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‘Research Prospects in the peripheral view of Kartika Nair’s epic Retelling ‘Until the Lions’- Echoes from the Mahabharata’

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Abstract:

Indian culture is based on two epics; The Ramayana and The Mahabharata. Every Hindu knows about these two epics, other religion people too. There is not any Hindu house which does not know and follow the rituals which are discussed in these two epics. The present generation takes interest to read Retellings of Indian myths which are written by the contemporary Indian English Writers. Indian women like to read Retellings of myths which are written by Indian women writers. Its reason is that it gives voice to marginalized women of the Indian myths. Females compare their unspeakable voice with the voice of marginalized women of the Indian myths which are discussed by Indian women writers through the retellings. This paper discusses the research prospects of one of the well-known epic retellings of Mahabharata Myth – ‘Until the Lions’. It is an experimental retelling of the epic Mahabharata; Karthika Nair writes poetry in the voices of those whose narratives remained



untold. Through this epic, Nair attempts to conduct an “inquiry of power” through the eyes of those who do not possess it: most often, the women of the Mahabharata. The story of women we do not hear as much about who were either eulogized too much or were peripheral characters in the story or were powerless queens- Queen Satyawati, Yuyutsu’s Mother, Dushala, Kunti, Gandhari, Hidimbi are fascinating. This epic is the best example to get the knowledge about female experience through the female voice. The objective of this research paper is to discuss research prospects which are applicable to this epic of retelling by the researcher. The researcher applies the theory of feminism to discuss this epic of retelling. The research question is that; Is the peripheral view of Karthika Nair justified as the female voice of Female experience through this epic of Retelling?

Key Words: Indian Culture, Mahabharata, Retelling, Research Prospect, Peripheral, Feminism.

1.Introduction:

Federico Fellini says,

“A different language is a different vision of Life” (Jordan)

Nowadays, the English Language is not a new thing for us because it has become an international Language. English Language Becomes Famous because educated people accepted it as their communication Language everywhere. People also like to write and read English. English Literature has become a subject of study in the Arts and Humanities field. There is a huge number of books available on English Literature from old age to the present age. Henry James says,

“It takes a great deal of history to produce a little Literature”.

So, the people can understand that writing a literature is not an easy task. Modern people do not only read literature but do research related to specific genres of English Literature. Indian English Literature has become the first choice for Indian People to do research work. There is a variety of Literature available in India which is written by not only male writers but women writers too write literature in English Language. In present times, “Retelling ” has become a



famous genre to write Literature in Indian English Literary Field. Indian English Women writers choose “Retelling” genre to discuss women suffering in Indian Society. Here, the genre of “Retelling” is directly connected with Indian myths because women writers take Indian mythical stories as background and put women characters of the Indian myths at the centre. The aim of Indian women writers is to discuss the voice of modern women with giving a voice to marginalized women characters of the myths. A lot of research work has been done Related to Feminist Retellings of Indian Myths and many works are continued. There are many women writers who write Retellings with female voice like Pratibha Ray, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Shashi Deshpande, Karthika Nair, Kavita Kane, Madhvi Mahadevan, Aditi Banerjee, Mahashweta Devi, Irawati Karve and so on. Here, the role of the researcher is to discuss Research Prospects in the peripheral view of Kartika Nair’s epic Retelling ‘Until the Lions’- Echoes from the Mahabharata. If people read the epic poem of Karthika Nair, then they get a variety of chances to do research work. The people can apply both the method- Qualitative and Quantitative for their research work of this epic.

2.Objectives:

The following are the objectives of the study:

- A) To discuss Linguistic Theories of Deconstruction and Post-Structuralism through the epic- ‘Until the Lions’.
- B) To discuss Narratology and post-modernism through the epic – ‘Until the Lions’.
- C) To discuss Research Prospects of Both Methods- Qualitative Vs. Quantitative through the epic – ‘Until the Lions’.

3. Research Questions:

The following are the Research Questions of the study:

- A) What are the research prospects of the Epic- ‘Until the Lions’?
- B) How to Overcome Difficulties of the Research Prospects of the Epic – ‘Until the Lions’?



C) Does the Quantitative Method of the research work applicable or not of the Epic – ‘Until the Lions’?

4. Methodology:

It is Qualitative Research so the Literature Review is carried out by the information collected from different sources like educational websites, peer-reviewed journals, and online sources. The proposed research will be carried out relying on the data collected through research journals, scholarly articles, and websites. The Qualitative Approach is conducted mainly based on collecting, examining, and interpreting existing knowledge on the selected topic by focusing the Key words of this paper.

5. What is Epic:

According to Merriam Webster’s Dictionary,

“Epic is a long narrative poem in elevated style recounting the deeds of a legendary or historical hero”. (Merriam and Merriam)

In its strict sense the term epic or heroic poem is applied to a work that meets at least the following criteria: It is a long verse narrative on a serious subject, told in a formal and elevated style, and centred on a heroic or quasi-divine figure on whose actions depends the fate of a tribe, a nation, or the human race. There is a standard distinction between traditional and literary epics. “Traditional epics” were written versions of what had originally been oral poems about a tribal or national hero during a warlike age. Among these are the Iliad and Odyssey that the Greeks ascribed to Homer; The Anglo-Saxon Beowulf and so on. “Literary epics” were composed by individual poetic craftsmen in deliberate imitation of the traditional form. Of this kind is Virgil’s Latin poem the Aeneid, which later served as the chief model for Milton’s Literary epic Paradise Lost. (Abrams and Harpham #)

6. Overview of Literature ‘Until the Lions’ as Primary Source:

This singular book of poetry was named after a well-known quote by Chinua Achebe:



“There is that great proverb- that until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter. That did not come to me until much later. Once I realized that, I had to be a writer. I had to be that historian.”

‘Until the Lions’ is Populated by the most hunted characters in the Mahabharata- most of them women. These are some of the most marginalized characters in the epic, whose stories are the least told. They are recounted here by Nair, meticulously, with great compassion, and prodigious skill. These women include Hidimbi, Bheem’s wife, who does not accompany him out of the forest because she would perish without it. There is Amba/Shikhandi, destroyed by Bheeshm, and reborn only to destroy him. There is Dusshala, the sole Kaurava sister, who names all her brothers. There is Poorna, the dasi, ordered to sleep with Ved Vyaas, who instructs him on the art of love-making. There is also the dasi Sauvali, kidnapped and raped by Dhritarashtra for the purpose of having a son. Each voice is distinguished by a particular poetic form and manages to convey – with the piercing ability to tell truth in a manner that is unique to poetry- the ills of war, and the unsung courage and grit employed by the vast range of characters it impacts. The book is one of the most original and contemporary readings of the epic in our generation, and we are fortunate to have Nair as the sharp, discerning storyteller who brings it to us. Until The Lions won the Tata Literature Live! Book of the Year award for fiction in 2015. (“Scroll.in”)

7. Research Prospects of Theoretical Framework to the textual Analysis of the epic:

This paper throws light on Various Theories which can be applicable for the Textual Analysis of the Epic – ‘Until the Lions’. Here, the researcher’s aim is to discuss brief outline to the theories which can be applicable to the research of this epic:

7.1 Literary Theories:

A) Narratology and postmodernism to the Retelling:

With the advent of postmodernism, there has been a constant distrust towards the ‘grand narratives’. There has been a constant and continuous attempt to deconstruct the role of these ‘grand narratives’ as privileged accounts of world affairs, contemporary and historical. The



epics The Ramayana and The Mahabharata form the ‘grand narratives’ which highlighted India’s ‘grand’ culture and traditions. The attempt of the ‘grand narratives’ was to hegemonize certain ideological frameworks over others. Postmodern retellings of ‘grand narratives’ attempt to dissect the grandness of these totalitarian narratives into ‘mini narratives’ by subverting the hegemonic ideas and using metafictional and self-reflexive elements to highlight upon its own fictionality. The Mahabharata is a familiar tale in which the ‘virtuous’ Pandavas eliminate the ‘evil’ Kauravas; it is a tale of victory, of good over evil. The contemporary renderings of the mythical tale have become very popular in India. Authors are not only experimenting with characterization; they are also experimenting with various narrative forms. The project is a critical evaluation of Karthika Nair’s retellings; *Until the Lions: Echoes from The Mahabharata*. It is the complexity of the text which leads to its uniqueness. Nair’s text not only “defamiliarizes” the familiar retellings by its intermixing of genres, it also overturns the perspective on war and violence. Therefore, though the war remains integral to the text; the context of the war changes, thereby changing the characters revolving around it. These reinterpretations of the epic pave way for “mini-narratives” which do not contend for a totalizing effect; rather, they create multiple versions of a “hegemonized” or “centralized” idea. The version in the text is treated as one of the many versions of war as the text itself designates the narratives as “echoes”. The structure of the text is therefore rhizomatic in nature where the different narrative voices co-exist independently within the backdrop of war. The connecting thread that can be established between these voices is that of revenge and regret. Interestingly, the narrative voices are not of men who fought the war; instead, these are the voices who never spoke for themselves within Vayasa’s Mahabharata: Satyavati, Gandhari, Kunti, Amba, Draupadi’s Mother, Sauvali, Poorna, Hidimbi, Dusshala, Ulupi, Uttaraa, Vrishali, Bhanumati. Apart from these characters, there are separate sections dedicated to the “Padavit and his son”; the foot soldiers who fought the war, the first casualties. The Characters Speak in monologues, which take the form of poetry, sometimes in the form of simple and fluid free verse, and sometimes in the form of concrete poetry or mixed verses. The “simulations” instigated within the text are an amalgamation of trauma, mixed with memories of violence and desire. The women’s voices create webs of memories which though distinct are integrally connected. (Chakraborty)



7.2 Linguistic Theories:

A) Post-Structuralism:

Poststructuralism is a linguistic approach in literary theory and criticism, primarily challenging the structuralist argument of Ferdinand Saussure that language in a text operates in terms of a system of signs and that a text may be comprehended in decoding the structure of correspondence between two dimensions of a sign i.e. signifier- the oral dimension and signified – the idea behind the signifier. Poststructuralism in response holds that language is a slippery medium and that a strict adherence to this structure of signs cannot be ascertained. Derrida’s arguments in this direction hold that the correlation between the signifier and the signified is not final for the signifier may indicate multiple signified. In other words, Poststructuralism problematizes the inherent gap in language by suggesting that a particular linguistic unit may generate a variety of meanings postponing the arrival at the absolute meaning of the same, by extension a discourse. This path breaking approach to linguistics upheld the ambiguity of meaning in language that opened a text for multiple interpretations. Consequently, from Roland Barthes perspective it questioned the existence of an authorial voice in a text suggesting that the intent of the author is insignificant, for the text is rewritten by the reader in the process of reading, and thereby announced the effacement of the author. Mythological Retellings are fictional rewriting of the original mythological stories, whereby the elements like characters, temporal and spatial framework, and narrative structure are experimented with to introduce a new perspective on the canonical texts. They inherently and intentionally challenge the fixed coordinates of the original texts by exploiting the linguistic medium and foreground the plurality of voices in them. It is to this effect that such narratives hold a poststructuralist stance. (Ravindran)

B) Deconstruction:

Derrida’s contribution in the field of deconstruction is also essential and crucial in understanding the impossibility and incredibility of “totalization.” According to him,

“Totalization can be judged impossible in the classical style: one then refers to the empirical endeavour of either a subject or a finite richness which it can never master”.



He Therefore, asserts totalization to be “useless” and “impossible”. He further explains his stance:

“If totalization no longer has any meaning, it is not because the infinity of a field cannot be covered by a finite glance or a finite discourse, but because the nature of the field that is, language and a finite language- excludes totalization. This field is in fact that of free play, that is to say, a field of infinite substitution in the closure of a finite ensemble.”

Derrida’s antipathy towards totalization arises from his analysis of myth criticism where he observes that:

“There is no unity or absolute source of the myth. The focus or the source of the myth are always shadows and virtualities which are elusive, un- actualizable, and non-existent in the first place.”

Derrida is already alluding to the rhizomatic functioning of mythology which cannot be contained within specific structures. Derrida is already alluding to the rhizomatic functioning of mythology which cannot be contained within specific structures. Derrida’s The primary intention was on breaking the preoccupations of ‘structured reality’ and highlighting upon the play of signifiers within languages and in culture which makes fixity of meanings difficult. He asserts that meaning in language is always in a flux as signifiers are always in continuous ‘play’ with each other. (Chakraborty)

Deconstruction, therefore, is very crucial in the re-reading of mythology. If not only subverts hegemonic boundaries, but also deconstructs truths. Overall, deconstruction resists any attempt of “easy summary”. It resists singularity and rejoices in plurality. In Psyche Derrida has noted that: “Deconstruction loses nothing from admitting that it is impossible”, that it is “an experience of the impossible”. Deconstruction is thus,

“A Series of responses which seek to be as faithful as possible to their various objects, whether a particular text, author, or historical event”.



Deconstruction becomes a necessary tool for analysing the concepts of “true” and “False”. It alerts one about the problems arising from the very idea of what is true or false: If the very idea of true and false, on which the philosophical account of the world depends, relies on a series of metaphors (Surface/depth; inside/outside) to explain itself, its literary aspects cannot simply be inessential. Equally, an account of metaphor, as a deviation or deferral of the truth, cannot ever be strictly objective (Since it in its turn relies on metaphors). The stance of cynicism is essential to denote the deference that has been silently occurring within the backdrop of one’s conceptual understanding of truth and untruth. (Chakraborty)

8. The Research Prospects in Methodology of the Epic – ‘Until the Lions’:

Research Methods are three types: Qualitative Method, Quantitative Method, and Mixed Methods. Qualitative research involves collecting and analysing non-numerical data (e.g., text, video, or audio) to understand concepts, opinions, or experiences. It can be used to gather in-depth insights into a problem or generate new ideas for research. Qualitative research is the opposite of quantitative research, which involves collecting and analysing numerical data for statistical analysis. (Bhandari) Nair’s Epic is the best example of Epic Genre in Literature. There are a lot of chances to do research Work in this epic. Most people apply the Qualitative research method for this Epic but there is a chance to apply the Quantitative method for this Epic. Still, no one has tried but the researcher of this paper thinks about how to apply quantitative methods for this research work. The researcher wishes to give questionnaires to the PG students of English Literature through the Google form which deals with Yes - No type questions. Quantitative method is possible with the application of Survey method too with the help of education Institutes. Here, researchers can choose the Education Institute of Arts and Humanities because the present generation takes interest to read such retellings of myth. The researcher can take a sample of the views of the students of Postgraduate of the specific institute, specially, females what they think after reading this epic retelling. The aim of such survey Sampling is to know the condition of women in the present India through the raised voice in such retellings of the epic. The question also raised the mindset of the patriarchy related to the feminist retellings of Myth. So, the researcher can also take a sample of males about how they give centre position to the



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female in Indian society with the influence of such retellings. The Quantitative method is a little bit difficult, but it gives uniqueness to the research work of this epic.

9 Conclusion:

The Epic 'Until the Lions' is a very interesting epic to do research work with a variety of prospects. Nowadays Literary Research work is not limited to only qualitative method but Quantitative method also applicable which discussed here. The Mixed method of the research gives uniqueness to the research work in the Literary field. The epic 'Until the Lions' is the tremendous source to do qualitative research because it deals with the major Linguistic and Literary theories. If the researcher thinks to do something interesting then the researcher must apply a mixed method of the research which deals with the views of the people of India. Here, the researcher avoided discussing the theory of feminism because the whole text of the epic is the mirror of feminism so it is indirectly interwoven in this whole paper which deals with feminist retelling of myth.



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