

Indian Mythology and Symbolism in the Select Works of Gita Mehta, Koral Dasgupta, Kavita Kane: An Analysis

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Abstract: *This Research Paper aims to provide an analysis of Indian mythology and its Significance for Indian culture, literature and human life in select works of Gita Mehta's A River Sutra, Kavita Kane's Lanka's Princess and Koral Dasgupta's Ahalya. It also examines how these authors employ Indian mythology and its symbolic meaning from a social standpoint. The aim of the study is to examine the symbolism of Indian mythology and how it is used in contemporary culture. In A River Sutra, Gita Mehta provides a very realistic and useful interpretation of renunciation and self-realization. kavita Kane tells the tale of Surpanakha, the catalyst for the Ramayana's events, in Lanka's Princess. As Koral Dasgupta writes about Ahalya, the woman whose adultery resulted in her husband's curse, a new perspective is revealed.*

Keywords: Indian mythology, contemporary culture, symbolism

I. INTRODUCTION

Indian mythology is perhaps the most popular and admired across all generations and genres. The fact that Indians from every era, location, and dynasty have demonstrated a strong desire to learn about myths, mythology, stories, and folklore is supported by historical evidence. Indian mythology and its several subgenres have had a lasting impact on Indian literature as a whole, which can be seen as a literary genre in and of itself, regardless of whether it is set in the present or an earlier era. The two epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata, which is where Indian literature's most significant and fate-defying mythological ideas first appear. These two enormous epics distinguish out from all other mythical series in ancient Indian literature due to their numerous plots, subplots, and supplementary narratives. There are many different kinds of legendary characters in Indian literature, and their portrayal has often been one that has a strong connection to Indian society today.

Exploring the Indian Mythology in the works of Gita Maheta, Koral Dasgupta and Kavita Kane

A prolific author from the Indian diaspora named Gita Mehta has made a name for herself as a master novelist. She is now well-known as an Indo-English postcolonial author. She has significantly influenced the worlds of fiction and nonfiction with her distinctive writing style and utilisation of advanced issues, gaining her a place in the elite group of Indian women novelists. A River Sutra by Gita Mehta offers unique perspectives on Hindu myths, rites, and beliefs. In addition to describing tribal customs and man's need for life, the book also relates the tale of Narmada, Shiva's penance, and the birth of the river that has come to represent Indian civilization.

A River Sutra is a collection of stories. The stories are narrated by an unknown narrator. The river Narmada, which acts as both a backdrop and a living identity, is in the centre of each one. Characters only appear once in each story, and all of them share the same theme—the river myth. The Narmada River's banks is where the story takes place. While listening to these stories, the unnamed narrator expresses his thoughts and ideas on each one. He seems to be the inspiration behind objectively summarising each of the stories. By examining the Narmada mythology, the novelist has given a fair representation of Indian cultural values, music, and creative forms. The myth of the Narmada, who is portrayed as the daughter of Lord Shiva, is the main myth in A River Sutra. The Narmada is described in the novel's opening pages, and "The Song of the Narmada" closes it. According to Uma Parameswaran in "A River of Wisdom," Puranic scriptures depict Narmada such as the daughter of Rishi Mekala, the moon, the Somapas' "mind born daughter," the sister of Nagas, and a daughter of Surya or Tapa the Sun God, who gave her the name Narmada. She also calls by the names Reva and Purvaganga (the name used in one of the poems in the novel).

"The Monk's narrative" is the first tale. It tells the story of Ashok, a wealthy man who, after witnessing exploitation and poverty, decided to become a monk. "The Teacher's Story" is the second tale. It concerns Master Mohan, a music instructor. He willingly shares his musical knowledge with Imrat, a blind orphan boy. But neither his family nor society seem to value his service. When Imrat is killed, he goes to Tariq Mia at the Narmada River to get comfort. "The Teacher's Story" continues the theme of love. The third tale is "The Executive's Story," in which Nitin Bose, a wealthy tea estate manager, engages in a casual romance. However, this love affair has made him yearn for a passionate connection. He keeps a diary to get away from this madness. The fourth tale, "The Courtesan's Story," is about an elderly courtesan and the tragic loss of her lovely daughter. "The Musician's Story" is the fifth narrative. The unattractive daughter of a musician describes how her father was duped by his follower, who made a commitment to wed his daughter as soon as he finished his studies. However, the egotistical boy betrayed his word and turned down his master's daughter. The Minstrel's Story, the final story, is once more narrated by Tariq Mia. He narrates the story of a Naga Baba, who protects a little girl from the superstitions of tribals. The Naga Baba was actually a professor working to uplift indigenous people in the Narmada Valley while living undercover.

Gita Mehta has documented a number of beliefs that are prevalent in the Narmada region. In actuality, the myth of the Narmada and the tale of the Musician's daughter are remarkably similar. Although their marriage was pre-arranged, both women were duped by their boy buddies and stayed unmarried. Gita Mehta can express every sentiment, every experience, and every conviction that people have regarding the myths surrounding the Narmada river via the lens of the Narmada mythology. Usha Bande writes in Gita Mehta: Writing Home/Creating Homeland that "the twentieth century's resurrection of myth revealed itself in writers' attempts to utilise it to look back and reconstruct the past. It provided a solid foundation on which to develop a fresh artistic viewpoint on known imagery. (GITA MEHTA: *Writing Home / Creating Homeland* by Usha Bande - 2008, n.d.)

The Shiva-Narmada myth is once more witnessed by a River Sutra. Tariq Mia met the Naga Baba, a warrior ascetic and a member of the Naga sadhus, also known as the Protectors. He covered himself in ash while bathing like an ascetic to help his meditations. He adored Lord Shiva as "the Annihilator of the Universe" and "the Lord of Death" in all of his furious manifestations since becoming a Naga Baba required passing the strictest test of penance and discipline. On Shiva's (Shivaratri) night, the ascetic, through a purification ritual, saved a young girl from prostitution and gave her the name "Uma," which, metaphorically, means "peace in the night" (241) and literally means "oh do not do" in Sanskrit. He explained to the young girl that "The Narmada claims all girls as hers." Tonight, you become Narmada's daughter (254). He taught her the songs of the Narmada and how to read, write, and sing them. Later, the identical Naga Ascetic emerges as Prof. V.V. Shankar, and Uma is the small child who has grown up to become a well-known River Minstrel. The Narmada mythology, which is continuously influenced by culture, religion, faith, and desire and yields to it, is used by the novelist to illustrate the psychology of the human mind. Above all, the river unites people of many ethnicities and beliefs, exemplifying India's secularist philosophy. The Narmada mythology enables the author to demonstrate how these people keep their individuality while adhering to the same myths, rituals, and beliefs.

Kavita Kane has a distinctive literary voice that empowers the underprivileged and voiceless. Her writings constantly offer a new perspective on personalities that popular mainstream media has frequently disregarded or misunderstood. Kane describes the story of Surpanakha, the catalyst for the Ramayana's events, in Lanka's Princess. One of the best authors of Indian mythological fiction offers a unique and crucial interpretation of the Ramayana in this riveting work. This illustrates how mythical retellings challenge the conventional, largely patriarchal narratives. Lanka's Princess narrates the story of Surpanakha, who was born as Meenakshi, a lovely young woman with fish shaped eyes. The novel is a mythical retelling told from the perspective of Surpanakha, who in Hindu mythology is thought to be the cause of the conflict between Lord Rama and King Ravana of Lanka. In Lanka's Princess, Surpanakha is followed from her early years, when her parents didn't love her as much, until her adult years. Kane questions if she is the manipulative monstress we define her to be or a victim in a man's society because she is a misunderstood figure in mythology. Her actions in the later part of the novel are justified by the fact that she had to make decisions about her life on her own, defend herself, and stand up for her rights.

A misunderstood myth is that of Surpanakha. She makes a brief appearance in the epic, both because she is a monstress and because she is a woman. Researcher admires how Meenakshi's childhood thoughts and the sadness she feels as a result of being always loved less than her brothers were woven into the novel by Kane. The character growth of

Meenakshi's father, the hermit, who discovers that his children have a higher percentage of the monster blood from their mother's side, made me particularly fond of the book. He may have to decide between his family and ethics because they lack a desire for education and do not behave morally. It seemed redundant because numerous instances are frequently used to demonstrate the same idea—that boys were valued over girls—in the text. But reading about the time in Lanka was quick and easy. Kane skilfully navigates Ravan's reign, his scandals involving women, the overlooked Meenakshi, whose brothers don't even consider her marriage, family secrets, love, and treachery. The middle part was faster paced than the beginning and end.

Thanks to authors like Devdutt Pattanaik (who is also an illustrator) and Amish, mythology has been reborn as bestsellers in Indian-English writing in the post-millennium. There have also been retellings by other talented novelists; two that immediately come to mind are Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions: A Novel* (2008) and *The Forest of Enchantments* (2019). However, none of them had Ahalya as the main character. ("Kavita" (*Book Review - Lanka's Princess by Kavita Kane*, 2021) Starting with Ahalya Draupadi, Dasgupta's selection of female characters for the series was in accordance with a Sanskrit prayer.

अहल्या द्रौपदी सीता तारा मन्दोदरी तथा ।
पञ्चकन्या स्मरेन् नित्यं
महापातक शिम् ॥

Ahalya Draupadi Kunti Tara Mandodari

Tatha panchakanya smaranityam mahapataka nashanam (Kishwar)

Translation: "Contemplating eternally the virgins five - Ahalya, Draupadi, Kunti, Tara and Mandodari Destroys the worst sins," according to Dasgupta. Despite the fact that each of the five ladies has had many partners, the term "panch kanyas" is sometimes translated as "five virgins." Dasgupta discovers a description of the mind in their attempt to comprehend the underlying idea known as "virgin," which has been translated into English. (*With Ahalya, Koral Dasgupta's Interpretation of Hindu Philosophy Points to Undaunted Women, Sacred Relation with Nature-Art-and-Culture News , Firstpost*, 2020) In her message to readers, Dasgupta clarifies the conventional distinction between the Five Satis (Sita, Sati, Savitri, Damayanti, and Arundhati) and the Panch Kanya (Ahalya, Kunti, Draupadi, Mandodari, Tara), noting that she herself views the categories differently. This is based on a distinct meaning of the word "sati," one that places less emphasis on chastity and more on a woman's "inner truth," for which she is responsible only to herself and not to anybody else, regardless of opinions held by others or popular interpretations.

Essentially, Ahalya's story is one of seduction. It is widely known that beliefs about seduction frequently have negative outcomes. In the same way, Ahalya. She was given to the wise man Gautama as his wife by Brahma, who created her to be impossibly lovely. But Indra, who was enamoured with her beauty, lured her by pretending to be her spouse. Despite recognising his lies, she found the interaction enjoyable. In response to his wife's adultery, a furious Gautama turned her into stone and warned her that Rama was the only one who could save her (an avatar of Lord Vishnu). On his trip to Mithila with Lakshmana and their teacher Vishwamitra, Rama passes into Gautama's ashram and revives the woman. In various narrations of this story, Ahalya's culpability is seen to differing degrees. However, they all believe that Rama is the one who frees her from her affliction.

II. CONCLUSION

There are many different types of legendary characters in Indian literature, and how they are portrayed has also been one that is highly relevant to Indian society today. For instance, the story of Panchkanya, the conflict between the Pandavas and the Kauravas, the reading of the Bhagavad Gita to Arjuna by Lord Krishna, or even Shakuni's infamous and deceptive dice game. In the creation of Rama, Sita, Lakshmana, or the demon Ravana, Surpankha and their ambition have been hugely celebrated in verse and poetic language, making the writers almost legend and myth-like themselves. The Ramayana also elaborates on lust for kingdom and power and a wife's devotion to her husband, or a brother's passionate respect for his elder ones. The mythological theme has repeatedly attracted and enthralled the segment of readers in general in Indian English literature or regional literature. These contemporary Indian writers stand out in a completely distinct genre because of the enormous proportions, the locale, the idea of families cohabiting, or the magnum opus work of art. Similar to Arundhati Roy, authors like Amitav Ghosh, Salman Rushdie, and Shashi Tharoor in *The Great Indian Novel* have repeatedly and repeatedly reclaimed their literary ground with mythology. One guiding

principle that now counts in contemporary Indian writing, recognised to be highly popular among readers of all ages, is symbolism and subliminal references to mythology

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