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Revisiting Myths from feminine Perspective

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Abstract:

Myths practically in every field of human activity like religion, history literature, Psychology, and even anthropology. Hindu mythology which is considered the oldest mythology is the source of epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. The women writers, in particular, try to envisage a new identity and a new role for women by revising the myths from a female perspective. This paper focuses on Kavita Kane's mythological novel Lanka's Princess, in which Kane, attempts to redefine the role of women in the patriarchal society. The modernist, writers considered myth as a way of criticizing the modern world and examining the existential concerns in contemporary society. The need for re-interpretation of history and myth through literature has been continually emphasized by the Indian writers in English.

Keywords: Provisioning, Revisiting, Andocentric, gynocentric.

Myth plays a very important role in refining the culture and behaviour of the people. Majority of these myths, which were created by unknown authors mostly deal with the creation of the Universe. Gods, goddesses, and supernatural beings are the principal characters in these myths. The Greek myth and Roman myth were considered as the classical myths in western countries. Hindu mythology is also classical mythology which shares many things in common with the Roman and Greek mythologies. The myth remains a source of inspiration from time immemorial. Myth is seen in all walks of life, religion, history, psychology, literature, and even anthropology. Myths are not rewritten by modern writers but they are retold, revisited, and re-surveyed from different perspectives. They have attempted to retell myths for a purpose but not in a way that differs from the prototype. Myths were believed to be factual by the ancient people and laws were formed based on their beliefs. The manuscript has a set of rules and regulations to be followed by the people. The epics were written

according to the rules outlined in the Manusmriti . According to these epics women are exclusively thought to be the personification of love, sex, and happiness. Women were supposed to be passive and patient. The Women characters in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata like Sita and Draupadi are adored as goddesses because of their patience, submissiveness, and subservience, Whereas women like Surpanaka are portrayed as witches because of their rebellious nature. Almost all the popular women characters in Hindu mythology are neither rulers nor rebels. The women who passively accepted the social norms set by the men are accepted as angels and Gods. Sita in Ramayana according to the women revisionists, jumped into the fire not just to prove her chastity but to prove that she is a devoted wife of Rama. It is not only Sita but all the five iconic women in the Indian epics referred to together as Pancha Kanya who are celebrated as ideal women because of their subservience. The modern women writers are attempting to break this tradition and envisage a new identity and new role for these ideal women. Many modern writers have tried to revise the epics, from a feminine point of view.

The women characters in the epics are given a new dimension, they who were in the margin are pulled to the center by the new generation of writers. The modern writers like Saiswaroop Iyer , Kavita and Ananda Neelakandan have tried to reinterpret the epics' women's stories from their perspective. They have talked about the women who had been passive prey to the rules set by the men. Kavita Kane is one such writer whose novels pay due attention to the neglected female characters in the epics, like Surpanaga, Menaka, Urmila despite their sacrifices and hardships. This paper tries to focus on Kavita Kane's Lanka's princess where, Kane has redefined the character of Surpanaga. Kane tries to make the readers reconsider the mythical woman character, Surpanaga. The current scenario has made Kavita Kane enter into the epics from a new critical direction. She has picked the women characters whose emotions and feelings remain untold and has tried to retell them from a geocentric view. As Kavita Kane herself says in one of her interviews,

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“I wanted to go beyond the stereotype.”(2016)

And at the same time she has not tried to make a vamp into a saint rather she focuses on how Lanka's princess, Meenakshi gets the name, Surpanga and how she is humiliated and oppressed by the men on expressing her sexual desire

The story of Lanka's Princess begins with Lord Krishna narrating the story to Kubja about her previous birth as Lanka's princess and how she was turned down as a vamp by him when he was Ram.Surpanakha was a neglected child in the family because she was born when her mother Kaikesi expected a son to rule the three realms. Meenakshi's nails which were almost like “claws, curved and somewhat curling, with moon-shaped crescent” made her mother think of christening her as, Chandranakha. But her resistance and defensive demeanor against masochism make her Surpanakha. Meenakshi was expected to be calm and submissive since her childhood by her parents but to their dismay, she was stern and aggressive. She was provoked by her family members by addressing her with different names like, ‘vagabond’, ‘monster’ ‘ugly wretch’, and ‘Surpanakha’. Her own mother's words,

“Why can you not behave like a girl? Always fighting and squabbling, hitting boys and throwing stones and scratching the eyes out of anyone who provokes you. Surpanakha that's the right name for you, you monster” (pg.9)

Irritates her and shouts at her mother in a high pitched saying, ‘yes. I am a monster’. The continuous neglect by her parents and siblings makes her vicious and vengeful. Since she defies the social conventions imposed on women she is looked down as a witch. But Kavita Kane has highlighted the emotions, feelings, and interests of Surpanakha, unnoticed by her family members. Surpanakha is moved from the margin to the Centre by asserting herself and establishing an identity. She is unconcerned about becoming a deviant when she says, ‘she will hurt anyone who hurts her ‘and considers her nails as her weapon, “If this could protect me, then well, I am Surpanakha.”(p.8).Kavita Kane has brought to light how women have been, shown ambiguously in epics.

Surpanakha's desire to be treated on par with her brothers was considered unusual. She was not allowed to study Vedas and calculations like her brothers and her parents

were oblivious of her interests and so she decides to learn magic from her Nani just to prove her mettle to her brothers and ‘defy her father’. Meenakshi remains a menace to her brothers even after her marriage. When Ravan refuses her wedlock with Viduyjiva she blackmails him that makes him feel, ‘strangely incapacitated and helpless. Ravan senses that this time her threat “was not a hallow treat, she would carry it with spite and vengeance.”

A neglected child according to psychologists will either become passive or aggressive. Surpanakha being a neglected child turns out to be aggressive and life-threatening to her family. She yearns for love from her family and when she finds that Viduyjiva is in love with her she accepts him and fights with her family to marry him. She wistfully tells her mother to be happy for her and says,

“you had everything- a man who adores you, a loving family.Let me be happy too.Let me have that chance of happiness (p.128)

Surpanakha right from her birth never knew the meaning of happiness, the nicknames she received from her family members never made her feel happy or proud. Every day she struggles to win the heart of her father and brothers. According to psychologists, neglected children would also feel inferior about themselves and so is Surpanakha. She tells her grandmother that she, is neither good at learning Vedas nor calculations and she is not talented like her brothers.Surpanakha longs for happiness which she has lost because of the political game played by her brother, Ravan through her marriage with Viduyjiva.Kavitakane has also criticized the patriarchal hegemony through Surpanaga regarding the swayamvar of Sita. She says,

“not that it is much of a swayamvar to be won where she gets to choose the groom. Rather it seems like she's a prize trophy to be won after winning a trophy.”(p.152)

Women in the patriarchal structure are expected to accept their fate and suffer the consequences. Kavita Kane has not digressed from the original text but skillfully presents the emotions of Surpanakha after the death of her husband. The words of her mother, " you will make life hell for us" (p. 175) haunts her and she reflects saying, "I will, for each one of them from today I would be Surpanakha.” (P.175).

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She leaves the palace along with her son and settles in the Dandak forest because it has too many bad memories for her. She hides her pain and hatred to seek vengeance on the person who killed her husband and son. The 'tigress's' Surpanakha, as addressed by her husband, disguises her inner self and decides to avenge the murderers. This attitude of Surpanakha makes her a rakshashi and a deviant. Her digression from the set of rules and regulations laid by the male-dominated society is highlighted in the epics to differentiate her from the passive Sita, the pious and submissive wife of Ram. The Manusmriti has imposed certain limitations for women regarding sexual desire which justifies the action of Ram and Laxman who mutilate Surpanakha for just expressing her desire. They treat her like a piece of amusement and when she approaches them and gets maimed by them she stands perplexed and drowned in pain saying, "Was it their apprehension for my uninhibited behavior, assuming it to be an overt vulgarity, an open display of unleashed carnal anarchy? Was that why they had laughed at me, ridiculing me in their contempt and amazement, their arrogant condescendence condemning me for my Feminine profanities" (p.202)

This cruel act of Ram and Laxman upon a woman exhibits patriarchal domination. Kavita Kane's retelling

through the eyes of a woman unfolds the truth that how Surpanakha turns out to be a victim of the male-oriented society and how resistance and rebellion has doomed the life of a woman. She is the result of masochism. The epic, from the androcentric view, depicts Surpanakha as an unchaste woman and a monster but Kavita Kane has unraveled it and depicted Surpanakha from a gynocentric view and reasons out how the Lanka Princess turned out to be a monster and she has attempted to bring the previously marginalized women character Surpanakha to the foreground by imaging her a new identity and role.

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