

Kavita Kané's *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty* Through the Lens of Victor E Frankl's Logotherapy

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Abstract—The quest to unravel the purpose of existence has been captivating human minds for centuries now. Philosophical, scientific, religious, and metaphysical conjectures have all been abundant in the historical discourse on the purpose of life. As for the solution to these questions, various people and cultures have different ideas. The neurologist and psychiatrist Victor Frankl developed a theory that deals with existentialism titled, "Logotherapy", which focuses on the meaning of human existence and man's search for such a meaning. Kavita Kané is an Indian author known for her novels that survey and conceptualize the lives of female characters from Indian mythology. The novel *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty* demonstrates how an author can take the most tarnished mythical woman character and transform her into a celebrated woman in the hearts of the readers. This research article attempts to study the character of Satyavati, the grandmother of Pandu and Dhritarashtra in the epic *The Mahabharata*, through the lens of Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning*.

Index Terms—mythology, logotherapy, existential vacuum, forgiveness, realisation

I. INTRODUCTION

Kavita Kané is an Indian author known for her novels that survey and conceptualise the lives of female characters from Indian mythology. Indian mythology is rich with high-powered and assorted female characters who play outstanding roles in shaping the narratives. M. H. Abrams states:

Myth is one story in mythology- a system of hereditary stories which were once believed to be true by a particular cultural group, and which served to explain (in terms of the intentions and actions of deities and other supernatural beings) why the world is as it is and things happen as they do, to provide a rationale for social customs and observances and to establish the sanctions for the rules by which people conduct their lives. (170)

Kané retells the tale of Satyavati in the novel *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty* and demonstrates how an author can take the most tarnished mythical woman character and transform her into a celebrated woman in the hearts of the readers. She has obtained acceptance for her distinctive frame of reference in retelling these stories, giving a voice to the often overlooked or misunderstood women in ancient epics. Tanvi Shah says, "Reading about strong female heroines gives us insights into the world of our old Indian epics. It has intrigued me deeply how women like Satyavati from our Indian mythology have endured pain and suffering and turned it into something wonderful" (Shah et al., 2019). Kané's writing style is known for amalgamating historical and mythological components while supplying a fresh approach to familiar characters. The title, *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty*, hints at the lineage and legacy of Satyavati, who is often mentioned as the "Fisherwoman" (Kané, 2022, p. 31). In Kané's novel the character Satyavati is introduced as Kali, as she is dark in colour. Her biological father, King Vasu of Chedi, abandons her as she is a female child, and he accepts her twin brother as the heir to his throne. Dasharaj, the chieftain of the fisherman community and Satyavati's uncle, adopts Satyavati and brings her up in an ambitious manner. This abandonment of her father becomes a scar that runs deep and from which she finds it hard to heal. She sees it as a disapproval of her identity, and that affects her overall development. In the process of healing, she slides away from the consequences of her actions and determinations. Marius et al. observes that, "parental rejection is a highly traumatic experience" (3), and the resulting feeling of abandonment can have profound emotional and psychological effects on people.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The question "What is the meaning of life?" leads one to seek the importance of life and existence in general. "Why are we here?" "What is life all about?" and "What is the purpose of existence?" are just a few of the many similar queries. Numerous responses to these queries have been put forth from a wide range of ideological and cultural perspectives. The neurologist and psychiatrist Victor Frankl's theory "Logotherapy," is a therapeutic approach that focuses on the meaning of human existence as well as on man's search for such a meaning. According to logotherapy, striving to "find a meaning

in one's life is the primary motivational force in man" (Frankl, 2022). This research paper attempts to study the novel *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty* by Kavita Kané through the lens of Frankl's theory of Logotherapy in his famous work *Man's Search for Meaning*.

The novel *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty* is analysed through various perspectives. Kapila Joshi's article *Dreams, Desires and Destiny in The Fisher Queen's Dynasty* explores how human's quest for power and throne creates an effect on oneself as well as others through the character Satyavati in the novel *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty*. Suchitra Rani Mahato makes a feminist study of the novel in her article *Gender Discrimination and Quest of Female Identity in Kavita Kané's The Fisher Queen's Dynasty*. Dr. Veerendra Kumar Mishra expresses the valour, strength and determination of Satyavati through his article *The Reconstruction of the Mythical Image of Satyavati in Kavita Kané's The Fisher Queen's Dynasty*. Basundhara Chakraborty, in her article, *Deconstructing the Patriarchal Construction of Epic: A Feminist Re-reading of Mahabharata in Kavita Kané's Karna's Wife and The Fisher Queen's Dynasty*, intervenes the meta narrative with the help of feminist nuances and refinement, attempts to ask and diagnose the popular conviction propagated and disseminated by the male constructions of the epic. Siddhi Shahi and Dr. Mandvi Singh, in their article, *Breaking Chains, Reclaiming Identities: Unveiling Women's Struggles and Empowerment in Kavita Kané's Novels*, have discussed the personification, illiteracy, ostracism, and confined preferences experienced by a female individual. The article also discusses how Kané's novels investigate the psyche of such characters. Parinitha B. and A. Lourdusamy, in their article, *The Evolution of the Female from Suppression to Supremacy in the Select Novels of Postmodern Retellings of the Epic: A Review of Literature*, have discovered the quest for power, politics, gender roles, etc. through the character Satyavati. The article presents a comparative study between western and Indian feminism.

III. METHODOLOGY

The researchers have applied Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy to explore the novel *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty* by an Indian author Kavita Kané. This paper focuses on the character of Satyavati and her role in shaping the meaning of her life. It also illustrates how Logotherapy and the quest for meaning resonate with Satyavati's experiences. Kané depicts her as a resilient individual who discovers the significance of her life despite the crises and suffering imposed by fate. The narrative reflects Frankl's three pathways to find meaning in life. Logotherapy is a type of existential analysis and psychotherapy created by Viktor E. Frankl. It is often referred to as the "Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy", (Pfeifer, 2021) following Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalysis and Alfred Adler's Individual Psychology. This approach uses various therapeutic techniques to assist individuals in discovering the meaning of their lives, especially during times of suffering or crisis. Frankl's own experiences in the Auschwitz concentration camp had a significant impact on the development of logotherapy. He observes that those who are able to find meaning in their suffering have a greater chance of survival and resilience despite the extreme hardships they face.

IV. DISCUSSION

This section of the paper provides a concise overview of Satyavati, highlighting the differences between the original mythology of *The Mahabharata* and the retelling by author Kavita Kané. Mythologies consist of a collection of stories, legends, and beliefs that are unique to a specific culture. They serve as a means to pass down heritage and cultural significance from one generation to the next. Indian mythologies represent a vast system intertwined with beliefs, culture, philosophy, and everyday life. These narratives often explore the human experience from birth to death, with central themes including Dharma, Moksha, and Karma. Satyavati is a pivotal character in the epic *The Mahabharata*, playing a significant role in instigating the Kurukshetra War. Her ambition and political acumen elevated her to the position of Queen of Hastinapur, despite her humble beginnings as a fisher girl. The novel *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty* explores Satyavati's life, shedding light on her inner struggles, emotions, and motivations. In Kané's portrayal, Satyavati is not merely a cunning figure; rather, she is deeply affected by her emotions. Her ambition is intertwined with a tragic personal history. Kané's retelling provides a feminist and psychological perspective on the character, highlighting her inner conflicts, desires, and sacrifices. While both interpretations of Satyavati follow a similar path in their actions, Kané's version offers a more profound exploration of Satyavati's emotional and moral complexities, granting her a voice and agency that resonates with modern readers.

The term "logotherapy" is derived from the Greek word logos, which denotes meaning. According to logotherapy, one can discover the meaning of life in three different ways: "(1) by creating a work or doing a deed; (2) by experiencing something or encountering someone; and (3) by the attitude we take towards unavoidable suffering" (Frankl, 2022). Satyavati tries to find the meaning of her life in all three ways.

The first way Frankl explains is by occupying oneself with work or doing a deed in the face of adversity. This will help the individual keep up with life without succumbing to the hardships. Kali's first phase of life is filled with trauma and insults. It is common for someone who is wronged to be filled with thoughts of indignation, resentment, anger, and vengeance, but Satyavati bears everything and moves forward towards her ambition. Leary explains in his article that feelings of loss, rejection, and confusion may arise, which impact one's self-esteem and sense of security. He further accentuates that when a person is, "incapable of managing his or her interpersonal interactions and relationships, they would likely experience wholesale rejection" (Leary, 2015, p. 441). These feelings develop a sense of fear and low self-

esteem in her. She says, “Never in my life have I been so deeply insulted...I, well-educated, refined, the daughter of a fisherman- chieftain, suspected of theft by the king's men” (Kané, 2022, p. 9). As her biological father, King Vasu of Chedi, rejects her just because she is a girl, Satyavati is determined to make use of her femininity to achieve her goals. She breaks through societal barriers and stereotypes and does whatever feels right for her. Jasvant V. Rathode observes, “Satyavati declares not only to use her body as a site to manifest her power relations in the future but to gain upward mobility in the social structure of her time” (Rathode, 2022). She neglects all the obstacles she faces because of being a fisherman’s daughter and continuously focuses only on her upliftment.

The second way that Frankl explains is by experiencing or encountering someone or something. Firstly, the romance she encounters with Rishi Parashar changes her life forever. She is ready “to deal with him” (Kané, 2022, p. 13) but only for a profit. She is clearly able to witness the arousal in his eyes and feels “no fear, no apprehension, no uncertain anxiety instead feeling a strange sense of power over him” (Kané, 2022, p. 15). She justifies her act that, “I am going to make love to a powerful seer, not some young fisher boy or some callow villager... She stiffened pleasurably against him, aroused not by desire but by ambition” (Kané, 2022, p. 19). Thus, she has “lost her innocence to gain Freedom” (Kané, 2022, p. 20). She gives birth to a son, names the son Krishna Dwaipayana, and gives it to Rishi Parashar. She and Parashar part ways like strangers with no emotions or feelings. She believes:

I -no Fate or God-shall be responsible for my own happiness, my own future. I promise myself, I will not be the victim anymore; nor will my child...It is better to use my ambitions wisely. I would rather make use of a powerful man and get some benefits, as I have done with Rishi Parashar. If it is looks and lust which can seduce a man, weaken him, then I shall employ them as my means; I shall use my charms to get what I want. I cannot afford to have morals like the rich and the royal. (Kané, 2022, p. 32)

With her newly gained confidence, she helps those in need, and by doing so, she becomes a respectable person in her clan. Frankl elucidates that, “the only way to grasp other human beings as they truly are at their innermost core is to love them” (Frankl, 2022). However, the definition of love for Satyavati differs because her experiences from childhood change her outlook on love. She says, “I learnt to love like a man-to love without feelings. And I shall never forget this lesson” (Kané, 2022, p. 42). Secondly, an opportunity to become the queen, as she always longs for, strikes her when she comes to know that the King of Hastinapur, Shantanu, wants her. She dreams of securing the position of queen beside the king and not as a mistress. She vows, “I shall make him so... But not as his mistress in his Harem, as he would have preferred; instead as his wife. His Queen. The Queen of Hastinapur, she smirked, relishing each word” (Kané, 2022, p. 65). Sumona Banerjee justifies the act of Satyavati as she asks, “How are virtue and chastity terms invented by patriarchy to suit its purpose? It makes us ask why it is only a grave misdemeanour when men think about upholding their code of ethics, but it is a crime, nay, a sin if women seek independence of thought and action” (Banerjee, n.d).

No one in the world is free from hard times. Getting past them is the real challenge, which differs from person to person. To overcome misfortunes, bounce back, and resume moving forward takes a certain kind of mental and emotional fortitude. Like a butterfly, she starts as a worm and transforms from Kali to Matsyagandha after she encounters Rishi Parasar. She always looks for opportunities to lift herself up from the pit and refuses to dwell in despair. All she cares for is the destination, not the journey. From her humble beginning as a fisherwoman to becoming the queen, Satyavati faces numerous challenges and moral dilemmas to secure her life. Satyavati turns the encounters with Rishi Parasar and Shantanu fruitful without worrying that they demand a heavy price from her. She makes it an opportunity to rediscover and rebuild herself. Victor Frankl states, “What matters is to bear witness to the uniquely human potential at its best, which is to transform a personal tragedy into a triumph, to turn one’s predicament into a human achievement when we are no longer able to change a situation,” (Frankl, 2022, p. 101). After becoming the Queen, Satyavati is not accepted by the people of Hastinapur. She knows that, “This is a new experience: she was a leader, popular with the people in her village. *But not always. I had to earn it*, she reminded herself. She would have to work at it here in Hastinapur too” (Kané, 2022, p. 112).

From ancient women to modern women, they are always on the quest to find meaning in their existence, their purpose in life, the courage to resist life’s temptations and challenges, and ultimately the power to become who they really want to be. Satyavati uses all the possible ways to turn her suffering into achievement and accomplishment. Suchitra Rani, in her article, discusses Satyavati as, “strong and independent woman who is able to fight for her own rights and take her own independent decisions. Her life is a story of transformations from Kali to Satyavati, Matsyagandha to Yojanagandha, a fisher girl to a queen. She made choices of her own and succeeded in attaining those choices. Satyavati had the ability to be practical, ask logical questions, and participate in debates and discussions” (Rani).

The third way Frankl explains this is through the attitude one takes towards unavoidable suffering. He illuminates that an individual should choose to see a meaning to their suffering. Satyavati feels a sudden prick on the wedding night as she realises that she did not love Shantanu. She finds it hard to fall in love with the king. However, she knows that, “She was his queen. It was her duty. Her status as a queen would be uncertain till she produced an heir. And for that she has to surrender to her King everyday...” (Kané, 2022, p. 120). She understands that, “she had overlooked all this in her greed to have him have the crown. She was supposed to fall in love with this man... She was incapable of falling in love. One has to stumble to fall in love or otherwise, she thought grimly, and I am not one who will ever stumble or fall. But to own the king, she had to give her all, she reminded herself” (Kané, 2022, p. 121).

Why and what we are suffering is more important than how we are suffering. Everyone in the world suffers according to their own deeds. Taking up the suffering for the cause of good makes one stand firm in one's decision. The riots of the public against her continue even on the day of her son's christening. The hostility towards her continues to burn within and outside the palace walls. She tries to win them over several times. Everyone inside the palace knows that, "she was trying to win their hearts, but it was a losing battle" (Kané, 2022, p. 141). Feeling socially unaccepted can be challenging. She breaks down her barriers by facing the public, engaging with them, and making them understand that she is also one of them. Her continuous efforts in asking them to give her a chance to serve them finally make the public understand her real concern for their community. Satyavati's sole existence, after the death of King Shantanu, depends on the crown and her power. Her biggest fear always is that the throne will slip away from her hands. She swears to herself that, "She would not allow any man, marriage, or motherhood to erode her power. She had to decide her priorities as she sat on the throne. And she was far too intelligent to compromise herself" (Kané, 2022, p. 188). She actively participates in court affairs after the death of her husband and channelled her determination into pursuing her ambitions with resilience. She possesses all the necessary qualities, such as empathy, resilience, adaptability, and strength, through which she navigates the new life she creates for herself. The novelist mentions, "She was the Kuru queen, mother of the heirs, and champion of the people. It had been a trying task, with the public and nobles both casting aspersions and accusations on her intentions and integrity, but she had eventually won them all over" (Kané, 2022, p. 190).

Life often tests some people more than their capacity; Satyavati is one such character in the novel. According to the words of Victor Frankl, "In accepting this challenge to suffer bravely, life has a meaning up to the last moment, and it retains this meaning literally to the end. In other words, life's meaning is an unconditional one, for it even includes the potential of unavoidable suffering" (Frankl, 2022). Satyavati loses her two sons and feels shattered and devastated.

As Victor Frankl says, "A man's concern, even his despair, over the worthwhileness of life is an existential distress" (Frankl, 2022). Even though Satyavati feels frustrated, she vows fiercely, "I will not surrender; I will not be defeated. I have to find a way" (Kané, 2022, p. 270). She tries to hold on to her power for herself and the generations to come. She is reminded of Krishna Dwapayan (Vyasa) for performing Niyog with her daughters-in-law. Niyog as explained in the Hindu Scripture is a process for producing a son and an heir in the family where, "the brother-in-law or a cousin or a person of the same clan can have intercourse with an issue less widow till she conceives... The son born thus is the legitimate son of the deceased husband" (Banarsidass, p. 293). It is not, "just caution or discretion that prompted her to take this decision" (Kané, 2022, p. 288); she adamantly wants, "it would be her blood that would inherit the throne" (Kané, 2022, p. 288). Therefore, to achieve her aim, Satyavati meets all odds and endures all the sufferings that life throws at her to reach her end goal. Even though she suffers extremely, she does not give up and keeps on going with optimism.

Her attitude and belief that life has its own purpose and she has the power to change herself make her a strong woman who faces struggle without surrendering or succumbing to it. Through all the hardships she faces, she not only succeeds in becoming a queen but also ensures that it is her bloodline that rules the kingdom. She finds her life's purpose and strives throughout her life to achieve it, irrespective of the obstacles she faces. Life will always find a way to fight with humans and make them face unprecedented crises, no matter how strong one may stand. Thereby, reading the novel *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty* makes us believe that even in the darkest of circumstances, changes may take place to drag us out of the miseries that may seem endless. Archa Sasi comments, "In *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty*, Kané describes the pathetic circumstances faced by women to achieve their passion for power. The victory of Satyavati in the novel provides an optimistic and logical message to the people around the world that their lives are in their hands, and if they have the intention and guts to protest the impediments enclosing their path, then they can extricate themselves" (Sasi).

Arlin Cuncic in her article states, "Frankl believes that humans are motivated by something called as a will to meaning, which is the desire to find meaning in life. He argues that life can have a meaning even in the most miserable of circumstances and that the motivation for living comes from finding that meaning" (Cuncic, 2024). Satyavati just wants to become a queen but never bothers about the direction she takes, as she is determined to follow what her heart desires. Desire, when it is self-centred, makes people rebel, which fractures an ideal relationship with the other people around them and makes them feel alienated from their own family. She thinks:

She had thought she was unvanquishable. She had power, wealth, and progeny, but in her heir-yearning, prestige-hungry life, she had witnessed her husband, her two sons, and one grandson die. She thought she had succeeded in using authority to achieve and accomplish, but where had it taken her? At this crossroads, where would her family be annihilated in a bloodbath? Was her leaving for the forest an escape from an end that was so lost that she could not bear to face it? (Kané, 2022, p. 319)

Satyavati at last retires to the forest and lives there until she realises, "It was time to leave this earthly kingdom, too. She thinks, "Ganga, would she ever forgive her for what she had done to her son? (Kané, 2022, p. 324) and begs, "Absolve me, Oh Ganga, forgive me for what I did. Wash away my sins; give me my salvation (Kané, 2022, p. 325), and she finally closes, "her eyes in tired surrender. Ganga had accepted her in her arms" (Kané, 2022, p. 325).

V. CONCLUSION

With sudden swiftness, one may feel life has come to a dead end, a kind of void choking the heart, the mind wrestling with unanswered questions, and nothing good remains in life. Seizing control of one's life is not so easy, though seizing the moment sounds pretty easy. Sometimes even determined efforts cannot bring personal fulfillment. There is no

assurance or promise that one's efforts will surely bring success into one's life. Satyavati's grasping attempts to seize power lead her not into self-actualization but into disillusionment and cynicism. The character of Satyavati is shown in brutally honest terms. The limitations do not stop her from achieving her determined and elusive goals. Despite her flaws, there is much one can learn from the encounters, unnerving occurrences, and episodes of her life. One can find sterling qualities alongside her human failings. To find instruction and inspiration, hope to face our trials, and strength to walk through the unlikable path, one must feel how the characters in the novel lived amidst uncertainty and despair. To comprehend Satyavati's ways of finding meaning in life one should have the ability to sense her emotions and mirror what she feels.

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