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Women imageries in Indian epics: A specific study on Mahabharata and Ramayana

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ABSTRACT:

The discourse of mythology can be viewed as being male-centered, which means that stories from mythology typically laud and extol masculine prowess. Conversely, women have been presented as submissive puppets with roles that are limited. similar to portraying victims or mute observers, with no indication of feminine prowess or even of feminine essence as such. As a result, mythology is androcentric because it is a type of canonical literature, and because most myths are created and read by men (Guerin, 2006). As a result, women's presence in myths is typically stereotypical, suppressed, and frequently neglected. The lack of a generally unfavorable portrayal of women in literature has been a problem for feminist writers.

Therefore, they observe and interpret patriarchal myths, and in the course of doing so, they not only represent women from a female perspective but also attempt to rebuild the canon of literature. This study explores myths as one of the primary places where ideological subjects are constructed and analyses Kavita Kané, a postmodern writer whose essays, are on Hindu myths.

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The author has subverted the patriarchal paradigm by bringing "other" characters like Urmila, Surpanakha, Menaka, and Satyawati from the margins to the center by utilizing the approach of revisionist mythmaking. As an alternative concept of female identity, this study explores the gynocentric myth developed by Kavita Kané in her book, *The Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen*(2013) and *Sita's Sister* (2014). This paper claims that by situating women within imaginary female communities and histories, modern retellings have dismantled the ideological boundaries erected by the phallocentric male canon.

KEYWORDS: Mythology, Indian, Women, Neglected, Phallocentric, Feminism, Marginalised

I. INTRODUCTION

Kavita Kane is an Indian novelist who was born on the 5th of August 1960. Her most well-known work is the mythical story *Karna's Wife*. Kavita Kane is well-known for calling attention to the significantly ignored female figures in Indian mythology in her novels *Analysis Awakening*. With a few notable exceptions, women rarely find mentions of stories like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, and her work has a vital tendency of revitalising the stories of disadvantaged female characters from these stories. Her books focus on women, tell the stories of relatively unknown female characters from mythology, and portray challenges and issues that women face today that are still relevant. This collection of her works includes feminist adaptations of Indian mythology.

1.1.1 Hindu mythology is deprived of a feminist perspective. Legends like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are passed down through generations as the literal words of Gods, imparting knowledge of how to live a decent life. But, what about women? The narrative cannot be changed when stories have a male-dominated echo chamber. This study will demonstrate the importance of an inclusive environment in addressing discrimination and fostering a wave of change. In reality, feminism is a more universal concept. Women writers here take on a more prominent role. They strive to make the hardship and dedication of women in society more real through novels, plays, and articles. Women are frequently marginalized. Here, Namita Gokhale and Kavita Kane want to demonstrate and shed attention on how women suffer due to their silence, lack of respect for themselves, lack of knowledge, and other issues through characters like Shakuntala, Urmila, and Urvashi. These female authors hope

to demonstrate to society how amazing women can be while yet being ignored, excluded, and stifled by society.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Epics would be lost if not retold: Kavita Kane: The New Indian Express group in Chennai sponsored an event named "A Tryst with the Ramayana."

The border between reality and fantasy is softly blurred in epics that represented the socio-political and geographic realities of the time. "We even have temples where key events are thought to have occurred."

2.2 Kavita Kane tells stories of unsung Women from mythology: Article by Poorvi Gupta, 26 November 2016

Their stories are hushed, unheard, and unsung, according to Kavita. "Marginalized figures like Urmila Or Menaka, and Surpanakha are also strong women with their own compelling stories to share that we are unaware of. They have their own story to tell, a story we don't know of. Kane likes to tell their stories."

2.3 Retelling Myths: A Study of Kavita Kane's Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen: . Monisha and Dr. SP. Shanthi, Mar-18

This book brings to life all the regal characters in a wonderful tale from the Mahabharata. Characters are crucial because writers use them as a means of expressing their views. This book warns modern readers against abandoning tradition in the name of progress because culture and tradition are the foundation of a healthy society. She has come forward to give voice to other Karna wives who were entirely ignored and silenced by writers from various ages through the fictional persona she created, Uruvi.

2.4 Urmila's Feminist Stance against patriarchy in Sita's Sister: Ayuta Mohanty and Puspita Das

This study tries to examine Urmila's feminism in Sita's Sister and how she performed all of her duties while speaking out against what she believed to be unfair treatment of women.

Women should be devoted to their husbands at all times, be obedient wives and devoted daughters, and support them in all circumstances. However, Urmila is given a

feminist perspective in Kavita Kane's book *Sita's Sister*, which enables readers to examine the epic from an original and never-before-considered perspective.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Aim and Objectives of the Study

This study aims to analyse the status of women since ancient texts such as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata Epic. It can direct us to take action that will provide women equal status in society. It will also assist in understanding Indian society, its issues, and challenges with a focus on women. The images of women in epics are mostly from a patriarchal perspective. Modern storytelling involves giving the stories new avatars through the teller's personal perspective, such as social, political, and gender ideas, or prejudices.

IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Indian mythology has always had a tendency to support the patriarchy by keeping women where they belonged—at the bottom of the social scale with the Shudras. But now things are starting to change. The oppressed are currently using the same weapons that were formerly used to defend their oppression, but this time as a means of empowerment.

Contemporary mythic fiction authors frequently use well-known clichés to take on the feminist issue. The straightforward decision between self-publishing and digital publication is giving rise to more new voices than ever before.

Feminism and mythology are not breakthroughs. Indian mythology has historically included strong female figures. In actuality, a well-known antiquated poem captures a hostile gang. He exhorts followers to begin each day with a thought of the "Virgin." Her five magnificent women, Ahaliya, Draupadi, Kunti, Tara, and Mandodari, will live on in our memories forever. She is shielded from all failures and misdeeds. In reality, Sita will always hold the coveted top slot for the ideal Indian woman among this eclectic "Savior" group as an excellent example of a strong woman and a rebel.

Yes, every decent Indian girl has long been expected to embody the charming and meek Sita who embraces all patriarchal conventions and whims. was offered as Making

the path to freedom may lead to the humiliation, public undressing, or petrification of bastard children. In fact, there have been countless retellings and reinterpretations over the years, which have given female protagonists new roles. But in terms of their popularity as a frame of reference, these stories have stayed confined to a small audience.

The story of Karna, the alienated Pandava brother, and Uruvi, a princess of the Pukeya dynasty, as well as their life together up until the battle of Kurukshetra and Karna's terrible demise, is covered in **Karna's Wife**. The significance of the novel's ending lies in the way Uruvi, a strong lady, continues to live her life even after Karna's passing. It should be emphasized that Karna's Wife has a far larger scope than a small love story centered on Kurukshetra's war between mythological figures. Despite the existence of the renowned tragic Hero Karna, Uruvi's character is given a lot of attention, making her a significant figure in the story. The tale of Karna's Wife weaves in and out of several instances of gaze. They are not forced into the storyline nor purposefully created as a recurring pattern.

One thing is obvious: the novel uses the subtle phenomenon of gaze to communicate desire. Secretive glances are used to establish the characters' silent conversation. The subject position changes; occasionally it is Uruvi and occasionally it is Draupadi. In the passage "She recollected her first sight of him- walking into the stadium of the archery contest in Hastinapur" (Kane, Karna's Wife 1), the narrator's voice makes it possible for visual phenomena to occur. The Pukeya princess, speaking in the third person, always refers to the moment she first fell in love with Karna as being "lithe but muscular with broad shoulders and a trim waist, the young stranger with his thick golden brown hair appeared almost God-like to Uruvi" (Kane, Karna's Wife 2). This always emphasizes the potency of sight as a medium.

This brings up the subject of third-eye staring, which is present in all of Kane's books and is possibly a metaphor for the covert 'gazes' of social consciousness at work. It's noteworthy to note that many other characteristics of gaze, where it is both associated with power and ridicule, can be found in this particular narrative, which combines the sense of desire with sight. Here, you can see how a particular focus was placed on specific thoughts. All of these ideas are related to the perception that it was enjoyable for bystanders to have the ability to judge Uruvi. Her choice is criticized by society for being inappropriate due to the match's violation of social norms. It is safe to say that the author's plot served as the strongest foundation for this story.

Thus, Karna's Wife establishes the secondary place given to a woman's desires in this context and introduces some fundamental characteristics of desire. The female gaze plays a key role in expressing female desire as well as disdain, contempt, rejection, and other emotions. A multivariate spectrum for the operational nuances of gaze is created by such a phenomenon.

The Ramayan is partially retold in **Sita's Sister** from the viewpoint of Urmila, Sita's younger sister and Lakshman's wife. In essence, the book is a discussion of all the women in the Ramayana, but Urmila emerges as the most significant figure since she is headstrong while remaining composed and able to see the broader picture. She strikes me as someone who handled difficult situations graciously, whether it was playing second fiddle to her adoptive older sister Sita or accepting the fact that her husband would continue to prioritize his brotherly responsibilities above and beyond her. She gives back by being a pillar of support for her loved ones rather than moaning. She is one of the Ramayana's most powerful characters, according to Valmiki.

The simultaneous marriages of Lakshman and Urmila, Bharat and Mandavi, and Shatrughna and Kirti continue the plot, which is introduced by Sita's amazing talent for raising Shiva's bow and her marriage to Ram. Urmila, Janak, and his wife's biological daughter, soon become the center of the story. It clarifies her function as Lakshman's divorced wife. Despite being the driving force behind the royal family following Dashrath's passing, she endures her loneliness in quiet until her spouse finally shows up after fourteen years.

A woman is aware of the standards of propriety that would condemn her strength. Kane also suggests the possibility of dread that the person forced to "look back" might be feeling since they are ill-equipped to understand the significance of the stony glare directed at her. This further increases the text's sexual tension while also making the reader's anxiety grow. The reader wonders if Urmila's hunger will elicit a response from Lakshman. However, when Lakshman's later sensitive quality met Urmila's anticipatory sight, it was no longer consistent with the order of gaze. The reader's perception of the visual hug's radiance has double-crushed the subject and item classes: "Does he love her? He got her to agree by making passionate eye contact with her for those fascinating, priceless minutes. She couldn't help but think back to that fleeting glance at his complicated face at the swayamvar, his feelings revealed to her, or his eager rage when

Ravan had offended her with his lewd gaze "Kane's Sita's Sister, page 47 Kane reiterates the depravity of spontaneous intrusive longing expressed in "licentious" yet again (Kane, Sita's Sister 47).

Urmila serves as an example of the antithesis of the female gaze that conveys a woman's longing in addition to serving as a simple representation of that expression. She provides the primary opportunity for a scathing stare back at a woman who won't be the target of a sexuality-loaded look. Ravan is the object of her unexpectedly violent backward glance as she says: "Urmila was touched by his obscene gaze. In his stern, shadowy visage, his eyes twinkled wolfishly. Urmila flinched at his invasive, open gaze, but she wildly lifted her jaw. She fixed her unwavering attention on him, her eyes glistening with unrestrained rage and hatred "Sita's Sister, page 32 (Kane).

V. CONCLUSION

Understanding the issues faced by women in the era depicted in the novel, as well as how they overcame the deterrents, is the primary driving force behind this study. Women's meaning in the general population is considered. The article also emphasizes the importance of involving women in order to dispel common stereotypes about them in public. According to the review's findings, women need to face their lack of decision-making since they are externalized, uneducated, and socially banned. The focus of Kane's original, however, is on deeply examining how the female characters overcome maltreatment caused by social norms and situations where they had to deal with psychological crises.

Kane illustrates the issue of similarity and offense by creating two equal images of Urmila and Uruvi. Congruity and offense are present in both books, but it is crucial to note how the author makes them available. Kane makes extensive use of Uruvi's internal conflict over whether to adhere to social norms regarding marriage or break them in order to satisfy her craving to show the passionate attack at work inside the individual.

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