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**Exploring the Eco critical themes in Kunal Kaushal's *Women of Ramayan: The Untold Stories* and Anurag Chandra's *The Ramayana Secret*.**

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper critically discusses the ecocritical themes in Kunal Kaushal's *Women of Ramayan: The Untold Stories* and Anurag Chandra's *The Ramayana Secret* as a way of investigating the engagement of such retellings of the ancient epic with the current world's environmental concerns and man-nature interaction. The books reimagine the classic traditional narrative of *the Ramayan* through a modern perspective while underlining a profound attachment between the characters and the natural surroundings in which they live. The women in Kaushal's *Ramayana* represent a symbiotic relationship with nature, which is the source of their strength but also reflects their inner state. Chandra's *The Ramayana Secret*, on the other hand, explores the ecological implications of divine intervention and human behavior that follows it, provoking questions on whether progress comes at the cost of nature. A comparison will indicate how the two different authors utilize the framework given by the *Ramayana* to criticize modern environmental threats while encouraging more harmonious and sustainable interactions with nature.



## Introduction

Over the centuries, the retelling and reinterpretation of this greatest of epics has had myriad forms in the country's rich mythology; however, each retelling gives an idea of its respective cultural, social, and political background, ultimately providing a tapestry of varied viewpoints. Rewriting the *Ramayan* has been the most commonly employed vehicle in contemporary literature to convey themes that resonate with modern sensibilities, such as gender, identity, power, and ecology. The paper will investigate ecocritical themes in two modern retellings of the epic: Kunal Kaushal's *Women of Ramayan: The Untold Stories* and Anurag Chandra's *The Ramayana Secret*. This paper will look into how these narratives engage with issues of the environment and a complex relationship between humans and the natural world.

The theoretical frame used in this analysis is ecocriticism, which studies the relationship between literature and the environment. By using such a lens, it becomes easy to see how Kaushal and Chandra remake the ancient story of *the Ramayan* to foreground ecological concerns. For instance, the work of Kaushal reimagines the *women of the Ramayan*, showing their intrinsic connection with the environment. He establishes nature as a haven and strength for these women, an organism corresponding to their emotional topography. In the case of Sita, who, as an earth goddess, epitomizes the strength of the earth, this symbiosis is not only sacred but also empowering, expressing her power and earthy character. Kaushal thus emphasizes the symbiotic relationship between women and nature, presenting the environment as both companion and protector. This resounds into the themes of ecofeminism, which stands for the recognition of a parallel between the exploitation of nature and the subordination of women. Kaushal frames the story within this context, thus highlighting the need for respect and care in attitudes toward women and the environment alike as a critique of patriarchal exploitative attitudes.

On the other hand, *The Ramayana Secret*, by Chandra, offers an ecocritical view in a different way: that is, the ecological effects of divine interventions and human actions. By seeing how supernatural elements disturb the balance of nature, Chandra raises questions about the effects of unchecked ambition and technological progress. His narrative traces the effects of wars, deforestation, and the exploitation of resources as both divine and human characters pursue power. Chandra's approach highlights the individual and societal choice issues that can disturb nature in general, leading to pollution and loss. In so far as this text functions as a critique of today's environmental issues, industrialization, and modern forms of consumption, *The Ramayana Secret* underlines progress without losing the urge to maintain the environment.



Together, these works borrow The *Ramayan* as a context to deal with contemporary ecological issues, proving that the old epic has relevance in every times. The ancient *Ramayan* discusses duty, devotion, and valor; the newer telling speaks about stewardship, harmony, and sustainability. Kaushal and Chandra both call the reader to rethink the balance between humans and nature, showing that the old tale reveals much to combat the ecological issues of today. Finally, through an ecocritical interpretation of the *Ramayan*, Kaushal and Chandra add their voices to the ongoing literary endeavor to make room for cultural heritage in line with environmental consciousness. Both of their works will further this dialogue on sustainable coexistence, drawing on mythological pasts to inform the harmonious future that all human beings seek.

### Literature Review

Ecocriticism is one of the recent approaches taken in literary studies, emphasizing the relationship between literature and nature. This theoretical approach emphasizes how literature reflects, critiques, and shapes environmental values and ecological awareness. In the context of Indian mythology, the *Ramayan* has been retold through various interpretations over centuries. However, contemporary versions, such as Kunal Kaushal's *Women of Ramayan: The Untold Stories* and Anurag Chandra's *The Ramayana Secret*, bring new ecocritical perspectives to the surface while foregrounding environmental themes to ancient narratives. In his work, *Women of Ramayan*, Kaushal focuses on the symbiotic bond between women and nature as an ecofeminist theme. Using the characters, Sita for example, Kaushal shows that strength, resilience, and power are not far from nature; this, in a way, follows the argument put forward by ecofeminism regarding the relationship between the exploitation of nature and the subordination of women. His storyline negates the patriarchal ideologies, showing instead a perfect relationship with nature. In Chandra's *The Ramayana Secret*, however, he speaks against the consequences of the actions taken by the gods and humans in relation to their ecological balances. Chandra questions anthropocentric values and their negative implications for nature by investigating divine interventions and human ambition. The studies of South Asian epics, such as the *Ramayan*, have remained scarce in ecocriticism in mythology. Hence, this research bridges the gap by focusing on the significance of ecocritical analysis in Indian literary traditions and discussing how these modern retellings shed light on pressing contemporary environmental issues.

### Research Questions

1. In how do the ecocritical themes emerge in Kaushal's *Women of Ramayan* and Chandra's *The Ramayana Secret*?



2. How do the authors of *the Ramayan* update the old tale to make statements about current environmental concerns?
3. Reflecting which principles of ecologies, what views on relations between people and nature Kaushal sustains when he gives such picture of woman characters, like that presented in film *Fitoor*?
4. How does Chandra's story criticize anthropocentric action and its effects on environment viability?

### **Theoretical Framework**

As for the bases, the use of ecocritical and ecofeminist theories is utilized to explain in detail Kunal Kaushal's *Women of Ramayan: The Untold Stories* and Anurag Chandra's *The Ramayana Secret*. Ecocriticism essentially focuses on how the concept of literature can relate and interact with nature and form the principal framework that focuses on how both the author's use the idea behind environmental themes that relate through the narrative of the *Ramayan*. This study will discuss and analyze the nature depictions, human activities toward nature, and its larger connotations toward ecological balance and harmony through this perspective. Hence, it analyzes these concepts to understand how literature is capable of criticizing unsustainable activities and promoting environmental ethics.

Ecofeminism further offers an inter-sectional approach, connecting female oppression to the exploitation of the natural world. The feminine characters portrayed by Kaushal connect to his belief in the form of ecofeminism as his story does provide them with importance, concerning their relationship to nature, strength, and power. The framework explores the patriarchal power that doesn't just affect women but reflects the destruction of the natural world. By integrating ecofeminism, this work delves into how the respective works of Kaushal and Chandra critique hierarchies based on gender as well as environmental degradation, providing a double-slamméd critique resonating with the contemporary social ecological concerns.

This research combines ecocriticism and ecofeminism to deepen the interpretation of the retellings, bringing out how ancient texts, like *the Ramayan*, can be reinvented in order to address the problems that the modern world faces as regards how to care for the planet, ethics, and well-being in the human and natural worlds.

### **Methodology**

This research will be using the qualitative methodology with textual analysis being applied in the center for analysis of ecocritical concerns in Kunal Kaushal's *Women of Ramayan : The Untold Stories* and



Anurag Chandra's *The Ramayana Secret* to how these retellings reframe the *Ramayan* in terms of talking about environmental issues; by concentrating on the structures employed in narration, how people are represented as characters in the text, and a symbolic nature. This paper focuses on the manner in which Kaushal and Chandra make use of elements of ecological concerns where human actions, divine intervention, and environmental consequences are interrelated.

Close reading will be used as the dominant methodology by which the application of language, descriptions, and character interactions will indicate subtle ecocritical communications. Select passages will be dedicated to imagery, metaphors, and environmental symbolism based on the representations of women in Kaushal's work and the consequences of the actions of the gods in the Chandra storyline. The study will find patterns that reinforce ecocritical and ecofeminist themes, such as the interconnectedness of women and nature in Kaushal's text and the critique of anthropocentric values in Chandra's work.

This paper, in addition to secondary source research on ecocriticism and ecofeminism, will explore literature and theory regarding mythology that would help ground theories and put ecocriticism into its own relevant place in mythology and literature. Finally, comparative works on environmental issues in myths will be discussed in juxtaposition with traditional tales such as the *Ramayan* to contrast current analyses from past narratives to reflect an evolutionary awareness.

Such a methodology is taken to help throw light on the ecocritical importance of such modern adaptations and ponder ways in which they may serve to influence readers' ecological ethics, with a repeated emphasis on how literature is able to inspire a change of heart in regard to the relationship between humans and nature. The research is expected to contribute to scholarship in ecocriticism by offering new perspectives toward the reshaping of old narratives to face new, contemporary ecological challenges.

### **Ecocriticism in Contemporary Retellings of the *Ramayan***

Ecocriticism is the literary theory that explores how literature is related to the environment. It tries to find out how texts reflect and shape our views about nature. When applied to the *Ramayan*, ecocriticism studies characters' interactions with their environments to shed light on greater themes of ecological balance and disruption. In contemporary retellings, authors such as Kunal Kaushal and Anurag Chandra reappropriate the *Ramayan* in a manner that focuses on environmental concerns and brings the ancient epic closer to the modern ecological issues it should be.



In the context of *Women of Ramayana: The Untold Stories*, Kunal Kaushal connects female characters with the natural world. Kaushal gives nature as a source of empowerment for these women, particularly Sita, who symbolizes resilience and harmony with the environment. This representation resonates with the ideas of ecofeminism, which states that oppressed women and exploited nature are on the same side. Thus, Kaushal's story becomes a criticism of the patriarchal forces that oppress both, calling for an inclusive worldview that values and respects women and the natural world.

The reverse case is presented by Anurag Chandra's *The Ramayana Secret*, where it portrays the ecological effects of both divine and human activities while probing the cost of ambition and power on the environment. By narrating it his way, Chandra explains the consequence of natural disorder caused in the name of personal or social achievement that seems to be a condemnation of anthropocentric values. His book postulates the impact of the actions of the characters in the epic on the environment and reflects on the importance of retaining a balance with nature.

Together, these contemporary adaptations of the *Ramayana* add to the conversation on environmental ethics by demonstrating how ancient texts can be a source of insight into contemporary ecological issues. By reimagining the epic with an ecocritical focus, Kaushal and Chandra advocate for a more harmonious relationship with nature. Their works urge readers to rethink humanity's responsibility toward the environment, using the *Ramayana* as a framework for promoting sustainable and respectful interactions with the natural world.

### **Ecocriticism and Environmental Ethics in Literature**

Ecocriticism is a literary theory that looks into the interaction between literature and the environment. It was a response to growing concerns over the environment. Challenging the anthropocentric view, which puts human beings at the center of existence, ecocriticism presents a more holistic view of the world and promotes a balanced relationship between humans and nature. This angle is very insightful when applied to ancient texts like the *Ramayana* and its modern versions; it opens wide scope for the exploration of environmental ethics and implications of human actions for the natural world.

The *Ramayana* thus relies significantly on the natural environment. Descriptions of forests, rivers, mountains, and animals abound throughout the story, all crucial elements of the epic. Rather than merely being backgrounds for action, these features have the ability to modify the lives and experiences of characters in significant ways. It is precisely through focusing on such ecological features that modern writers such as Kunal Kaushal and Anurag Chandra recast the *Ramayana* so that the theme of



environmentalism assumes the central stage of their writing, enabling the readers to perceive a different relevance of the *Ramayana* to an enlightened, environmentally aware contemporary society.

Kaushal's *Women of Ramayana: The Untold Stories* underlines the interlinkages between female characters and nature, which it advocates for as a view that resonates with the ideals of ecofeminism, which ties the exploitation of nature with the subjugation of women. Chandra's *The Ramayana Secret*, on the other hand, is an exercise in probing the ecological cost of divine and human interventions into nature, questioning the costs of progress and power in a fragile environment. Through these interpretations, both authors critique modern, often exploitative attitudes toward the natural world.

Together, works by Kaushal and Chandra highlight how closely ecocriticism touches the reevaluation of older narratives, challenging the readers' minds to think how literary works can shape our ethos towards the environment. It reminds us of the ways of sustainable coexistence built on the wisdom of ages for a balanced future.

### **Kunal Kaushal's *Women of Ramayana: The Untold Stories*: Nature as a Reflection of the Inner Self**

In *Women of Ramayan: The Untold Stories*, Kunal Kaushal reconstructs lives for the women in *Ramayana*. He focuses intently on the connection that they appear to share with nature. With a connection to nature, for example, Kaushal creates stories that are power-laden, resilient and self-transformational. There is a sense in these stories that the very natural surroundings themselves embody power and provide images of the inner characters of these stories.

For example, Kaushal's Sita is a representation of her and her relationships with the earth. In the *Ramayana*, Sita is often depicted as a paragon of pureness and virtue, and the earth is integral to her life. In Kaushal's narration, the earth acts as a shelter and also mirrors Sita's emotions. The forest of Dandaka, where Sita spends her years of exile, becomes a space of transformation, where she draws strength from the natural world around her. The forest is not merely a backdrop for Sita's suffering but is integral to her character development. It is through her interaction with the forest that Sita finds solace, strength, and a deeper understanding of herself. This symbiotic relation with the environment is analogous with Sita and applies also to the other women characters in the text.

This makes the story that Kaushal has told, as related to this context, reflect a connection of the female characters toward nature in the *Ramayana*. Here, through it, they get empowerment and thus, in inner depth, demonstrate their strength. The best example of this might be the general way of degrading



Shurpanakha, but here different shades were given relating to the connection, showing that force within herself and those forces of the natural world, with which she was inclined. Focusing on the affinity of the female protagonists toward nature, Kaushal challenges the traditional patriarchal narration of the *Ramayana* that has often denied the role of women. He lets his readers know in his telling of the story that both the woman and nature were potent and rejuvenating power elements that needed to be talked about with the same attention and respect as given to the male protagonists of the epic.

This view is not far-fetched since it conforms to the argument of ecofeminism on the interconnected oppression of women and nature. Thus, Kaushal's work, in turn, makes known the themes of ecology within the *Ramayana* while advocating a more expansive understanding of inclusiveness regarding both women and the environment.

### **Anurag Chandra's *The Ramayana Secret: Divine Interventions and Ecological***

#### **Consequences**

*The Ramayana Secret*, by Anurag Chandra, is a very different retelling of the *Ramayana*: focusing on the ecological consequences of divine interventions and human actions. Through this retelling, Chandra raises critical questions regarding the impact of progress and development on the environment through the epic.

*The Ramayana Secret* is a narrative revolving around the aftermaths of god's actions in the human world, which Chandra speculates have untold ecological consequences that are not immediately observable. For instance, the Lanka bridge that Rama and his host build is an act in the tradition of divine engineering celebrated for its engineering but, in Chandra's telling, an act of disrupting the balance of nature in the ocean and its surroundings. Chandra's natural world in *The Ramayana Secret* is fragile and interconnected.

The environment is not a mere passive background for human and divine activities but plays the role of an active character in the drama with agency and effects. All this is told to include even the felling of trees for building the bridge, the disturbance caused to the sea creatures, and changing landscapes. This retelling by Chandra critiques the anthropocentric worldview often embedded in traditional narratives of the *Ramayana*. The assumption that human progress and divine will are good and necessary in themselves is here belied by the very high environmental cost of these factors. This perspective is relevant to current concerns about human impact on the environment, specifically large-scale development projects and their



ecological consequences. Chandra's work raises a number of issues on the ethics of what human and gods owe nature. *The Ramayana Secret* presents a scenario to its characters to face what has happened to them, enabling a realization that there will be no moving forward but by way of balance and sustainability. In this storyline, there is a progression not about conquest or conquest but the living in symbiosis with the environment.

### **Comparative Analysis: Critiquing Contemporary Environmental Challenges**

In terms of the structure of the *Ramayan*, both Kaushal and Chandra are critics of modern environmental challenges but in dissimilar ways. Kaushal emphasizes female characters' relationships with nature as being intertwined through empowerment and rebirth themes. Chandra employs the ecological effects of human and divine activities by critiquing the ethical implications of progress and development.

This narration by Kaushal has a kind of an ecofeminist critique whereby the oppression of women and exploitation of nature are tied together. The women are portrayed in the *Ramayan* as deeply connected to the nature and environment, so they are very strong and resilient in this respect. This approach will challenge the patriarchal old narratives that have long portrayed women's roles and participation as secondary, while proposing a more inclusive and just understanding of gender and the environment. In contrast, Chandra's work gives more critical attention to the relations between humans and nature through the destructive consequences of human progress and development.

This gives the impression that power and control, exercised by man or god, can bring about environmental degradation and a loss of balance. Chandra, in reviving the divine interventions of the *Ramayan* into events that have significant ecological repercussions, raises important questions on sustainability and the responsibility needed to develop in an ethical way. Together, these two works put forward a complete critique of today's environmental challenges, adopting the framework of the *Ramayan* to discuss at length and in detail complex and often fraught relationships with nature. The retellings by Kaushal and Chandra reveal the importance that must be given to assessing the environmental implications of an action and the need to achieve more harmonious interactions with nature.

### **Conclusion**

Kunal Kaushal's *Women of Ramayan: The Untold Stories* and Anurag Chandra's *The Ramayana Secret* discuss ecocritical dimensions of the *Ramayan* through the age-old epic to comment upon present



environmental issues that were burning in our minds. In the two books by different authors, the former use the mythological construct for driving home the elaborate, long-lasting bond formed between humans and their ecological milieu, which they pursue even in the ecological consequences of unchecked human ambition. Through their distinct stories, Kaushal and Chandra bring out new aspects of the *Ramayan* where nature is not a background but a living force shaping the moral and philosophical messages of the story.

Kaushal's work is on the connection between the female characters in the *Ramayan* and the natural world, which focuses on how the environment becomes a source of strength, solace, and resilience for them. This narrative fits well with the theme of ecofeminism, which points out that women and nature have both been oppressed and objectified in patriarchal societies. By relating the plight of his female characters to that of nature, Kaushal is able to recover their voices, implying that women's emancipation and the protection of the environment are two sides of the same coin. For instance, the figure of Sita who has been tied to earthy soil, epitomizes resistance and harmony with nature as the ecofeminist symbol of strength in the earthly bonding. In this regard, Kaushal's representation of the destructive powers of gender oppression and environmental exploitation is highly critical while proposing a more inclusive view that respects women and nature alike.

Chandra addresses the environmental theme by analyzing how religious actions and human decisions interfere with the environment. Such a story questions whether developing power and progress through nature is worth the price: ecological balance. Through this aspect of ecological costs, Chandra subverts the very anthropocentric nature usually seen in the *Ramayan*, suggesting that both human and divine aspirations have often neglected or disrupted the natural order. In such an approach, he describes the actions of characters by how they affect the ripples of the environment and indicates the need to account for the greater impact in any quest for personal or societal gain. This is especially true in the present world, where development has been pursued to such an extent that ecological well-being is ignored and is associated with deforestation, pollution, and biodiversity loss. Chandra's story calls for a reconsideration of humanity's dominion over nature and the balanced relationship that respects the earth's intrinsic value.

The two together tell a nuanced critique of modern environmental challenges In the form of retellings of the *Ramayan*, thus showing how old stories might be reinterpreted to raise new ecological concerns. So, by reframing this epic through an ecocritical lens, they contribute to an evolving discourse about the ethics of the environment and the role of literature in forming human attitudes toward nature. Such works remind us to rethink our relationship with nature in light of global ecological crises. The retellings by



Kaushal and Chandra also talk about a holistic understanding of the interconnectedness of all life forms and inspire the reader to envision ancient wisdom as a guiding force to build a harmonious, sustainable future. Their stories thus serve cultural critique purposes as well as ecological commentary as they call for a shift toward responsible consciousness with nature.

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