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## Mythology: a Literary Genre Proliferated Post Millennia

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### Abstract:

Since past few years India has yielded a young breed of writers who has brought out plethora of new fiction based on mythology. This paper is based on the study of the *Palace of Illusions* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and *Sita's Sister* and *Lanka's Princess* by Kavita Kane. Mythology is not new to Indian literature but how it has been presented by the new writers of the present age makes it new and different. Indian literature is full of many historical and mythological characters. With time there has been a change in social scenario of India and so is in the thoughts of the people. Also, globalisation has led to many changes redefining the thoughts of people regarding understanding of fields like culture, politics, literature etc. This had a great impact on the thoughts of the reader as well as the writer as it exposes to the outer world. The present generation want something interesting and different in taste. There is a change in identities of various mythological characters and also, these characters call attention to and raise voice against various social issues.

**Keywords:** Mythology, Draupadi, Society, Mahabharata, Sita.

With the advancement of technology and increasing globalisation, it has become easy for the people to interact with multiple cultures and thoughts of other places and people. Today, the world has shrunk into a global village by advance technology. This digital world has given platform to people to share ideas on various issues openly.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century writers draw inspirations from the works written in past. The technological advancement has yielded some different themes to the 21<sup>st</sup> century contemporary writers like mythology, machinery, and hypothetical approach to the future, comment on the present, kindle introspection and encourages questioning regarding the concept of self.

The contemporary literature has left no field untouched, whether it is political, economical, social, or technical. Since past few years some young writers has come up with new genre of writings that is attracting predominantly, the young readers. These writers have presented a whole new assortment of a new and fresh, spicy and fascinating fiction.

These post millennia writers have shifted from the conventional post colonial themes to the contemporary problems of modern India. Also, with the changing lifestyle and increasing technology , the modern reader have become so much involved in his life that he is not aware of what is going on in society. Everyone is rushing towards anonymity. No one has time to pause and know his responsibility towards society.

This makes the role of writers even more challenging in strengthening culture and incorporating values among readers. There is a strong need to connect to each other and to our roots. Of course, this young generation of writers has kept in mind the marketing style and demand of readers to draw more and more readers to their writings. But we cannot deny the fact that this is what the majority of readers want, that is, something kinky which is non-identical to the previous writings.

In today's fast growing world of science and technology, we have forgotten the values of humanity and have isolated ourselves to our own needs. These new young writers have chosen some bizarre themes like mythology, mis-match marriages, and campus novels, women different from the ideal image, reincarnating the past, gender, caste and politics, problems of new urban society etc.

This paper focuses mainly on mythology, so first let's understand the term mythology. Generally mythology refers to something that happened long ago but we don't believe it to be true now M. H. Abrams explains mythology as:

*In classical Greek, "mythos" signified any story or plot, whether true or false. In its central modern significance, a myth is one story in a mythology- a system of hereditary stories which were once believed to be true by a particular cultural group, and which served to explain (in terms of the intentions and actions of supernatural beings) why the world is as it is and things happen as they do, and to establish the rationale for social customs and observances and the sanctions for*

*the rules by which men conduct their lives...a mythology, we can say, is any religion in which we no longer believe (102).*

Indian mythology is a vast stack of stories of various fascinating characters. These myths or the stories were meant to impart values to the reader and help them gain better understanding of life. Since past few years some writers have attempted to retell these myths by making them relevant in the present context. These mythological fictions show different perspectives, like feminism, power, politics, gender identity, truth etc.

Literature connects us with larger truths and ideas in a society and gives us insight into the world literature. Literature is thought provoking and develops in us a deeper understanding of issues and situations. Earlier also, some books were written on mythology but since last decade there has been a boom in this field. *The palace of illusions* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is one of the exciting novels on mythology. The novel is an interpretation of Mahabharata from Draupadi's point of view, depicting the existence of women in a patriarchal world. *Panchalli*, the wife of five *Pandavas*, narrates the story of great era from her perspective and gives it a new interpretation.

In the palace of illusions, Draupadi has shown her affectionate relationship with her brother Dhristadyumna. They both were born out of fire and here in the story is depicted a special bonding between the two siblings. She says:

*But that first loyalty made us inseparable. We shared our fears of the future with each other, shielded each other with fierce protectiveness from a world that regarded us as not quite normal, and comforted each other in our loneliness (ch.1).*

Here, the sentiments, emotions and thoughts of Draupadi are depicted in an elaborated manner and also there is a keen observation of what she felt for her near and dear ones. Reading the book, helps us imagine for a while that how Draupadi felt personally at each and every occasion.

Chitra Banerjee's Draupadi is different from the one we all had known till now in our tales of Mahabharata. This Draupadi is presented as a dark complexioned princess in contrary to the fact we know that she was one of the most beautiful women on earth. Through Draupadi, Chitra

Banerjee has questioned the scornful attitude of society towards the dark skinned women. She writes:

*In a society that looked down its patrician nose on anything except milk-and-almond hues, this was considered most unfortunate, especially for a girl. I paid for it by spending hour upon excruciating hour being slathered in skin whitening unguents and scrubbed with numerous exfoliants by my industrious nurse. But finally she would give up in despair. I, too, might have despaired if it hadn't been for Krishna (ch.2).*

*The palace of illusions* traces the life of Draupadi from birth till death, her mysterious relationship with lord Krishna, commencement of war and also Draupadi's unreciprocated love for Karna. This book is also very relevant from the viewpoint of gender studies and feminism. When Draupadi was humiliated at the hands of Kauravas, she puts many questions before us which compel us to think again about the existence and meaning of a woman's life. She writes:

*What did I learn that day in tha sabha?*

*All this time I'd believed in my power over my husbands. I'd believed that because they loved me they would do anything for me. But now I saw that though they did love me- as much perhaps as any man can love- there are other things they loved more. Their notions of honour, of loyalty towards each other, of reputation were more important to them than my suffering. They would avenge me later, yes, but only when they felt the circumstances would bring them heroic fame. A woman doesn't think that way. I would have thrown myself forward to save them if it had been in my power that day. I wouldn't have cared what anyone thought (ch.25).*

*Lanka's Princess* by Kavita Kane` is a fascinating book that compels us to look at Surpanakha from a different viewpoint. Surpanakha, is remembered as the ugly, demonic and horrifying sister of Ravana. But in this novel Kavita Kane` has tried to give human traits to the demonic Surpanakha. In the novel, Surpanakha is shown as a neglected character since her childhood and seeks love. Kavita Kane`, a well known name in the mythological fiction writers, is an expertise in telling stories of women largely marginalised in the epics.

Surpanakha, as we all know was the reason behind the Great War between Ram and Ravan. We have been acquainted with only this much information about her and never cared to discuss more than that. Kavita Kane` has presented Surpanakha as a neglected and unwelcomed child. She was unwanted as her mother desired another boy in her place, so that her sons could rule over the world.

*'It's a girl!'*

*Kaikesi heard the words as the last wave of pain and relief. It was a daughter, not a son, her heart sank, her aspirations drowning in a flood of disappointment and easy tears...This girl has cheated me of my plans, she thought angrily, a faint stirring of unease making her more restless (ch.- She).*

This book relates to the present issues of the society like gender discrimination and insecurity based on looks and skin color, feminism and violence. All these issues are intertwined through the narrative and handled appropriately. On contrary to the scornful and demonic image of Surpanakha, this book looks at her from a different perspective.

*'She hardly looks beautiful or like me. In fact, she is quite ugly!' said Kaikesi, staring at the sleeping child, a frown deepening on her lovely face. 'She's scrawny and much darker than me!' 'Yes, she is dark', smiled Vishravas, and again she heard the doubt in his voice. 'Bu she's a newborn and all babies can't be as bony as Kumbha or fair as Ravan or Vibhishan!'*

*Kaikesi flushed guiltily, 'Yes, because of me!' she said bitterly. 'You had said that each of our children will be remarkable, that each shall change the future of our race, our family. How is this dark monkey going to bring us good fortune? No one will ever marry her!'(ch. - She)*

It depicts the life of Surpanakha originally named princess Meenakshi, the only daughter of Rishi Vishravas and Kaikesi and sister to Ravan, Vibhishan and Kumbhakaran. This book unfolds incidents that contribute in moulding Surpanakha's character and how she became Surpanakha from Meenakshi.

Kavita Kane` gives some optimistic quotes through Taraka to present this idea that beauty lies in the head and heart and one should believe in oneself. This is a harsh reality of our society that there is a tendency of choosing the fair over the dark.

*'Beauty should be flaunted, and don't start off that you aren't one! Beauty lies in your head and heart, you have to believe it. But for that first you have to love yourself. Love is magic; it has the mysterious supernatural power of influencing your heart and mind and soul and change the course of events in your life.... (ch.- Taraka)*

Since childhood she was a lonely child, but after Ravan murdered her husband, the only person who loved her, the circumstances took an ugly turn. Princess Meenakshi became Surpankha, ready to avenge her husband's death. She was desperate to destroy Ravan. Later she became the reason for destruction of Ravan.

*Sita's Sister* is another book by Kavita Kane` which tells the story of a woman who suffered a lot but was always an overlooked character. Urmila the neglected wife of Laxman is a forgotten character. No one speaks about her while discussing Ramayana. Though Kavita Kane` did not mention in the title the name of the sister she is talking about, it intrigues us and makes us think of Urmila. Urmila was one of the brave characters in Ramayana who sacrificed her own joy just for dharma like Ram, Laxman and Sita.

Urmila was always a humble, calm and mature person who accepted to be Laxman's wife, knowing the fact that he will fulfil his duties to his brother first and then anything else. Kavita Kane` has very beautifully described the relationship of two brothers. Laxman while speaking to Urmila says:

*...For me my life is being with my brother. He is my all. He's my friend, my teacher, my life, my soul. I cannot do without him- that's how I have grown up, that's how I have been made...' He shook his head in disbelief (ch. - The Rejection).*

This fact didn't affect Urmila's decision to marry Lakshman and she was willing to accept him in every situation. Instead she dissipated all his confusions and fears by happily being his second choice. She says in a calm voice:

*'Loving is also giving; you are not ready to give yourself to me. But don't you see, I don't want your complete surrender. I love you but that does not mean I possess you, your beliefs and your loyalties. I assure you that I shall never come between your loyalty to your brothers and your family. Likewise, I shall not allow my love for you to be threatened by my love for my sisters and my parents. By loving you, my love for them will never falter, nor should yours.'* (ch. - The Rejection)

Though Sita was the privileged one since childhood and got all the attention of the parents, Urmila never complained. There was never a tinge of jealousy or hatred in Urmila against Sita. That's why when Sita expressed her concern and guilt regarding this, Urmila supported her and expressed her selfless sisterly love and drove away all her guilt and fear. Sita said:

*'You loved me doubly more instead!' cried Sita. 'I love mother, father and you but between the four of us love hasn't been distributed equally, has it? They loved me too much for your little, even though you are their blood daughter.'* (ch.- The Rejection)

When Laxman initially was unwilling to marry her due to his duties to his brother, Urmila expressed great patience and understanding and accepted things as they were. That is why when her sisters were comforting her, knowing Laxman's feeling, she says:

*'At every point, we need to choose between those whom we love. It is a constant conflict but that does not mean we love one less than the other.'* (ch.- The Rejection)

When Urmila heard that Sita, like her husband, is also accompanying Ram, she was horrified as well as worried. She couldn't imagine her sweet, innocent sister to live in forest among all the dangers.

*'She would be an incumbent for them in their mission, and worse, she would be exposing herself to unknown danger. Urmila was about to protest but bit back her words at the last possible moment: she should not interfere between husband and wife. It was their decision.'* (ch.- The Exile)

Urmila was the ultimate power of Laxman who provided him with inner strength to follow his dharma. Sita's words clearly exhibit this in the following lines:

*'But, do you know why Lakshman could take such a hard decision? Because he has faith in you. I think he believes in you more than in himself. You are his tower of strength, like you have inadvertently been for us sisters. I might be the oldest but it was you on whom we relied for support and comfort.'*(ch.- The Farewell)

Urmila showed great courage and perseverance when Laxman was leaving for forest along with Ram and Sita. She asked Sita not to discuss about her with Laxman in these fourteen years so that he could perform his duties faithfully without being distracted.

*'And, Sita, please I have a request. Don't ever discuss me with Lakshman, don't do anything that would remind him of me,'* said Urmila, *her eyes steady, her voice steadier. 'That's my sincere appeal to both you and Ram.'*(ch.- The Farewell)

Urmila knew that like her, it was going to be equally difficult for Laxman also to leave her and go for fourteen years. So she took a great step, and spoke harshly to Laxman and made him hate her so that he would not think of her and perform his duties wholeheartedly. It was a very courageous task on Urmila's part. She sacrificed her everything just for the sake of her husband's and her dharma.

*'Will deserting your wife and serving your brother make you more noble? Then, let me hate you for that. Let me hate you for the forthcoming fourteen years- that endless chasm you have driven between us. Let me hate you as passionately as I loved you. Now, go!'* (ch.- The Exile)

*...You can hate me for all I just said. I hope I have made it easier for you now, she thought bleakly, made it easier for us, to hate rather than to love each other for the next fourteen years of separation. Would hatred be easier than loving?* (ch.- The Exile)

*'Then why can't you take me with you?'* she said sadly. She said it before she could stop herself as she knew the answer. It was a futile request. Lakshman was going out of his own volition with Ram, he had not been

*banished. He was going with his brother as his soldier, his bodyguard, and a soldier does not take his wife to the battlefield. Urmila knew she had to harden her heart for herself- and for him. (ch.- The Exile)*

Urmila, as she promised to Laxman before marriage, never blamed him for preferring his brother ram over her or never felt jealous, ignored or cheated. Because she realised the depth of brotherly bond between Laxman and Ram.

*Urmila understood, their close bond was characterised by an unusual rationality based on mutual comprehension, discernment and empathy. She had learnt to accept that Lakshman was Ram's eternal companion, his alter ego, but watching the two brothers, it became visible to both sita and her that Ram couldn't do without Lakshman either. Lakshman seemed to be an extension to Ram-his brother, fellow, friend and confidant. Ram trusted and loved Lakshman the most, even more than Sita, urmila sometimes suspected. Like her Sita knew this and accepted it with dignified grace( ch. – The Crown Prince).*

When Laxman and Sita gave their final decision to go with ram, they all forgot about Urmila. In fact, today we also haven't realised that Urmila was also the one most affected by the decision and she also want to lessen their troubles.

*Urmila's first instinctive reaction had been a flood of hurt for being rejected by both her husband and sister, followed by a deep and bitter anger. They had not considered her at all, each intent on getting what they wanted. She felt betrayed, left out nad let down. Her grievance was more against Lakshman. For Sita, there was reserved an envy-another unfamiliar feeling-that she could accompany her husband to the forest; Urmila could not. Her husband had rejected the option outright. There was guilt for harbouring such disagreeable scepticism towards the people she treasured most (ch. – The Exile).*

After coming back, Sita revealed to Urmila that it was her silly desire for golden deer that caused all the trouble and for that she sent Ram after him. When she heard ram's scream she became restless and asked Laxman to follow after. But Laxman wanted Sita's safety and initially refused

but then Sita rebuked and humiliated him. Sita here asks for forgiveness from Urmila as she was suffering from guilt and embarrassment to speak in such a way to Laxman. Urmila was so indulgent that she forgave Sita in the wink of an eye. She just said:

*'We made mistakes...let's just learn from them and not keep searching for justifications. Life is too short to have regrets. And too long to endure the tribulations,' she said, gazing at her sister long and searchingly (ch. – The Return).*

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