

## Empathy and Power: Kavita Kane's Exploration of Forgotten Characters in Indian Mythology

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### Abstract

Kavita Kane's writings illuminate the overlooked and marginalised figures of Indian mythology, providing them with voice, agency, and empathy. This study analyses her depiction of marginalised characters, including Urmila (*Sita's Sister*) and Uruvi (*Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen*), exploring how Kane reclaims their narratives to contest patriarchal storytelling conventions. Through empathic reimaginings and the presentation of delicate power relations, Kane builds multi-dimensional characters who resonate with current readers. The research examines themes of endurance, sacrifice, and emotional fortitude, establishing Kane's works as crucial in the re-evaluation of Indian mythology in Indian English literature.

### Keywords

Kavita Kane, Empathy, Power Dynamics, Indian Mythology, Marginalized Voices, Indian English Literature

### [1] Introduction

Indian mythology, intricately embedded in the cultural and spiritual essence of the subcontinent, functions as an enduring reservoir of moral, intellectual, and sociological precepts. Throughout the years, these legends have been recounted, interpreted, and modified across several mediums, mirroring the changing ethos of society. In conventional narratives, the emphasis frequently centres on male protagonists, their celestial achievements, and their contributions to the formation of cosmic or social structure. Women and marginalised characters, despite their crucial significance, are often pushed to the periphery, their voices muted, and their narratives overlooked.

Kavita Kane, a distinguished author in Indian English literature, confronts this narrative disparity by emphasising these neglected individuals, especially women. Her writings revitalise characters like as Urmila (*Sita's Sister*) and Uruvi (*Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen*), elevating women from marginal figures to essential protagonists endowed with agency, depth, and complexity. Kane's sympathetic writing humanises the characters and redefines power as a multi-dimensional notion that transcends conventional hierarchies and patriarchal standards.

This study examines Kane's capacity to intertwine empathy and power in her retellings, crafting captivating narratives that emphasise perseverance, sacrifice, and inner strength. It analyses how Kane's paintings recuperate the narratives of overlooked figures, providing a feminist vision of Indian mythology that connects with modern audiences. The research contextualises Kane's works within the wider scope of Indian English literature, highlighting her influence in transforming the debate on mythology and gender.

Kane's writings encourage readers to reevaluate conventional perceptions of legendary beings by emphasising empathy as a transformational force and power as a complex dynamic. This examination of neglected figures enhances the body of mythological reinterpretations and highlights the significance of these stories in confronting contemporary social and cultural challenges.

### [2] Kavita Kane and Her Feminist Reinterpretations

Kavita Kane's writings connect the legendary with the contemporary, reinterpreting Indian epics through a pronounced female perspective. By doing so, she resists the patriarchal prejudices of conventional narratives, providing agency and voice to marginalised female characters. Kane's reinterpretations are not simple retellings;

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they are acts of reclamation, depicting her heroes as intricate, multi-dimensional characters who assert their individuality within the limitations of their cultural circumstances.

Kane's feminist reinterpretations are profoundly anchored in empathy. Her capacity to humanise those sometimes overlooked or demonised in conventional narratives enables readers to connect with their feelings and motives. In *Sita's Sister*, Urmila transcends her role as just the wife abandoned during Lakshman's exile, instead becoming a symbol of profound emotional fortitude and subtle perseverance. Kane asserts, "Urmila did not choose silence as surrender but as survival, as strength" (145). This depiction not only reasserts Urmila's story but also reconceptualises silence as an expression of autonomy rather than subservience.

In *Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen*, the fictitious character Uruvi articulates a critique of the inflexible caste system and the ethical quandaries associated with Karna. Uruvi's empathy with Karna's sufferings is clear when she remarks, "What greater curse than to be denied your truth for the accident of your birth?" (202). Kane attacks the structural inequalities inherent in the epic's structure by offering Uruvi a perspective that contests societal standards.

Kane's works frequently examine power in its nuanced, relational dimensions, particularly with women's roles in mythology. Conventional interpretations of Indian epics generally associate power with physical strength or political dominance. Kane reinterprets it via the perspectives of emotional resilience, moral boldness, and intellectual independence. In *Sita's Sister*, Urmila's choice to remain in Ayodhya during her husband's exile is depicted not as passive compliance but as a deliberate decision. This undermines the conventional depiction of women as simple extensions of their male counterparts.

Kane's heroes possess imperfections, enhancing their genuineness. Uruvi grapples with anger and bitterness with Karna's allegiance to Duryodhana; yet, her internal fight enhances her character. Ray, Sangeeta observes, "Kane's characters are rooted in their humanity, making them relatable and empowering for contemporary readers" (Ray 67). A fundamental element of Kane's feminist reinterpretations is her rejection of conventional tropes. She deconstructs the dichotomy of the virtuous, submissive woman vs the ambitious, defiant one. In *Sita's Sister*, Urmila exemplifies loyalty to her family while also asserting her personal ambitions, representing a balance seldom ascribed to women in epic storytelling. Kane states, "She was neither goddess nor martyr; she was a woman who bore her choices like her crown and her shackles" (176). Kane's subversion also extends to male characters, notably Karna, whose representation through Uruvi's eyes adds depth to his identity. Literary critic Arijit Sen observes, "Kane's reinterpretations force readers to confront the inherent biases in epic storytelling, making space for alternative voices and perspectives" (45). Kane has established a distinct position in Indian English literature by emphasising empathy and intricate power relations. Her novels resonate with modern readers, particularly women, who perceive in her protagonists a reflection of their challenges and aspirations.

### **[3] Forgotten Characters in Focus**

Kavita Kane's writings focus on figures frequently neglected in Indian mythology, providing them with narrative complexity and examining their emotional and intellectual dimensions. Her emphasis on characters like as Urmila in *Sita's Sister* and Uruvi in *Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen* highlights the challenges and autonomy of women who, although being marginal in conventional narratives, are essential to the epics they occupy. Kane's feminist reinterpretations elevate these "forgotten" people to important roles, highlighting themes of perseverance, empathy, and power.

In the *Ramayana*, Urmila is mostly marginalised as Lakshman's wife, eclipsed by Sita's celestial storyline and Lakshman's fidelity to Ram. In *Sita's Sister*, Kane reinterprets Urmila's narrative, depicting her as a lady of extraordinary resilience and distinctiveness. Kane states:

She had borne the brunt of rejection, not just of her beloved's absence but of her role, her significance in their lives, which had been rendered negligible by his sacrifice. (211)

This portrayal represents the silent sacrifices of women in patriarchal systems and reframes Urmila's story as one of quiet perseverance and agency. Urmila's choice to remain in Ayodhya during Lakshman's exile is neither passive acquiescence nor a forfeiture of autonomy. Kane underscores her proactive involvement in preserving household and social stability, a force sometimes overlooked in conventional narratives.

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Uruvi, a fictitious figure created by Kane, is depicted as Karna's wife, providing a novel viewpoint on the hero of the *Mahabharata* while examining the intricacies of caste, devotion, and morality. Uruvi confronts the caste-based systems that shape Karna's existence, exemplifying her bravery and resistance.

Kane states, "In loving Karna, she defied not just her parents but society, tradition, and the laws that bound her existence" (152). Uruvi's union with Karna, a charioteer of low rank, represents a defiance of traditional conventions, encapsulating Kane's feminist critique of inflexible hierarchies. Uruvi's profound affection for Karna does not obscure her perception of his shortcomings, especially his steadfast allegiance to Duryodhana. She interrogates his ethical choices, especially his silence while Draupadi's degradation: "How can you, my Karna, the man I adore for his nobility, remain a mute spectator to such cruelty?" (227). This clash not only humanises Karna but also positions Uruvi as a morally autonomous figure, contesting the male-dominated narrative of the *Mahabharata*.

Kane's depiction of overlooked people highlights the emotional and intellectual efforts of women manoeuvring through repressive structures. In doing so, she subverts established depictions and reimagines these characters as agents of change. Both Urmila and Uruvi illustrate the potency of empathy. Urmila's perseverance and Uruvi's ethical fortitude exemplify how emotional resilience may confront patriarchal conventions. By emphasising their choices, Kane converts these marginalised women into proactive agents of their fates, reinterpreting the role of women in mythology. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni in *The Palace of Illusions* asserts, "Kane's feminist retellings challenge readers to rethink not just the epics but the role of women in these narratives and beyond" (112).

Kane's examination of overlooked figures like as Urmila and Uruvi redirects attention from the heroic deeds of male protagonists to the intricate lives of women who subtly mould and impact epic stories. Kane employs literary empathy, feminist critique, and narrative reclamation to provide a place for these women to flourish as important roles.

### **[4] Themes of Empathy and Power**

Kavita Kane's reinterpretations of Indian mythology are grounded on the core principles of empathy and power, which she skilfully integrates into the stories of marginalised figures. These themes function as a framework for her examination of the personal conflicts, social limitations, and ethical quandaries encountered by her heroes. In Kane's writings, empathy transcends mere emotional response; it serves as a transforming force that influences relationships, decisions, and identities. Power is reinterpreted as a dynamic construct, grounded in resilience, moral agency, and the audacity to confront established norms.

In Kane's works, empathy serves as a conduit between the divine and the human, the ideal and the imperfect. In *Sita's Sister*, Urmila exemplifies empathy through her silent yet profound comprehension of her husband Lakshman's obligations to Ram and Sita. Although abandoned for fourteen years, she harbours no resentment against Lakshman and graciously accepts his decision. Kane states, "Her pain was hers to bear, but in it, she found her strength—a love so profound that it needed no words, no presence" (183). Urmila's empathy enables her to rise above the immediate unfairness of her circumstances and discover agency in the sacrifices she voluntarily makes.

In *Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen*, Uruvi's compassion for Karna arises from her acknowledgement of his challenges as an outsider inside a stringent caste system. Her affection for Karna is rooted not in his bravery but in his fragility, as seen by her statement: "I love you not for your victories but for the weight you carry in your silences, the strength you show in your struggles" (196). Kane examines society stereotypes through Uruvi's perspective, illustrating how empathy can uncover the humanity of even the most hated and celebrated people.

Kane reinterprets the notion of power to signify inner strength rather than exterior dominance. In conventional mythological myths, power is frequently linked to physical strength or divine intervention. Kane challenges this paradigm by emphasising the moral and emotional resilience of her female heroines. Urmila's choice to remain in Ayodhya, frequently perceived as passive compliance, is reinterpreted by Kane as an act of subtle resistance. Kane contests the conventional concept of power as control, redefining it as influence grounded in patience and intelligence. Uruvi's strength resides in her readiness to challenge Karna's ethical quandaries and

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scrutinise his allegiance to Duryodhana. Her fortitude is apparent when she states, "If love means blind acceptance, then I fail. I cannot love you without questioning what you stand for" (254). By voicing her criticism, Uruvi reclaims her agency in a story dominated by male viewpoints, proving that genuine power frequently rests in the bravery to speak against the tide.

Kane's novels explore the convergence of empathy and power, enabling her to create intricate, accessible characters that traverse the dualities of their life. Urmila and Uruvi are neither sanctified nor vilified; they are women who acknowledge their flaws as sources of strength. Kane's depiction of these people emphasises her conviction that empathy is a sort of power, empowering individuals to contest cultural conventions and reconfigure their positions within patriarchal frameworks. Kane's examination of these topics corresponds with feminist reinterpretations of mythology. Her heroines negotiate intricate relationships via empathy and express their identities through power, establishing a balance that connects with modern viewers.

### **[5] Conclusion**

Kavita Kane's writings serve as potent feminist reinterpretations of Indian mythology, transforming narratives through the concepts of empathy and power. Kane confronts patriarchal structures by emphasising overlooked figures like Urmila and Uruvi, who have always been marginalised in legendary narratives. Her depiction of empathy as a transformational force highlights the inner strength of her heroes, while her reinterpretation of power underscores moral bravery and endurance rather than domination and authority. Kane's insightful storytelling amplifies marginalised voices while critiquing cultural conventions and biases. Her novels illustrate how subtle actions of rebellion, emotional resilience, and intellectual autonomy may transform the portrayal of women in conventional myths. Kane's writings inspire readers to examine mythology from a modern perspective, fostering a profound comprehension of the human experience and generating fresh viewpoints on historical and cultural legacies.

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