

**Feminist Revisionist Mythology and the Lost Voices –
A Subversive Analysis of Select Literary Texts.**

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Abstract

Myths and mythical narratives are part of every vibrant culture and much of it is centred on Gods and heroic figures of the past glorious times. Much of the cultural practices and customs are based on myths and most often they are taken for as literal truths. The myths and legendary tales that permeate the spiritual landscape across India derive its origins in the Vedic era. Revisionism is a technique widely used by postmodern authors in Literature and aims to narrate or retell an existing literary artefact in a different, divergent or contemporary perspective. The technique has especially been employed in the retelling of the mythical tales, out of the presumption that such artefacts may be analysed, dissected and even delved into, to come across patches of ambiguity which needs to be cleared or patched up. The revisionist tendencies breaks and at the same time revive the existing class, caste, gender and even religious stereotypes by employing critical and as well as creatively progressive reinterpretations. The feminist revisionists concentrate on the gender stereotypes embodied in Indian myths and often their fiction sends research arrows in search of a character's portrayed silence and the artful contrivance by which they were swept to the margins. Such writers often salvage the events or characters to the forefront bringing in a multitude of newer events and perspectives take shape, often toppling the existing and structured norms of vision startling the readers. The paper titled "Feminist Revisionist Mythology and the Lost Voices: A Subversive Analysis of Select Literary Texts", is an attempt to subvert the preconceived acceptance of Feminist Revisionist Mythology as a successful genre in foregrounding the subsided women characters in the epic, by exposing the voids within the genre.

Keywords: Myth Revisionism, Feminist Revisionist Mythology, Subversion, Patriarchy, Deconstruction.

Introduction

Myths and mythology are treasure troves of artefacts from the ancient and bygone eras and beyond narrating mere happenings and events, they embody a rich and nourishing tapestry of universal thoughts and ideas. A huge gamut of Indian mythology derives its roots from the mighty epics- The Mahabharata and The Ramayana and it's of no wonder that India through the passage of centuries produced and continues to read and re-read its mythical literary artefacts. Having survived the rolling centuries, such universally popular myths and legends still shape and mould the thoughts and the very foundations upon which our psyche is constructed. Myth Revisionism, the most influential stream in the postmodern literature aims at foregrounding the concealed elements of the mythical literary artefacts, casting them the shades of contemporary relevance.

Statement of the Problem and Objectives of the Research

This research work of mine embarks upon the magnitude of revivalism, applied to the ancient literary artefacts by feminist revisionists; more precisely a study that casts focus on the argument exemplifying the failure of feminist revisionist mythology to subvert the hegemonic patriarchal traditions, through select literary texts. The thesis deconstructs the common acceptance of feminist revisionist mythology as a stream of writing which revolutionises the gender politics of the age, annihilating the gender stereotypes in the epics. The research calls for the replenishing of the gaps in the stream of feminist revisionist mythology, by not only ensuring the depiction of the unseen tears and agonies of the women characters in the epics, but also exhilarating them redefine their destiny rather than being succumbed to their victimising fate. The thesis calls for the revisionist techniques to break as well as revise the existing class, caste, gender and even religious stereotypes, employing critical as well as creatively progressive reinterpretations.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel *The Palace of Illusions*, which perceives the events in *The Mahabharata* through the eyes of Draupadi, is known to be 'a feminist reinterpretation of the epic'. The research aims at dismantling this pre-conceived notion, proving the fact; other than casting Draupadi as the protagonist of the novel, the author by the end, portrays the heroine as a helpless victim of fate, where all her attempts fade away amidst the aura of patriarchal social norms. In the novel, though she expresses her strong distaste to Kunti's decision to be the "shared wife" of the five Pandava princes, she is forced to obey this decision. This re-

establishes the notions of patriarchy. Moreover that, the unclothing of Draupadi, re-confirms the notions of male dominance as Draupadi yearns for a man, to come and save her, when she gets molested by Duryodhana, instead of fighting herself for her dignity.

Similarly, *Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen*, by Kavita Kané, though attempts at the creation of a fictional character Uruvi (Karna's wife), happens to be a failure as it had further marginalised the already neglected wives of Karna in the epic (Vrushali and Supriya) and thus there happens to be a double marginalisation. Uruvi's 'survival' as a subservient wife dominates over the feministic overtones of her inner self. Though the author creates a new space for Uruvi, the character fails to foreground a chivalric self as she is portrayed as a character who is not even able to deviate her husband from his blind devotion towards Duryodhana. Instead of discovering new bold ways to explore herself, she tries to engage herself with household duties, wherein she confines herself within the walls of gender inequality. The novel is more a tale of Karna, than Uruvi's and thus the text deconstructs the text itself.

The Curse of Gandhari by Aditi Banerjee, though humanises Gandhari, rescuing her from the state of being a shadow of her husband, a bad mother for her disloyal sons; fails to grant her a chivalric self, which itself wrecks the aims of feminist revisionist mythology. The novel as progresses portrays Gandhari as the sole reason for all her sorrows in her life and the character of Krishna is raised to a higher pedestal, diminishing the character of Gandhari as a mere victim of fate.

The Forest of Enchantments by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, though centralises the character of Sita, the author often urges her heroine endure and be satisfied with her own assumptions as answers for the questions posed by herself and she is often given the image of an internal protestant and not a woman who voices her opinions aloud, thereby re-establishing the *pativrata* culture. The character of Sita in the novel, instead of protesting against undergoing fire testimony again, she takes the chance to prove her chastity once again to her husband. The strong bond the concept of "chastity" has with femininity, is re-confirmed her with the willingness of Sita herself. Though Sita expresses her discontent against Rama's decision to banish Sita, eventually she willingly welcomes the decision and gets banished in the forest by her husband. Instead of representing the much-neglected character in *The Ramayana*; Sita, as a chivalric woman who questions all the misogynistic events in the patriarchal epic, the novel re-establishes the aspects of male hegemony.

Review of Literature

In the gamut of revisionist Indian fiction, one could easily notice the pervading presence of revisionists, wherein fictional works enter into tremendous arguments of having subverted certain voices, within the towering mythical structures.

Myth in Contemporary Indian Literature, an anthology by K. Satchidanandan attempts to provide a collective understanding about the reworking, reinterpretation and reconceptualisation of myth in the literature of contemporary India. *The Kaunteyas*, a novel by Madhavi S. Mahadevan perceives *The Mahabharata* through the character of Kunti providing her subtle humanistic overtones unlike in the epic, but in an unrevolutionary tone. *Sita's Sister* by Kavita Kané enables a sojourn through the incidents of *The Ramayana* through the central character Urmila, Sita's sister.

Novelty of the Proposed Research

The proposed research work is an attempt to travel against the cliché conceptions regarding feminist revisionist mythology as a complete replacement for the once neglected female characters in the Indian epics. The studies of the age spread grounds for the feminist revisionist mythology, to affirm itself as a successful genre in subverting the gender stereotypes portrayed in the ancient literary artefacts. In contrast, this research work is an attempt to foreground the shortcomings of the genre and to establish its failure in reconstructing the gender politics of the age, through select literary texts.

Research Methodology

The proposed ideas in the thesis can be derived through the deep examination of the critical areas of myth revisionism and from the larger theoretical domain of Gender Studies and Deconstruction. The women characters' evolvment in the novels from the periphery of negligence and their repeated victimisation, where the text deconstructs itself can be employed under the tenets of Derridean Deconstruction. In this study, I aim to make maximum possible employment of all the available sources. Print and web materials have aided in the comprehensive understanding of the scope of this research area and the potential of the topic to revolutionise the current society's beliefs and thought patterns.

Conclusion

The revisionist zeal to identify patches of mythical narratives that seemingly hide, subvert and deny alternate perspectives has become a much-debated topic especially for creative writers and literary enthusiasts alike. But the extent to which this subversion happens is to be taken care of. This paper titled “Feminist Revisionist Mythology and the Lost Voices: A Subversive Analysis of Select Literary Texts”, analyses the voids and gaps within the genre of feminist revisionist mythology and the extent of failure of feminist revisionists to cast chivalric selves to the once neglected women characters in the epics, through select literary texts.

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