



Women in Kavita kane's novel: Sita's Sister

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Abstract

Kavita kane- a new woman writer who carved her own style of writing in literature. The concept that she has chosen are from our Puranas, epics and Ithihasas. The way she has built up the story makes her reader to re-think or to re-analyze the story from different perspective instead of the approach that the ancients made us to think. This article starts with the history of feminism, next, women's writing in three phases as discussed by Elanshow Walter and then applies Elanshow Walter's points with Kavita kane's novel Sita's Sister. The article discusses Kavita kane's approach in understanding the grand narratives and how she tried to bring the unsung women into light with her method of narration, diction and the free flow of dialogues.

Key words: feminism, unsung women, Women's writing in three phases, grand/meta narratives.

Feminism is one of the major modern critical outlooks in the present scenario. The word 'Feminism' could be traced in the ancient books of Greece - The work of Sappho and also in the play of Aristophanes Lysistrata. In Lysistrata, women was depicted as the treasury of Acropolis, who was a female chorus, physically and intellectually superior to the male chorus. Feminism is also traced in the book of Chaucer's 'Wife of Bath' who vociferously values 'experience' over authority. In the Middle Ages, Christine de Pisan had dared to argue with the classified male critics of her scenario. There was constant progress as the ages passed. Many number of women poets such as Catherine Des Roches appeared in France and England. Aphra Ben and Anee Bradstreet were pioneers who gained grip in the literary profession. Mary Wollstonecraft debated that the ideals of the French Revolution should get extend to women through education. Nineteenth century produced significant number of female literary figures in Europe as well as America, ranging from Mme.de Stael, the Brontes, Jane Austen, George Eliot, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Margaret Fuller and Emily Dickenson. Modernist female writers included Hilda Doolittle, Gertrude Stein, Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf.

The whole long history of women shows how women were not merely deprived of education and financial independence but how they struggled against male ideology which expects only silence and obedience. In male literature, women was depicted as the decision maker, angel, goddesses, obedient wives and mother figures. Most of the characters go round the women character. In real life, their position was different. It was only in the 20th century, feminist criticism arose in systematic way. It had extended its wings to encompass a vast series of concerns; considerable thoughts were invited to include the efforts of women. Above all, feminist critics displayed a persistent concern with both experience and language.

In 1960's like all other critical tendencies, modern feminism is distinguished from its precursors, came out with different fire, stable notions of gender, sexuality, and even the category of "woman." It has further extended to the concepts of gender with class and race, power structures and with different ideologies.

American Feminism:

Feminist criticism accepted widely in America since 1960's Civil Rights Movement and got distinguished with its considerations from its equivalent countries 'France and Britain'. Betty Friedan who had endeavoured in establishing National Organization of Women in 1966s, authored a creative work 'The Feminine Mystique' (1963). It expressed the underlying grievances of middle class American women in their personal & private life

and their inability to pursue public careers. Number of other important works are Mary Ellman's 'Thinking About Women' (1968), Kate Millett's 'Sexual Politics' (1969), Germaine Greer's 'The Female Eunuch' (1970), Shulamith Firestone's 'The Dialectic of Sex' (1970), Patricia Meyer Spacks' 'The Female Imagination' (1975), Ellen Moers' 'Literary Women' (1976), Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's 'The Madwoman in the Attic' (1979). Some of the feminist texts concentrated their attention in identifying an alternative and neglected traditions of female writing. The most influential work of this kind was Elaine Showalter's 'A Literature of their Own' (1977). She divided the Women's writing in three phases. The first phase was a 'Feminine phase' (1840 -1880). During this period, women writers followed male models and their style of writing. The second phase was called 'Feminist Phase' (1880-1920). During this period women challenged the approach of men's writings and questioned their ways. The third or the last phase was "female phase" i.e from 1920 where women created their own perspectives, methods and approaches. A recent significant development in the third phase can be founded in Alice Walker's 'In Search of Mother's Gardens' (1983) and Barbara Smith's "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism" (1977).

British Feminism.

Just like American Feminism, British Feminism has had its orientation in United Kingdom. Juliet Mitchell produced her theory in terms of Marxist Categories of production and private property as well as psychanalytic theories of gender in her landmark book "Women: The Longest Revolution" (1966), later it got extended as Women's estate (1971). Even in her later work 'Psychoanalysis and Feminism' (1974), she continued to integrate the insights of Marxism class analysis with feminism in analyzing and influencing gender representation. Similarly, Michele Barrett, in her book 'Women's Oppression Today: Problems in Marxist Feminist Analysis' (1980) attempted to formulate a materialist aesthetic. Her book mainly concentrated on three concepts: patriarchy, reproduction and ideology. Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfelt's 'Feminist Criticism and Social Change' (1985) also argues for feminist analysis. Jacqueline Rose and Rosalind Coward formulated materialist feminism, Catherine Belsey assessed Renaissance drama from a materialist feminist perspective and Toril Moi worked on implicit essentialism of some American feminists. Some other critics such as Cora Kaplan, Mary Jacobus and Penny Boumelha have comprised the UK Marxist-feminist collective formed in 1976.

French Feminism:

French Feminism was drawn from the revolutionary spirit of May 1968. Based on the theories developed by Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida, feminists such as Annie, Leclerc, Marguerite Duras, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Helene Cixous variously advanced a notion of feminine. Luce Irigaray advocated undermining patriarchal discourse where she discussed from Plato through Freud and Marx to Lacan. Helen Cixous observed "solidarity" between logocentrism and Phallogentrism. She impuled that women must write their bodies to bring out the resources of the unconscious. Other feminists such as Christine Faure, Catherine Clement and Monique Wittig challenged the emphasis on the body as biologically reductive, fetishistic and politically impotent.

Virginia Woolf (1882-1941)

Woolf is also known as one of the foremost modernist writers of the English - speaking world. She was the daughter of the philosopher Leslie Stephen. She inherited the talent of her father. After her parent's death, she, with her sisters settled in the place called Bloomsbury which later give its name to the intellectual circle in which Virginia and her sister moved. The "Bloomsbury Group" included John Maynard Keynes, Lytton Strachey, Clive Bell and the writer Leonard Woolf whom Virginia married in 1912. The most important novels of her include 'Mrs Dalloway' (1925), 'To the Lighthouse' (1927), and 'Orlando' (1928). 'A Room of One's Own' (1929) and 'Three Guineas' (1938) are the two important lectures that Woolf had given at Cambridge University in 1928. In both the essays, she had passed an important statement concerning women's alienation from the related ethics of war and patriarchy. She reacted against the Enlightenment presumption that reason could master the world and reduce it to total intelligibility.

A Room of One's Own: One of the important lectures of Virginia Woolf is 'A Room of One's Own' in which she raised a number of issues that would remain of central concern to feminists. She claims in her essay that women need financial and psychological independence in order to use their creative potential. Woolf notes that "Women have burnt like beacons in all the works of all the poets" but in reality they were "locked up, beaten and flung about the room" (Room 43). A Room of One's Own might also represent the ideal of a female language or at least of appropriating language for female use. According to her the 'male' language women have inherited cannot express their female experience. (Room 82).

Simon de Beauvoir (1908 -1986)

Simon de Beauvoir was another classic feminist who had translated *Le Deuxieme Sexe* (1949) as *The Second Sex*, (1952). She had laid the foundations for much of the feminist theory and political activism that emerged during the 1960's in Western Europe and America. In her introduction to 'The Second Sex' she used the terms "Masculine" and "Feminine". Masculinity is considered to be the "absolute human type" whereas a woman's views are often held to be grounded in her femininity rather than in any objective perception of things.

Julia Kristeva (b1941).

Kristeva's most influential work is 'Revolution in Poetic Language' (1974) in which she distinguishes between two orders whose interaction makes up the human subject: the "semiotic," and the "symbolic." The 'semiotic' consists of the pre-Oedipal drives and immediate surroundings of the body. The 'symbolic' encompasses the emergence of subject and object as well as the constitution of meaning structured according to social categories (RPL, 86).

Helene Cixous (1937): Helen Cixous peculiar contribution to feminism was to promote feminine writing, as expressed in her powerful manifesto "The Laugh of the Medusa"(1975)

She stresses on the need for a female writing, the nature of female writing and its momentous implications at both personal and societal levels. She charges that men have "riveted us between two horrifying myths: between the Medusa and the abyss." The "abyss" refers to Freud's myth - his designation of woman as a "dark continent," He emphasized women as mystery, negativity, dependence and signifying nothing. On the other hand, she describes "Medusa" as a beautiful and laughing women. Cixous exhorts women to bring to birth a female language, which acknowledges its rootedness in the body: "Write yourself. Your body must be heard" (LM" 284).

Kavita Kane's Sita's Sister:

The two great epics of India are 'Ramayana' & 'Mahabharatha'. Rama, Lakshmana, Krishna, Arjuna, Draupathi, Dharma Raj, Bheema likewise there are some iconic characters whom Bharatiyas like to hear, pray and follow. They stood as examples for the one who challenged adharma and did endeavour to move dharma on four pillars. Along with the iconic characters, whom we appreciate, there are some other characters who stood & sacrificed their personal lives for the Gods who incarnated on earth to establish Dharma on four pillars. They remained unsung in history. Among such characters is Sita's Sister 'Urmilla'. Kavita Kane in her novels focused most of her attention on the characters who are treated as supporting characters but not as the one who are prominently treated like the strong pillars for the story.

Some of her novels are: 1. Sita's Sister 2. Karna's wife 3. Lanka's Princes 4. Menaka's Choice etc.

All the characters whom she has chosen for her novels are known but unsung characters. Kavita Kane, with her wit & logical thinking made insignificant as significant and made us to rethink and reanalyze the stories what we have read or heard from the ancient days.

Kavita Kane's Sita's Sister 'Urmilla' was the story of 'Ramayana' narrated from the perspective of 'Urmilla' one of the overlooked characters in Ramayana. She was the real inheritance of King Janaka, but she received less honour in comparison with Sita. Sita was called, treated, honoured & loved as the princess of Mithala by all including the king Janaka putting aside the real inheritor Urmilla. Seldom, Urmilla had taken it seriously & negatively. She looked such matters as trivial and hardly showed her impatience on Sita regarding this indifference. But Sita felt inconvenient when Urmilla was neglected. In spite of the difference in their treatment, they developed a kind of bondage that couldn't separate them.

When Sita moved with her little finger 'the bow of Lord Siva' (which is regarded as the most sacred), King Janaka of Mithala decided to call for Swamyavara for his beloved daughter Sita on a challenge that who would lift the sacred bow would be given Sita in marriage. Viswamithra along with him brought Rama & Lakshmana to Mithala where Rama won the hand of Sita. That was the story that the readers heard & considered Rama & Sita as the incarnated Gods on earth. Kavita Kane created a new tradition with her focus on the heroines who are unsung and neglected. Urmilla was one among such characters. She developed a new approach with her in-depth attention that she had paid to bring the story of Urmilla & Lakshmana in her novel. With utmost affection, Urmilla invited Lakshmana into her life despite the warning that Lakshmana had put forth before her. During the exile of Rama, Lakshmana took the decision to accompany his brother to forest leaving Urmilla to Ayodhya. He did not even ask the opinion of Urmilla. She was isolated from Lakshmana while Sita was following her husband Rama. Though Urmilla wished to move with her husband, she could not go against the decision of her husband. She took the responsibility of the whole split family of Raghava dynasty and united them with her wit & courage.

The epic Ramayana says 'Urmilla' was in deep slumber for fourteen years but from the perspective of Kavita Kane - the deep slumber that she had gone was not physically but psychologically & mentally. She did not allow herself to any kind of palace luxuries and had spent the whole fourteen years in search of the truth.

Just as Lakshmana accepted penance sacrificing his personal life for his brother Rama, Urmilla sacrificed her love, affection, luxuries of palace and performed penance for fourteen years.

Feminism in Kavita Kane novel:

Three phases of feminism:

There is close match of Elan Show Walter's three phases of feminism in Kavita Kane's novel. In **the first phase of feminism**, women tried to write their own books on the model suggested by men elevating the characters of women without degrading anyone. Some of the women writers wrote their books on pseudonym of men. Kavita Kane in her novel 'Sita's Sister' presented her point from Urmilla's perspective without degrading any of the iconic characters. While re-narrating the story of Ramayana, she concentrated most of her oeuvre on Urmilla and Lakshmana. She highlighted Urmilla's courage, understanding nature, spontaneity & wit while highlighting Lakshmana's demeanor, discipline, devotion in following his brother, dedication in his service and dexterity in his fight with Indrajit. Lakshmana looks very ferocious but loves his wife intensely. Before his marriage, he warned Urmilla that he would give preference to Rama when the question of priority comes between brother and wife.

"There will be times when we shall have to choose and I shall unhesitatingly choose my brother each time over you. He shall always take precedence in my life not you. And that is why, I cannot marry you. I simply should not." (page 68, **The Rejection**).

Rama decided to go on exile on being asked by Dasaratha. Lakshmana declared that he would also go with Rama rejecting Urmilla outrightly in accompanying him but later explained his reason to his wife Urmilla.

"It is not easy in the forest. Ram is taking Sita because he knows he will be able to protect her. I am going at his guard, so how will I be able to look after you or protect you? And more importantly, you are safer here in the palace. The forest is not a safe place, and it's not just the physical hardship..... I would go mad with worry just imagining you coming to any harm! No, Mila, I would rather part with you for these many years than endanger you even for a moment!" (Page 144, **The Exile**)

Nowhere in the novel, Kavita Kane said a single word against men characters. She managed well in elevating the character of Urmilla without reducing the level of Lakshmana. She highlighted women character in her novels but at the same time she did not degrade any of the men character. On reading her novel, her readers understand that she had balanced the words appropriately maintaining equanimity between the opposite genders.

The second phase of Elan Show Walter is called 'The Feminist Phase': Kavita Kane has run the story from Urmilla's perception. Urmilla was ready to question 'Rama' for her sister Sita. Kaikeyi, the dearest queen of Dasaratha was not satisfied with the choice of Rama. She expressed her reluctance openly. Urmilla observed her feelings and conveyed her discontent with Lakshmana in privacy. Urmilla was flabbergasted and rushed to her sister's chamber on hearing the news that Kaikeyi had put the proposal of remarrying Rama. She did not hesitate to question Rama in support of her sister Sita.

"As a man who loves his wife, you would not" – "But perhaps your other roles- as the eldest son, as the prince of Kosala, or as the heir apparent to the throne – they would have made you think otherwise and made you do so." (Page 101 **Sita's Sister**.)

She relieved from her thoughts only with Rama's convincing answer.

"As Sita's husband and the three roles notwithstanding – of which one is questionable – I would not abandon Sita. I would never remarry," (Page 101 **Sita's Sister**.)

Another instance where the writer challenged the society from the mouth of Urmilla is about husband's Dharma towards the wife. In the chapter 'The Meeting', Bharat declared that he would administrate the kingdom on the name of Rama for fourteen years while Rama was on exile, and he would do penance as a hermit on the banks of River Sarayu at Nandigram.

It was like a scream for Urmilla. Urmilla could not tolerate as it ruins the happiness of one more sister. She questioned with cold deliberation all the assembled members in the meeting

"Who cares whatever happens to your wife and your family?" "Today in this room we have talked about all sorts of dharma – of the father and the sons, of the king and the princes, of the Brahmin and the Kshatriya, even of the wife for her husband. But is there no dharma of the husband for his wife? No dharma of the son for his mother? Is it always about the father, sons and brothers?" (Page 219 **The Meeting**)

The author Kavita Kane expressed her rising thoughts on the question of Dharma. Her challenging thoughts match the second phase of feminism that Elan Show Walter talked in her book 'A Literature of their Own'

The third phase of feminism is 'Female Phase' from 1920 which saw woman advocating their own perspectives.

Kavita Kane novels touches the point of the third phase of feminism. She developed a new style and a new way that is different from male writers. With her creative nature, she made her readers to rethink the story of Ramayana. The most serious character in Ramayana is 'Lakshmana'. He smiles a little and talks a little. He is diligent and determined. Kavita Kane added one more characteristic to Lakshmana and made her readers to think and like Lakshmana than that of the iconic character Rama. She developed a sensible story between Lakshmana and Urmilla.

The unsung heroine of 'The Ramayana' is Urmilla. Kavita Kane in her novel gave the most prominent place and centre place to Urmilla. She was shown as good-natured, good-looking, witty, studious and courageous to face any of the situation. Rama, Sita & Lakshmana went to forest, Bharat & Shatrughna were not in the palace, King Dasaratha died and there was no one to look after the administration. It was Urmilla who managed well the administrative matters and handled the situation with decorum. Once the administration was handed over to Bharatha, she concentrated her attention to unite the family. She started the family gathering with united meals,

'The occasion is that we will start having our meals together henceforth,' Urmilla replied (**Page 231, The separation**)

The whole fourteen years, Urmilla managed the house hold activities with utmost care. She did not allow the family to get break.

After reading Kavita Kane's novel 'Sita's Sister', one starts loving Urmilla. She has become the role model for the current generation.

The choice of Kavita Kane's novels are metanarrative:

Metanarrative means a narrative which concerns the narrative of historical meaning, experience or knowledge and offers legitimization of such through the anticipated completion of some master idea; a grand story that is self-legitimizing.

Kavita Kane developed her composition on the stories familiar to the world. Every concept that she had chosen for her novel was from the grand narratives. Urmilla is unsung character of Ramayana. Kavita Kane had chosen her and made her the central part of the novel. While bringing the story of Urmilla, she discussed various other corners of the stories. She explained every connected stories very clearly. The story of Rishyasringa & Shanta "Rishyasringa, before he met Shanta, had led a singularly isolated life, having never been exposed to any womanly influence including that of his mother, the apsara Urvashi, who had left him and his father Sage Vibhandaka, after giving birth to him..... she persuaded him to come to the city to perform the agnihotra puja.(page 84-85 The four weddings)

The story of Queen Kaikeyi's childhood

"As a young girl and the only sister to seven brothers, she grew up motherless, in the care of her wet nurse, Manthara.... the little princess Kaikeyi never saw her mother again and was raised by Manthara who accompanied her to Ayodhya and she stayed on' (Page 117-118 The Sisters)

Likewise, Kavita Kane discussed various other linked stories throughout the book.

III) No bias in Kavita Kane's character analysis: The concept of 'Feminism' is an integral part of Kavita Kane's novels but that does not mean that she showed only the positive side of women character and neglected the negative frame of women's mind and their weakness. There is no bias in her expressions.

Sita : Sita is the Goddess Mahalakshmi incarnated on earth as Sita. She is very energetic, subtle, and brilliant, possess patience and many other sublime qualities. She is the role-model for all the generation of women. But too many number of good qualities also leads to downfall. Kavita Kane gave lucid description of her nature. No doubt, Sita was very submissive. Rama was her soul. Day and night she thought only of Rama from the time she got married. Seldom, she had spoken negative of others. Manthara, the maid of Kaikeyi took advantage of it and tried to degrade Sita in the eyes of others. She had played a double role in intriguing the situations against Sita. Her weakness was her too generous, submissive and loving nature of her. She never opposed Rama. She followed Rama neglecting her personal deeds and also neglecting her sister who loved her deeply. She did not stand for her sister Urmilla who was expecting her support to accompany Lakshmana.

Urmilla: A warrior like queen in Ramayana. She was the sister of Sita. Both were nurtured in the same palace. Though Urmilla was the real inheritor, she was given less priority than that of Sita. Even then, she loved Sita a lot. She had fought for her and was ready even to kill Lakshmana unknowingly when Lakshmana attacked a demon who was in disguise of Sita. She did severe penance during the fourteen years of her husband's absence. Her love towards her husband had become her weakness. In spite of warning given to her by Lakshmana, she preferred him out of her love for him. She faced torment in her mind but she could not express or fight for justice when she was left at Ayodhya. She raised her feelings when Mandavi, her cousin was about to face the same fate what she was facing.

Kaikeyi: She was the second consort of King Dasaratha. She was very dear to Dasaratha. Through the character of Kaikeyi, Kavita kane focused on the point that the women can stand for any circumstances. She knew what the destiny was and why Rama had to go to forest. To create such circumstances, she stood very aggressive and made Dasaratha to send his dear son on exile. At the end of the novel, when Rama successfully returned to Ayodhya, he thanked her for getting the situations to happen accordingly, so that he could kill Ravana. Kavita kane, with her subtle style of writing, made the readers show sympathy on Kaikeyi whom people regard as the women who had sent Rama on exile.

Mandavi: She was the wife of Bharat. Her desires were many. She expected the throne of Ayodhya for her husband and had dreamt of being queen of Ayodhya. She entertained Manthara by believing all her words. She was disappointed with the decision of Bharat to be as ascetic when Rama refused to return to Ayodhya even after many requests. She felt that her dreams got shattered with her marriage. Her own instincts put her in misery. She could not recover herself until Urmilla who received the unlucky fate but still remain strong consoled her..

Kousalya: She was the first consort of Dasaratha. She obediently followed her husband. Due to lack of a child, Dasaratha married Kaikeyi. From then onwards, she felt as she lost everything. She eagerly waited for her husband's love and developed negative feelings against Kaikeyi. She did not express her feelings to anyone but made herself available to the dark side of thoughts

Sumitra: Third wife of Dasaratha and the mother of Lakshmana. She was always vibrant and optimistic. She had grown her son in such a way that he had become another soul of Rama. She was a good adviser to her sons and also her husband. Whenever Dasaratha wanted some advice, he used to take from Sumitra.

Manthara: The treacherous woman in the story of Ramayana. She played games on all with her seducing words

Kavita kane developed her own way of style to make her readers to understand the real nature of the characters and made all to re-read Ramayana from different perceptions.

Women in her other novels:

Karna's Wife: The concept of Kavita kane's novels centered around the unsung heroines and the hated characters of grand narratives. Very few people knew about the wife of Karna. With her novel Karna's wife, she successfully brought out an unknown character in Mahabharatha. Karna's wife was very gentle, good and caring women. She did not hesitate to go against Duryodhana. She warned Karna many times not to support Duryodhana as he was using him for his purpose. She directly rebuked Duryodhana for involving her husband Karna in all his sins that he committed.

Menaka's choice: Menaka, an enchanting woman of Indra's court. Afraid of Viswamitra's deep meditation to become Brahmarushi, Menaka was sent down to attract Viswamitra. She was able to attract him with her captivating body and trapped him in her love. But she herself had fallen in his true love. She understood the pure love of Viswamitra and tried to make him realize his responsibility. As he was not coming out from her love, she had broken his heart and left him for his benefit. Later, Viswamitra realized her sacrifice.

Lanka's Princess: On reading Ramayana, we estimate Surpanaka as the most violent, wildest and cruel woman, who was the reason for the biggest battle. Very less number of people knew that she was not what she looked. She was having ideals. She loved her husband a lot. She lost her husband in the hands of Ravana and also lost her son in Dandaka forest. To take revenge on her brother who was responsible for the death of her husband, she came to Dandaka forest, created a circle of situations to trap her own brother Ravana

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