

A Critical study of Kavita Kane's Lanka's Princess

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Abstract: *Many research studies have proved that substantial development is unfulfilled dream without women's empowerment and gender equality. When women are making independents, and educated properly and supported with care and love, they gain an opportunity to speak up for their own right, and also to advocate for their families, communities and nations. Myths, epics, legends, fables and folktales encompass the canvass of folk literature. Mythology and folktales present the culture, beliefs, and value systems of ethnic groups. Indian literature and Indian culture are interwoven, where epics occupy the highest pedestal. The most popular epics of India are the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Indian epics are the terrain of patriarchy with women in the last stage of the social ladder. Deep insights into the works unveil the strong female characters embedded in the story. Modern writers deal with the retelling of epics from differ viewpoints. This reinterpretation breathes a fresh and new outlook on the conventional themes. The writers draw parallels to contemporary issues like sexual violence, gender discrimination, honour killing, and racism by retelling the mythologies. Many writers have been engaged in retailing in present times. Kavita Kane is a Mythological writer. Kane has written a string of books in this genre of retailing Indian myths, highlighting the characters that are marginalised or neglected. Her book Lanka's Princess is about Surapankha, Ravan's sister. Who is popularly known as a lustful demoness. Kane describes the story from Surapankha's standpoint, portraying her pains, grievances, and losses which transformed her to act negative negatively. The paper addresses the current issues and gives a better understanding of neglected or lesser-known characters of the Ramayana. It attempts to create awareness about a number of female issues with reference to the muted group theory..*

Keywords: Ramayana, Mahabharata, Honor killing, Sexual violence, Racism, Empowerment, and Gender

I. INTRODUCTION

Myth is always connected with holiness, "Every human society has its mythology, a body of scared stories about the gods and matters of cosmic significance from the creation to what happens after death. People have been telling these stories for thousands of years, to help them make sense of the world and their lives"(Wilkinson 10). It may either be right or false and doesn't hold any authentic records, "Literature is a reconstructed mythology, with its structural principles derived from those of myth"(Frye 603). Myth occupies a supreme position in the art of storytelling. "Myth is a conception permeating many areas of contemporary thought anthropology, psychology, comparative religion, sociology and several others" (Frye 587). Humankind is in continuously search of answers about life and its relationship to the cosmos. There are many retellings of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata and are always regarded as sacrosanct. Retellings the myths may be generally classified into three types, the first one being word-to-word translation without any changes in the meaning or essence of the plot. The second is where the writer incorporates minor changes with versions heard from the traditional folk tales without altering the traditional background. The last type of retelling involves re-visiting the facets of the myth and builds a new plot that is fictional and is different from the historical version. A string of writers like Devdutt Pattanaik, Ashok Banker, Ashwin Sanghi, Amish Tripathi, Anand Neelkantan, Chitra Banerjee, Divakaruni and Kavita Kane have ventured into retelling Indian epics.

Kavita Kane is an Indian woman novelist. She debut with the novel *Karna's Wife: The Outcast Queen* following which are a stream of books in the same genre like *Sita's Sister*, *Menaka's Choice*, *Lanka's Princess* and *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty*. All her works unfold the tale from the side-lined or neglected characters point of view. Kane brings a new outlook on Ravan's sister Surapankha through her book *Lanka's Princess*. The present paper traces many Correlated issues of the contemporary world with the help of the novel issues like honour killing, gender discrimination, racism, family feud, and the physicality of women, are discussed in detail. The paper gives equivalence from the myth to the happening issues faced today. The name Surapankha has a preconception notion of a villainous, hastful and malevolent

demoness. People have a strong dislike and detest her character and brand her as a crooked manipulator. Kane is says in her interview gives a reason for choosing Surapankha's character, "Society has always ridiculed her, we take her role lightly. When infect she is such a crucial character. And then she has been sidelined through the rest of the epic, whereas her brother Ravan is more fleshed out. I want to humanize her and make her real to people" (Palat, web). The view alerts the preconception notion of Surapankha as evil *Lanka's Princess* unfurls the tales from the marginalized Surapankha's viewpoint. Her named Meenakshi by her parents Vaishnavas and Kaikesi. She has grown up along with her brothers Ravan, Kumbha, and Vibhishan. She married Vidyujiva against her family's wish and loses her from him because of a family machination. Vidyujiva was accused of confiscate Ravan's throne and was killed. The mourned Surapankha determines to take revenge on Ravan and leaves for the Dandakforest along with her son Kumar. But she loses her son too in an unexpected incident. She manipulates and begins the battle between Ram and Ravan. She remains the main reason for the annihilation of the Ravan clan.

The tale starts with the birth of Surapankha, daughter of Rishi Vishravasand Kaikesi, an asura Princess. Kaikesi tempted the Rishi so that he forsaken his first wife and son Kuber. Kaikesi's plan was to get back Lanka's thrown from Kuber, for which she needed powerful and wise offspring. Her plan fell in true as she had three sons Ravan, Kumba, and Vibhishan. When the fourth child was the daughter, Kaikesi expressed her aversion right from birth, "This girl has cheated me of my plans" (Kane, 2). The conventional belief that sons are needed for fighting family squabbles is vogue in the contemporary world. Any girl child is considered a responsibility to a family and a son is a treasure trove right from the earlier women are every time subordinate occupying the last rung of the social ladder. Women are often discriminated against based on their physical appearance, particularly the colour of their skin. A Surapankha right from birth feels low about her colour of the skin and physical appearance. Kavita Kane presents this is in several incidents throughout the book, Kaikesi questions, "How is this dark monkey going to bring good fortune?" (Kane, 3). Surapankha was very nicely attached to her grandmother Taraka and she asks her, "Can you make me beautiful with one of your potions, Nani?" (Kane, 20). She is demoralizing and saddens by her looks and shares it with her grandmother, "But I am not like either of you, I am darker, like night sky!!" (Kane, 21). Even in present, it is compulsory that a girl should look fair and pretty. Kane gives a solution to this problem through Taraka as she counsel, "Beauty lies in your head and heart, you have to believe it. But for that first you have to love yourself" (Kane, 22). After hearing these words, Surapankha praised the wisdom of her grandmother. These words of wisdom can be related to the today's younger generation too.

Patricia Collins Formulated a conception called the matrix of domination, which defined oppression of race, gender, and class. Surapankha fits into this matrix as a twice displaced woman suffering oppression, first time as a woman and then as a Princess of the asura clan. Her family members failed to give her to attention and love, she longed for, so she fell in love with Vidhujiva the Prince of Kalakeya. He is enemy of Ravan. Surapankha married to Vidhujiva against the wishes of her family. Now, she had a strong grounding to consummate her wish proving herself as brave and obstinate woman. In short time, when her husband is killed on the battlefield in the name of holding family prestige. Such as honour killings are present in the present society too, where women need to fight for own rights and justice, conventional gender roles, cast women as docile, submissive, weak, emotional, and passive. When women act aggressively and try to make her as self-assertive it is not accepted by society from a young age. Meenakshi safeguard herself and retaliated when some events caused her unsafe. She never waited for any man to combat for her and protect her. During Meenakshi's childhood Ravan killed her small pet lamb which angered her and made her combat with her brother. She injured Ravan with her strong nails and it started bleeding abundantly. Only this incident gave her the name Surapankha, a woman is hard as nails. Her mother reproved her saying, "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" (Kane, 9). When Kuber, Meenakshi's step-brother tried to kidnap her, at that time she attacked him with her nails. Kuber was scared by the revenge and left the place with a bleeding face. Meenakshi knew the art of self-defence as there was no once to save her. This situation could be related to the contemporary world, where women should aware to how defend themselves from alarming situations. Women were precluded from writing or expressing their views right from the ancient times. That patriarchal society was too tight that abstain the women from expressing their views, be eat written, oral, or physical. Cixous quotes, "I wished that

women would write and proclaim this unique empire so that the other women, other unacknowledged sovereigns might exclaim: I too overflow, my desire have invented new desires, my body knows unheard of songs” (Cixous, 876).

Surapankha was physically attracted to Ram and Lakshman, after seeing them in the spot Dandak forest. She approached them and they denied her offer. Surapankha think that, “They are rejected me. But why, she taugth wildly I am young and beautiful and desirable. Why did they not like me? Am I not enticing enough?” Then she tried to harm Sita in anger. In retaliation Lakshman mutilated her. Surapankha was believed to be the intriguer of behind initiating the battle. Surapankha is every time seen as a lustful demoness, but Kane says, “Every character has shades of grey and they make you think and question”(Palat, Web).Surapankha and Sita, are the two most powerful characters of the Ramayana, are always presented with remarkable differences. Surapankha being evil and impure, Sita being pure and saintly. Surapankha’s son Kumar is killed by Lakshman unwittingly in an accident. After this war, Surapankha goes to Ayodhya for take revenge against Lakshman. Though she gets a chance to kill Lakshman’s child, but she doesn’t harm to his son and pardons Lakshman. So, this act of forgiveness proves her humankind nature.

II. CONCLUSION

The retelling of the epics in English in today’s dystopian world serves a huge motive of nation building. There is a big loss of touch with once language and culture. The search for once root creates extensive interest in the retellings of myths, which connects the nation together developing of a sense of belonging. In short, the retailing by Kane represents the grieved side of the Surapankha, where one is made to feel that Surapankha was more sinned against than sinning. The standpoint of the strong and brave female characters expressing her physical wish is a always welcoming note in the field of literature.

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