

A Historical Mythopoeia In Women Of Ramayan: The Untold Stories By Kunal Kaushal

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	<p>A historical mythopoeia is imbibing the history to create an artificial mythology out of a mythological tale. Mythopoeia is a narrative genre in modern literature where artificial mythology is created. This meaning is given by J.R.R. Tolkien in 1930. The term mythopoeia comes from Hellenistic Greek ‘muthopoiia’ meaning “myth-making”. The definition of mythopoeia ‘creating myth’ is first recorded in 1846. Kunal Kaushal in his book <i>Women of Ramayan: The Untold Stories</i> created a historical mythopoeia by uncovering the layers of distant past. This study attempts to peel away the layers of mythology to draw attention to the core of the historical tale. Kunal Kaushal presents the events in the way they might have happened. He chooses a feminist perspective to create a historical mythopoeia. His female characters manage to change the course of history. Kaushal believes that mythology is simply an extension of history into the times of which we cannot be certain. He dives into 2000 years of past events that happened in the historical landmass of Jambudvip (India). This study analyzes the logical, factual and historical account of the mythological events occurred in <i>Ramayana</i> with the point of view of female characters. The female characters are Ahalya, Kaikeyi, Surpankha, Mandodari and Tara. Their story is told with a feminist, historical and political approach to justify their role in the history.</p> <p>Key Words: historical mythopoeia, myth-making, feminist perspective, artificial mythology, narrative genre</p>

Author's Introduction:

Pragya Dharendra is a research scholar at Banasthali Vidyapith, Newai, Tonk. She has completed her Masters and M.phil. from the Department of English, University of Rajasthan. She has presented various papers on mythology which is her research area. The topic of her upcoming thesis is Exploring the Genre of Feminist Revisionist Mythology in the Selected Indian English Fiction Based on the *Ramayana*. She has presented in three national and one international conference. The Co-author of this paper and supervisor is Dr. Sunil Kumar Jha, Assistant professor, Banasthali Vidyapith.

The term mythopoeia comes from Hellenistic Greek ‘muthopoiia’ meaning “myth-making”. The definition of mythopoeia ‘creating myth’ is first recorded in 1846. Mythopoeia is a narrative genre in modern literature. “Mythopoeia” is neologism, a creation stemming from the Greek words “mythos” and “poiesis”. “Mythos”, of course, means myth while “poiesis” stands for acting as well as creating. Creation in the case of “Mythopoeia” is used in an artistic sense, and this artistic sense is related by Tolkien to the human ability of sub-creation. Three features of mythopoeia are as follows:-

Recovery- This aspect of mythopoeia refers to “the restoration of a true view of the meaning of ordinary and humble things that make up human life and reality, things like love, thought, trees, hills, and food” (Duriez 2003, 71-72).

Escape- This aspect of mythopoeia refers to “escape from one’s narrow and distorted view of reality and meaning – the escape of the prisoner rather than the flight of the deserter” (Duriez 2003, 72).

Consolation- This aspect of mythopoeia refers to “consolation, leading to joy” (2003, 72), which is similar to the experience of intense longing for the supernatural world.

Kunal Kaushal in his book *Women of Ramayan: The Untold Stories* created a historical mythopoeia by uncovering the layers of distant past. A historical mythopoeia is imbibing the history to create an artificial mythology out of a mythological tale. This study attempts to peel away the layers of mythology to draw attention to the core of the historical tale. Kunal Kaushal presents the events in the way they might have happened. He chooses a feminist perspective to create a historical mythopoeia. His female characters manage to change the course of history. Kaushal believes that mythology is simply an extension of history into the times of which we cannot be certain. He dives into 2000 years of past events that happened in the historical landmass of Jambudvip (India). This study analyzes the logical, factual and historical account of the mythological events occurred in *Ramayana* with the point of view of female characters. The female characters are Ahalya, Kaikeyi, Surpankha, Mandodari and Tara. Their story is told with a feminist, historical and political approach to justify their role in the history.

Kunal Kaushal has started his book with six hypotheses from the ancient mythological tale of *Ramayana*. He challenges these hypotheses with his creation of artificial mythology but we cannot say that his stories are all fictional. In the beginning the author gives us a historical account of the geographical regions and communities of the ancient India. This study will analyze the description of the author about the five women from the mythological tale of *Ramayana*. He portrayed them as the strongest women of their times. They are not the helpless characters as they have been shown in popular culture. They were women of such mettle that despite all obstacles, they managed to carve a significant and unique space for themselves in Indian history. This study will explore the methods with which the author has imbibed the history or Indian subcontinent into an artificial mythology. This study will embark upon the historical, factual, logical and political description of the tale of *Ramayana* as depicted by the author. This paper will start the argument with each hypotheses and its destruction by the author in his fictional tale.

The first hypothesis is about Ahalya. In popular culture it has been shown that she was deceived by Indra into believing that he was her husband. When her husband Gautama discovered her inappropriate physical intimacy, in a fit of rage, he cursed her to turn into a rock. She remained a rock until Rama the god incarnated magically turned her back into a woman. Here Ahalya is shown a weak women who could not resist a rapist and surrendered to the rage of her husband without any fault of her. She is shown as dependent on other men to decide her destiny. In the book Kunal Kaushal has altered the definition of Ahalya as a woman. His Ahalya wants the revenge from the almighty Indra. She is respected and admired by all the people when she decide her own destiny by leaving her home to live alone in the forest. She is logical and intelligent enough to know that Indra cannot be defeated on the battleground. She wants her husband to avenge his wife with his influence. In the popular culture Gautama is shown as angry risi but in this version kaushal has shown him as a loving, supportive and kind husband. She metaphorically changed into a rock when she left her husband and child to face the hardships of the forest life. Her decision was important because her absence will empower her vendetta against Indra. In the book it is shown that she was not deceived by Indra but raped by him. Indra has been described as a womanizer. The dual faces of the people including king janak has been unmasked as nobody wants to support Ahalya because of the fear of Indra's rage. They want her husband to let her go so that they do not loose political affirmation from indra. Thus the political and misogynistic approaches are shown by the author to give the tale a realistic touch. The tribal conflict between raksas and Aryan is enough for showing this tale historical fiction. Ahalya wanted to demolish the fake image of Indra as the supreme human being and she does it with help of Gautama. Gautama writes a thousand articles about the past deeds of Indra. They finally succeeded and everyone shunned Indra from their ally list. Ahalya's wish was that she will only go back to her husband when a warrior with considerable strength and influence in Aryavarta requests her to return. Her wish came true when Rama came to bring her back. There is no magic or supernatural turning into a stone part in this story but the logical, political, and historical description of the tale to support the historical mythopoeia in the story.

The second hypothesis is about Kaikeyi that her demands to cancel Ram's coronation and have him exiled were acts of unadulterated envy that cannot be justified at any cost. For no reason, she destroyed the tranquility of a happy family and a prosperous kingdom. Her husband gave in to her demands for one simple reason that he granted her two boons that he must honor. Kunal kaushal challenges this hypothesis by showing Kaikeyi as an outsider and victim of the politics of the court. She has to marry Dasratha because her father wanted to avoid the clash between their armies. She has to marry an old man and in her in-laws house she never felt at home. She can never be their queen of choice and always be at the receiving corner of their scheming. She has become insecure and doubtful about her wellbeing in kaushal state. She takes permission from the king and established a little-kaikeya in the heart of Ayodhya. Kaikeyi also wanted to fight against the south kaushal lobby's vendetta to spread their own culture as best. She wanted to show one and all that her culture is more progressive. She wanted to remove the marginalized status of her own kaikeya culture. She and her army fought well against sambhar. She inspired many ladies to be independent and many feminist decisions were taken because of her. Even dev armies were ready to fight for her cause. Kaushal has shown that her insecurities and pride led her to the path for which she has always been condemned. Manthara played a vital role in her actions. Kaikeyi was an ambitious women and she can never allow herself to be inferior to kaushlaya. She was worried about her son's future as well. Dasratha does not simply got ready to succumb to her demands. Kaikeyi told

him that if he doesn't imply to her wishes she will take help from her own army along with the dev army. After recognizing her strength and a detailed discussion about the outcome dasratha and rama got ready to imply to her wishes. She was a woman who has power to change the course of the history. She is someone who must not be crossed.

The third hypothesis is about Surpanakha that she is inherently uncouth woman who didn't think twice before prepositioning a much younger, married man. When scorned, she became violent and was rightly punished for her evil act. In retaliation, her brother, driven by the affection for his younger sister, traveled cross-country to avenge her. Kaushal has created an artificial mythology by telling us that Surpanakha never liked Ravana. She blames him for their father's abandonment of them. She wants to take revenge from Ravana. She married Ravana's nemesis Vidhyutjiva for this very reason but when failed she came back to Ravana. She was not an uncouth woman from the very beginning but became one after losing so much. She lustfully approached Rama and lost her army to him. But she knew that Ravana's weakness and she told him about the splendid beauty of Sita. She knew that Ravana will not stand against Rama and thus she made all of them a medium for her long lasting revenge. Ravana did not kidnap Sita to avenge his sister but because he wanted her for himself. Surpanakha's punishment has no place in the fiction. Laxman just humiliates her and did not cut her nose and ears.

The fourth hypothesis is about Mandodari, the queen consort of a powerful empire, was merely a puppet in her husband's hands. She had neither the right nor the say to stand up to her despotic husband. When he abducted and brought someone else's wife home, Mandodari could do nothing but be a mute spectator. Kunal Kaushal has shown that Mandodari is not a mute spectator she did everything she could do to retain her place as maharani. When her brother was killed by Bali she came into the court and faced Ravana in public and demanded justice for her brother. At that time Ravana gave her assurance that her brother would be respected after death, but when Ravana abducted Sita and wanted to make her maharani Mandodari chose to stand up against Ravana once again. She gained support of Vibhishana and Indrajit. They were her two pillars against the almighty Ravana. She demanded to return Sita to her husband but she knew that this will never happen. She deliberately put this demand so that she can get support for her other demand. She demanded that Ravana would not marry Sita for one year and will not meet her alone. This gave a huge shock to Ravana because he was so eager to marry Sita. Mandodari knew that Rama will come and save Sita within a year and she also knew that she has to be the queen at any cost. Thus we can say that Mandodari is a clever woman and she can get what she wanted everytime with her patience and grace. She was not a mute spectator but she was an active player in this political game.

The fifth hypothesis is about Ravana that he was unable to have his way with Sita for one simple reason he was cursed that if he forced himself upon an unwilling woman, he would die immediately. Kunal Kaushal has nullified this hypothesis by saying that Ravana wants to marry Sita as soon as possible but it is Mandodari who asked for time of one year for Sita. Mandodari knew that Ravana will not return Sita at any cost but she also knew that in a period of one year Rama will come for his wife. Ravana was taken aback by this shock coming from his wife whom he never thought to be a threat for his plans.

The sixth hypothesis is about Tara that like a baton she was passed from one husband to another. She had no influence of her own and had no option but to side with the killers of her first husband. Kunal Kaushal has shown Tara as witty, intelligent, expert administrator and force behind the development of her clan. Her husband Bali was always away for fighting and other reason. In his absence she learned policymaking and statecraft. She was the real empress of Kishkindha. When her husband came into the influence of Ravana and Mayavi, it was Mandodari who sided with Sugriva to unravel the real face of Mayavi to Bali. She has a soft spot for Sugriva whom she advised to run away when Bali returned. She was blamed to have an affair with Sugriva by Bali. She was the one who sent message to Sugriva about Rama and his mission.

Because of her wise counsel Sugriva met Rama and together they killed Bali. Tara married Sugriva just to give authenticity to his coronation. She announced her son as the heir. Thus she knew the value of the public opinion and state politics. She was not passed as a baton from one husband to another but she did this for the welfare of his state. She has an active role in Bali's murder. She did not want a cruel rapist to be the ruler of her people. When Bali raped Rama Sugriva's wife she decided to change the ruler. She has the real wellwisher of her people and a real queen.

To conclude the paper we can say that Kunal Kaushal has really created the historical mythopoeia by using the historical facts and information to create a fictional tale. His tales seem justification of all the unspoken truths from the story of Ramayana. He used logic and facts to create his stories and his women characters are the real force behind the events of the story.

Works cited

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