

SOCIAL CONVENTIONS AND IDENTITY CRISIS IN KAVITA KANE'S NOVELS: A STUDY

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Abstract

A myth is a universal reality that is also personal, intuitive, cultural, and religious. A current urban legend will prove to be genuine one day. By its very nature, literature is biased towards a select few viewpoints, ideas, and points of view. Because of the clearer distinction between overt and covert narration in myths, this may be even more accurate. In a broader sense, mythology interacts with feminist politics. Neither feminism nor mythology has a place in the modern world. Myths serve as the cornerstone of many cultures and civilizations. It is believed that the cultural myths embody ideologies, ideals, and ideas that benefit the general public. Classic myths are being reinterpreted by writers from all around the world to comment on contemporary situations. Mythological figures and themes have been used as symbols for many cultural norms, beliefs, and philosophies throughout time. This results in myths continuing to grow in both size and importance. Myths typically shine because of their rich concepts and narratives. Writers of all generations employ these concerns and techniques. By depicting the complexities of these women's lives, Kavita Kane challenges the notion that a matriarchal society automatically guarantees women complete freedom and empowerment. Instead, she portrays how women in such societies must also negotiate their work within specific cultural norms. Throughout both novels, Kavita Kane's narrative emphasizes the resilience and strength of women in the face of adversity. By presenting multidimensional female characters who transcend the limiting roles assigned to them, Kane showcases women's contributions to society and challenges preconceived notions about their capabilities. The novels delve into these women's struggles, which helps shed light on the historical difficulties women face across different cultures and periods. The primary goal of this dissertation is to analyse the portrayal of female adversity in the novels and the subsequent triumphs of these women over societal conventions and restrictions. By examining how the characters in the stories navigate their identity crises and find work despite their circumstances, the dissertation aims to demonstrate the significance of women's contributions to society.

Keywords: Indian mythology, women's struggles, subjugation, history, identity crisis women's contributions etc.

Kavita Kane highlights the challenges and adversities faced by women throughout history, particularly in societies with patriarchal structures through her novels. They delve into the lives of central female characters and their struggles against objectification, undereducation, social marginalization, and limited opportunities. The novel *Karna's Wife* not only highlights Uruvi's character but also delves into the complexities of other prominent characters like Draupadi, and Kunti. It offers a captivating and engaging narrative that brings to life the characters and events of the epic tale. In *Ahalya's Awakening*, the central female character, Ahalya, is a figure from Indian mythology. Her story is often seen as a cautionary tale, wherein she is unfairly blamed for an incident involving the god Indra's deceit and subsequent punishment. In this context, women are often depicted as being at the mercy of powerful men's actions and decisions. Kane's retelling of Ahalya's story aims to challenge this stereotypical portrayal and explore Ahalya's character's depth beyond the victim role. By doing so, Kane raises Ahalya's work level, highlighting her ability to overcome societal conventions and regain her identity after facing immense challenges. In *Lanka's Princess*, Kavita Kane offers a fresh perspective on Surpanakha's life, delving into her thoughts, feelings, and experiences. The novel humanizes Surpanakha, shedding light on her struggles and the events that shaped her decisions. It presents her as more than just a vengeful demoness, offering readers a deeper understanding of her character and the choices she makes. Similarly, in *The Fisher Queens Dynasty*, the novel centres around female characters from Indian mythology who belong to a matrilineal society. Despite being part of a society where women hold power and influence, they still face obstacles and struggles. The novel explores how women in such a society navigate their roles, responsibilities, and identities, despite societal expectations and constraints.

Methodology

The present study is explanatory and exploratory and hence focuses in detail a study on two selected novels of Kavita Kane, Ahalya's *Awakening* and *The Fisher Queens Dynasty*.

Objectives

1. To understand Kavita Kane's novels as feministic in their themes.
2. To analyse the selected novels from feministic perspective.
3. To understand and probe into the aspects of subjugation and identity crisis in the characters of selected novels of Kavita Kane.

Kavita Kane's storytelling in *Ahalya's Awakening* and *The Fisher Queens Dynasty* serves as a means to challenge stereotypes and misrepresentations of women in history. Through these retellings, she provides a platform for women's voices and experiences, highlighting their struggles, triumphs, and work throughout time. By doing so, Kane's work contributes to a better

understanding of the challenges women face and continue to face, thereby encouraging a re-evaluation of their historical roles and contributions in society.

Kavita Kane's approach to mythological fiction sets her apart from other authors in the genre. Unlike many authors who have retold Indian epics and mythological tales, Kane focuses on the lesser-admired and marginalized women figures from these stories. She engages in historical revisionism, reimagining the narratives and perspectives of these women who have been historically excluded, mistreated, and abused. This unique approach allows her to shed light on the experiences and voices of women often sidelined in traditional mythological accounts.

By giving voice to these silenced women, Kane's works become a means of healing for a community that patriarchal norms have long oppressed. Her female protagonists challenge the idealized depictions of women in traditional narratives, breaking away from stereotypical roles and expectations imposed by patriarchal society. Through her storytelling, Kane empowers her female characters to forge their paths, taking charge of their destinies, and defying traditional gender norms. This portrayal of strong and independent female characters not only challenges conventional notions about women but also inspires readers. In contrast to the traditional portrayal of women as damsels in distress, Kane's heroines are depicted as agents of their fate. Their relationships with male characters do not solely define them but stand as individuals with their desires, struggles, and triumphs. This shift in perspective provides a refreshing and empowering take on these mythological women, giving them work and autonomy in their stories.

Kane's works can be seen as part of a broader movement in literature that seeks to challenge and subvert patriarchal norms. Authors like Shashi Tharoor, R.K. Narayan, Mahasweta Devi, and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni have also contributed to this genre of historical revisionism. Still, Kane's specific focus on the female figures and their work sets her apart. Her writing is a powerful tool for raising awareness about the importance of women's voices in history and encouraging re-evaluating traditional narratives that have marginalized them. Overall, Kavita Kane's mythological fiction is a testament to her mission of giving voice and work to the forgotten and mistreated women of Indian mythology. By challenging preconceived notions about these characters and providing them with strong and independent narratives, Kane's works contribute to the ongoing progress towards gender equality and empowerment in Indian society.

The interesting observation is the comparison between Kavita Kane's female protagonists and Mahasweta Devi's portrayal of Draupadi in *Draupadi*. Both authors present strong and empowered female characters who challenge conventional ideas of femininity. Both authors depicted their female characters as subjugated women but with efficiency and a voice, defying traditional gender roles and expectations. By giving attention to the struggles these women face on their paths to pursuing their true callings, Kane and Devi highlight the central struggle caused by society's objectification of women.

Kane's portrayal of Ahalya in *Ahalya's Awakening* stands out as a particularly powerful depiction of an overlooked character from the Ramayana. By devoting greater attention to Ahalya's struggles and journey, Kane brings depth to the character and challenges the lack of attention and praise in the original epic. This deep dive into Ahalya's story allows readers to see her as an incredible person with her work, rather than just a marginal figure. The observation that Kane's writing makes the events and characters more relatable by eliminating the possibility of readers idolizing certain individuals, particularly Bhishma, speaks to the complexity and realism of her narratives. By presenting characters with flaws and consequences for their actions, Kane's work portrays a more human and nuanced perspective, making the stories resonate with readers on a deeper level.

The study's exploration of the status of women in ancient India is also significant in understanding the context in which these mythological women lived. It highlights that the women in ancient India had more social status and independence than in later periods, but they were not entirely autonomous. As the Vedic period progressed, patriarchal norms began to impact women's roles and societal standing. The decline in women's status during this period is evidenced by the belief that only sons could save their parents from damnation, diminishing the worth of mothers who bore only daughters or single children. Overall, the research presented in the dissertation and the analysis of Kavita Kane's works provide valuable insights into the historical struggles and triumphs of women in Indian society. By focusing on mythological women and reimagining their narratives, Kane's writing serves as a means to challenge conventional perceptions, empower women's voices, and shed light on the enduring adversities faced by women throughout history.

The historical account provided highlights the fluctuating status of women in Indian society across different periods. The Post-Vedic era saw a decline in women's status, influenced by various factors such as colonial rule, religious dogmatism, and the writing of the Vedic texts. During this time, girls were forced into early marriages, and widows faced severe restrictions on remarriage. The Mughal period further exacerbated the subordination of women, despite some prominent princesses whose names were recorded in history books. The girl child was often considered a bad omen, and Mughal women from the upper and middle classes faced significant oppression from patriarchal rules. However, with the arrival of the colonial rule in 1857, Indian women began to play a more active role in the fight for independence. Although their numbers were relatively small, the women of the independence movement made significant strides towards gaining independence and challenging traditional gender norms.

In the context of this historical background, Kavita Kane's myth retelling work becomes even more significant. By giving depth and complexity to the female characters in her narratives, Kane challenges the prevailing cultural norms that define women primarily by their appearance and gender roles. She explores the emotional issues that define the human condition, presenting her female protagonists as individuals with work and their voices. Kane's writing helps to break down the notion of viewing women solely as objects. It emphasizes valuing women for who they

are beyond physical attractiveness or reproductive roles. Her focus on female protagonists and their experiences under various societal and cultural norms reflects her commitment to shedding light on the struggles and triumphs of women facing conformity.

In a society where women have often been subjugated and objectified, Kane's works provide a refreshing and empowering perspective, emphasizing the complexities and depth of women's experiences. Through her storytelling, she challenges women's traditional norms and expectations, encouraging readers to see them as individuals with their desires, aspirations, and work. Overall, Kavita Kane's myth retellings raise awareness about the historical challenges women face and the need to move away from the objectification and commodification of women in society. By giving voice to these marginalized mythological women, Kane's work becomes a powerful force in the ongoing struggle for gender equality and empowerment.

In *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty*, Kavita Kane explores the complex character of Satyavati, a woman with lofty aspirations. The story delves into where the line between desire and feeling of insufficiency should be drawn and how societal conflicts ultimately revolve around power dynamics. Through the portrayal of Satyavati, the author investigates whether our opinions of characters change depending on their religion, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. Kane's feminist revisionist approach challenges the objectification of women, a common theme in ancient stories. In the novel, Satyavati's life is marked by the actions of the men in her world, driven by their desires and interests. Her biological father rejects her at birth simply because she is a girl and becomes a means for Sage Parashara to have a son. King Shantanu's sexual attraction to her further complicates her relationships with men. Due to these circumstances, Satyavati is labelled negatively as an "evil temptress," "opportunist," "misbegotten," and "cold-hearted."

The novel also hints at the pervasive societal view of women as defined solely by their sexuality. The tragic backstory of Satyavati's mother being raped by her father, King Uparichar Vasu, and then disowned serves to underscore further the objectification and mistreatment of women in the narrative. Satyavati's determination to claim what is rightfully hers and seek redress for the wrongs done to her stems from these injustices. The character of Amba, seeking redress for the wrongs committed against her, also adds to the exploration of women seeking justice in the story. However, her quest for vengeance ultimately leads to her ruin.

Kane's approach in contrasting Satyavati with the men in her life, rather than reducing her to a caricature defined solely by her gender, sets the novel apart. It highlights the complexities of her character and the impact of patriarchal traditions on her journey. By examining the themes of power dynamics, objectification of women, and women seeking justice and empowerment, *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty* becomes a powerful work that challenges traditional gender norms and elevates underappreciated female characters. Kane's exploration of the complexities of female experiences in ancient narratives adds depth to the story and contributes to the ongoing discourse on women's rights and work.

In *Ahalya's Awakening*, Kavita Kane delves deep into the character of Ahalya, showcasing various perspectives on female sexuality and challenging societal norms that commodify women. The novel opens with King Mudgal praising his newborn daughter, Ahalya, for her beauty, highlighting the societal emphasis on a woman's appearance from the beginning. This context sets the stage for understanding the challenges the female characters face in the story. Ahalya's life is marked by the traditional expectations of her community, where her parents prioritize Indra's marriage proposal despite knowing about his infidelity. The social value of men extends beyond their physical prowess, while women are expected to be submissive and obedient, existing to serve their fathers and husbands. Ahalya's dreams and aspirations are disregarded, and she is quickly married off despite her desire to become a Rasika, showing how women were often treated as commodities for men's domestic and reproductive needs.

The novel portrays how women like Ahalya and Satyavati are treated as objects rather than individuals with work and emotions. Ahalya's husband, Gautam, uses her as a pleasure object when he desires some space, reducing her to a mere tool for his convenience. Similarly, Satyavati's worth is diminished in her husband Shantanu's eyes after their marriage, objectifying her instead of valuing her as a person. Kane challenges the traditional portrayal of women as passive victims as often seen in historical and narratives after colonial rule ended. Instead, she presents strong and resilient female characters like Ahalya and Satyavati, who defy societal norms and assert their work. They refuse to be mere pawns and assert their individuality despite the injustice and challenges they face.

Through the story, Kane sheds light on the injustice women have historically endured due to societal norms. She emphasizes that women should be seen as future possibilities rather than commodities and encourages readers to consider women's aspirations, dreams, and work beyond their physical appearance. In her storytelling, Kane doesn't shy away from portraying the harsh realities women face but also gives voice to their strength and resilience. By presenting multi-dimensional female characters, she challenges the objectification and commodification of women, offering a more nuanced and empowering perspective on their experiences.

Overall, *Ahalya's Awakening* is a thought-provoking work that delves into the complexities of female sexuality, societal expectations, and the struggle for work. It encourages readers to view women as individuals with aspirations and work deserving respect and consideration beyond their appearance or societal roles. She then presents a lady who, in a culture that equates femininity with physical attractiveness, creates a protagonist who views her body as "her sharpest weapon to cleave and crave a better life for herself."

The analysis provided sheds light on the gender gap in decision-making power and the impact of societal norms on women's choices and opportunities. Kavita Kane's writings, particularly in *Ahalya's Awakening*, serve as a lens to examine these issues. The story of Ahalya exemplifies how women's choices were often restricted and dictated by their families and society.

Despite her intelligence and talents, Ahalya was denied the opportunity to pursue her education further or follow her aspirations due to traditional norms that prioritized marriage and domestic roles for women. This lack of work in making decisions about her life reflects a broader pattern of limiting women's choices and potential in society.

The portrayal of Satyavati further highlights the constraints imposed on women's decision-making. Despite her intelligence and potential, Satyavati's access to education was limited, and her life choices were shaped by circumstances and the men in her life. The characters' experiences in *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty* underscore how societal norms, patriarchal traditions, and the prioritization of marriage and motherhood hindered women from fully exercising their decision-making power.

Education is crucial in empowering women and enabling them to make informed life choices. However, societal norms often stigmatize women pursuing education without a specific goal, limiting their opportunities and potential. The lack of education and opportunities further perpetuates gender inequality and restricts women's participation in decision-making roles. The historical context of ancient India's educational system, where women like Ahalya had limited access to education compared to men, reflects the deep-rooted gender disparities that continue to impact women's decision-making abilities in modern society. The analysis highlights the importance of empowering women to make choices and decisions. When women are allowed to exercise their work, they can contribute significantly to societal progress and development. Education, empowerment, and challenging traditional norms are crucial steps in bridging the gender gap in decision-making power. Through her writings, Kavita Kane highlights the challenges women have historically faced in making decisions and pursuing their aspirations. By portraying strong and determined female characters, she advocates for women's work and challenges the societal norms restricting their choices. The characters of Ahalya and Satyavati serve as examples of the resilience and potential of women when allowed to exercise their decision-making power.

The analysis highlights the importance of Kavita Kane's portrayal of strong female protagonists who resist societal norms and gender discrimination. Through characters like Ahalya and Satyavati, Kane sheds light on women's challenges due to social isolation, lack of decision-making power, and limited opportunities for education and leadership. The study emphasizes the need for continued progress in achieving gender equality, as there are still communities where women are excluded from economic, social, and political life. Women's social exclusion and limited access to education and employment opportunities hinder their ability to build successful careers and contribute to global progress. Kane's use of characters like Ahalya and Satyavati illustrates the consequences of denying women their social status and birthright. Both characters face isolation and discrimination, highlighting the impact of reducing women to their physical appearances and devaluing their personal lives.

The analysis also points out that women must be given the tools and opportunities to advance themselves in society. Kane's female characters serve as role models, not succumbing to societal norms and fighting against conventional expectations. Through her writings, Kane raises consciousness about gender discrimination and challenges patriarchal traditions. Her female characters are not mere pawns in a male-dominated culture; instead, they assert their voices and interrupt masculine traditions, advocating for women's rights and empowerment.

In conclusion, Kavita Kane's portrayal of strong and resilient female characters in *Ahalya's Awakening* and *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty* sends a hopeful message to readers. The characters' determination and courage demonstrate that women can overcome obstacles and take control of their lives with willpower and courage. Kane's writings are a powerful reminder of the importance of fighting for gender equality and challenging societal norms to create a more inclusive and empowering world for women.

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