

## KARNA'S WIFE: A RECONSTRUCTION OF A SUBALTERN SAGA THROUGH THE MYTHOLOGICAL CHARACTER OF URUVI

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### Abstract:

A myth, like a history unfolds the past for the sake of the present, is thoroughly rooted and embedded in our psyche and behavior both in the visible and invisible forms which are easily perceivable in our culture, traditions, religion etc. It is so much recurrent that we have internalized some of the myths of the Hindu tradition within our lives like the myth of caste and creed. Further, its existence can be noted down in the form of the plethora of writings. While emerging trends of writing, reading, and reception are reconstructing and reintroducing the images of women in our literary and non-literary world. These writers are embossing their footprint on the sands of literary creation as they

have enlivened their characters in the light of theories of Jacques Derrida, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Adrienne Rich. Some of the writers from this genre of writings are Amish Tripathi's Sita: Warrior of Mithila, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's The Palace of Illusions: A Novel, Mahasweta Devi's Draupadi Pratibha Ray's Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi. One such revolutionary writer is Kavita Kane, who has grabbed the attention of the readers' through the selection and description of her women characters. Kane's literary career is introduced by her epoch-making novel Karna's Wife: The Outcaste's Queen. She has decided to renovate the very tradition of writing by the reconstruction of the mythological characters, and consequently, she has validated her argument through the systematic study of the different characters of the Mahabharata that is also in an unconventional way. Her character Uruvi is firm at her decision, and she asserts her identity unabashedly. In the last chapter, Kane defiantly points out the six reasons behind the demise of legendary hero Karna. She outlines the deadliest causes behind the death of Karna who has faced many deaths before his mortal end. In fact, he had faced the pangs of death in every second of his life at the altar of social custom and traditions. The second one is the three curses of the angry Brahmin, Guru Parshurama's curse of Forgetfulness at the crucial and the most urgent moment of Karna's life.

Keywords: A myth, Hindu tradition, Mahabharata,.etc

A myth, like a history unfolds the past for the sake of the present, is thoroughly rooted and embedded in our psyche and behavior both in the visible and invisible forms which are easily perceivable in our culture, traditions, religion etc. It is so much recurrent that we have internalized some of the myths of the Hindu tradition within our lives like the myth of caste and creed. These myths have grabbed a dominant place and position in our Indian society to the verge of establishing pseudo-identity, but an inseparable entity in our social, cultural and political practices. However, the myths had their own saga and significance in our society, as myths had the glorious and rich heritage of their dissemination. Since they were implanted on some sound grounds, not in a vacuum. Although the origin of myth isn't substantiated, it is documented in our traditional writing. The Mahabharata, the Ramayana. Initially, it was preserved in form of our oral narratives, and later on, it is documented by numerous litterateurs from the various realms of literature. But myths are purposive by their nature, and they are heavily loaded with some central and essential motives of human society, religion, and culture. As some of the fictional characters of the Hindu mythology are signifying the stereotypical forces of our society. These mythological figures are foregrounding the ideologies of our society. In fact, they are one of the dominant sources of the construction, deconstruction, and percolation of the prevalent socio-political ideologies in our society, which have culminated in the multiple and divergent views among the critics and scholars regarding myths. Kavita Kane is one such writer who has created her individual style of composition and of reconstruction of mythological characters.

The myth is a charismatic device for her to rejuvenate the marginalized characters of society and to paint them in the light of individuality. **Keywords:** Myth, Stereotypical, Traditional, Visible, and Ideology. For further clarification, here the words of Lillian Feder are worth citing:

While in "Myth, Fiction, and displacement", Northrop Frye has concluded that myth proves itself even "larger in power than humanity" (360).

Objectives of the Paper

- To subvert the stereotypical presentation of the characters and to invest them with fresh meaning.
- To bust the earlier version of the monolithic saga and to re-narrate the Mahabharata from the perspective of the marginalized characters.
- To contemporize the sub-texts in the shade of our modern culture and tradition to establish a counter-discourse to the dominant version of the myth.

The myth is one of the fundamental forces behind the production and propagation of stereotypical images in our society. Patriarchy had, therefore, consolidated its position in the society by the mythical character of Savitri and Sita. However, it is primordial but profoundly captivated in the psyche of the Indian people even today, where common masses in general and women, in particular, do believe in the characters like Savitri, Sita, and Kuntietc. Indian

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women observe fast and celebrate the festivals like Vat Savitri Pooja for the longevity of their husbands' lives while the occult figure of Sita has gained a strong hold on the psyche and behavior of Indian Hindu women.

Further, its existence can be noted down in the form of the plethora of writings. While emerging trends of writing, reading, and reception are reconstructing and reintroducing the images of women in our literary and non-literary world. Feminist writers Urmi Chanda-Voz states: Neither feminism nor mythology is a modern construct. In fact, a famous ancient verse brings together quite a fiery bunch...the five "maidens" from the Indian epics: Ahalya Draupadi Kunti TaraMandodari tatha/ Panchakanya smaranityam mahapataka nashaka.

Inevitably, myths are so much infused in our lives that often times it becomes difficult for us to discriminate between the real and the fabricated characters of our social construction. Modern trends of writing stimulate some writers to adhere to the path-breaking theories of literature, to cut through the politics of representation and reception of the mythological characters in our society. As some of the characters are being castigated by predetermined frames and formations of the literary representation. Conversely, some of the pioneer writers of the 21st century have chosen the mythological characters as a literary device to dismantle the preconceived notion related to the presentation of these characters. Their writings are registering their dissent against the traditional form of reading where readers remain at the passive end.

These writers are embossing their footprint on the sands of literary creation as they have enlivened their characters in the light of theories of Jacques Derrida, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Adrienne Rich. Some of the writers from this genre of writings are Amish Tripathi's Sita: Warrior of Mithila, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's The Palace of Illusions: A Novel, Mahasweta Devi's Draupadi Pratibha Ray's Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi. One such revolutionary writer is Kavita Kane, who has grabbed the attention of the readers' through the selection and description of her women characters.

Kane was born on 5 August 1966, and she belonged to Mumbai. She had enriched her personality with avid and extensive experiences of her life which were accumulated by her excursion in the different parts of India. Her experiences had cast their seminal spell on her psyche and writing. Her career in journalism has inculcated the spirit of inquisitiveness in her writing, and at present, she is a celebrated film and theatre aficionado. Her works are an index to the matter and the manner of her writing as she has inaugurated a literary debate-the

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peripheral and marginalized characters of our legends. The main crux of her writing is relegated mythological women characters e.g. outcast woman character (Uruvi), marginalized woman character (Urmila), Woman's body and sexuality as a site of multiple politics (Menaka) and branded woman character who is punished for voicing her sexual desire and for her race (Surpanakha). In fact, she has echoed the pangs and agony of a particular section of our society who are subjugated and tormented in the name of Indian culture and tradition. Her writing is an endeavor to construct a literary and non-literary space in our society.

#### Dismantling the Myth of Myth Creation

Kane's literary career is introduced by her epoch-making novel *Karna's Wife: The Outcaste's Queen*. She has decided to renovate the very tradition of writing by the reconstruction of the mythological characters, and consequently, she has validated her argument through the systematic study of the different characters of the Mahabharata that is also in an unconventional way. Her character Uruvi is firm at her decision, and she asserts her identity unabashedly. She is an independent lady who does fight for her love, Karna, and creates a space for herself at personal and impersonal level. But at the same time, she is not ready to sacrifice her own principles on the altar of her society. Instead of presenting her as a goddess, Kane has dragged her to the level of humanity, and thus makes Uruvi more practical and logical like one of us. The eponymous character of Uruvi has provided ample scope to contemporize the saga of Karna and of the marginalized sections who are at the dagger's end of our society even today. In this context, Adrienne Rich has rightly observed that "It is an act of survival" (18)

Kane has invested twofold purposes to the vogue of myth writing; on the one hand she is exploring and investing immense power in the character of Uruvi, and on the other hand, she is untangling the knotted life of Karna before the readers. In the novel, Uruvi is commenting on the vital and crucial issues related to the life of Karna while the other characters are narrating the saga of Uruvi. The novel is providing a platform to those who are subsided on the fringe of the narration and reception, and they are mounting some questions before us which need to be answered as they are no longer remain in the state of inertia. In fact, Uruvi is the mouthpiece of the author and reader as she is divulging the dormant and unanswered question of our readers. In the novel, innermost desires and complications of the mythological characters of the Mahabharata are inundated. They had faced the same sort of dilemma during the course of the action; Bhanumati and Uruvi were courting on the behalf of Gandhari and Draupadi who had suppressed their anger and resentment in the recess of their heart against her own kith and kin.

### A Heroine with Heroic Deed

The novel is the recital of Uruvi, and other characters in her life are like a window to the heart and character of Uruvi. She is a single daughter of the sixth king of Pukeya, Vahusha and queen Shubra. In legacy, she has inherited the quality of intelligence, resilience, adorable candor and beauty. Although she is born with a silver spoon, she possesses a spark in her character. The initial chapters of the novel unveil the unconventional, but the vibrant character of Uruvi, who is described as a girl of scientific temperament. Kane states, "While girls of her age were groomed to become dainty princesses, Princesses Uruvi saddled her horse each morning to ride to the gurukul where she spent the day immersed in the world of medicinal herbs and other remedies"(15). For her father, she is a strong opponent of war and "there were moments she hated being a Kshatriya princess too"(16).

The story of the novel is a corpus of thoughts and contemplation of Uruvi; how did she intensely in love with Karna, and how he had become the source of happiness and inspiration in her life. Karna's life, his interrogations, his search of identity, aspiration, and thought are unlocked before us through the fascia of his wife. She is presented before us in her divine attire, but soon she becomes a character of flesh and blood; she confesses that Vrushali and Draupadi are such ladies who do invoke the sense of worthlessness in the heart of Uruvi. In her divinity, there is a coating of humanity. She is different from her counterparts; Draupadi and Vrushali at the discretion of her own.

In the novel, Uruvi expresses to her father, "You told me to look into the mirror each morning and be proud of myself, to do nothing that I would be ashamed of.. She not only convinces her father but also asserts that Karna is not "the wrong man" but "the wronged man". She further consolidates her point and states, "A good man trapped in a bad situation" (18). After her marriage, she faces the social segregation of her kith and kin like a lioness.

At the starting point of her conjugal life, Karna was a bit apprehensive about Uruvi's selection, but she convinces him very diligently. Shatruntapa, the younger brother of Karna, furiously opposes the inclusion of Uruvi in his family, and he declares: "she's a Kshatriya princess, a stranger, an outsider who will never be able to mingle with us" (45). Her deeds and actions do melt the ice which has frozen the heart of Karna's family members.

Although Uruvi loves Karna wholeheartedly, she isn't blind in her love, which leads her to leave Karna for his misbehavior towards Draupadi in the royal court. She frowned at Karna for insulting a woman and made him recognize that "It wasn't Draupadi whom Dushasana was stripping but You!...not Draupadi"(119).

### Reconstructing Muted Characters of the Mahabharata

Kane has highlighted the marginalized characters of the Mahabharata e.g. the pent-up desires, grief, and agony of Ashwatthama, Bhishma, Draupadi, Duryodhana, and Kunti. Their



hidden emotions are divulged through the conversations of Uruvi. At times the expressions of the characters turn out to be the manifestation of the readers' dilemma and doubt which do ebb and flow in our mind during the reading of the novel. For example, the characters of Ashwatthama and Duryodhana are presented in the shade of Machiavellian and Byronic heroes who have inculcated negative traits because of unfulfilled desires of their own. Uruvi states:

Ashwatthama's parents loved him exceedingly, yet he was ignored by others for no fault of his own, and he had no friend to boast of except Karna, who was an outcast himself. Perhaps that was why they emphasized with each other so well (70).

"While Duryodhana was doomed before he was born...he was born a child of hatred and lives to hate..." (87).

In the last chapter, Kane defiantly points out the six reasons behind the demise of legendary hero Karna. She outlines the deadliest causes behind the death of Karna who has faced many deaths before his mortal end. In fact, he had faced the pangs of death in every second of his life at the altar of social custom and traditions. The second one is the three curses of the angry Brahmin, Guru Parshurama's curse of Forgetfulness at the crucial and the most urgent moment of Karna's life. The third one is; when Lord Indra had disrobed the kavach and kundals of Karna on the ground of treachery. The fourth one is the discloser of "the truth of his birth at the time that suited her-just before the war". The fifth one is; "when King Salva did not help him when the wheel of his chariot got struck". The last one is when everything is failed to kill it You, Arjuna, have killed a man already killed six times before by his own people!" (300-301).

During her discussion with Radheya maa, Uruvi articulates her contempt with the existing order of the things which are operating prejudicially, and she asserts: Dronacharya's treatment of Karna was as malicious as the pitiless suppression of Eklavya's talents- not just because Eklavya was a tribal but because he would have been a threat to his favorite disciple, Arjuna. Like Karna, Eklavya was rejected and callously cast aside so that Arjuna could feel secure and become successful! Is that the dharma of a teacher? (75).

For the accomplishment of her Purpose, Kane has adopted different and varied devices of writing; of the dream, flashback, and interlocution for the development and construction of her character.

#### Contemporising the Legend of the Past

While the character of Uruvi is the projection of a modern woman who isn't scared of social stigma, Kunti is presented as the scapegoat of the social traditions and culture. In the novel, Uruvi has voiced Kunti's thought who is given away by her father and forced to renounce her individuality. She is compelled by the circumstances to accept the title of Kuntibhoja, only to lose her husband at the hand of Madri. Uruvi ponders at the lot of Kunti and states Kunti, A

wife who loved her husband so much that she let the childless Madri use the same boon she had been given by Sage Durvasa to invoke the divine twins the Ashwini Kumaras and gave birth to Nakul and Sahadeva. Kunti...became a king's widow without a kingdom (27).

She considers Kunti as an epitome of love and compassion who is always ready to bestow it without any expectation. She is "self-appointed foster mother" to Uruvi who does not want to hurt Kunti. Once again the motherly character of Kunti is visible at the time of Uruvi Swayamwara, and instead of getting angry, she blesses her, "May God give you the strength to lead you have chosen...the strength I lacked,' she muttered under her breath" (29).

In the chapter "The Swayamwara" Kane has reversed the very ceremonial of the Swayamwara that is an integral component of the Indian epic Tradition. The unconventional heroine, Uruvi, has subverted the tradition of Swayamwara by preferring a sutaputra Karna to the apple of eyes, Arjuna. While Kane's Draupadi didn't muster the courage to accept Karna and discarded the competent Karna at the pretext of his caste and status. "I will not allow a low -born sutaputra to participate in the challenge. Please do not proceed" (31).

Father of Uruvi, king Vahusha is presented in a realist and life-like manner where after lots of apprehension and debate, he decided to adhere to the will of her daughter. He recollects his conscience and promulgates to his wife, "Let's stop being so slavish to customs and think this over. It would be braver of us to live as the in-laws of the "dishonorable" Karna than be the honorable parents of an unwed daughter whose life has been forever blighted" (23). In this way, this novel is disseminating the message of ideal parenthood which is an urgent need of our society. Shona strongly courts for his brother and asserts that "Lineage matters over merit and Radheya cannot lay claim to it. His lineage is considered ignoble, so his merit has been consistently ignored" (89). For Karna, Uruvi is an intelligent person and he declares:

I love her enthusiasm, her lively humor, her ambition to work as a healer. She is interested in everything and has a lot of knowledge and good sense. There are very few topics she cannot discuss. She is an extraordinary creature of opposites-there seem to be two women in her, one rational, and the other is emotional. (Kane, 67)

The reaction of Krishna who is considered as the incarnation of Lord Vishnu is also worth of pinpointing here as he is citing the example of a different form of marriages and instance of to protect Uruvi and Karna from the infuriated and disheveled people of the Swayamwara.

#### Karna's Life: A Scuffle for Recognition

Through the character of Karna, Kane has exposed the futility and duality of the Hindu caste-system where caste is considered as the hallmark of respectability and worthiness, instead of one's merits. His longing for social recognition leads him to vow that anyone who will approach him at the time of his worship of God, Surya, he will not let that applicant return empty-handed. It will be clarified by Uruvi's questions at the act of generosity of Karna.

In the chapter "The Death of Karna" is explicitly exposing the orthodoxy and hypocrisy of the Hindu caste-system which does not allow anyone to accept the dharma of a sutaputra. Karna gave his life because "he did not want the future generation to point a finger at him and say that the sutaputra Karna killed the Kshatriya Arjuna by deceit. But, in turn, that is exactly what the Kshatriya Arjuna did- he killed Karna through treachery!" (284).

He was an epitome of righteousness, and in his righteousness, he was happily ready to sacrifice all his good action to a Brahmin who was Lord Indra to save his son Arjuna by deceit. Though Karna was aware of the truth, he did not disappoint him and consequently appeased Lord Krishna who was there on the pretext of a Brahmin. When Lord Krishna asked him for a boon, then Karna wished for two things\_ "That upon my death, queen Kunti should declare publicly that I was her son and that I am no longer a lower-caste man" (290). The second one is – "that of annadanam" as in his life, he was not able to materialize this wish of himself because people had rejected to food from a sutaputra.

The last lines of "Pandavas' Hastinapur" are like the climax of the novel, which announces the message of forgiveness to posterity: "It was leaving hell and touching heaven. It was divinity"(305). Kane's mosaic writing is embedded with distinguished and legendary characters who are capable of creating commotion in the nerve of our society at the ground of their reasoning and faculty. The character of Uruvi is just in contrast to the character of Draupadi, for her trying to heal people is like healing me. Lastly, we can say that Kane has contrasted a 'rhizomatic' version of The Mahabharata which is adopted and circulated in the literary arena by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari as a specimen copy of the non-hierarchical, relational, and individualistic form of narration. Though Karna's Wife is based on the saga of Karna from the compendium of the Mahabharata, it is countering Vyasa's version, and recreating a subaltern's saga through the lens of contemporary theories of studies.

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