



“Breaking Chains, Reclaiming Identities: Unveiling Women’s Struggles and Empowerment in Kavita Kane’s Novels”.

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Abstract

Throughout history, women have been misrepresented and undervalued in patriarchal societies. This is often evident in the portrayal of women in literature and mythology, where they are often depicted as mere extensions of men perpetuating a system where women are often objectified, socially excluded, and deprived of their choices. Kavita Kane through her novels *Ahalaya’s Awakening* and *The Fisher Queen Dynasty* represents the mythological women through her major female characters shedding light on the struggle faced by Ahalaya and Satyavati. The objective of the paper is to recognize the significance of women in society and raise awareness to empower them challenging the stereotypical impressions imposed on women. The study delves into the portrayal of women in the novels analyzing how the female characters overcome the oppression inflicted on by social expectations and the situations that create their identity issues. By examining the struggles faced by women in the era depicted in the novels, the study aims to pinpoint the societal and cultural factors that have limited women’s roles and agency. It emphasizes the need to overcome these limitations and showcases the resilience and strength displayed by the female characters as they navigate their path toward empowerment. However, the outcome of the study highlights the objectification, lack of education, social exclusion, and limited choices experienced by a woman. It also underscores how Kane’s novels delve into a deeper understanding of the journey undertaken by these characters to reclaim their identities and assert their autonomy.

Keywords: mythology, objectification, resilience, social exclusion, autonomy

Introduction

The role of women in Indian society has evolved over time, and Hinduism is no exception to this. In ancient times, women enjoyed a greater degree of freedom and autonomy within the family and society, as evidenced by the

proper role played by women in various mythological stories and texts. However, as society evolved and changed over time, the position of women in Indian society gradually eroded. Despite this erosion, there have always been women who have pushed against the societal constraints placed upon them and sought to assert their independence and agency. Kavita Kane is one such woman who has been inspired by the stories of mythological women who have been overlooked or marginalized by traditional narratives. By writing novels based on these women, Kane is contributing to a growing movement to reexamine the role of women in Indian society and to give voice to those who have been neglected by the society. Social exclusion is a serious issue that many women face worldwide, and it can take many different forms, including economic, social, and political exclusion. One of the main causes of social exclusion is cultural inequality, which is deeply ingrained in many societies and can lead to women being denied access to education, adequate income, and opportunities to participate in the formal and informal sectors of the economy, which in turn perpetuates their subordination and compromises their sense of dignity. Social isolation and discrimination based on gender are significant problems that women face in many parts of the world. Women often face barriers to decision-making, education, and other opportunities that can limit their ability to participate fully in society and reach their full potential. Ahalaya's character in Kavita Kane's novel represents the social exclusion and isolation that women can face in society. Ahalaya was not allowed to participate in decision-making or know about important events in her family's life. She was treated as an object rather than a person with feelings and emotions.

In contrast, Satyavati in the book *The Fisher Queen Dynasty* was not even given the privilege to know that she was a King's daughter. Dashraj finally told her the truth about her father, King Uparichar Vasu, abandoning her when she was a newborn, demonstrating the rejection of a woman's birthright. A fisher chieftain's daughter named Satyavati is forced to use marriage as a method of achieving her goal of moving up the social scale. The Kasi princesses Ambalika, Ambika, and Amba are also kidnapped to settle political scores. The royal household women are once more judged on their capacity to bear heirs to the throne.

It's nothing new for writers who are enamoured by mythology to carve out a place for themselves. Kavita Kane, however, is unique for two reasons. First off, since her revisionist novel *Karna's Wife: The Outcast Queen's* in 2013, revisionist novels have dominated her body of work. While books like *The Great Indian Novel* by Shashi Tharoor, *The Indian Epics Retold* by R.K. Narayan, *Draupadi* by Mahaswata Devi, and *The Palace of Illusions* by Chitra Banerjee Divakurni have succeeded in this and received worldwide praise. Kane advances and assumes the role of "woman with a mission." She achieves this by recounting the stories of the neglected women who are often physically harmed in mythology. Kane's major female characters provide a community harmed by patriarchal customs a therapeutic voice. Kane's female characters pierce the adored ideals of women by separating themselves from gender beliefs and patriarchal fears. All of Kane's protagonists, from Uruvi to Ahalaya, are the antithesis of conventional gender norms. In Kane's literature, the damsel is the one who creates the anguish if the latter depicts a damsel in peril.

The image of the perfect lady is subverted by her character. The art of Kane complements *Draupadi* by Mahaswata Devi quite well. In certain ways, Spivak's interprets Draupadi as a subaltern woman who possesses agency and voice. In 'The Fisher Queen Dynasty,' no one escapes the consequences of their deeds. This presents the text less fantastical, making the incidents and characters feel grounded in reality and humanizing them, including the character of Bhism.

Ahalaya's character in Kavita Kane's *Ahalaya's Awakening* is portrayed as extraordinary and given more significance than in the original Ramayana. Kane highlights the obstacles that Ahalaya faced in her life and the struggles she overcame to achieve her passions. By placing importance on her female characters, Kane sheds light on the main struggles faced by woman in society, including being viewed as objects. In the novel, Ahalaya is a complex and nuanced character who defies traditional gender roles and expectations. Kane's work is significant because it gives voice to women who have been ignored or marginalized in traditional narratives and highlights the importance of understanding the struggles faced by women in society.

Reveling the female progress and Struggle

It is true that the struggles faced by women in India have a long history, dating back to ancient times. While it is true that during the Rig Vedic period, which extended from 2000 BC to 1500 BC, women enjoyed a certain degree of freedom, it is important to note that they were still subject to patriarchal control. While women were granted access to education and had some say in their marriages, they still faced significant challenges in their daily lives. Despite the challenges faced in their daily lives, women during the Rig Vedic period (2000 BC to 1500 BC) encountered significant obstacles. They were expected to be subservient to their husbands and were excluded from participating in specific social and religious practices. Additionally, they faced significant challenges related to their health and well-being, including limited access to healthcare and high rates of maternal mortality. Despite recent progress, acknowledging the enduring history of patriarchy and gender inequality in Indian society is crucial.

The position of women during the Post-Vedic period in Indian declined due to several factors such as foreign invasions, ardent belief in religious practices, and social customs that favored male dominance. During this period, the teachings of Lord Buddha served as a profound source of inspiration for individuals striving to elevate the status of women. However, following the decline of Buddhism and preceding the arrival of Islam in India, a somber era enveloped the nation, called as the darkest period in history which significantly impacted the social fabric of the time which imposed several restrictions on women such as early marriage and prohibition of widow remarriage.

The India Independence struggle saw the active participation of women in the fight for independence, which helped in breaking down the gender barriers and empowering women to fight for their rights. Prominent women leaders such as Sarojini Naidu, Kamala Nehru, and Kasturba Gandhi played a significant role in the Indian Independence movement. The Indian Constitution adopted in 1950 provided equal rights to women and outlawed discrimination against women on the basis of gender. However, despite these advancements, women still face discrimination and

violence in various forms in Indian society. The need to empower women and provide them with equal opportunities is still an ongoing struggle in the 21st century.

Dehumanization of Women's Ambition

Writing is a great example of how literature can challenge societal norms and perceptions. By giving voice to female characters who are often sidelined or reduced to their physical appearance, Kane helps to break down these limiting stereotypes and highlight the complex inner lives and struggles of women. She also explores the impact of patriarchal values and norms on women's lives, and the ways in which women navigate and resist these constraints. By doing so, Kane encourages readers to think critically about gender roles and the ways they shape our society, and to recognize the full humanity and agency of women. In the case of *The Fisher Queen Dynasty* the novel's central theme of ambition and power does offer an opportunity to explore the gendered dynamics of these concepts. It is certainly true that traditional narratives often depict ambitious women as greedy or selfish, while ambitious men are portrayed as determined and heroic. This double standard is a product of the patriarchal biases that have long dominated our cultural narratives. It is commendable that the author does not satirize the characters based on their gender, but instead contrasts Satyavati with the males in her environment, particularly for women. The portrayal of Satyavati as a woman who takes control of her life and uses her sexuality to gain power challenges the traditional portrayal of women in literature as passive and submissive.

The men in Satyavati's life including her biological father, the sage Parashara, and King Shantanu take advantage of her body and she is labeled as a malevolent seductress, opportunist, illegitimate, and callous individual. This reinforces harmful gender stereotypes and perpetuates the notion that women who use their sexuality to gain power are immoral and deserving of condemnation.

The story's female characters face oppression and mistreatment based on their sexuality, which drives them to seek justice and revenge. Satyavati's ambition and desire to undo the injustice done to her mother by the king of Chedi shows her resilience and determination. Similarly, Amba's relentless attempts to make Bhishm wed her to right the wrongs done to her show her strength and agency. However, Kane explores Ahalaya as a woman and demonstrates the varied perspectives on how the world sees women. The opening dialogue of the novel, where King Mudgal declares Ahalaya to be the most beautiful girl in the world, sets the tone for the rest of the narrative. It seems that the novel aims to challenge the notion of women being reduced to their physical appearance and instead portrays women as capable and independent beings who can thrive in the world. As soon as Ahalaya was born, her parents began to wonder about her future spouse. At the age of sixteen, Ahalaya started receiving suggestions to hastily enter into marriage, disregarding her aspirations to become a Rasika. Despite the fact that Indra had committed adulteries, Ahalaya's parents, Nalayani and Mudgal, gave him the go-ahead to marry her. Society does not just value and regard men based on their physical powers. Nonetheless, Indra's method of objectifying women was a prevalent practice that many males in the community disapproved of when given the opportunity to speak.

According to his perspective, women are initially destined to be their father offspring and subsequently meant for matrimony.

Women are perceived as mere objects of sexual desire for men, expected to fulfill their spousal duties and cater to their needs, home duties, do home duties, and watch after the children etc. Ahalaya's story shows how societal expectations limit a woman's agency and prioritize her role as a wife and mother, often at the expense of her own ambitions and desires. Gautama's treatment of Ahalaya as a pleasure giving object further emphasizes this objectification, reducing her to a means of fulfilling his own desires without regard for her own needs or desires. Similarly Satyavati being reduced to an object by Shantanu's pleasure, with her worth being measured by his carnal response to her. This dehumanizing attitude towards women is a pervasive theme in patriarchal societies where women are viewed primarily as objects for male pleasure and reproduction. The statement by Neera Desai and Maithreyi Krishnaraj suggests that "women have been locked upon either as victims of social practices or targets for development as in the post-independence period, but never as participants in development". Women have historically been marginalized and excluded from participating in development processes.

Satyavati and Ahalaya both demonstrate agency and resilience in the face of adversity. Despite being born in patriarchal societies that limit their opportunities and reduce them to objects for male desire, they both find ways to assert themselves and pursue their own goals. Satyavati draws upon her beauty and patronizes her intelligence to navigate the male-dominated political landscape, while Ahalaya defies societal expectations by pursuing her passion for music. Furthermore, while both characters may use others to achieve their goals, they never become mere pawns in the process. They maintain their agency and autonomy despite of constant rejection from patriarchal society.

Singular Essence of Women's Ambition

It is unfortunate that gender-based discrimination and the unequal distribution of decision-making power continue to be pervasive issues in today's society. The persistent notion that women are not capable of making important decisions that their opinion and choices are not as valuable as those of men is not only unjust, nonetheless, such beliefs also undermine the immense potential and capabilities of half of the global populations. Deserve equitable opportunities to engage in decision-making processes and have their voices acknowledged. This can be achieved through policies that promote gender equality in education, employment, and leadership positions.

Ahalaya's Awakening is a powerful example of how women are often denied agency in their lives. Ahalaya's limited independence over her own destiny is a manifestation of the broader societal norms and expectations that curtail women's self-determination. By depicting Ahalaya's struggles, Kane exposes the systemic issues that prevent women from achieving their full potential. In the historical era, equal access to education and employment was not provided, and Kane focuses on Ahalaya's quest to educate herself. The decision and action of lady must be accepted by her parents. Ahalaya in the book wanted to pursue her studies more, but her parents refused to give her

the freedom to do so. While her mother frequently desired to see her daughter be married right away, especially to Lord Indra, she was unwilling to wed him. Due to lack of permission to influence others in the direction she desired, Ahalaya encountered numerous challenges on her journey towards achieving her dream of becoming a Rishika.

When it comes to Ahalaya's marriage, several factors come into play we find that when it comes to marriage and family issues, women don't have the same freedom to make decisions that men have. A woman's parents or other family members frequently choose who she will marry, basing their choice on aspects including reputation, financial security, and familial ties. The woman's right to express an opinion on her marriage is not given importance. Only women have the ability to make decisions regarding the home. Similar to this, patriarchal traditions that place an emphasis on family, marriage, pregnancy, and domesticity confine women in the Fisher Queen's Dynasty, including Satyavati, Kripa, and the three Kasi Princesses. Satyavati did not find it too simple to get what she wanted. Satyavati, a strong woman with complete awareness and beauty, declares, "I have power over only myself and not others." There is just one 'opportunity' for her to make the most of her encounter with Parashar and Shantanu. However, avoiding it is never tolerated. The Kasi princess' union with the prince Vichitravirya is not really a possibility because they are not subject to any conscience or other concerns. These females are wronged by the ever-righteous Bhism himself, who treats them as little more than things to be brought, traded, or gained by him. For a lady who considers "the meaning of life is in the struggle, the fighting." Satyavati is stomped and crushed, and is repeated. These characters are supposed to accept the atrocities done against them and endure the consequences while the offender is still at large being forced by fate and the men around them to the verge of life.

Persistence in Pursuit of Education and Determination

Under the guru's guidance, individuals attained a comprehensive understanding by immersing themselves in the teaching of nature. At Vashisht Ashrama, Ahalaya and her brother received instruction in ancient Indian traditions in Ahalaya's Awakening. A quick learner, Ahalaya had early signs of being extremely intelligent. She only had the choice of getting married because she was not permitted to relocate to the ashram as she wanted. She begged her mother to reconsider, but she wouldn't budge. However, there was no choice to send Ahalaya to Rishi Gautam's ashram because the Kingdom was going to be attacked. Despite all the difficulties, she eventually marries him. Ahalaya was devoted to her education even after she got married.

Ahalaya is shown as a driven individual who fights valiantly to the latter end to accomplish her academic goals when she resides in the royal residence and at the hermitage. Satyavati had just a few years of formal schooling considering her familial background. However, she acquired expertise in maneuvering the boat adeptly, relying on her robust and muscular arms. Her intelligent use of talents demonstrates her high level of intellect. She was later led by Kripa, the daughter of a Rishi, when she arrived at the palace of Hastinapur after getting married to King Shantanu, who instructed her about the ceremonies and trained her in all the traits that a queen should possess.

While making decisions, Satyavati usually wore a determined attitude. Satyavati's brilliance and sharp mind were previously mentioned to Bhism by Kripa, who also that Satyavati is holy and should be taught more since one day she may turn all of her Knowledge over her and the residents of Hastinapur, along with the king and Bhism.

Highlighting, both the characters the writer reflect their different approaches to education and learning, both women defied societal expectations and overcame obstacles to find success through their unique paths.

Subverting the Shackles: Social Exclusion and Resilience of Woman

Social exclusion may take many different forms and is a serious issue that many women face globally including economic, social, and political exclusion. One of the main causes of social exclusion is cultural inequality, which is deeply ingrained in many societies and can lead to women being denied access to education, adequate income, and opportunities to participate in the formal and informal sectors of the economy, which in turn perpetuates their subordination and compromises their sense of dignity. Social isolation and discrimination based on gender are significant problems that women face in many parts of the world. Women often face barriers to decision-making, education, and other opportunities that can limit their ability to participate fully in society and reach their full potential. Ahalaya's character in Kavita Kane's novel represents the social exclusion and isolation that women can face in society. Ahalaya was not allowed to participate in decision-making or know about important events in her family's life. She was treated as an object rather than a person with feelings and emotions.

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Reducing women to their physical bodies and assigning negative characteristics to them based on their gender, women are not only marginalized and excluded from social contexts but also deprived of agency and control over their own lives. Women, who are treated as objects or whose identities are limited by societal norms and expectations feel alienated, disempowered, and undervalued. It is important for communities and societies to recognize the value and potential of women and to allow them the assets and resources they require in order to prosper. In the case of Ahalaya has fought back against conservative traditions and societal expectations, and who has refused to let those limitations hold her back. Her determination and resilience are a testament to the power of individual of individual agency and the significance of questioning cultural expectations that restrict women's endless possibilities.

Conclusion

It is important to approach Kavita Kane's works with an open mind and avoid falling into the same traps of judgmental thinking that the author seeks to challenge. The goal of Kane's work is to combat gender oppression and promote awareness and understanding of feminist ideology.

Kane's portrayal of female characters, such as Satyavati and Ahalaya, shows that even in a male-dominated society, women can resist and challenge patriarchal norms. These female characters do not cater solely to men's desires, but instead assert their own agency and autonomy. The Cambridge Companion to Mediaeval Women's Writings editors point out that Marie de France uses a feminine voice in her writings that "interrupts masculine traditions" in their 2003 publication. This is the actual concept and vision of Kane.

Indeed, Kavita Kane's novels depict the struggles and the quest education and power in a patriarchal society. Ahalaya and Satyavati, the central female characters, exhibit remarkable resilience and unwavering determination as they conquer adversities and realize their aspirations.

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