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A Study of Silence Voice in Kavita Kane's Sita's Sister

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Abstract: Mythology is a part of the collective unconscious of human beings. It will rule our values and belief system. In Mythologies, Roland Barthes suggests that a myth is a special form of myth told with intent. India's most famous epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, portray the typical woman as maintaining patriarchal norms. However, retelling/rewriting mythology is an effective tool for feminists to subvert notions of the ideal image of woman. This research article silences studies of Kavita Kane's Sita's sister. Urmila is the least heard-of woman in the Ramayana. In the original epic, she is blamed for not accompanying her husband, unlike Sita. The novel presents the Ramayana from Urmila's perspective. Generally, the comparison between Sita and Urmila shows how patriarchy rejects characters like Urmila who do not follow its rules. The rewrite gives a voice to the unheard and marginalised Urmila and presents her from completely different perspectives.

Keywords: Silence, Mythology, Love, Feminism, Hope, Marginalisation, Retelling.

Introduction

The Ramayana profoundly influences human wisdom through its philosophical dimensions; Indian mythology's women characters are known for their determination. Women are often portrayed in supporting roles, but throughout the epic they still show optimism and moral strength. Indian writer Kavitha Kane belongs to the new era of authors who skillfully retell and re-voice these ancient stories, breathing new life into familiar narratives and characters. In Sita's Sister, Kane takes us back to the Ramayana through the brave, resolute eyes of Urmila, a marginalised figure who has not been given the respect and consideration she deserves. Kane gives Urmila's modest personality a silent voice. The aim is to explore the kind of love Urmila represents and to depict the broader thematic study of love, sacrifice, and hope within the framework of Indian mythology. This significantly symbolises that every woman should face hardship with grace and find courage in developing the strength and capacity to challenge social norms with desire and anticipation, which in turn helps shape changing attitudes and expectations in society through faithfulness. The article presents Kavita Kane's feminist retelling of Indian mythologies through the voice of silence, reconfiguring the marginalised woman Urmila so she can renegotiate the sources of identity and power within patriarchal formations. It highlights how Kane's narratives challenge feminist discourses in India and expand feminist literary debates. In this sense, the theory explicitly expands feminist literary treatment to mythological retelling, showing that myth can become a living story space within which gender can be renegotiated. It is a performance structure or a form of performance enactment by academic practitioners and students in which canonical works can be revisited.

Silent Voice in the novel Sita's Sister

The myth is an integral part of our Indian psyche. All our life values, ideas and beliefs are drawn from these epics. Mythological stories in literature are male-centric. Women appear on the margins, often masked, as the emphasis is placed on valour and chivalry, even when they drive the story. Both epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, have been constantly retold and revisited. Myth is the most powerful tool used by patriarchy to subordinate women in the use of language. Myth attributes to women a gender identity built on logic and a

sexual identity submerged within the phallic system. Generally, women poets revise myth to present perspectives long ignored. Myth is a complex form of language, and women poets steal the language that humiliates them and refashion it to tell their tale. The great epic gives women writers the context to challenge the patriarchal point of view that moulds our realities, fixes our values, and limits our vision of individual possibilities. Therefore, retelling mythology from a female perspective is an effective feminist tool. It gives voice to the unheard and marginalised. In this light, I study Kavita Kane's Sita's Sister.

Kavita Kane, in her Sita's Sister, gives a voice to the most neglected and misunderstood character of the Ramayana, 'Urmila'. Urmila is symbolically reflected in Sita's sister, Lakshman's wife, or the one who did not follow her husband into exile and chose the luxury of the palace. Valmiki's Ramayana, and later versions of it, never portray Urmila as a strong female figure. This may be because she did not adhere to the patriarchal norms like the quintessential Sita. Kavita Kane retells the Ramayana from Urmila's perspective and gives her a voice.

The tale begins with Urmila's childhood and tells about how she was overshadowed by Sita. Sita is the adopted daughter of King Janak and Queen Sunaina. They adopt Sita after they give birth to Urmila. Urmila is called Janaki and Maithili, but these respects are reserved for Sita. Urmila is a wonderful and faithful character because she is never jealous/envy of Sita. Instead, Sita is her world or life. Even when her mother, Sunaina, confesses that she did neglect Urmila, she does not criticise her mother. Sunaina says she took Urmila for granted because she was her own daughter, while Sita was adopted; Mandavi and Shritakirti were daughters of her sister-in-law, who did not have a mother. Urmila, instead of complaining, empathises with her mother. She is sensitive to the slightest changes in her loved one's expressions. She is the first to know whether Sita is sad, Lakshman is happy, or her mother is apprehensive. This helps her manage the family when Ram, Lakshman, and Sita are in exile for fourteen years.

The first scene in the text shows Urmila's true love for Sita. During the swayamvar rituals, Urmila is apprehensive for Sita. Before the swayamvar, when Lakshman attacks a demon disguised as Sita, Urmila thinks that he has killed her Sister. She snatches his dagger and tries to kill Lakshman, the love of her life. Urmila has love for Sita. Her love for Sita surpasses her love for Lakshman. Later, when Kaikeyi does not receive Sita with respect, Urmila is upset. Kaikeyi calls Urmila the real Janaki and Maithili. Urmila was a secondary figure to Sita. Therefore, Kaikeyi calling her Janaki should have made her happy. On the other hand, Urmila responds quickly. She corrects Kaikeyi: "'I am neither,' Urmila corrected emphatically. 'It is Sita who is called Janaki and Maithili, Mother.' Her tone was almost defiant." (Kane, 61). Even when Urmila gets to know that Keykeyi wants Ram to remarry, Urmila is flabbergasted. She opposes it loudly: "'Do they seriously take us to be such tame girls who will scurry to obey? scoffed Urmila in grim agreement." (Kane, 61). Later, when Lakshman and Sita decide to accompany Ram into exile, Urmila worries more about her sister. She knows Sita is naive and worries about the dangers she will face in the forest. She does not complain when Lakshman leaves her. Nevertheless, she protests when she fears Mandavi's fate will be the same as hers. When Bharath announces that he will spend fourteen years in Nandigram doing penance, Urmila questions him. He loves her sisters too much to let them suffer what she is going through. She is fearless. She questions everyone, including Guru Kashyapa and Vishwamitra, about what dharma it is for wives to be left by their husbands. When Lakshman decides to accompany his brother in exile, Urmila, though she feels rejected, does not fight with her husband. She does not even ask him to take her with him as she realises that that would jeopardise his duty towards Ram. When her mother asks her about how she feels about Lakshman not being with her, she replies: "…we followed our dharma. Ram had to go to the forest, and she went with him. Lakshman considered his dharma to serve his brother, so he went with his brother, and I agreed to stay back, however much it broke my heart." (Kane, 118)

Urmila took her mother's hand, "I supported him in this decision. By going with him, I would have imposed myself on him; I would have been a distraction. I helped him follow his heart and his greater good." (118) Urmila asks Sita not to talk about her in exile. She does not want Lakshman to miss her, which would make his

exile more difficult. Lakshman asks her not to cry when he leaves. Urmila keeps this promise, and when he returns after fourteen years, she begs to be allowed to cry. As an ideal wife, she supports her husband, never complains, though she questions. Urmila is also an ideal daughter-in-law. She takes care of the entire family in her husband's absence. She could have returned to Mithila when Lakshman was in exile. However, she remains in Ayodhya. She cares for everyone, including Kaikeyi. She handles the outraged Bharath, the lost Mandavi and Ayodhya itself. We often talk about what happened to Ram, Lakshman, and Sita during their exile. This book, by contrast, focuses on what happened to Ayodhya during those fourteen years. Urmila keeps the Raghuvamsha from breaking. When Bharath, after learning of his mother's treachery, says he too will go to the forest, Urmila brings him to his senses. “If you go, Shatrughna will not remain here either. So how will it turn out if the four princes of Kosala reside in the forest as hermits while the kingdom is headless, at the mercy of enemies and chaos? You have to be here, Bharat, as your father commanded, and rule the kingdom.” (120) She tries to resolve the rift between Kaikeyi and Kausalya. She tries to cheer Mandavi, who is separated from her husband. She tries to include Kaikeyi, who is despised by everyone, in the family. She tries to keep them together. She introduces the tradition of eating together. Hence, Urmila becomes the son of the family. Urmila and Sita are both daughters of King Janak and Queen Sunaina. Both love each other too much. However, they are very different. Sita accepts everything without questioning. Urmila does question. Sita supports her husband without being critical. Urmila supports her husband only after analysing his decision.

Conclusion

The Ramayana and its characters, like Ram, Lakshman, Bharath, and Sita, are often discussed. These characters are treated as the epitome of goodness and selflessness. So why is Urmila, though a character from the same epic, rarely discussed? This is because our patriarchal society talks about only those characters that conform to its rules and regulations. Urmila questions patriarchy. She questions the hypocrisy of dharma, which always talks about all duties, especially those of a woman. It talks about the duty of a wife but not that of a husband. It talks about the duty a son has to the father but not to the mother. What kind of Putra Dharma is it to follow a dead father's command at the cost of abandoning a widowed mother? Urmila is a feminist. She is a warrior in her own terms. In Bharath's absence, she engages in state affairs and makes many decisions. She ruthlessly punishes Manthara. She quests for knowledge. Mandavi calls her as a free thinker who does not believe in rituals. She not only enters the male bastion to acquire knowledge but also consolidates her identity as a scholar. Janak invites her to participate in a conference not as his daughter but as an acclaimed scholar in her own right, mastering the Vedas and Upanishads and able to debate religion and philosophy. In his arguments as a theologist, King Janak did not always agree with her, but Urmila continued questioning the rationality of religion. She uses her knowledge to judge what is right and wrong. She is critical. She enters the male venture and breaks the gender stereotypes. Patriarchy never talks about Urmila because it doesn't want any woman to question, but to follow, like Sita blindly. Hence, the quintessential woman is always Sita, not Urmila. Kavita Kane's Sita's Sister gives voice to the unheard character of the Ramayana- Urmila. She uses a reinvention technique to present Urmila as a modern woman who negotiates her way through circumstances to achieve what she wants, rather than being passivised as a woman who makes glorious sacrifices. Her dominant form of resistance is questioning. She suffers, of course, but mainly because of her decision- her decision to marry Lakshman despite knowing his priorities and her decision to stay back in the palace.

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