme of this novel. The paper explores the pivotal role played by the protagonist Satyavati in shaping the plot and the subsequent turn of events and incidents in the novel. The paper further elucidates the journey of Satyavati from being mere fisherwomen to that of the queen of the Hastinapur.*

Keywords--- *Ambition, Identity, Marginal, Myth, Society.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Epics like *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* attracted writers' interest from time immemorial. Writers from different geographical spheres, native and non-native tried their hand in interpreting them. Mythology is an evergreen enigma, known for its grand narrative as well as its in-depth philosophical thoughts and interpretation. Several practitioners have attempted to use their intellect in analyzing *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* and address several issues like a race, class, gender, power- politics and attempted to resolve through this genre to the fullest of their ability. List of contemporary Indian English writers is quite long whose chief interest lies in interpreting mythology from various perspectives, thereby contributing significantly to the existing domain of knowledge.

We observe writes like Amish Tripathi, Ashwin Sanghi, Devdutt Pattanaik, Kavita Kane and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni in contemporary times whose works document the theme of mythology. Among these, Kavita Kane portrays the unheard or relatively less spoken women characters of Indian Mythology. In her novels, mythology no longer remains the story of Gods and Goddesses but speaks about the common flesh and blood human beings. She purposefully uses the two great Epics of Hindu Mythology, *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* as a background of her novels foregrounding the ebb and flow of human life.

In *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty*, Kali-the central protagonist of the novel turns to Matsyagandha with the help and support of famous Rishi Parashar, and finally, with her talent and farsightedness, she creates her own identity. She becomes Satyavati -The First Queen of Hastinapur.

II. METHOD AND OBJECTIVES OF RESEARCH

To carry out this research, the method consists of a close reading of the text, followed by an analysis of text from various perspectives. These perspectives are:

1. A brief study of various themes of other contemporary mythological writers like Amish Tripathi, Ashwin Sanghi, Devdutt Pattanaik, Kavita Kane and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni.
2. Study the representation of Myth in the novel of Kavita Kane with a special focus on “The Fisher Queen's Dynasty”.
3. A close textual analysis method is followed to understand the subtleties and nuances of character representation with reference to Satyavati--the leading female protagonist of the novel. This is done for a better understanding of the character, Satyavati's struggle to create her own identity through the unique presentation style of Kavita Kane which is done basically by keeping mythology as a background, foregrounding the story of human beings.

III. DISCUSSION

In contemporary Indian literature, we observe the existence of writers like Amish Tripathi, Ashwin Sanghi, Devdutt Pattanaik, Kavita Kane and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni who have attempted at reworking on mystical themes, altering the traditional perspective. The way these writers have interpreted and analyzed age-old mythological beliefs it can be emphatically said that they attempt at providing us a new outlook towards mythology. Contemporary Indian writers have not challenged the existing approach but added a new frame of reference to the existing one. They have touched the human psyche as well.

Amish Tripathi in presented Shiva as a moral being and raised the fundamental question in his first book *The Shiva Trilogy*: “What if Lord Shiva was not a figment of rich imagination but a person of flesh and blood?” (1). He re-presented the Shiv-Puranas in *The Immortals of Meluha* (2010), *The Secret of the Nagas* (2011) and *The Oath of Vayuputras* (2013). The second book, *The Secret of the Nagas* (2011) recounts Shiva's quest to understand the different facades of evil. The last sequel, *The Oath of the Vayuputras* (2013), Shiva is presented as Lord Neelkant who finally discovers that the Somras as the cause of all evil. The story ends by showing Shiva as God who became famous due to his heroic deeds.

Ashwin Sanghi is another contemporary writer who made several experiments with the fiction-thriller genre. He has penned many best- selling books. Some of his creative works are: *The Rozabal Line* (2007), *Chanakya's Chant* (2010) and *The Krishna Key* (2012). His works significantly contribute to the theme of mythology. He compiled fiction- thriller genre with mythology. The book *The Rozabal Line* (2007) presented the story of Jesus Christ who somehow escaped crucifixion and came to India to settle down in Kashmir. His second book, *Chanakya's Chant* (2010) throws light to the glorious past of India. The book presents the story of Chandragupta Maurya who resisted the attack of Alexander, the great and established the Maurya Dynasty with the help of Chanakya, his court-poet and political strategist. Chanakya was popularly known as Kautilya who authored *Arthashastra* (1909). After rebirth, Chanakya is renamed as Gangasagar Mishra in modern India who has a dream to become the most powerful man in the country by uniting India against all odds.

The Krishna Key (2012) tells the reader about the importance of the Vedas influenced the life of the people of ancient India. The main character, Professor Ravi Mohan Sani is a descendant of Lord Krishna. The author, in this book, depicts post- Mahabharata history as well as the biography of Lord Krishna parallelly. All the books document a unique blend of history and mythology.

Devdutt Pattanaik is a very prolific Indian English writer who has written more than fifty books on mythology with special reference to the customs and rituals of ancient India. He has written books like: *Myth = Mithya: A Handbook of Hindu Mythology* (2006), *Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of the Mahabharata* (2010), *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana* (2013). Almost all books highlight the theme of mythology. In the book, *Shiva to Shankara: Giving Form to the Formless* (2017) the author discussed the different stages of the Shiva-linga as well as several meanings related to it. He presents myths in such a way that the reader considers myth as something live and dynamic, full of life and vitality which is very much related to the modern life of human beings. Star T.V. Network and Devdutt Pattanaik jointly collaborated for daily soap like “Mahabharata” and “Siya Ke Ram” which are serials based on mythology. It has also changed the conventional views by presenting it in the modern context. This modern interpretation of mythology through audio-video format and in colloquial language has also helped us to cross the language barriers as well as to realize the universal significance of mythology.

Although Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is a diasporic author who was chiefly concerned about the marginalized women of America and documents her multi-cultural experiences in her novels, still she considers mythic tales as ‘driving force’ of human civilization. Her fictional works such as: *The Mistress of Species* (1997), *The Palace of Illusions: A Novel* (2008). Her novel *The Mistress of Species* (1997) successfully documents the struggle of the immigrants in foreign lands. The work highlights how the immigrants adjust themselves with different geographical, political, social and cultural conditions in a foreign land. This novel document the cultural differences in India (homeland) and America (host-land) which is very much associated with the life of the writer as well. Divakaruni is a diasporic writer who has spent her childhood in Kolkata (India) and later moved to the United States with her family. The protagonist of this novel is Tilothama. She has magical powers and she is can solve the problems of man’s life by giving them her magical spice. She is even kidnapped due to her magical power. Her magical elements consist of turmeric, fenugreek, cinnamon and, other spices. This novel is a unique blend of myth and magic. Her other novel *The Palace of Illusions: A Novel* (2008) is based on *The Mahabharata*. It is narrated from the perspective of Panchala queen, Draupadi. The book is composed from the first-person point of view. Draupadi is presented as a protagonist. She is the spokesperson. She narrates incidents related to abnormal birth, her lonely childhood, her relationship with Krishna, her marital life, the nature of the five Pandavas, her relationship with her mother-in-law Kunti, her insecurities and mental dilemma, her feminist thoughts and also her attraction towards Karna.

Kavita Kane is another prolific Indian writer who writes extensively about the unfamiliar and unexplored characters associated to mythology. All her novels are based on mythological themes. She speaks about the ups and downs of human life against the backdrop of mythology. Her works include: *Karna's Wife - The Outcast's Queen* (2013), *Sita's Sister* (2014), *Menaka's Choice* (2016), *Lanka's Princess* (2017), and *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty* (2017).

All the novels have female protagonists, namely, Uruvi in *Karna's Wife - The Outcast's Queen*, Urmila in *Sita's Sister*, Surpanakha in *Lanka's Princess*, Menaka in *Menaka's Choice*, and Satyavati in *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty*. In these novels, Kavita Kane has presented how women played a significant role not only in *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* but also in human society as well. She has also shown how women became the victim of patriarchy and how they responded and reacted to it. All these writers have altered the traditional viewpoints and approaches towards mythology by incorporating various contemporary themes, socio-political issues, by presenting them through cinematic adaptations, associating them with human life and adding a new perspective to the existing domain of knowledge.

Myth is intricately linked with history. Myths are based on fiction and history is based on facts. They together form a unique balance of fact and fiction, and this novel is also not an exception. The novel implies the very fact that mythology is timeless, and one can paint the picture of life in the huge canvas of mythology. Myth has a larger domain and it not only documents our glorious past, culture, and civilization but also makes it relevant even today by presenting the story of common flesh and blood human beings.

The general perception is that myth is un-authentic tales created to interpret the existence of the Cosmos and the supernatural. The term "myth" is borrowed from the Greek word "mythos" that is rooted in society's religion or beliefs. M. H. Abrams states:

Myth is one story in mythology- a system of hereditary stories which were once believed to be true by a particular cultural group, and which served to explain (in terms of the intentions and actions of deities and other supernatural beings) why the world is as it is and things happen as they do, to provide a rationale for social customs and observances and to establish the sanctions for the rules by which people conduct their lives. (Abrams 170)

Myth interlinks heaven and earth in this novel. The author has narrated complex marital life of King Shantanu of Hastinapur and river nymph Ganga who were cursed by Lord Indra and had to accept the pain of separation from their loved ones. The story of Shantanu and Ganga in the first half of the novel dissolves the boundaries of heaven and earth. King Shantanu was bestowed with Ganga and she gave birth to Devavrat or Bhishm after their marriage. This incident is an example how heaven and earth meet. The novel goes on to present incidents which are common in the mortal world. The mystery of myth continues even when Satyavati, popularly known as Kali was born. The name 'Kali' indicates her dark complexion. Kali's father Dasharath who was the leader of the fishing community creates a mythical story that she was born of an Apsara. To hide the truth, he says that in many an instance heavenly being are seen interacting with earthly beings. Kavita Kane presents incidents related to human life against the backdrop of mythology. This association of mysteries of the past and the present this is done not only to satisfy the curiosity of the reader but also to show how mythology is presented through the life of human beings.

Characters used in this novel like Shantanu, Ganga, Satyavati, Rishi Parashar, Rishi Vishwamitra, Lord Indra-all are associated with mythology. They are presented as down-to-earth human beings filled with emotions and feelings. Like human beings, they, too, responds and reacts to emotional and mental conflicts. Rishi Parashar, a great rishi, a hermit who was regarded as elevated spirit succumbs to carnal pleasure. Rishi Parashar identified Kali as an unconventional woman and wanted her to give birth to a son who would later become a great Rishi and the world

would remember him for long years. Later, King Shantanu of Hastinapur also falls in love with Kali and finally marries her. Both submit themselves to the carnal pleasures- one the great Rishi and another the great King of Hastinapur.

Commenting on the character, Kavita Kane said: She is my favorite character in the Mahabharat, I confess! I see her largely as the most political person in the epic, the seeds of which are sown in the later narrative as the story unfolds... We see her as a widowed queen mother who ruled her own future and her family and the kingdom besides that of Bhishma. She unmade and made him. She turned him from Devavrat to Bhishma, while transforming herself astutely from Matsyagandha to Satyavati and in doing so, changed the lives of all those in the epic. Yet we don't often fathom her significance. She was the queen in every sense. (Chakrabarty)

The Fisher Queen's Dyanasty is a modern interpretation of the epic Mahabharata. Satyavati is the leading female protagonist, who is an unconventional woman. Although she just wanted to be queen, knowingly or unknowingly, she is dragged into the politics of patriarchal society. She is a rebellious, challenging and unconventional character who fights against all odds, does not confront the role of minute spectator and use the male society for her gain and upliftment, and finally creates her identity in a male-dominated society. Satyavati –then un-acknowledged and deserted fisher- girl becomes the queen of Hastinapur and the Royal Dynasty of Hastinapur gets its first female ruler. Although she was deprived of her royal birth just because she was a girl and was brought up by Dashrat, a fisherman. She was neglected of her royal parentage because the king needed a male heir would uphold his lineage. Her foster father made her feel special by saying that she was born of an Apsara of Heaven. Her father called her Satyavati.

Her first meeting and encounter with Rishi Parashar changed the entire course of life. She was gifted with immortal youth and evergreen virginity. From 'Kali'-the name by which she was popularly called, she became 'Matsyagandha'-emanating sweet fragrance from her body and possesses the power the heart of any person whom she desires. She is an unconventional woman who became a mother by conceiving Parashar's child illegally before the wedding and even gave her firstborn child to Parashar without a second thought in to achieve her dream. Her meeting with Parashar also taught her important lessons of life: "I learnt to love like a man-to love without feelings. And I shall never forget this lesson" (Kane 42).

She seduces King Shantanu of Hastinapur and even marries him, a person almost the age of her father, ignoring the society. She became the queen. Satyavati also participated in courtly affairs, sits on the throne with him and gives valuable opinions. King Shantanu succumbs to carnal pleasures and becomes a womanizer. He fails as a king, as a ruler, ignores his duties and responsibilities towards his citizen, his kingdom, and his family members. Unofficially, she becomes the ruler of the state by taking the incapacity of Shantanu as her advantage.

She even uses Devavrat, Shantanu and Ganga's son for her gain and to secure the future of her offspring. After becoming the Queen, she had a desire to become *Rajmata*, mother of King and assured that her son would become the king of Hastinapur after Shantanu. She is responsible for transforming Devavrat into Bhishma. Bhishma takes a terrible vow of lifelong celibacy, serve his father and the kingdom till the end of his life and ultimately sacrifices his happiness.

She uses him as a pawn to solve crucial stately affairs and to settle mass discontent by declaring a regent of the kingdom. She never leaves him and uses him as her right hand.

Although she commits many mistakes in her life but never gives up her ambition. She even illegal and unethical ways to have a male hare from her two sons by getting them married to kidnapped princesses to run the kingdom and continue her bloodline. Being guided by her ambition, she was even ready to follow unethical steps. Finally, her redemption occurs when she accepts her faults and considers them as experiences in life. She was even responsible for the beginning of the Kurukshetra war, and to escape the reality she opts for salvation in the lap of river Ganga.

The entire novel revolves around her and shows her struggle to create identity in a male-dominated society. She is an unconventional woman who is guided by her own ambition of becoming a queen someday. She challenges the existing patriarchal norms and creates her identity. Kavita Kane presented her in such a way that she no longer remained insignificant character rather became the leading female protagonist who contributed to the Kurukshetra war to a large extent.

IV. CONCLUSION

This research broadens our outlook and we observe the presentation of mythology from an alternative perspective. We no longer remain confined to the stereotype form of mythology representation. We realize that mythology can be presented in a larger frame of human life. Moreover, it adds new knowledge to the existing domain, enhances our thought process by making the reader think about mythology from a distinguished angle. This research, to some extent, throws light on the work of other contemporary writers. This is done for better understanding themes of contemporary writers as well. It also helps in the study of mythology with special reference to the *Mahabharata* from the perspective of comparatively lesser-known women character of Indian Mythology, which is a rare presentation, hardly focused on any mythology writer in contemporary times.

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