



Feminist Revisionist Mythmaking in Kavita Kané's Retelling: Menaka's choice

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Abstract

The genres of literature provide both teaching and delight as defined by Plato. Indian writing in English brings back the various aspects of humanfolk. The present trend is reusing the stories of mythology, especially in the recent past, retellings of Hindu mythology as per the present context is in trend. It's a great help to the present society youngsters to know the traditions of our country.

Kavitha Kane is one of the emerging legendary writers of contemporary Indian Writing in English. Her feminist retellings are remarkably well. She has done justice to all of the unknown female characters in the modern context. Karna's wife Uruvi's story is a reaction of a rich single girl child, her love marriage to a so-called low class King Karna. Whereas, The Fisher Queen's Dynasty's protagonist Satyavati's character is a reaction to a low class queen and the abduction of a great King, her father. The villainous character of the epic Surpanakha is turned as the protagonist of Kane. Similarly, Urmila, wife of Lakshmana, the minor character of Ramayana, becomes the title holder of Kavita Kane. Her novels are proof for the fact that the culture has not given the due significance to the wives or queens unless they are noted for their power or cruelty. The novels of Kane redefine the unknown and least known women characters of popular epics of India.

The book Menaka's choice starts with the introduction of Shakuntala whose beauty is hilarious as her mother Menaka. She is smart enough to lead her life in an ashram as an orphan. Despite being an orphan, she is like a princess in the ashram of Rishi Kanva. She esteems her famous parents Viswamitra and Menaka although she is abandoned by them. The pride femininistic statement through Menaka from Kavita Kane is that, while the ocean churning process is at its peak, the process is completed with the help of a lady Mohini. The long term unconquerable task of male gender comes to an end with the presence of a single lady. It shows the power of femininity.

'Menaka' is an apsaras. The word 'Apsaras' is as famous as the word Menaka. The life of heaven may be heavenly to the others but for the girls i.e Apsaras of the heaven is hellish. The basic rule for them is that they should entertain others with their physical features. Their major duty is to obey lord Indra as well as lord Kama, the male domination of heaven. They are not supposed to love anyone even though their major work is 'Art of making love'. They are prohibited to bear and give birth to a child rather Marry anyone.

The novel Menaka's choice portrays the psychopath of Menaka strongly. She just wants to lead a normal life as a normal domestic girl. Her courtship with the great sage Viswamitra is a world known story. That's the courtship for the couple but for Indra and the universe it's a seduction. She is termed as a seductress.

Menaka's love and life with Vishwvasu who is a Devagandharva is a jealousy task to Indra. The feelings of a girl if just a fun filled one to the male chauvinistic society. Though Menaka is one of the celestial nymphs of heaven who would never die, she just wants to avoid all those grandeur manners of lifestyle and wants to lead a simple life with her husband and child. She could be considered as a modern lady of the 21st century who has fulfilled the desires of her own. Menaka knows the fact about the limited Liberty of a child, but the jealousy Indra who never wants to leave Menaka, forbids her happiness by making a condition of throwing away her baby. She is not supposed to see her daughter ever. "Apsaras did not marry but Menaka had. They did not love, but Menaka did. "She loved Vasu and she had dared to marry him". (P.no:14, Menaka's choice).

Gandharvas are like Apsaras who lead a comfortable life in heaven they would neither die nor could undergo familial relationship. Their major duty is to do and teach courtship and dance. Gandharva marriage is one of the famous terms of India which means the couple who fell in love with each other at first sight would do

courtship with the marriage ceremony of only the concerned couple.(secret marriage) It is the case of Menaka and Vasu too.

The major plus side of heavenly life i.e indralok is that the courtship is considered as an art not such as the aspect mistreated by humans. This art is in need of perfection. The teachers of courtship would expect such perfection. Menaka is not only meant for her beauty, she is intellectual as well. The courtship is a compulsion to all Apsaras. They should be ready to have a relationship with any of the Gandharvas or with the one recommended by lord Indra though they are willing to do or not. Menaka is one of the favorite Apsaras of Indra.

Menaka is always duty conscious. Though she never likes Indra, her duty makes her obey his commands. The discussion between Gandharva Tumburu and Apsaras shows that these Apsaras are exclusively created to make legends and greatmen's pleasure. They should mentally be ready to entertain them without losing their hearts to them. They are always trained to be heartless. They are always intended for quick pleasures. They are not supposed to be faithful. They have to be selfish and pitiless. The basic feminine processes are prohibited to them. Menaka is the only girl who boldly rejects the norms and gives birth to a child.

A conversation between Menaka and her lover Vasu proves that Menaka is pregnant and that is not Vasu's first child. It shows their ways are to either abort the fetal or to abandon the child once they are born. Women have been just toys for the men as well as to the universe. Vedic period is also not an exception. Though the Apsaras are in eternity, they won't meet death at all, Menaka has had her feelings as a mother on her child, Pramadvara who is the child of Menaka and Vasu.

Indra, though the lord of heaven, is the villain of most of the Apsaras. The jealousy Indra never wants to leave any of the apsaras to anyone. Menaka and Urvashi are the flowers of his crown. He uses their beauty to abandon the life of any king or Rishi but he just wants to hold them in his hands. The story of Menaka's seduction of Viswamitra is a famous incident of history but the least known fact is that under the command of Indira she has done it but the known fact is that girls are seductresses they would spoil the lives of innocent men.

The same story as of Menaka is Urvashi's. A mortal king Pururav wants to have her with him. A clever Urvashi accepts his proposal under two conditions. Pururav should take care of her pet goat and he is not supposed to go naked in front of anyone except her. After accepting these they have lead a successful life. But even after several years Indra could not forget her and makes a plan to bring her back with the help of Vasu, Indra executes

the plan successfully by making after the goat and the thief. The two conditions are broken by him because of Indra.

In this case Indra uses Vasu as his weapon. But the curse of Urvashi upon Vasu works here. Because after a certain period the same deceiving is done by Indra to Vasu. Indira Nagar wants to see the continuation of the love of Menaka and Vasu. So the punishment is given to Vasu. The sin of Vasu to Urvashi has bounced back. The thoughts have certain power. It would be a perfect reaction. In India it's called Karma.

In Hindu mythology femininity is always connected with softness. But those who have done Ill things to them would suffer in all their next births. Since, the people of heaven don't have death in their lives within a certain period the Karma returns to Vasu in the guise of Menaka.

Feminine psychology is to accept and adapt to the situation whether they like it or not. Urvashi's advice to Menaka proves it. They all know the fact that in heaven they are not supposed to marry or give birth to children. Urvashi gives birth to many children but they are either with their father are with the adapted parents. Urvashi tolerates everything and pursues her duty by giving sensuality to the Gandharvas. She just consoles Menaka also but the contradiction is that they always say they are (Apsaras) free and unconfined in their choice but it's not actually supposed to be. Women or women wherever they are. Even in heaven women are restricted in the name of Liberty.

Indra has spoiled the lives of many women with his burning desire either directly or indirectly. He could always cross his limits whereas in women's case it's vice versa. Women have to tolerate everything even in heaven. They should not overrule anything. Though their duty is to entertain others they could not do it wholeheartedly with the men they would like to have a relationship with, although they have their own likes and dislikes. Rambha, Tilottama and others complain about the ill mannered behaviour of Vasu, it may seem awkward to consider this ill mannered behaviour because their major duty is to give sensual pleasure but they also have hearts that have their own likes and dislikes.

Other Apsaras state that Menaka is Indra's weakness. But she could not overrule his words. It is the condition of women in the present world. They have been treated as slaves to men till now. Others may think that life of an Apsaras is easy. They are so fortunate etc. But most of the absurdities are never desired to stay in heaven. Especially

Menaka never wants to. Menaka just saves the life of Vasu from Indra's curse. Indra gets back his curse from Vasu.

Menaka has real love for Vasu. Being aware of the fact that Indra abandons Vasu. But on a particular situation she saves Vasu from the curse. She says she has lost everything and nothing more to lose. But being a loser of all in her life she could be able to command the lord of heaven Indra it shows her boldness. She had both Indra and heaven. But she could not escape from there as well as from her duties. She could be there in front of his eyes but he could not consume her, either her beauty or her singing. That's her punishment to Indra.

She is clever enough to convince Viswamitra during the seduction. She has done a perfect job by making Viswamitra trusts her. He is a force here he could find every single movement of the globe. But the clever mannaka convinces him by her truth-covered lies. Through his power he could see the past of her but she has managed the circumstance. Here they are ready to use the feminine aspects for seduction purposes alone. Kama's Arrow would be a better option to control any man

When she reaches the earth to seduce Viswamitra her condition is proved through her statement. She just wants to apologize for the upcoming process. She is embarrassed much to do the process she states that she is just a weapon of some men. Her words are from her bottom of the heart and it is soulful but the generations never declared it. The general thought is that menaka's feminine qualities are the major reason for the default of the great sage Viswamitra.

The portrayal of suppressed women as a protagonist is the common strategy of postmodern fiction. The novel Menaka's choice presents the fictitious character Menaka as a real woman of flesh and blood. The intellectual ity and toils of Menaka shellshocks the readers. The strong emotions of women are the tool for men like Indra. The condition of womenfolk is always pathetic, it could be related to contemporary society. The real happiness of the female world is 'understanding'. If a girl's heart is an open book she is treated as a courtesan. But for the courtesans also the condition is the same. Centuries and decades may change but the stages of women are always the same. It's proved once again by Kane through Menaka.

Works Cited:

Primary source:

Kane, Kavita. Menaka's Choice. Rupa Publications, 2015.