Mythology Retold: Exploring the Subjective Realities Told in the Mythological Retellings with Special Emphasis on Kavita Kane's *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty*

Uma Sharma[1*] and Dr. Saurabh Kumar[2]

[1*,2]Department of Languages and Social Sciences, CPU Hamirpur, Himachal Pradesh. umasharma8888@gmail.com, saurabh.eng@cpuh.in

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	Reimagining mythology and retelling it afresh is an exceptional creative endeavor that has been undertaken by numerous Indian writers, enormously inspired by the Indian epics and mythological texts. The epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* have been revisited by countless authors across the globe down the ages and the result is the availability of a number of retellings of these texts, possessing the unique stamp of the author's viewpoint. Gupta and Singh while highlighting the prominence of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* among creative writers assert that both these texts are valued amongst "the most important works of literature in South Asia" (311). The present study is an endeavor to highlight the prowess of the recent retellings of the ancient Indian mythological texts in expressing the hitherto unheard tales and subjective realities of the mythological characters. The study explores the life of a mythological woman, Satyavati, through the retelling of *Mahabharata* by Kavita Kane in *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty*. It explores Satyavati's journey from being an unfamiliar fisher girl to an awe-inspiring matriarch of Hastinapur dynasty. **Keywords:** Mythology, Retellings, Subjective Truth, Women, Satyavati, Kavita Kane

Introduction:

Prior to the pervasive association of 'myth' with 'fiction', the term was extensively used to designate any persuasive story that talked about culturally specific events and individuals. These narrations of the primordial experiences reflected a burning reality existing in the psyche and culture of the concerned people. Myths reflected a common understanding about religion or culture by people of various communities and ethnicities, who were bound together with the shared understanding. Thus, contrary to the popular assumptions of acknowledging myth as something false and irrational, myth is subjective truth that is "intuitive, cultural and grounded in faith" (Pattanaik 14).Such truths of any culture evolve over time through various stories, rituals and symbols, heard, performed and witnessed by the respective communities (Pattanaik 15).

Myths not only express the objective tales of the culture specific events but also exhibit the real revelations of the preconscious psyche and unconscious psychic happenings. They reflect the psychic lives and the living religion of people (Jung and Kerenyi 73).Myths reflect the subjective realities and the inner world of thoughts, feelings and emotions of the individuals. In a myth, legend, dream or even in a hallucination, every single mental construct, either voluntary or involuntary, may be said to be real thing occurred either with conscious or unconscious deliberations (Knapp xii).

Myths contribute to interpret and comprehend the contemporary realities and subjective truths by way of making associations to the legendary past. Rather than considering myth as an idle tale, it may, thus, be perceived as a hard-worked pragmatic charter of people's primitive faith and moral wisdom (Malinowski 100) which holds significance when a recent rite, ritual, social or moral conduct needs warrant of antiquity and reality (107). Eminent ethnologist Claude Levi-Strauss also believes that more than anything else, mythology illustrates objectified thoughts and provides empirical proofs of its reality. Various retellings of the ancient Indian epics may, thus, be perceived as specimens of the subjective realities portrayed emphatically in them by writers in different languages during diverse ages.

Objectives:

o To study mythology as representation of subjective reality.
o To explore the prominent retellings of Indian mythology from antiquity till present times.
o To study the representation of mythological woman, Satyavati, in Kavita Kane's novel *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty*

Research Methodology:

The present study focuses on an in-depth textual analysis of the retellings of Indian mythology. The qualitative tools like interpretation and description are used to highlight the hitherto unfamiliar and unheard viewpoints of the mythological characters. Different aspects of the feminine sensibility inherent in Kavita Kane's retelling *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty* are scrutinized using the feminist theory.

Literature Review:

Recently a steady evolution in the fictional, non-fictional and research works related to mythology has been witnessed. The present study has reviewed certain works in the field of mythology that highlight the subjective truths and role of women in myths, in addition to exhibiting the prowess myths possess in shaping the worldview across cultures while allowing multiple answers to the contemporary queries.

Devdutt Pattanaik in *Myth=Mithya* explains that myth, quite opposite to the popular belief of being considered as something false, irrational and unreasonable, is actually a finite expression of the infinite truth. Myth is a subjective truth expressed in the form of stories, symbols and rituals (Pattanaik 13) shaping all cultures alike irrespective of their time period or ethnicity.

Bronislaw Malinowski in *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays* compares myth to a living reality happened in primeval times that still influence human destinies by offering rules to guide the humanity (100).

Dr. Sabita Mishra's research work "A Modern Approach to Retelling of Indian Epics and Mythical Characters" highlights that how retelling a myth not only paves way to a fresh myth, but also hints at the solutions to the burning problems of present times "through reference to such mythologies and epics" (Mishra 163).

Bettina L Knapp's *Women in Myth* explores the role of women in the ancient societies by examining the myths of nine different lands including the tale of Sita from the Indian mythology. The study awakens readers to the novel perceptions and diverse judgments with regards to themselves, other peoples and the life as a whole (Knapp xi-xii).

Bettina L Knapp's *Women, Myth, and the Feminine Principle* focuses on the role of feminine principle or feminine consciousness in the myths, epic poems, religious works, theatre pieces and other diverse tales while paying special heed towards myths revoked by the writers in the common times. The work aims at adapting myths to modern sensibility and reconsidering religious beliefs and emotions abound in our lives (Knapp xi-xii).

Mythology Retold:

Numerous mythical paradigms have evolved over time out of the extremely venerated classical mythological texts, retaining some character or specific historical-cultural matrix. Every textual retelling of mythology configures pertaining to the contemporary tastes and values. It is inevitably pertinent for the myths to remain amenable to diverse revisions if it has to come out much more than a reflection of the dead society (Cyrino and Safran 11).

Ramayana and *Mahabharata,* the great Indian epics, had not only been the favorite topic of writing among the ancient writers, writing in different regions and diverse languages, but these texts have garnered the attention of the contemporary writers, too. Ramayana has been retold multiple times and the story of Rama is heard or read worldwide "with pleasure and piety in the places as well as in the hovels" (Ramesh 2453).

Kalidasa, the greatest playwright and poet of the ancient India, wrote *Raghuvansham*, an epic poem, narrating the tale of the Raghu clan in the 5thcentury. Bhavbhuti, prominent Sanskrit scholar of 8th century, wrote the plays *Mahaveer-Charita* and *Uttar-Ramacharita* revolving round the early and later life of Rama respectively. In the 12th century, Kamba wrote *Ramavataram* or *Kamba Ramayana* in Tamil language. In the 14th century, Chandrabati, the earliest female poet in Bangla, wrote *Chandrabati Ramayana* in Bengali. In the 16th century, Tulsidas wrote *Ramcharitmanas,* "a retelling of the Valmiki Ramayana in Awadhi language" (Preeti 759). More than 300 versions of the epic Ramayana were written by writers in various languages in different periods, nevertheless, the most accepted , celebrated as well as the earliest considered version of this epic is Valmiki's *Ramayana*.

The other Indian epic, *Mahabharata*, has also been rewritten by many writers in many ages and languages. *Sarala Mahabharata* is quite popular retelling of the epic written in the 15th century, by the Odia poet Sarala Das. However, Maharishi Ved Vyasa's *Mahabharata,* written in Sanskrit language, is regarded as the earliest and the most popular version of this epic

The revisionist versions of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, along with the retellings of the other Indian myths have been in circulation in abundance during the recent times and are fascinating the modern day readers. These rewritings are igniting the interest of the contemporary readers in the roots of our culture and are providing insightful knowledge about the ancient mythological tales by relating them to the contemporary times. Counted among the initial modern rewritings of the Indian epics and mythology are Romesh Chandra Dutt's English translations of these epics towards the end of the 19th century.

T. P. Kailasam's well known work *The Burden* explores the mental distress of Bharata after the banishment of Rama and the death of his father, King Dashratha. Highlighting Kailam's dexterity in rewriting the mythological characters M.K. Naik asserts that although Kailasam selects his subjects from the old epics yet he is not at all content with just copying the original one. Kailasam applies a strenuous individual approach to his writings that "bear upon the mythological personages he portrays" (156) Kailasam's retelling of the Mahabharata *Karna and the Brahmin's Curse* is a popular play about Karana who got cursed by his guru Parshuram for hiding his true identity. This play is adjudjed as "almost a Mahabharata in miniature" (155) by M. K. Naik.

R. K. Narayan*'s* shortened prose version of the *Ramayana*is mainly based on the Kamba Ramayana. Shashi Tharoor has reset the old tale of the Mahabharata in context of the independence movement of India. Amish Tripathi has written the popular *Shiva Triology* and *Ram Chandra Series*. Devdutt Pattanaik's famous retellings are *Sita: An illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana* and *Jaya: An illustrated Retelling of Mahabharata*. Anand Neelakantan has also written some popular contemporary revisionist mythological books like *Asura: Tale of the Vanquished, The story of Ravana and his People* and *Ajaya: Role of the Dice (Epic of the Kaurava Clan* etc.

Women in the Retellings of Mythology:

Numerous revisionist writers have rendered feminist viewpoint and sensibilities to their retellings of the traditional mythological tales. Writers have applied new approaches to revisit mythology by incorporating subjective viewpoints, contemporary themes, socio political concerns and fresh perspectives to the previously existing domain of knowledge. Bettina L Knapp asserts in her book *Women in* Myth that writers of the feminist retellings probe mythology for such questions that authorize the readers to establish visible parallels and polarities betwixt the mythological women and women of present times (xi).Such associations enable the readers to have insight into noted events as well as relations and discern rationally about the ramification of such bonds in present day society.

Kavita Kane is prolific contemporary Indian writer who skillfully portrays human life against the legendary backdrop of mythology. Kane has extensively tried to explore the subjective viewpoints of the unexplored and unfamiliar characters of Indian mythology. All her novels are endowed with fascinating female protagonists borrowed from the classical Indian mythological tales. She has tried to present the subjective realities of the mythological women by allowing these women to express their viewpoints. Uruvi is the protagonist in *Karna's Wife - The Outcast's Queen*, Urmila tells her tale in *Sita's Sister*, Surpanakha speaks her mind in *Lanka's Princess*, Menaka is the moving spirit of *Menaka's Choice*, and Satyavati is the standard bearer of her clan in *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty*. Kavita Kane has tried to highlight the actuality through her retellings that women are the inevitable component of mythology and it is pertinent to know their subjective tales from their own viewpoint.

Kavita Kane's *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty*: It retells the tale of Mahabharata from the viewpoint of Satyavati and also sheds light on the women's position in society during those times. Satyavati, a fisher woman, who ferried people across the river by rowing a boat, played a pertinent role in the political power struggles of her times and heralded the establishment of monarchy in the kingdom of Hastinapur. Kavita Kane lets the mythical character of Satyavati speak her mind and shed light on her journey from being mere fisherwoman to that of the queen- mother of the dynasty, who protected the throne meticulously. While portraying the mythical Satyavati as a flesh and blood human being Kavita Kane resonates to the views of Knapp who asserts that mythology is superabound with joys and griefs of women who are on one hand encountered by war and unbridled hatred, and on the other are involved in establishing individual identities of their own (Women in Myth xxi). Satyavati's unprecedented journey of attaining identity as the monarch of the Hastinapur dynasty and her challenges to accomplish this feat are portrayed quite judiciously by Kavita Kane.

In an interview Kavita Kane confesses her fascination for the mythological character of Satyavati. Kane asserts that Satyavati, her favorite character in the epic Mahabharata, emerges as the most political person of the epic. She was more than a widowed queen mother of Hastinapur. She not only paved way for her own future but also had authority on that of her family and the kingdom as well. She not only transformed herself from Matsyagandha to Satyavati quite astutely but she was also the person behind the transformation of the lives of others in the epic, including that of prince Devavrat to Bhishma. Satyavati was queen in real sense (Chakrabarty).

In *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty, Kavita Kane* not only humanizes the epinomous character Satyavati but also the other mythological characters like Ganga, Shantanu, Rishi Parashar, and Bhishma etc. She portrays them as real humans possessing array of emotions and responding to the emotional conflicts and mental dilemmas. Satyawati detested to live a life of poverty and envied the way the royalty lived their lives. She felt that she was cursed to live a life of hard work and stench, without any hope of ever bridging the gap (Kane 10). When

Satyavati, who was known as Kali in her childhood, felt disheartened at her name suggesting her dark complexion, her father told her that she was unique as she was born of a celestial nymph. Even the great hermit of her times, Rishi Parashar, who was considered as an elevated spirit, acts as an ordinary man who couldn't resist her charm. He bestowed her with a son who later got prominence as revered sage Vyasa, the prestigious writer of the *Mahabharata*. Even Shantanu, the king of Hastinapur, who earlier got fascinated to celestial goddess Ganga, succumbed to Kali's charm and married her.

Satyavati expresses her pain and vulnerability when she asserts that she had no other option than to use her charms to get what she wanted as for being grown in penury she could'nt afford to have morals like the rich and the royal. She affirms that the righteous people would deem her acts as unscrupulous, but she would readily be branded that, rather than being forgotten as a casualty, as her mother was. (Kane 32).

Satyavati, the protagonist of the novel, emerges as a rebellious woman who struggles hard to create her own identity in a politically prone society. Rather than remaining passive as a mere spectator to the turn of events or just following the commands of others, she fights against all sorts of odds. The insignificant little girl, who was deserted by her royal father for being the girl child and who, in his notion, couldn't uphold his lineage, dreamt of attaining significance. This unwelcomed girl ultimately rose to become the first female ruler, the matriarch of the Hastinapur dynasty, owing to her skills and charms.

After entering the royal family upon her marriage to the king Shantanu, Satyavati quite tactfully overcomes the conflicts arising in the palace as well as people's resistance to acknowledge her as the queen of the dynasty. She skillfully handles her conflicts between Bhishma and ups and downs of her life that are very challenging to her. Neither does she get intimidated by the harsh criticism hurled on to her by the general public, nor does she lose her composure. She emerges as an ambitious and visionary woman possessing courage and resolution to execute her political standpoints. She was so sagacious that even Bhishma valued her advice on administrative as well as family matters. Kavita Kane has, thus, provided penetrating projection to the subjective realities of mythological woman Satyavati's viewpoint and methodologies for accomplishing the objectives of her life.

Conclusion:

The research study tried to unveil the significance of the mythological retellings to interpret the subjective realities inherent in them. Myths, although may be ancient, but their aspects are eternal, and they hold key for explanation of human behavior as well as behavioural problems. Myths provide answers to our queries and help us deal with our problems. The tales of exceptional mythological women help women to attain new insights to cope with the unpleasant and even pleasant situations, while blending both the seemingly disparate and antithetical elements to one's set course in life(Knapp xiv).This research has tried to shed light on some significant retellings of the Ramayana and Mahabharata with special reference to Kavita Kane's retelling of the Mahabharata from the perspective of Satyavati,a lesser-known female character of the Indian Mythology. Kavita Kane has presented the events concerning Satyavati's life against the backdrop of Mahabharata very efficiently, making it quite relatable to the present day reader associating the tale to the contemporary issues. Satyavati appears as a symbol of conviction against all the odds and obstacles of life. She emerges as a resolute woman to change the course of her life as well as of the history.

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