



## Revisiting Modern To Ancient- An Analysis On Kavita Kane's The Lanka's Princess

B. Padmavathy<sup>1\*</sup>, P. Premalatha<sup>2</sup>, P. Vedamuthan<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1\*</sup> Research Scholar (Full-Time), (Reg no: 21214014012048), Department of English, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli-627 012. Email padmadfgh@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup> Associate Professor & Head, Department of English, Sri K.G.S. Arts College, Srivaikundam-628 619. Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli-627 012. Email: premlatha68@gmail.com

<sup>3</sup> Assistant Professor, Department of English Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli-627 012. Email prof.pvm.english@gmail.com

**Citation:** B. Padmavathy, et.al (2024), Revisiting Modern To Ancient- An Analysis On Kavita Kane's The Lanka's Princess, *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 30(10), 115-118  
Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v30i10.7997

### ARTICLE INFO

### ABSTRACT

Throughout history, women have often been subject to inaccurate judgments and misrepresentations in various historical accounts. This phenomenon is particularly prevalent in patriarchal societies, where women are often either completely marginalized or primarily perceived as objects that serve to enhance men's status. This is especially evident in the sacred texts and mythologies of these nations. The literary work *The Lanka's Princess* delve into an exploration of the portrayal of mythological women. This novel focuses on the significant female characters and their representation within the narratives. The challenges faced by women have existed since ancient times. The primary objective of this paper is to examine the challenges faced by women during the time period depicted in the novel, as well as the subsequent empowerment of women in overcoming these obstacles. The societal importance of women is duly acknowledged. This paper also seeks to raise awareness and empower women, with the ultimate goal of challenging and dismantling societal stereotypes surrounding women. The findings of the study reveal that women experience objectification, limited access to education, social exclusion, and a lack of agency. Kane's novel endeavors to undertake a thorough examination of the emancipation of its female characters from the oppressive forces of societal norms and the challenging circumstances that engendered an identity crisis for women.

**Keywords:** agency, authenticity, traditional, feministic, freedom, trauma

The significance of women in the Indian community has been developing. Hinduism is no exception to this and as one progresses from society in Ancient times to the Early Medieval times, the decline in the degree of freedom that women enjoyed in the family and the Indian society becomes steadily sharper. Although it is hard to define the precise juncture of the period in history where this erosion began. The Ancient Indian civilization can be juxtaposed against each other to analyze the changing position and part of women in the community. Kavita Kane found herself more inquisitive in mythological women characters who were least praised and glorified and started to write novels based on mythology.

The novel is set in the mythological world of the Ramayana, primarily focusing on the life of Surpanakha, the sister of Ravana, the demon king of Lanka. Traditionally, Surpanakha is portrayed as a malevolent character whose actions lead to the abduction of Sita by Ravana and the ensuing war. However, Kane's narrative diverges significantly from this traditional portrayal. Instead of depicting Surpanakha as a mere antagonist, Kane delves deep into her psyche, unraveling her complexities and vulnerabilities.

Kane's Surpanakha is not just a demoness; she is a woman with desires, dreams, and a quest for identity in a patriarchal world. The novel begins with her childhood as Meenakshi, unfolding her experiences of neglect and discrimination in favor of her brothers. These early experiences shape her character, driving her need for love and acceptance. Kane skillfully portrays Surpanakha's transformation from a neglected child to a woman who fiercely asserts her identity, despite the societal norms of the time.

One of the novel's central themes is the exploration of identity and self-worth, particularly in the context of women. Surpanakha's journey is marked by her constant struggle against the limitations imposed upon her due to her gender. She challenges the traditional roles and expectations, asserting her independence and agency. This aspect of her character resonates with contemporary discussions on feminism and women's empowerment.

Another significant theme in *Lanka's Princess* is the complexity of human emotions and relationships. Kane explores the nuances of love, jealousy, and revenge through Surpanakha's interactions with other characters, including her brothers Ravana, Vibhishana, Kumbhakarna, and her love interest, Vidhujjihva. These relationships are portrayed with depth, highlighting the emotional conflicts and moral dilemmas faced by Surpanakha. Kane's narrative style is engaging, blending mythological elements with human emotions in a way that makes the characters relatable to modern readers. The novel provides a fresh perspective on a familiar story, encouraging readers to question and rethink established narratives, especially regarding the portrayal of female characters in mythology.

The significance of *Lanka's Princess* lies in its feminist retelling of a traditional myth. It is a part of a larger movement in contemporary literature that seeks to give voice to female characters who have been marginalized in classical texts. Through Surpanakha's story, Kane not only humanizes a demonized character but also sparks a conversation about the representation of women in mythology and literature.

In traditional versions of the Ramayana, Surpanakha is portrayed as a malevolent figure, often serving as a catalyst for key events in the story. She is depicted as a demoness with a grotesque appearance and evil intentions, primarily known for her role in inciting the war between Rama and her brother Ravana. This portrayal stems from a deeply rooted perspective in Indian mythology where characters are often dichotomized into good and evil, with little room for complexity or depth, especially for female characters. Surpanakha's actions, particularly her attraction to Rama and subsequent humiliation by him and Lakshmana, are depicted as the triggers for Rama's battle with Ravana, thus casting her in a negative light.

Kavitha Kane, in *Lanka's Princess*, takes a drastically different approach. She humanizes Surpanakha, giving depth to her character that is missing from traditional tellings. Kane's Surpanakha, born as Meenakshi, grows up in the shadow of her powerful brothers, facing neglect and the harsh realities of a patriarchal society. This background provides a foundation for understanding her motivations and actions. Kane portrays Surpanakha as a complex character with emotions, desires, and a sense of agency. Her actions are not merely driven by evil intent but are a response to the injustices and humiliation she endures. Kane delves into Surpanakha's psyche, exploring her feelings of love, rejection, and her quest for self-identity. This portrayal challenges the traditional narrative, suggesting that her actions are more a result of her circumstances and emotional turmoil rather than inherent evilness.

In traditional texts, Surpanakha's character is static; she is the quintessential antagonist with no redemption arc. However, Kane's narrative offers a dynamic character. She evolves from a neglected child, who craves love and attention, to a woman who asserts herself in a world dominated by men. This evolution is a significant departure from the traditional portrayal, where her character is limited to the role of a temptress and instigator.

Kane also explores Surpanakha's relationships in a more detailed manner, particularly her interactions with her brothers and her tragic love affair with Vidhujjihva. These relationships are portrayed as complex and layered, adding to the understanding of her character. In contrast, traditional narratives often overlook these aspects, focusing instead on her interactions with Rama and Lakshmana, which lead to her disfigurement and the subsequent war.

Traditionally, Surpanakha's love for Rama and the revenge for her humiliation are depicted as the driving forces for her actions. However, in Kane's version, these themes are explored with greater sensitivity and depth. Her love is not portrayed as mere infatuation but as a genuine emotion, seeking acceptance and belonging. Her quest for revenge is also depicted as a response to the deep wounds of rejection and the societal norms that constantly belittled her. This approach adds a layer of tragedy to her character, making her more relatable and less of a caricature.

Kane's Surpanakha is not just a victim of her circumstances; she is also a figure of empowerment and agency. Despite the constraints of her society, she makes bold choices, asserting her desires and standing up against the injustices she faces. This portrayal is a stark contrast to the traditional depiction, where her actions are often seen as mere plot devices, lacking depth or purpose. In *Lanka's Princess*, Kane explores the transformation of Meenakshi into Surpanakha as a means of survival. In her portrayal, Kane effectively illustrates that Meenakshi, despite being an asura girl, shares many similarities with her peers of the same age. Similar to her peers, she too harbored the desire for a nurturing and affectionate family. However, she was not fortunate enough to attain the fulfillment of her aspirations. The level of attention that Kaikesi, her mother, bestowed upon her sons far exceeded the attention she directed towards her. The father, Rishi Vishravas, consistently displayed a lack of interest in her presence within the family. Furthermore, her brothers also exhibited a distant attitude towards her. Since early childhood, Meenakshi has experienced the distressing effects of abandonment. Despite her physical presence among her family, she exhibited emotional detachment from all members, rendering herself an outsider within her own community. In contrast to her brothers, the girl child found herself unable to fulfill her mother's ambitions or satisfy her father's sense of pride. Consequently, she frequently encountered a sense of being burdensome to the individuals from whom

she sought the most essential love and support during her formative years. In a similar vein, Meenakshi also experienced the repercussions of gender discrimination, although this aspect of her life was scarcely depicted in the epic portrayal. In a society characterized by patriarchal norms, women are consistently positioned as the "other," being perceived as embodying qualities or attributes that are perceived to be absent in men. The underlying foundation of women's subordination is rooted in the concept of "deficiency" rather than the notion of "diversity". In order to establish the legitimacy of prevailing policies, patriarchal society exerts pressure on women to embrace their subordinate position. This patriarchal hegemony further facilitates the perception of their subordination as an inherent and unquestionable aspect of their existence.

Therefore, Simone de Beauvoir "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (Beauvoir, 249). According to Nayar, Judith Butler posited "This 'performance' is the repeated citation -iteration- of the role in particular contexts"(Nayar 128).

Traditional Indian mythology often portrays women within a narrow spectrum of roles — the virtuous wife, the devoted mother, or, conversely, the malevolent figure. Surpanakha, in the classic Ramayana, falls into the latter category, depicted as a demonic, malevolent woman, serving as a counterpoint to the virtuous Sita. This portrayal reflects the societal tendency to categorize women into extremes, either idealized or demonized, with little room for nuanced characterizations.

Kane's *Lanka's Princess* breaks away from this dichotomy. By giving a voice to Surpanakha, a character traditionally marginalized and vilified, Kane challenges the reader to reconsider these entrenched narratives. Her Surpanakha is not merely a demoness; she is a woman with her own story, emotions, and complexities. This reimagining serves as a critique of the oversimplified portrayals of women in mythology, urging a reevaluation of how these stories influence societal perceptions of women. Kane's narrative is an act of empowerment, providing agency to a character who has been historically voiceless. By focusing on Surpanakha's inner life, her desires, and her struggles, Kane presents a character who is more than her actions in the traditional epic. This approach is emblematic of a broader movement in contemporary literature that seeks to reclaim the narratives of female characters in mythology, offering them depth and agency.

The novel becomes a medium for discussing broader issues of women's identity in society. It highlights how women, like Surpanakha, often grapple with societal expectations and are judged based on narrow parameters. Kane's portrayal suggests that understanding a character's background and motivations is crucial in challenging the stereotypes that have long defined women in both myth and reality. Kane portrays Surpanakha's transformation from a neglected child to a woman who asserts her identity against patriarchal norms. This transformation is symbolic of a woman's journey in society, battling against the prejudices and limitations imposed on her. Surpanakha's character becomes a metaphor for the struggles of many women who are trying to find their place in a world that often seeks to define them in simplistic terms.

The themes explored in "Lanka's Princess" resonate with contemporary issues of gender equality and women's rights. Kane's reimagining of Surpanakha's story encourages a reflection on how traditional narratives can shape societal attitudes towards women. The novel invites readers to question and rethink their own perceptions of female identity, both in mythology and in the modern world.

In *Lanka's Princess*, Kavita Kane wanted to transform Surpanakha from a dark demonic adulterous ogress into a powerful, courageous, and fearless lady who has endured and opposed all her gender injustices. Kane deconstructed Surpanakha's identity by emphasizing her motivations rather than her persona. Kane showed how Meenakshi's childhood rejection and humiliations shaped her adult life. It caused her resentment and forced her to find a new identity to fight for her rights and dignity. Meenakshi never accepted prejudice as her fate because she felt she could build her own future. She also knew she had to face all her life's obstacles alone, having seen how everyone had abandoned and humiliated her. Male-dominated culture seldom lets women fulfill their dreams; women rarely acquire inspiration to dream for themselves. Therefore, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie said, "We teach girls to shrink themselves, to make themselves smaller" (10).

In traditional tellings of the Ramayana, Surpanakha is often depicted as a one-dimensional antagonist, lacking autonomy and depth. Kavitha Kane, however, reimagines her as a character with agency and the power to assert her identity. Surpanakha's journey in "Lanka's Princess" is marked by her attempts to navigate and challenge the constraints imposed by her gender and status. Kane's narrative allows Surpanakha to make choices, express her desires, and confront the injustices she faces. This portrayal is a significant deviation from the traditional narrative, where Surpanakha's actions are often controlled by the male characters or dictated by the plot.

Surpanakha's story in "Lanka's Princess" is not just about personal growth; it's also about challenging the patriarchal structures of her society. The novel portrays her as a woman who consistently questions and defies the norms set by a male-dominated world. Whether it's in her interactions with her brothers, her romantic pursuits, or her confrontations with Rama and Lakshmana, Surpanakha's actions are indicative of her resistance against patriarchal oppression. Kane's portrayal highlights how Surpanakha's assertive behaviour, often viewed negatively in traditional narratives, can also be interpreted as a form of resistance against the subjugation of women. Kane portrays Surpanakha as emotionally resilient, transforming her pain and humiliation into strength. This aspect of her character is pivotal in her journey of self-assertion. Her resilience is not just about overcoming the physical and emotional scars inflicted by Rama and Lakshmana,

but also about reclaiming her story and identity. Kane's narrative empowers Surpanakha by giving her the voice to narrate her own story, thus challenging the narrative imposed on her by a patriarchal society.

The themes of self-assertion and agency in "Lanka's Princess" resonate deeply with contemporary issues surrounding women's rights and empowerment. Surpanakha's character becomes a symbol for modern women's struggles against societal norms and expectations. Kane's reinterpretation encourages readers to reflect on how women, both in mythology and in reality, navigate a world that often seeks to limit their autonomy.

In pre-historic patriarchal societies, women were limited to being either vamps or victims, limiting their possibilities. Women were praised when they meekly accepted traditional norms and limits, but if they opposed them, they were viewed as abnormal and cruel. Most Ramayana women characters accepted victimization, fearing being labeled perverts or immoral if they did otherwise. Despite some women characters resisting and retaliating, they were always portrayed as a menace to society.

The figure Surpanakha is credited for destroying the whole Asura dynasty of Lanka, although her motives remain unclear. Ravana abducted Sita because Surpanakha angered him, yet he did so for his own lustful nature. Lakshmana's act of chopping off Surpanakha's nose revealed his fury and delved into the treatment of asura women in that culture. While angry, Surpanakha attempted to assault Sita, but Lakshmana intervened and mutilated her. There must be other methods to prevent her from doing it.

Kavita Kane revisited the epic from Surpanakha's perspective to present an alternative interpretation. Kane decentralized epic portrayal and illuminated the life of Surpanakha, the Lankan princess, highlighting the pre-historic social challenges faced by women.

### Works Cited

1. Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *We Should All Be Feminists*. Fourth Estate, 2014.
2. Barry Peter. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. 4th ed., Viva Books Private Limited, 2018.
3. Beauvoir Simon De. *The Second Sex*. Vintage Random House, 1997.
4. Kane, Kavita. *Lanka's Princess*. Rupa Publications, 2017.
5. Nayar Pramod K. *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory: From Structuralism to Ecocriticism*. Pearson, 2009.