

# REIMAGINING MYTHOLOGY IN CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE: A STUDY OF KAVITA KANE'S WORKS

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**Abstract-** The aim of this research article to explore the works of acclaimed author Kavita Kane, specifically focusing on her unique approach to reimagining mythology in contemporary literature. Kavita Kane has gained recognition for her retellings of ancient Indian epics and mythological tales, giving a voice to female characters that have traditionally been marginalized or overlooked. This paper seeks to analyse the thematic elements, narrative techniques, and character portrayals employed by Kane in her novels, shedding light on her contributions to the literary landscape. This abstract provides an overview of the study that explores the reimagining of mythology in contemporary literature, with a particular focus on the works of acclaimed Indian author, Kavita Kane.

Through her novels, Kane skillfully intertwines ancient mythological narratives with contemporary themes, presenting readers with a fresh perspective on timeless tales. This research aims to analyse the various literary devices and narrative techniques employed by Kane to reshape mythology and engage with the cultural and social context of modern times. The study begins by establishing a theoretical framework that examines the significance of mythology in contemporary literature, emphasizing its role in addressing universal human experiences and reflecting upon societal issues. It explores the ways in which mythology provides a rich source of inspiration for authors to explore complex themes, characters, and moral dilemmas that resonate with contemporary audiences.

**Keywords:** Mythology, Re-Imagining, Empowerment, Psychological and Emotional.

Kavita Kane has gained acclaim for her skilful retelling of ancient Indian myths, focusing on the female characters often relegated to the margins of the original narratives. Her works, such as *Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen (2013)*, *"Sita's Sister (2014),"* and *"Lanka's Princess (2016),"* have captivated readers with their compelling narratives and nuanced characterizations. She is an Indian author known for her works of mythological fiction. In her novels, she explores the concept of reimagining mythology in contemporary literature. She takes inspiration from Indian mythology and its various characters, gods, and epics, and reinterprets their stories in a modern context. She delves into the lives of lesser-known or misunderstood characters from mythology, offering fresh perspectives and giving them a voice.

One of Kane's notable works is *"Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen (2013),"* where she focuses on Uruvi, the wife of the legendary warrior Karna from the Indian epic Mahabharata. In this novel, Kane sheds light on Uruvi's experiences, emotions, and struggles, providing an alternative viewpoint to the well-known tale. This paper aims to analyse the unique features of Kane's mythological retellings and understand their significance in the broader context of contemporary literature. This article will provide an overview of her background and the significance of her works in the realm of contemporary Indian literature. It will discuss the increasing popularity of mythology-based fiction and the reasons behind Kane's unique perspective and choice of female protagonists. Through her writing, author aims to humanize mythological characters, exploring their complex motivations, desires, and dilemmas. She often incorporates contemporary themes and issues into her narratives, making the stories relatable to modern readers. By reimagining mythology in this way, she brings a fresh perspective to these timeless tales, making them more accessible and engaging. Her approach to reimagining mythology in contemporary literature adds depth and richness to the characters and narratives, challenging traditional interpretations and encouraging readers to reconsider their perceptions of these mythological figures. Her novels offer a blend of historical fiction, mythology, and social commentary, creating a unique reading experience that bridges the gap between the ancient and the modern.

This theme explores the existing scholarship on mythology-based literature, with a focus on contemporary Indian authors. It will discuss the ways in which these authors have approached the retelling of myths and legends, and highlight the gaps in the literature that Kavita Kane's works fill. It will also examine critical responses and reception to Kane's novels. The main body of the paper will delve into an in-depth analysis of Kavita Kane's novels, examining the themes, characterizations, and narrative techniques employed by the author. Each novel will be discussed individually, highlighting the specific mythological source material and the ways in which Kane has re-imagined and subverted traditional narratives. The analysis will also consider the portrayal of female characters and the feminist undertones in Kane's works.

*Karna's Wife: The Outcast Queen* is a historical fiction novel. It reimagines the life and experiences of Vrushali, the lesser-known wife of the legendary Indian warrior Karna from the epic Mahabharata. The story is set against the backdrop of the ancient Indian

kingdom of Hastinapur, a time of great turmoil and conflict. Vrushali, a young and spirited woman, is forced into an arranged marriage with Karna, who is widely known as a warrior from the lower caste. Karna's low birth becomes a source of constant humiliation and discrimination for Vrushali. As the wife of an outcast, Vrushali struggles to find acceptance in the royal household and society. She endures the disdain and taunts of others, including Karna's legitimate wife, Draupadi, who is part of the royal family. Vrushali's love for Karna is tested repeatedly as she witnesses the choices he makes and the sacrifices he must endure for the sake of his loyalty and honour. Throughout the book, Vrushali faces numerous challenges, including her own insecurities, societal prejudices, and the tragic events that unfold during the great war of Kurukshetra. Despite all odds, she remains a strong and resilient character, demonstrating unwavering love and devotion towards Karna. "*Karna's Wife: The Outcast Queen*" offers a unique perspective on the Mahabharata, delving into the often overlooked story of Vrushali. It explores themes of love, sacrifice, social discrimination, and the complexities of relationships in a historical context. The novel provides readers with a deeper understanding of the characters and events of the Mahabharata, while shedding light on the experiences of a woman living on the fringes of society. The story begins right from the moment, "A love-struck princess refuses to see reason and warnings by her parents and well-wishers. She is so impressed by this great warrior that she decides to go against all and choose him in the Swayamvara." (Verma 09)

Karna is chosen over Arjun, his arch-rival and he himself is confused as to why? The images that, "she had carried in her mind about Karna were similar to the effect of repetition on human mind. It was the reminder for Uruvi of her new locus – Karna. Uruvi was full of despair at the thought of the hurt she would cause her family because she wanted Karna – yet, being Karna's wife was now her only aspiration, the only aim that gave meaning to her life." (*Karna's Wife* 16) He had heard that this princess was to be married to his infantile friend Arjuna, but on the day of Swayamvara, he catches himself enchanted by her beauty and returns home with her as his queen. Unknowingly, "She was trying to understand the pain of Kunti and Karna; she attempted to get into the shoes of Kunti to understand the fear and courage breathing at the end of the chapter births she had stated, in anger and regret, they'd both wish she'd had the courage to choose another way." (*Palace of Illusions* 79)

Her life takes a turn and nothing is as she dreamed, "soon after the wedding she realizes why everyone around her warns her not to marry Karna, a low-caste sootputra were staying Just as she decides to look beyond the politics of the Kuru brothers and settle down in her marital bliss, the fateful day of Draupadi's disrobing arrives and Uruvi's life is never the same again. A wonderfully written story with beautiful sentiments of a wife concerned for her errant husband. The wife is torn between her love and her senses. Will she ever be able to love and laugh like before? Will she ever be able to forgive and move on in life? Will she ever be able to become the love and strength that Karna has started to see in her? Karna portrays a continuous day-to-day turmoil due to the mystery of his birth." (Verma 09) The story of a mother ready to sacrifice her own son, the story of a son who searches for his mother, yet ultimately abandons her,

"He was a beautiful orphaned baby, with bewitching kundals (earrings) and a golden kavach (armour) to protect him, who had mysteriously strayed into a river and into the lonely lives of Dhristarashtra's charioteer, Adhiratha, and his wife Radha." (Karna's Wife 12-13)

Love doesn't understand any caste or gender, "which can be proved by many examples including epic Draupadi who had saved Karna in her heart and married the Pandavas. This is also similar to the promise made by Bhishma for the sake of his father. In fact, every drama of this world gives a sense of eternity on the same formula: displacement and Replacement. King Shantanu married Goddess Ganga, who abandoned him when he broke her promise. Later they fell in love with Satyawati, who is the daughter of a fisherman." (Saha 08) Ganga was displaced and replaced by Satyawati; yet the state of his existence remained eternally intact. Thus Draupadi has used the word "then" more in her statement. Powerful: "This reflects the nature of the cycle of replacement and displacement that has made the phenomenon eternal. It similar the nature can be seen in the below statement, the gods, who seem to like it when humans make unnatural sacrifices, gave him a boon for that: no one would be able to kill him (Bheeshma) unless he was ready to die." (*Karna's Wife* 132)

Similar unnatural sacrifice has been glorified in Kane's Karna's wife, "where Karna has sacrificed his kavach and kundals to Lord Indra and received the vasabishaktiastra and a boon of being eternally remembered in the future: Lord Indra was taken aback when I ripped them out and lay them in front of him. He said, Karna, no ordinary mortal would have done what you did today, I am moved by your gesture and will grant you a boon in return..." (*Karna's Wife* 217-218)

The second novel of the author, "*Lanka's Princess*" is a historical fiction. The story revolves around Surpanakha, a prominent character from the Hindu epic, the Ramayana, and provides a fresh perspective on her life and experiences. The novel begins by delving into Surpanakha's childhood as Meenakshi, a precocious and headstrong young girl growing up in the lush kingdom of Lanka. Meenakshi is the younger sister of the powerful and feared king, Ravana. However, as a female in a patriarchal society, she faces numerous challenges and restrictions that hinder her aspirations and desires. As the story progress, Meenakshi transforms into Surpanakha, a fierce and enigmatic woman. She is a skilled warrior, gifted with immense beauty and intelligence. Surpanakha's encounters with the protagonist of the Ramayana, Lord Rama, and his loyal ally, Lord Hanuman, play a crucial role in shaping her destiny. The novel explores Surpanakha's complex relationship with her family, particularly her brother Ravana and her sister-in-law, Mandodari. Ram orders Lakshmana to maim off her nose: "Maim her...she will remember her dishonourable crime and not attack a helpless woman again." (*Lanka's Princess* 202) It delves into her unrequited love for the dashing warrior, Rama, which ultimately leads to the infamous incident where she attempts to harm Rama's wife, Sita. Mandodari says to Surpanakha:

"All for our men; we dress up for them, we keep house for them, we have their children, we carry on their lineage, and we even suffer for them, and deal with their vanities and a lot else...why? Because we love them!" (*Lanka's Princess* 155)

Through Surpanakha's narrative, writer weaves a tale of love, betrayal, and revenge. The novel examines the motivations and struggles of a misunderstood character, shedding light on her emotional journey and the circumstances that drive her actions. It questions traditional notions of good and evil, presenting Surpanakha as a multidimensional character rather than a mere antagonist. "*Lanka's Princess*" offer readers a fresh perspective on the Ramayana, presenting Surpanakha as a woman with her own agency and desires, rather than a one-dimensional villain. The novel explores themes of gender inequality, power dynamics, and the consequences of societal expectations. Overall, Kavita Kane's "*Lanka's Princess*" is a captivating and thought-provoking novel that reimagines the story of Surpanakha, providing a compelling exploration of her character and motivations within the larger context of the Ramayana. Edwin Schur, comments: "When a woman achieves to an extent or in ways that stereotypical notions describe as beyond female capacities, it is assumed and said that she must be 'exceptional'...it is not just an assertion that most women do not do these things, but rather an implicit claim that 'typical,' 'normal,' and even 'natural' women do not and cannot do them. Such reasoning allows the categorical type to stand, as does the description of a woman who behaves contrary to type as 'acting like a man,' or as being 'masculine.'" (Schur 30) Women are commonly, "discriminated against based on their physical appearance, particularly the colour of their skin.

The prejudice due to physical appearance has a recent coinage of the word *Lookism* Surpanakha right from birth feels low about her physical appearance. Kane presents this in various incidents throughout the book." (Mandal 10) Kaikesi questions, "How is this dark monkey going to bring good fortune?" (*Lanka's Princess* 03) Surpanakha was much friendly to her grandmother Taraka and she asks her, "Can you make me beautiful with one of your potions, Nani?" (*Lanka's Princess* 20) She's dismayed by her looks and portions it with her grandmother, "But I am not like either of you, I am darker like night sky!! Even today, it is compulsory that a girl should look fair and beautiful. Kane gives a solution to this problem through Taraka as she advises, Beauty lies in your head and heart, and you have to believe it. But for that first you have to love yourself. Hearing this, Surpanakha admired the wisdom of her grandmother. These words of wisdom can be related to the younger generation too." (*Lanka's Princess* 22) "We live by myth and inhabit it and it inhabits us. What is strange is how we remake it." (Michael Ayrton) Using a close reading approach, the research delves into Kavita Kane's literary works, including her acclaimed novels such as "*Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen*," "*Sita's Sister*," and "*Lanka's Princess*." It examines how Kane breathes new life into iconic mythological figures, such as Draupadi, Urmila, and Surpanakha, by giving them agency, voice, and multidimensional personalities. The study also highlights the author's skill in seamlessly blending historical research with imaginative storytelling, enabling readers to envision the mythological past in vivid detail while exploring its relevance in the present. Furthermore, the research investigates the thematic motifs and social commentaries present in Kane's re-imagined mythology. It analyses how she tackles issues of gender, patriarchy, societal norms, and power dynamics, and how her narratives shed light on the untold stories of marginalized characters within mythological frameworks. By challenging established narratives and providing alternative perspectives, Kane encourages readers to question traditional interpretations and encourages a more nuanced understanding of mythological texts.

In this section, the paper will explore the impact of Kavita Kane's novels on the readership and the broader literary landscape. It will discuss the significance of her works in challenging traditional gender roles and giving voice to marginalized characters. Additionally, it will address the implications of Kane's reimagining of mythology for contemporary readers' understanding of Indian culture and heritage. Representation of marginalized characters: Kane's novels aim to give a voice to female characters that have been marginalized or overshadowed in traditional mythological narratives. By retelling myths from their perspectives, she brings these characters to the forefront, allowing readers to connect with and understand their experiences. Exploration of untold stories: Kane explores untold stories and aspects of mythology that may have been overlooked or underdeveloped in the original texts. By delving deeper into these narratives, she fills in the gaps and provides a fresh perspective on well-known myths, shedding light on lesser-known characters and their motivations. Reinterpretation of traditional narratives: Kane's retellings often involve reinterpretation of traditional narratives, challenging conventional interpretations and highlighting alternative viewpoints. She explores the complexities of characters and their relationships, providing a nuanced understanding of their actions and motivations.

Feminist perspective: Kane's novels have a strong feminist undertone, as they centre on the experiences and struggles of female characters. By examining these characters' roles, agency, and challenges within the context of ancient mythological settings, she highlights issues related to gender, power dynamics, and societal expectations. Contemporary relevance: The retelling of myths in Kane's novels often draws parallels between ancient mythological themes and contemporary issues. By bridging the gap between the past and the present, she invites readers to reflect on timeless human dilemmas, moral choices, and societal structures that continue to resonate today. Engaging storytelling: Kane's novels are known for their engaging storytelling, blending myth, history, and fiction to create a compelling narrative. Through her vivid and evocative writing style, she brings the myths to life, making them accessible and captivating for modern readers. Overall, the retelling of myths in Kavita Kane's novels serves to give voice to marginalized characters, explore untold stories, challenge traditional narratives, provide a feminist perspective, highlight contemporary relevance, and engage readers with captivating storytelling.

When I come to findings of my article, i found that re-imagining mythology in contemporary literature help to disclose the facts about human nature, more about women, as women's life, expectations, approaches, contribution to the society and the reality of their lives. The epitomes of womanhood are greatly formed by the ideals of femininity that are set out in the stories and legends. In doing so, their genuine happiness and rights are seized and their inborn nature is not spoken aloud. Kavita Kane is an Indian author

known for her reimagining of mythological stories in her novels. She has gained popularity for her unique perspective and interpretation of well-known myths, often focusing on the female characters and their untold stories. Kane's retelling of myths in her novels provides readers with a fresh and contemporary outlook on ancient stories. She delves into the inner thoughts and emotions of the characters, giving them depth and complexity beyond their traditional portrayals. By highlighting the perspectives of the female characters, Kane challenges the male-centric narratives that dominate many mythological tales. One of the notable aspects of Kane's retellings is her ability to blend historical accuracy with imaginative storytelling. She meticulously researches the cultural and historical context of the myths she retells, ensuring that her narratives are rooted in authenticity. This attention to detail enhances the reader's immersion into the ancient world and makes the characters more relatable.

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