

## Women Identity And Self-Assertion: Study Of Kavita Kane's Mythological Novels

Archa Sasi<sup>1</sup>, Pooja Bindu<sup>2</sup>, Shilpa M Chandran<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>PG Student, Department of English, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Amritapuri, India

<sup>2</sup>PG Student, Department of English, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Amritapuri, India

<sup>3</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of English, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Amritapuri, India

**Article History:** Received: 11 January 2021; Revised: 12 February 2021; Accepted: 27 March 2021; Published online: 10 May 2021

**ABSTRACT-** Women are generally misjudged and misrepresented models in the annals of history. This is extremely reasonable in patriarchal nations, particularly, the sacred articles and mythologies, where women are either completely resisted or primarily discerned as conveyances of men's worth. The novels inscribed by Kavita Kane; "Ahalya's Awakening" and "The Fisher Queens Dynasty" and it investigates specifically on the representation of the mythological woman through the major female characters in the novels. The female struggles have its origin from time immemorial. The fundamental purpose of this paper is to understand the dilemmas encountered by women in the era represented in the novel and the resurgence of women from the obstacles. The significance of women in a society is taken into consideration. The paper also aims in providing an awareness to empower women and thereby overturn the stereotypical impressions of women in society. The outcome of the study elucidates that women are objectified, uneducated, socially excluded and have to face the dearth of choice. However, Kane's novel attempts to deeply analyze how the female characters emancipate themselves from the oppression caused by the social norms and the circumstances in which women had to face identity crisis.

**KEYWORDS-** Women; Female Struggles; Dilemma's; Resurgence; Objectification; Education; Oppression; Dearth of Choice; Social exclusion; Identity crises;

### Introduction

The significance of women in the Indian community has been developing. Hinduism is no exception to this and as one progresses from society in Ancient times to the Early Medieval times, the decline in the degree of freedom that women enjoyed in the family and the Indian society becomes steadily sharper. Although it is hard to define the precise juncture of the period in history where this erosion began. The Ancient Indian civilization can be juxtaposed against each other to analyze the changing position and part of women in the community. Kavita Kane found herself more inquisitive in mythological women characters who were least praised and glorified and started to write novels based on mythology.

Writers obsessed with mythology carving out a niche for them have not been a new thing. But Kavita Kane stands out for two reasons. One, from her debut novel- "Karna's Wife: The Outcast Queen's" in 2013, her repertoire is defined by revisionist novels. While Shashi Tharoor's- "The Great Indian Novel"; R.K. Narayan's "The Indian Epics Retold"; Mahasweta Devi's "Draupadi", and "The Palace of Illusions" by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni have triumphed in this genre reinforced by widespread attention and acclaim. Kane goes a step forward and becomes the 'woman with a mission'. She achieves this by telling (or retelling) the stories of women who are marginalized, misunderstood, misrepresented, and literally abused in mythologies.

Kane's female characters provide a cathartic voice to a community victimized by patriarchal traditions. By distancing themselves from patriarchal anxieties and gender ideologies, Kane's women characters puncture the idolized images of women. From Uruvi to Ahalya, all of Kane's protagonists are the anti-thesis of traditional gender roles. If the latter present's damsel in distress, in Kane's writing, it is the damsel who causes the distress. Her characters subvert any notion of ideal womanhood. Kane's work acts as an excellent companion piece to Mahasweta Devi's "Draupadi". Spivak's reading of "Draupadi" as an outstanding example representing subaltern voices proves true for Satyavati in certain extents. Like Mahasweta Devi's Draupadi, Kane's Satyavati too is "a subaltern woman with agency and with voice." No characters are spared of their actions in "The Fisher Queen's Dynasty". This makes the text feel less fantasized and grounds the incidents and characters to reality. Thereby, humanizing and weeding out chances of idolizing these characters especially Bhishm.

In Ahalya's Awakening, Ahalya is an extraordinary character when viewed from the eyes of Kane. In Ramayana, Ahalya was less glorified and not taken into consideration. But in this novel, Kane focuses more upon the obstacles that Ahalya had to face in her life in order to attain her passion. Kane by giving importance to her female characters, emphasis on the main struggle caused to women in society by viewing them as an object.

### Female Struggles then and now

The struggles faced by women have its origin from the ancient time. In the ancient ages, women of India faced a superior position as compared to the recent times. The Rig Vedic period which spanned from 2000 BC to 1500 BC, comprised of the Aryan community exerted much freedom to the females. However, it cannot be said that the women of Ancient India were completely outside the patriarchal control of the society. Though they experienced the taste of freedom in education, marriage etc. women had suffered a lot for their existence.

A close scrutiny of the later Vedic period which spans from 1500 BC – 800 BC reveals the fact that the status of women gradually began to deteriorate. P. Thomas in his “Indian Women through the Ages” affirms that during the later Vedic period people used to believe that sons alone were capable to redeem their parents from hell and daughters were inept to perform this spiritual deed. This notion led to devaluating women as only child bearers.

In the Post Vedic period also, the position of women declined to a lower level. The foreign invasions on India, ardent belief in religious practices etc. led to the subjugation of Indian women which still exists in higher levels in society. However, during the Post-Vedic Period, Lord Buddha and his teachings inspired the people to raise the status of women. The age of the fall of Buddhism till the advent of Islam in India marked the darkest age in the history of India. This age was the age of later Puranas and Dharma Shastras. During this period, the girls were imposed to marry before they menstruate, and widow remarriage was also prohibited.

During the age of Mughals, i.e., from 1526AD to 1857AD, the statuses of women deteriorated to a higher level yet there were written in golden letters the names of some Mughal expresses in the history books. Right from birth, a girl child was considered inauspicious in the society. The Mughal women who also belonged to the upper class and middle class experienced much subjugation from their male counterparts. After the advent of British in India in 1857, women community came to the forefront for the cause of an independent India. Though their number is few, the Indian independence struggle helped the women to empower themselves which has its continuing effect in the 21<sup>st</sup> century also.

### **Objectification of Women**

Kavita Kane has been a revelation in the sphere of retelling myths. In a society that lessens female identity to her body and preconceived gender responsibilities. Her knack to distance from patriarchal anxieties and yet flesh out women who are victims of it, elevate the emotional dilemmas that define human plight. In a socio-cultural context, the female body is sexually objectified and a women’s appearance and sexual functions are equated with her worth. Men in our society are not identified and associated with their body, but the woman in our society is more identified and associated with their body. Objectifying a woman and watching a woman through her beauty and appreciation is different. Human beings should not be considered as objects to be used. A woman has more to offer to the world than their body, so the woman doesn’t deserve to be objectified. Kavita Kane in her works center on the female protagonist and try to analyze and write down the perspectives of a woman who undergoes different sociocultural conservatives.

Satyavati, the central character of the ‘Fisher Queen’s Dynasty’ is characterized by her vaulting ambition. Furthermore, the novel invests heavily in exploring the theme of where the line should be drawn between ambition and greed. Power is at the center and cause of conflict. Using this idea, the author asks if our judgments of characters would vary based on their caste, creed, and gender. Would we have judged a man misbegotten and self-assertive as traditional narratives often do with Satyavati? Would ambition then become determination, where Satyavati was labeled greedy? As a step in this direction, Kavita Kane’s feminist revisionist work ‘The Fisher Queen’s Dynasty’ is studied for the instances of ‘Objectification of women.’ This may sound blasphemous considering Kane’s repertoire of championing women's voices and bringing the neglected female characters to the forefront from patriarchal literary abuse. But here the main focus is not on the author but on the patriarchal traditions that exist within our society and inside the novel that the author vows to expose.

The author, rather than caricature the characters whose gender defines their actions (especially for women) juxtaposes Satyavati with the men in her world. Whether be it her biological father the king of Chedi who abandons her at birth (for the sole reason of being born a girl), or the sage Parashara who uses Satyavati as a means for a son, or King Shantanu who is drawn by her sexuality. All the men in Satyavati’s life who take advantage of her body are in turn led by her. She is unsurprisingly dubbed as an evil temptress, opportunist, misbegotten, and cold-hearted among many others for this reason.

The notion of women reduced to their sexuality foreshadows before the beginning of the main narrative. When Satyavati learns that her mother was raped by Uparichar Vasu, the king of Chedi, her father and that she was afterward rejected by her father, it only adds fuel to the fire. This spurs in her the ambition to get what is rightfully her and to undo the injustice imposed upon her. The idea of a wronged woman seeking righteousness is repeated with Amba when her ceaseless attempts to make Bhishm wed her for the injustice wreaked upon her becomes futile. She then pledges to bring ruin upon him and his empire. Unlike Sita who puts blames on herself for her misfortune, claiming that “...it is as a consequence of my evil destiny and my own misdeeds in the past that I have suffered all of this...” However, Amba tragically brings ruin upon herself in the process.

However, in the novel “Ahalya’s Awakening”, Kane penetrates deep into Ahalya, as a woman and shows the various vision of how a world observes a woman. The first chapter of this novel incepts by a dialogue of King Mudgal, ‘Ahalya is the most beautiful girl in the world’ as a newborn infant and is being compared to her brother. The beginning of the novel fundamentally puts perspective on the representation of female character

throughout the novel. Woman amidst the world is proficient enough to survive independently and to be encouraged and to enhance the developing world.

As Ahalya was born, the thought that induced into the mind of her parent was, to whom she will be getting married. At the age of sixteen, Ahalya started hearing to get married off as soon as possible, without the consideration of her desire to be a Rasika. Nalayani and Mudgal, Ahalya's parents gave the priority to Indra to marry her, setting aside the truth of Indra's adulteries. Men are not viewed and praised by society just for their physical strength. But Indra's way of objectifying woman was a common thing that all men in the society opinioned off when given a voice to talk. His view about a woman was that they are born to be first father's daughter and then to get married and known as husband's wife and his description of the woman was 'just lovely creatures', which says it all: a woman is a mere object.

Woman are married off to as an object for men, to take care of her husband, do household chores, look after the children etc. Here, Ahalya had her ambitions but society have given least importance to it and married her off to suffer from it. Gautam used Ahalya whenever he wanted her and used her as a pleasure-giving object, but as a Rishi, when he wanted space, he kept his family aside. Similarly, in one instance in "The Fisher Queen's Dynasty", the author remarks Satyavati feels like 'a used glass of wine after a good drink' to Shantanu after their marriage when his carnal response to her had left him. This captures the essence of women thought of as objects and possessions.

According to Neera Desai and Maithreyi Krishnaraj, "women have been looked upon either as victims of social practices or targets for development as in the post-independence period, but never as participants in development". Satyavati and Ahalya however would never adhere to this notion. Though they make a pawn out of people before them, they never become one in the process.

Through the novel, Kane demonstrates how the criteria in society have set up an astonishing injustice accomplished on a woman. A woman should be considered as a hope for the future rather than as an object for the current user. Fortunately for us, Kavita Kane doesn't leave her readers at stake. She goes on to present a woman, who in a world that mistakes female identity with her body, molds a character who uses her body for purpose than pleasure as 'her sharpest weapon to cleave and crave a better life for herself.

### **The Dearth of Choice**

The people inhabiting the world have established a format for classifying people to make choice based on gender and not under consideration as a human with creative skills. An immeasurable number of women confront the deficiency in the production of decision, whereas men have the right to put forward their choice and opinion in deciding things for the world. The world has not empowered a woman to decide. The dearth of empowerment of woman to make decision originate the gender gap in employment, lack of woman leaderships, inequality in the workplace, etc. The notion of choice must be made relevant in many ways and make a change in the conception of who will have the right.

The inequality shown in the capacity to make choices by a woman could be analyzed through Kavita Kane's works. In Ahalya's Awakening, the protagonist never had the right to originate a decision on any events that happened to take place in her presence and her absence. Ahalya was never given the right to choose for herself. By taking away the right of a woman to make their personal choice, the world gets nothing, but a huge loss to its development. Women have the greatest power in the ability to produce creative thoughts and choices in life. Her life decisions were taken by her family members and gurus at first and then later by her husband.

In the academic and career-wise equal ingress wasn't given in the historical era and Kane focuses on the struggle Ahalya has gone through to educate herself. A woman cannot decide and do what she wants, her parents must accept it. In the novel, Ahalya had a wish to persuade her education further, but her parents didn't give her the right to choose. She was not willing to marry Lord Indra, but her mother was intensely longing to see her daughter marry immediately and that too with Indra. Many obstacles were there in front of Ahalya to attain her aspiration, to be a Rishika, as she was not allowed to persuade in the path she wants to lead.

In the case of Ahalya's marriage, we find that a woman doesn't have the right to choose her life partner as they wish. The importance and right to choose a life partner for a woman was taken over by society and her parents. Societal norms play a vital role in the selection process of a women's life partner. The woman is not given the priority to have an opinion on her marriage. Women have the only choice to be made on the decisions related to the household.

Similarly, Women in Fisher Queen's Dynasty, be it Satyavati herself or Kripa or the three Kasi Princesses- all are restricted within the patriarchal traditions which insist family, marriage, motherhood, and domesticity as focal points in a woman's life. It was not too easy for Satyavati to attain what she had desired. A bold lady with full consciousness and beauty Satyavati says, 'I have power over only myself and not others.' In her encounter

with Parashar and Shantanu, she is only left with a 'chance' to make the most out of it. But it is never allowed to avoid it. Subjected to no conscience or any considerations, the Kasi princesses' marriage with the prince Vichitravirya is not so much of an option. The ever righteous Bhishm himself wrongs these girls by treating them a little more than commodities, possessions, and trophies to be purchased, exchanged, or won over. For a woman who believes 'the meaning of life is in the struggle, the fighting,' Satyavati is trampled and crushed and is remembered for her 'errors, not endeavours.' In the case of Ganga, Kasi princess, and Satyavati, history repeats itself. Cornered by fate and by the men around them into life's edge, these characters are expected to gracefully accept the atrocities committed upon them and bear its consequence while the perpetrator is left free.

Life is all about the choice that we make, if we don't have the right to make a choice then everything comes under a threat. It's difficult to choose a woman living in a society following all conservative traditions. They are willing to make a choice but the people surrounding them don't allow them to make it happen. Woman doesn't have the freedom to exercise with their choice and have an experience. Kane in her work has focused on the historical culture and tradition to make a barrier around woman's choice. But even today woman have no choice to take a decision and the main reason is that the choices made by a woman may go opposed to the common conventions.

### **Women and Education**

In the developing world, educated women play a vital role. A woman must know how to face various situations in their life with courage. Unlike men, women are not allowed to gain education as their desire unless it has a purpose. Women have boundaries in what they try to do. It is not their opinion that is put forward when a situation comes to decide on what next to do in their life. Women never get the chance to develop the inborn skills and potential. Illiteracy and lack of knowledge are pervasive in the population of women than in men. This unholy culture is spreading like wildfire in undeveloped society and especially in the countryside. It is essential to educate women, not just to get healthier jobs and settle in life but to diminish the death rate, domestic violence, dowry torture etc. against women. In India, women status is lower when compared to men due to the appreciation of conservative traditionalism.

Ancient India had forest universities as holistic learning was obtained from nature under the supervision of the guru. In Ahalya's Awakening, Ahalya was provided education with Ancient Indian traditions along with her brother at Vashisht ashrama. Ahalya showed early signs of extreme intelligence and was a fast learner. She was not allowed to move to the ashram as she yearned, but she only had the option to get married. No amount of pleading convinced her mother to change this decision. But as the kingdom was about to be attacked, there was no other alternative than to send Ahalya to the ashram of Rishi Gautam and later she gets married off to him withstanding all the obstacles. Even after marriage, Ahalya was completely committed to learning. Throughout her life in the kingdom and at the ashram, we find Ahalya as a woman who fights till the end to attain her passion for education. Whereas in the case of Satyavati, we can see that she was not well educated as a woman and as a fisherman's daughter but she was trained to be talented in controlling the boat with her strong sinewy arms. The usage of skills in an appropriate way shows that she has good intelligence. Later as she came to the palace of Hastinapur after marrying King Shantanu, she was guided by Kripa, the daughter of a Rishi to instruct her about the rituals and to train her with all the qualities that a queen should emanate. Satyavati always had a stubborn expression towards anything she decides. Kripa once told Bhishm about Satyavati's smartness and intelligence, suggesting that she is sacred to teach her more, as one day, Satyavati might use all the knowledge that she had acquired against her and the people of Hastinapur including the king and Bhishm.

Therefore, we could see that Ahalya and Satyavati differ only in one paradigm, that is, Ahalya went in search of knowledge and education whereas, Satyavati used the knowledge she had to attain what she wanted in her life. Through all the impediments to achieving their dreams, they didn't forfeit their hope. Kavita Kane's female characters are embodiments of successful women who fight staunchly against the established social norms.

### **Social Exclusion of Women**

Social exclusion is an existential affair striking woman, around the world. According to the research analysis on woman's development, we could see exceptional progress as a year pass by. Still, some community distinguishes a woman from participation in economic, social, and political life, as the societal roots of cultural inequality are deep and strong. Social exclusion affects many woman communities around the world. A woman can't establish and develop the world without getting a chance from society. A woman should have the participation right in the formal and informal sectors of economic events. Rather than a consciously targeted propagandist attack, what women encounter is stepped in lack of access to education, and adequate income which purports subordination both emotional and financial. Women's sense of dignity is compromised under such circumstances and is considered as a problem pestering female liberty for decades.

Social isolation is a burden for women, and it is brutal to categorize and make a woman suffer based on gender. Women are not allowed to decide or to be a part in decision-making, have good education, put forth their arguments, suggestions etc. Kavita Kane in her novel includes the act of social exclusion of woman through Ahalya. She was not allowed to know various instances that were happening to the family and even to herself. She was socially excluded by her family, knowingly and unknowingly. Ahalya was abandoned by everyone, seeing her just as an object. She was feeling alienated in her life as the approach of people towards her was in such a manner, whereas in the novel "The Fisher Queens Dynasty", Satyavati was not even provided with the right to know her identity as a king's daughter. Her father, King Uparichar Vasu had abandoned her as a baby and this truth was revealed to her after many years by Dashraj, which proves the denial of a women's birth right. Satyavati, a fisher chieftain's daughter has to resort to marriage to climb the social ladder as a means to curb her aim. Likewise, the princesses of Kasi- Amba, Ambika and Ambalika are abducted for settling political scores. Women of the royal households are again assessed on their ability to produce heirs for the throne. By limiting female identity to her body and demeaning her character, women are excluded not only from their social realities, but become bystanders to their own life.

Therefore, women are expected to feel alienated if they are treated in such a way by society. In our country, woman must be given the power to empower them. A community should not treat a woman as just an object to use. The field of vision about a woman in a society, is the change to be made otherwise a woman alone must fight till she gets satisfied. Ahalya has fought back with the conservative traditions and she did not have a break on her decisions knowing that society was against her.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, when reading Kavita Kane it is important to not stray and be blindfolded by the very vices that the author herself is trying to purge us from i.e. being judgmental. This would then be self-defeating as men and children unlike women can fall victims to patriarchy. Hence, Kane through Satyavati and Ahalya is combating gender oppression by generating awareness which is definitely a precondition for the development and spread of feminist ideology. An analysis of Kavita Kane's selected female characters suggests that though all of them lived in a male dominated society, these females never cater completely to the men's desires. The editors of the Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing (2003) note that Marie de France's texts "use a female voice that interrupts masculine traditions," This exactly is Kane's vision and philosophy. In Ahalya's Awakening and The Fisher Queen's Dynasty, Kane describes the pathetic circumstances faced by woman to achieve their passion for education and power. The victory of the main female characters, Ahalya and Satyavati in the novel provides an optimistic and logical message to the people around the world that their life is in their hand and if they have the intention and guts to protest the impediments enclosing their path then they can extricate themselves.

### Works Cited

1. "Ahalya's Awakening by Kavita Kane – Book Discussion." *Youtube*, Merrative, 02 Jan 2021, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PD0Z2x9yO9M&ab\\_channel=Merrative](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PD0Z2x9yO9M&ab_channel=Merrative).
2. Kane, Kavita. *Ahalya's Awakening*. Chennai: Westland, 2019. Print.
3. Kane, Kavita. *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty*. Chennai: Westland, 2017. Print.
4. Mohanty, Ayuta. Revisiting the New Woman in Indian Mythology, *IJSRST*, Issue 2, Volume 4, 2018.
5. Mondal, Krishna Chatur Sow, and Lavanya S. "Satyavati: The Enigmatic Woman in Kavita Kane's The Fisher Queen's Dynasty." *International Journal of Psychosocial Rehabilitation*, 2019, pp. 295–301. *Crossref*, doi:10.37200/ijpr/v23i1/pr190238.
6. Sahasrabudhe, Aishwarya. "In Ahalyas Awakening, Kavita Kané Questions the Penalty for Infidelity, and its Significance in Indian Mythology." *Firstpost*, 30 Aug. 2019. Web. 04 May 2021.
7. Thapar, Romila. *Ancient Indian Social History: Some Interpretations*. Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 1978. Print.