



EXPLORING MYTHOLOGICAL CHARACTERS IN THE WORKS OF KAVITA KANE:

A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how mythical figures are portrayed from a feminist perspective in Kavita Kane's literary works. Famous for her female-perspective retellings of Indian mythology, Kavita Kane provides a distinctive lens through which to examine how women are portrayed and given agency in historical accounts. Examining Kane's books like "Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen" and "Lanka's Princess," this research explores how she transforms typical mythical characters—often portrayed in supporting roles—into strong, independent female leads. This study examines the issues of gender, power relations, and agency in Kane's retelling of mythical stories using feminist literary theory. The objective of this research is to provide light on Kane's contribution to feminist discourse in the context of Indian mythology by critically examining the characters and storylines she presents. The results of this study should deepen academic knowledge of how modern writers employ mythical themes to subvert gender stereotypes and elevate female voices in literature.

Keywords: *Kavita Kane , Mythological characters , Feminist perspective , Gender representation , Indian mythology*

INTRODUCTION

Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen is a novel that retells the Mahabharata, which is a well-known Indian epic. It is written from Uruvi's (Karna's wife in the epic) point of view, with an emphasis on her ideas, conversations, and actions. She has provided Uruvi with a strong sense of femininity and a humanistic viewpoint, expressing her unbiased opinions and choosing bold decisions in a society where males dominant. Despite the fact that Kane conceived Uruvi, she has presented the character

with these qualities. Because of her adorable appearance, she was able to deceitfully conceal her keen intellect behind her little size. However, many people found her blithe confidence and dogged resolve to be appealing. Unfortunately, few people understood her. In addition, Kane draws attention to the subjection of other epic figures, including as Kunti, Draupadi, Vrushali, and Karna, depending on their castes and genders. Kane has shown how Uruvi takes a stand against the inequalities that exist in society.

Although it is fruitless to compare the social mores of the two times, these epic stories have the potential to serve as a huge canvas on which to shine light on a number of circumstances that are occurring in the present day. Numerous pieces of evidence demonstrate that women's roles have become less important in both the household and in society as a whole. It is particularly the female characters in these writings that fell victim to patriarchy, which reduced them to images of conventionality that are so mind-bogglingly archaic that they are almost unrecognizable. Despite the fact that their individual stories are compelling, the female characters in our mythology have gotten a very little amount of attention. The interview for "Sharing Stories"

Various Mahabharata Versions of Uruvi

According to the Stri Parva of the Mahabharata account of Vedvyasa, Karna is stated as having been married to Padmavati. Vrishasena and Sushena are the names of the couple's firstborn children. Karna reveals to Lord Krishna in the Udyoga Parva of the Mahabharata that he has never married outside of his tribe, and that he has never wedded a Kshatriya. He also reveals that he is dedicated to his foster parents, the Adhiratha, who were a clan that was originally considered to be backward. "When also I reached youth, I married wives in accordance with his [Adhiratha] selections," says Karna in his declaration. O Janardana, it is through them that my sons and grandchildren have been born with me. As stated in the Ganguli, Section CXLI, "all the ties of love and attachment, including my heart, are riveted on them, O Krishna." There is no mention of Uruvi being one of Karna's wives in the Ved Vyas version of the Mahabharata, which contains the classical version. In the Vyasa Mahabharata, Karna's wife is Padmavati, who is also the mother of Vrishasena and Sushena, two of Karna's sons who are among the most famous in the world.

On the other hand, in another well-known epic written by Bhasa, Karnabharam, which is claimed to have been written in the sixth century BCE, Uruvi is mentioned as Karna's second wife, while Vrushali is referred to as his first wife. In Pukalentippulavar's drama Karna Moksham, which was written in Tamil around two thousand years ago, Ponnuruvi plays the role of Karna's wife. It is shown that she is a Kshatriya princess who holds Karna in contempt due to the fact that he belongs

to a lower caste. The fact that Karna is from a Kshatriya caste, on the other hand, causes her perspective on him to shift. Karna is advised by her to depart from Duryodhana and provide assistance to the Pandavas.

According to the Marathi novels that are based on Karna's life, such as *Radheya* by Ranjit Desai and *Mritunjaya: The Death Conquer* by Shivaji Sawant, Karna is claimed to have had two wives, Vrushali and Supriya.

Throughout the course of *Kavita Kane, Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen*, Uruvi is shown in a great deal of detail. She is not Kane's original creation; rather, it seems that she was derived from those earlier interpretations of the Mahabharata, as can be seen in the preceding sentence. According to Kane, "Uruvi is fictitious, derived from a Tamil folk lore," as was said in the interview with S. Chakrabarty (2020). Her parents, King Vahusha and Queen Shubra, are said to have been her parents, and she is also known as the Kshatriya princess of Pukeya. As a result of falling in love with Karna, a Sutaputra, Uruvi makes the decision to marry Karna in the Swayamwar. The pursuit of equality for all individuals and the combating of systemic inequities are her goals. Kane makes a mention to Karna's wives, including Uruvi, in a subsequent conversation with Wagle when he discusses the topic. The character of Uruvi is a work of fiction, as she points out. I needed to create her in order to provide evidence for my views and assertions. In contrast to the current impression of him, Karna was married and the father of eight sons. This is in contrast to the perception that prevails now. The character Vrushali, who plays a key role in my book, was one of his many wives. It has been said that there are further ones, such as Supriya, Prabhavati, and Ponnaruvi. After reading and rereading all of the Mahabharata scriptures, I came to the realization that Karna's family and personal life are still among the most ignored portions of the epic drama. This is because the scriptures contain very little information about any of them.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study on Various Mahabharata Versions of Uruvi
2. To study on Lanka's Princess feminist revisionist

Following the realization that Guru Dronacharya has a preference for Arjuna, Uruvi poses the question, "What dharma does Dronacharya talk of?" to the Guru. Some people may get the impression that he is committed to the Kuru country; nevertheless, has he truly been fair to everybody, with the exception of Arjuna? On page 75 of *Karna's Wife*. Dronacharya did not accept Eklavya, the tribal king, and Karna, the Sut-putra, as pupils. Both of these individuals were considered to be great adversaries of Arjuna. Uruvi continues by saying, "Eklavya was not only

disregarded but also mercilessly abandoned, much like Karna, in order to ensure that Arjuna would feel secure and be successful! Is it the dharma of a teacher? It is 75. She raises her voice and asks how a person has the ability to teach honesty and humility to his students if he is not himself, as well as how a partial person can be a perfect Guru. Throughout the whole of the novel, Uruvi plays a number of different roles, including that of a daughter, wife, strong lady, devoted queen, and many more beside her. As a result of Uruvi's unwavering devotion to Karna, she is capable of exploding in wrath at anybody who treats her poorly. "Are you going to get angry and abusive with all the people who have behaved me badly with me?" During one of the moments, Karna questioned her. When Uruvi was asked about it, he immediately said, "Yes, I will!" If someone were to hurt you, I would not tolerate it.

Within this context, Uruvi is analogous to the contemporary woman in society. However, she confronts patriarchal norms and disobeys the warped conventional rules of society, all while sticking to the traditions and practices that are associated with Indian culture. In light of this, she presents herself as a symbol of the force that is capable of striking a balance between modernity and tradition, or the old and the new.

Uruvi's willingness to speak out against territorial imperialism and brutality demonstrates the brave humanity that she has. During the Rajasuyayajna, which is a kind of fire worship performed by the royal family, Yudhishtira leads a discussion in which she makes a sharp question to both Lord Krishna and Karna on war and martyrdom. She asks, "Why should a king not be pleased with controlling his realm and making it a peaceful, wealthy state?" In the event if every monarch had this frame of mind, there would be no conflicts, disagreements, or random encounters. Karna's Wife may be found on page 101. The question that she poses to her father, who is a Kshatriya princess, is as follows: "How can you feel so victorious when you have injured and killed so many people?" "Insatiability, egotism, or self-importance" are the three things that motivate you to engage in warfare. She states that she is a supporter of riches and peace, and she envisions a state that is free of violence in its whole. Her convictions are strong, and she is of the opinion that ideas such as the "Kshatriya code of life" and the valor of martyrs are entirely devoid of any significance. According to Uruvi, the entire war-mongering activity could only generate dread (G. Beena, 2017, p. 171). "I have lived with it all through childhood, tortured by constant worry, and I have seen my mother do the same, as well as my grandmother before her," Uruvi confesses to Lord Krishna. Getting a war started is easy, but putting an end to it is beyond your power since wars almost always have terrible outcomes.

Humanity is more important to Uruvi than caste, that much is clear. Those who have been harmed in war are the recipients of her compassion and sympathetic understanding. Attempting to heal them is the primary focus of the majority of her time. Karna experiences the battlefield as a source of pride, but Uruvi views it as a place where he must fulfill his duties. It is true that Karna and Uruvi are each outstanding in their own way. In contrast to Karna, Uruvi was a healer, whereas Karna did battle. In their minds, the battlefield was a representation of two other worlds, each of which had contrasting meanings. From Karna's perspective, it was a priceless location to fight for honor and the truth, in contrast to Uruvi's perception of it as a wasteland where the wounded and the dead fell.

Uruvi is dedicated to the betterment of mankind via the use of her healing art, which she is very enthusiastic about. Both her perspective on battle and her desire to assist others are manifestations of the kind and sensitive nature that she has as a woman. In her assertion that "feminism is all about human rights at its most basic and fundamental level," Lakshmi Kannan chooses Uruvi as a symbol to represent the feminist movement.

Her Freeing Position Against Patriarchy

Not only does patriarchy oppress women, but it also oppresses other disadvantaged groups as a system. The journey that Uruvi takes is a metaphor for the spirit of rebellion in this way. G. Beena (page 168) in the year 2017. Her marriage to Karna, a suta-putra (a member of a lower social class), is evidence of Uruvi's feminist resistance to patriarchy. Karna is a member of their social class. Her decision is being questioned by everyone due to the patriarchal attitude of her parents and the caste system that exists inside the Hindu civilization.

Uma Chakravathy, in her study titled "Conceptualizing Brahminical Patriarchy in Early India," highlights the ways in which the rigid caste system exerts control over women's sexuality and influence over them. When women were married to people of the same caste, as well as when they were married to people of higher castes and lower castes, their libido was often restricted. It is imperative that women be protected from harm because, as stated by Chakravathy, "the lower caste male whose sexuality is a threat to upper caste purity must be institutionally prevented from having sexual access to women of higher castes." This means that women must be properly protected. (From page 579 of 1993). Kevin McGrath, in his book "Stri: Women in Epic Mahabharata," addresses a pratiloma marriage, which is a marriage between a woman from a higher varna and a man from a lower varna. The couple in question belonged to a varna that was far lower.

According to Jayanti Alam, the author, "Yudhishtira was no less censored for 'selling' his wife in the gamble because women in the Mahabharata enjoyed quite a bit of freedom of thought and expression, though their activities were confined to the 'andarmahal' ladies' section of the palace; perhaps, more or less, the same moral standards were applicable to men and women."

As the protagonist of *Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen*, Uruvi is portrayed by Kane as a courageous, courageous, and outspoken princess. On her own, she is a beautiful and intelligent lady who lives her life on her own terms. She has the ability to speak out against the atrocities that are committed by the patriarchal culture. Therefore, she has given a new meaning to the concept of femininity. Kane's introduction states that Uruvi is a vibrant daughter who has a short fuse for anger and inherited both her father's sharp brain and her mother's stunning beauty. Uruvi is also said to have inherited both of these qualities. All of the people were left with a lasting impression due to the vibrant personality and natural compassion of the little princess. The most severe of the royal patriarchs, Bhishma Pitamaha, would never really consider sitting her on his lap. He would never even consider the possibility.

Lanka's Princess feminist revision

In traditional mythology, Surpanaka is portrayed as a wicked and crafty woman who is devoid of morals and engages in behaviors that are considered to be immoral. It is also common practice to depict the female demons in a negative light. In the narrative written by Valmiki, Surpanakha is shown as being very repulsive, with a pot belly and big breasts. In addition to having a terrible odor, she has an insatiable appetite for human flesh and a lack of what is regarded to be "womanly" modesty. In order to stress the dichotomous nature of the relationship between Sita and Surpanakha, the majority of mainstream writers have portrayed Surpanakha as a black, ugly, and fat demon. This is in contrast to Sita, who is described as being pale and beautiful. The contrast between the noble hero Rama and the villainous heroine Surpanakha in Valmiki's work is remarkable. According to Bibek Debroy's *Valmiki Ramayana*, the following assertions made by Valmiki about Surpanaka and Rama are translated:

The person with the enormous belly confronted the person with the small waist, the person with the deformed eyes confronted the person with the large eyes, the person with the copper-colored hair confronted the person with the handsome form, the person with the ugly form confronted the person with the handsome form, the person with the horrible voice confronted the person with the pleasant voice, the person with the hideous and ugly form confronted the young person, the person with the harsh speech confronted the person with the sweet speech, the person with the extremely wicked

behavior confronted the person with the excellent behavior, and the person with the extremely wicked behavior confronted the person with the excellent behavior. The reader is given the impression that she is a dishonest woman whose physical appearance is representative of the mental depravity that she has.

Surpanaka face challenges in their life for providing stability

The novel Princess Kane in Lanka highlights the fact that a female child may feel unwanted in her own home, especially if the family is financially disadvantaged. The issue of females living in Indian homes is addressed in a roundabout way throughout the novel. It centers on a man who is responsible for providing stability for his family, yet he considers a girl to be a burden. The book explores the challenges that a young woman may face in her life when she is subjected to tyranny from the outside world in addition to being rejected and neglected by her own family.

A daughter was born to the Asura princess Kaikesi and the wise Vishravas from their union. The three brothers who are her elder siblings are Ravana, Kumbhakarna, and Vibhisan. She is the youngest of the four siblings. The very first line of the piece of literature draws attention to the humiliations that the little girl would go through. This is what Kane had to say: "It's a girl!" When she saw that it was a girl and not a boy, her heart sank, and her dreams sank along with it, causing her to experience a wave of grief and easy tears (LP 1). Kaikesi was dissatisfied with the outcome of her delivery. To this day, only a small percentage of readers are aware that Meenakshi was her birth name. All readers, whatever of age, will refer to her as Surpanakha, the one who is reviled.

In her essay titled "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision" (18), Adrienne Rich addresses a number of issues, including but not limited to the following: "How we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has both trapped and liberated us; and how we can begin to see-and therefore live-afresh." Feminist revisionists are novelists who take up the cause of studying, elaborating, and expanding upon the position of women. They define themselves as feminist revisionists. The novel Lanka's Princess, written by Kane, is an example of a feminist revisionist piece of literature.

It was necessary for Kaikesi, the mother of Surpanaka, to have other sons in order to achieve her unmet desire of regaining the lost kingdom of Lanka, which had been ruled by her father in the past. Kuber, the son of Rishi Vishvaras, was installed as the new ruler by Lord Vishnu after her father was convinced to step down from his position as monarch. Kaikesi had skillfully made arrangements to marry the credulous Rishi Vishvaras, who would later fall completely in love with her and reject

her true intentions for marrying him. The mother of Kaikesi, Taraka, and the father of Kaikesi, Sumali, had the intention of arranging for their daughter to meet and mate with Rishi Vishvaras. Rishi, who was already married to Ilavida and the father of Kuber, separated from his family and married Kaikesi, much to the dismay of everyone around him. Additionally to the three boys that she already had, Kaikesi needed other sons in order to be able to rule over the three worlds and the golden city of Lanka.

Kaikeshi remembers the following: "That is why I married Vishvaras so that I could beget the best progeny, the most powerful and most wise to win back what we have lost" (LP number two). The advent of a daughter, however, alleviated her feelings of disappointment. When she gazed at her daughter, she couldn't help but feel hatred, and she thought to herself, "This girl-child has cheated me out of my plans" (LP 2). "She doesn't really look like me or lovely," she said, criticizing her looks. Her disillusionment was so profound that she could not help but make comments that were contemptuous about her appearance. It's true that she is a terrible person! (The second LP). An unsightly and unwelcome child was the target of the scenario that was set for him.

Issue of gender bias

In his book titled "The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian Culture, History, and Identity," Amartya Sen makes the following statement in reference to the issue of gender bias inside the family: "This is one area in which these interdependencies are particularly strong and blatant concerns between women and men within the household." A good place to begin if we want to have a more in-depth knowledge of the process is to consider the fact that men and women have interests that are both similar and different that have an effect on family life (240).

With regard to Lanka's Princess, another girl, an individual, was exposed to prejudice and excluded from her life path due to the fact that her look and skin tone were different from those of other girls. It is possible that a newborn child who is insulted by her mother and told that she is "ugly" may continue to experience feelings of rejection and humiliation throughout her whole life. It is up to her to decide whether she will fight the outside world or accept her shame. When it came to Surpanaka, she came dangerously close to using her nails as weapons. Her nails were abnormally long and curved, almost like claws, despite the fact that her eyes were wide and honeyed, like two golden drops glittering against her dark skin. Her eyes were like honeyed droplets. It was a sad and lovely birth for her. Vishvaras had given her the name Meenakshi as she had eyes that were as graceful and brilliant as those of a fish. As she grew older, however, she wanted to be referred to by the moniker "Surpankha," which literally translates to "woman with sharp nails." Her own family

had a strong aversion to Meenakshi. It was important to her that she protect herself from the hostility of her family. Due to the fact that she became so vile, her own family portrayed her as a monstrous person. As a result, she would have preferred to take the name Surpanakha rather than Meenakshi. In the article titled "The Power of Man-Made Language in the Construction of Gender," written by Nazlipinar Subasi, it is said that there is no biological explanation for the reasons why guys should behave boisterously and ladies should behave coquettishly. Further, there is no biological explanation for why women should wear cosmetics and men should not. According to Anne Fausto-Sterling's summary, the gender norms of a culture have a significant impact on the person's ability to determine if they are a man or a woman from that society. It is not science that is responsible for its definition; rather, it is a male-centered view on gender .

The fact that Surpanakha was a female growing up with three elder brothers meant that she was often ignored. Her mother had a preference for Ravana, while her father had a preference for Vibhishan. Only her middle brother Kumbhakarna was able to comfort her during this difficult time. Both Ravana and Vibhishan seemed to be trapped in their own world of self-indulgence for all of eternity. In order to recapture the kingdom that had been once held by his grandfather Sumali, the former king of Lanka, Ravana had to acquire the skills necessary to become a powerful warrior. In addition to becoming an accomplished weaponsmith, he studied the four Vedas and the six Shastras, and he set out to fulfill the long-lost dream of his mother. In addition, Ravana had a natural passion for politics and music, which Sumali said was a characteristic of Asura blood. Ravana was held in high esteem by both Sumali and Kaikesi, who saw him as the rightful Asura heir to the throne of Lanka. As a result of Vibhishan's outstanding competence in the Vedas and Shastras, his father took great delight in him. In the same way that his father, who was a rishi, was intensely engaged in acquiring wisdom and knowledge, he was as well. As Kaikesi and Vishvaras argued about who they liked more, Ravan or Vibhishan, they paid little attention to Surpanakha, their youngest child, or to the joy that she was experiencing.

Once upon a time, Surpanakha came upon her cherished lamb, Maya, lying lifeless in a pool of blood with her neck twisted and her pink tongue sticking out to the side. It came as a shock to her when she learned that Ravana had killed her pet, and she was emotionally distraught by the news. Surpanakha's grief gradually transformed into resentment and resentment against her brother. This, however, was a gradual process. In an unexpected move, she pounced on Ravan and buried her claws into the sensitive place on his neck, shredding the skin and exposing the flesh underneath. While he was seriously bleeding, Ravana yelled out in a fit of fury and misery, "You hideous wretch...The person that Surpanakha is...a witch with long, pointed claws" (LP 8). Having the

audacity to criticize her elder brother, her mother even reprimanded her for her inappropriate behavior. Furthermore, she referred to her as a monster stating, "Surpankha, that's the right name for you." This was in response to the fact that she did not behave like a girl but rather engaged in fights. She cried out in a mixture of sadness and hate, "Yes, I am a monster." She was so disillusioned to hear her mother openly supporting Ravana and saying such things that she was unable to contain her anger. She said with a look of evident satisfaction that she did not mind being called Surpanakha, the one with the sharp nails, given that those nails were able to protect her from harm. A giantess, guided by her imagination, made her way to his little house in the woods. Suparnaka, the fierce one,... she of the past Surpanaka, the mother bone of the ten-necked tyrant, was written by Valmiki and included in the Ramayana (1250).

The figure of Shurpanaka, who appears throughout the novel written by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, is a representation of the concept that people are, at their essence, good. He continues by saying, "But the evils of society corrupt this natural innocence" (1). In light of the fact that she was abused and uninformed when she was a child, Shurpanaka is demanding justice. As a kind of retribution for the murders of her husband and kid, she undergoes a transformation that culminates in her becoming a demon and transforming from the beautiful-eyed Meenakshi into the long-nailed Shurpanaka.

In order to rectify patriarchal notions of feminine identity, female writers like Sarah Joseph use the feminist revisionist mythmaking component and put female characters to the forefront of the narrative. While simultaneously opposing gender preconceptions, this facet contributes to the further development of gender consciousness. Through the use of the revisionist framework, the misogyny that is embedded in the legendary tales is brought to light. "The subversion of the dominant ideology's hidden male bias is the motivating force behind women writers' revisionist myths," Alicia Ostriker writes in her article "Stealing the Language" (214). Ostriker makes this assertion in reference to the revisionist literature of women writers. For the purpose of reframing what it means to be feminine, Alicia Ostriker suggests that revisionist mythmaking is an effective strategy: "This dimension of feminism reconstructs the images of women who have historically and collectively suffered."

CONCLUSION

In her first book, *Karna's Wife*, Kavita Kane depicts the emergence of a more assertive, free-spirited, and verbally expressive woman in the character of Uruvi. Uruvi is seen as a strong young woman who isn't afraid to stand up for what she needs. She understands that marrying Karna, who belongs to a lower caste and is a social outcast, would permanently alter her life, but she is content to make this decision and she keeps to it. Uruvi was a beloved princess who was skilled in painting, riding

horses, and medicine, but her life altered once she married Karna. Uruvi's attempts to fit in with the other family members, her support of Karna through difficult times, her attempts to steer Karna toward dharma, and her choice to depart for Pukeya upon realizing Karna's involvement in Draupadi's disrobing speak volumes about the deeply ingrained prejudices against women in Indian society today. The figure of Shurpanaka, who appears throughout the novel written by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, is a representation of the concept that people are, at their essence, good. He continues by saying, "But the evils of society corrupt this natural innocence" . In light of the fact that she was abused and uninformed when she was a child, Shurpanaka is demanding justice. Kane has made an attempt to portray them as women who are self-reliant, revolutionary, and have a strong will. These women live lives of their own choice and face repercussions for being loud. As a result of the fact that all of the epics and myths were written by men, they portray women as creatures of lower quality. Now more than ever, feminist revisionist mythmakers are under the impression that they are forced to narrate the history of women in a way that they "have never been heard" and to portray them as heroes.

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