

Transformation and Empowerment in Kavita Kane’s “Lanka’s Princess”

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Abstract

Mythology serves as a moral element for numerous cultures and civilization particularly in India. The moral thoughts shapes contemporary relevance by encapsulating a wide range of human experiences and emotions. To understand the social, political, cultural and religious facets of India. Mythological retellings is essential to comprehends it's ideology and their impact on society. Thus modern writers interpret mythology through the lens of social perspectives. Kavita Kane mythological retelling writer gives a new insight for unknown minor characters. In Lanka's princess Surpanakha transforms her identity from human to demoness. She empowers herself to revenge the hegemonic social setup. Kavita Kane sketches Surpanakha has a strong and self-reliant character who transforms and empowers her identity as Lanka's Princess.

Keywords: Demoness, Transformation, Empower, Hegemony, Revenge

Introduction

In Indian literature, Mythology plays a vital role in shaping cultural and moral beliefs. They serves as a rich theme with a source of inspiration. They reflects the cultural and religious beliefs of India, focusing it's values and ethics. It offers a lens through which the society understand it's history and morality. It's a platform to understand cultural values, spiritual beliefs and moral values. Contemporary writers most often reinterprets and recontextualise the traditional myth whereas these reinterpretation explore the necessity to preserve and transmit the societal norms to future generations. These laws were rich in moral lessons to convey the truth behind the myth and guides the society with virtue. Thus they ensure the continuity of tradition and beliefs. They gives a new insight for ancient narratives. In essence, Indian mythology serves as a powerful tool to shape Indian literature, to understand and explore past and present.

Traditional narratives portrays women in a narrow vision like virtuous and obedient women. So the society expects the same scenarios from women. So they are forced to act according to

expectations of the society. But the contemporary literature brings changes so that the women reclaim their rights to perform a great role in society. Many writers break the malevolent portrayal of women and provides a platform to transform and empower to survive in society.

Kavita Kane Indian mythological writer attempts to give voices to voiceless minor character. Meenakshi is the real name but humiliation reforms her as Surpanakha. The novel starts with Gender prejudices where Kaikesi expresses her sadness for giving birth a girl child. Kane opens the novel as “It’s a girl! ‘ Kaikesi heard the words as the last wave of pain and relief. It was a daughter, not a son, her heart sank, her aspirations drowning in a flood of disappointment and easy tears’ (Kane, pg 1) These lines shows the marginalization of Meenakshi begins from her birth itself. The reason is Kaikesi needs male heir to restore the lost Lanka from Kuber grandson of Brahma. Kaikesi says, “ Lanka, my lost home, Kaikesi grimaced. Her father had been forced to surrender to Vishnu to give up his crown, the throne and the Kingdom.” (Kane, pg, 1)

Areker and Doibale in their article says, “From the simmering bitterness since birth due to rejection and neglect, to being a loving wife, mother and aunt, Surpanakha keeps watering her desire for revenge and vengeance due to the injustice inflicted upon her not only by her clan but by outsiders who mutilate her. Her mutilation adds fuel to the fire and thus transforms “ Lanka’s princess “ into a cunning and scheming yet an assertive woman”. (132)

Though Kaikesi throw her disgust for Meenakshi Rishi Vishravas showers his happiness for having a girl child. He gently placed on his arms and named ‘Meenakshi’ as her eyes look like fish. Vishravas describes her daughter as, “Meenakshi, breathed Vishravas Her eyes are as golden and graceful as a fish’s” (Kane, pg, 5)

The beautiful girl Meenakshi undergoes numerous humiliation from her family where once Ravan killed Meenakshi’s pet Maya for damaging his herbal nursery. This made Surpanakha to attack his brother with her sharp nails. So Kaikesi scolds her for the fight. As Kaikesi says, “ Why can you not behave like a girl? Always fighting and squabbling, hitting boys and throwing stones and scratching the eyes out of anyone who provokes you. Surpanakha, that’s the right name for you, you monster!” (Kane, pg, 9)

Another time when family members discussing the issues of Kartaviryaarjun Meenakshi intervenes by supporting Kumbhakarna everyone including her father Vishravas scolds her for intervention in political issues. As Meenakshi hurts badly that her father too controlling her. As Vishravas says “Meenu, stay silent. It is bad manners to interfere and what you just said to your brother was downright disrespectful, if not rude! ‘ (Kane, pg, 35) These humiliations from her family hurts her badly they didn’t teach her good and bad. They treat her an outcast.

Next to her father Vishravas love the rival king Vidyujiva falls in love with Meenakshi but Ravan fails to realise their love and kills him. This infuriated Meenakshi to transform as Surpanakha to revenge her family members. As Kane says, “He had been particular about her _his only sister _and he had loathed Vidyujiva for this one reason that the king of Kalkeya had used his sister to eye his throne. And that is how Ravan had justified to the world that he had killed Vidyujiva _ for his sister”, (Kane, pg, 192)

Through Kane’s vision ‘ Surpanakha is a jungle tigress’ who is most dangerous and attacks her enemies. As Kane says, “ She was like that tigress. If she saw a way out, she would have run, but she was trapped in her grief, churning unto fury” (Kane, pg, 175) But the death of Vidyujiva hurts Surpanakha badly as she is unable to take revenge consequently. So she needs some time to trap and train her son Kumar for revenge. So she leaves Lanka moves to Padmavati forest. The beauty of forest heals her grief. As Kane says, “She was walking out of the palace as her father once walked out. The only words echoing in her ears were her mother’s, ‘ You’ll make life hell for us! ‘ (Kane, pg, 174).

The words of her mother echoed in her mind and so she decides to destroy their family and make Lanka hell. So she needs a plot to take revenge. She overhears that the two Ayodhya princess were in Padmavati forest for exile. Ravana is a powerful man so she decides Ram is the only man to kill him. If Ravana dies Kaikesi's plan will destroy. So she approaches them. But Surpanakha attracted towards Rama's charmness. She remembers her Grandmother Nani's words, "Is that not what her Nani had taught her: that there was no shame in desiring a man, that a self-assured woman be comfortable with her flowing urges and desires?" (Kane, pg, 194)

So Surpanakha approaches Rama to express her desire to marry but he declines that he is uttamapurusha for Sita. The mistake Rama commits is she asked Surpanakha to approach Lakshmana. So she moves towards him but he too declines that he is a servant of Lord Rama. You again approach him and be Master's wife. Surpanakha notices that two princess mock her. So in anger she tries to attack Sita but Lakshmana approaches to kill her. But Rama orders Lakshmana to Maim her for dishonour. So he cuts off Surpanakha's nose and disfigure her.

Thus Lakshman's decision to disfigure Surpanakha is an act of retaliation. Kane rebuilds Surpanakha identity to attack the gender injustices. Padmavathy, Premalatha & Vedamuthan in their article says, "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". The word _ 'resentment' act as a motivation to rebuild her identity by the course of action so she reshapes her fate to decide her future. This willpower transforms her from Meenakshi to Surpanakha. Thus the themes of transformation and empowerment navigates the contemporary issues related to women's right both in myth and reality. Kane reveals Surpanakha as a strong women who transforms her humiliation into strength

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