

Valiant and Exceptional Females in the Chosen Novels of Kavita Kane

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Abstract:

Kavita Kane, a renowned Indian author, is celebrated for her groundbreaking contributions to mythological fiction. She brings to light the untold stories of women from ancient myths, portraying their struggles, resilience, and inner strength. Her novels highlight the challenges faced by these women, who, despite their extraordinary qualities, endure oppression and hardship. In *Karna's Wife*, Uruvi defies societal norms by marrying Karna, enduring ostracism and isolation. Unlike the conventional image of a submissive wife, Uruvi questions Karna's moral choices while standing by him during his tribulations. In *Sita's Sister*, Urmila spends fourteen years apart from her husband Lakshman, shouldering familial and political responsibilities. Her sacrifices and emotional fortitude underscore her selfless dedication to others. *Menaka's Choice* presents Menaka, a celestial apsara whose life is marred by heartbreak and loneliness. She experiences profound loss, including the separation from her love, spouse, and children, ultimately living a solitary existence. In *Lanka's Princess*, Surpanakha emerges as a misunderstood and marginalized figure. Alienated by her family, she endures rejection, betrayal, and the pain of unfulfilled desires. Similarly, *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty* narrates Satyavati's rise from a humble fisherwoman to a queen, showcasing her unyielding spirit despite the sacrifices and impermanence of her achievements. Through these narratives, Kane reclaims the voices of overlooked female characters, celebrating their resilience and agency. Her works reveal the universal struggles of women, connecting mythological pasts to contemporary realities and emphasizing the shared strength of womankind across time.

Keywords: Female resilience, oppression, women's struggles, retelling mythology, Desire, pain, affection, sorrow, payback, offering and agony.

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Kavita Kane, born on 5 August 1966, is a celebrated Indian author and former journalist renowned for her work in mythological fiction. All her writings draw inspiration from Indian mythology, reimagining these ancient tales through the eyes of overlooked female characters. Her debut novel, *Karna's Wife: The Outcast Queen*, became a bestseller and established her as a prominent voice in the contemporary retelling of myths. She was born in Mumbai and grew up in cities such as Patna, Delhi, and Pune. Kane pursued her education at Fergusson College, Pune, and completed her postgraduate studies in English Literature and Mass Communication at the University of Pune. Although she initially aspired to work in administration, her love for writing led her to journalism, where she worked for two decades in renowned publications such as *The Times of India*, *Daily News and Analysis*, and *Magna Publications*. Following the resounding success of her first book, Kane transitioned to a full-time writing career.

Uruvi, the central character in *Karna's Wife: The Outcast Queen*, is the princess of Pukeya and Karna's wife. Her love for Karna begins as an intense admiration, despite societal disapproval due to his status as an outcast. Falling in love with him is effortless, but convincing her family and society of her decision proves to be an arduous task. Uruvi stands out as a woman of remarkable strength and emotional depth. Unlike the archetypal submissive wife, she challenges Karna when his moral choices conflict with her values. This tension is most vividly portrayed during the episode of Draupadi's disrobing, an event that leaves Uruvi distraught. Her moral outrage leads her to confront Karna, questioning his loyalty to Duryodhana and his role in such a heinous act.

Despite these conflicts, Uruvi remains a devoted partner, standing by Karna through his struggles and sharing his moments of joy, such as the news of her pregnancy. However, their happiness is overshadowed by Karna's tragic destiny, which he reveals to her in a moment of profound vulnerability. This revelation brings her immense grief, but Uruvi's resilience enables her to support him unconditionally, even as she grapples with the impending loss. Kane crafts Uruvi as a complex character who embodies love, loyalty, and moral courage, making her one of the most compelling figures in her retellings. In *Sita's Sister*, Urmila, Lakshman's wife and Sita's younger sister, emerges as a figure of silent strength and sacrifice. Newly married to Lakshman, she faces the heartbreak of his decision to accompany Ram and Sita into exile, leaving her behind. Urmila's sacrifices are profound, as she spends fourteen years managing the household and the kingdom in Lakshman's absence. Her quiet endurance and ability to suppress her personal grief for the greater good highlight her resilience and fortitude. Urmila's strength extends beyond her personal sacrifices. Her intellect and wisdom earn her recognition as a scholar, independent of her familial ties. She is invited to participate in a philosophical conference, where

she is acknowledged for her insights and achievements, not merely as King Janak's daughter. Despite often feeling overlooked compared to her sisters, Urmila remains a unifying presence within her family. She mediates conflicts and supports her loved ones, demonstrating emotional maturity and an unwavering sense of duty.

Urmila learns of Sita's kidnapping and is immediately overwhelmed with shock and a torrent of emotions—panic, dread, and anger. She questions everything and blames herself for Sita's distressing situation. Overcome by fear, rage, and sorrow, she screams aloud, leaving everyone around her astonished, as they have never seen her like this before. Despite attempts to reassure her, she remains gripped by guilt and fear for her sister's safety. In the days that follow, she is haunted by nightmares about Lakshman, which fill her with dread. She repeatedly convinces herself they are just bad dreams and clings to the hope of his safe return. However, her worst fears seem to materialize when she learns that Lakshman has been severely injured and is on the brink of death. Immobilized by the devastating news, she still manages to comfort her family, insisting that everything will be fine. With remarkable strength and belief, she remains hopeful that Lakshman will recover, defeat Ravan, and bring Sita back safely.

When the day of Lakshman's return finally arrives, their relationship is forever altered by the traumatic events. Throughout her life, from childhood to the present, Urmila has known sorrow and hardship. Yet, despite enduring so much, she refuses to succumb to despair. Her existence revolves around others more than herself, and she continually sacrifices her happiness and well-being for the sake of others. She endures countless struggles, facing a life devoid of joy with her husband, and remains resilient, confronting every challenge with courage and grace.

Menaka is an apsara created by Lord Brahma, the creator, to enchant, entertain, and distract. As the epitome of beauty, charm, and intelligence, she captivates many, including Indra, the king of the gods. Despite her heavenly duties, Menaka falls deeply in love with Vishwvasu, yearning to marry and have a family—an unconventional desire for apsaras, who are forbidden from marrying. In Indralok, while romance is permitted, marriage is strictly prohibited. Apsaras are meant to provide pleasure to others, with no room for personal desires. Menaka, however, defies these heavenly rules by choosing to love only Vishwvasu and secretly considering herself married to him, longing for a life together.

Menaka's life takes a significant turn when she discovers she is pregnant. Unlike the lust-driven perceptions of apsaras, their conception is only possible through genuine love. Indra permits apsaras to have children but forbids them from raising their offspring in heaven, requiring them to give their children to kings or sages. Menaka, torn between her duties and desires, gives birth but is forced to abandon her child, unable to nurture her as a mother.

After some time, Vasu is falsely accused and cursed by Indra, who labels him a monster. This unjust action devastates Menaka, who is absent from the court when the accusations unfold. Indra and Rambha's manipulation succeeds in separating Menaka from Vasu. Later, when Indra approaches Menaka to seduce Vishwamitra, she sees an opportunity to escape the oppressive confines of heaven. Although she engages in the plan, her true motive is to secure her freedom and distance herself from Indra's influence. Menaka seduces Vishwamitra and becomes deeply devoted to him. He accepts her as his partner, lover, and companion, and together they experience a blissful life. As Menaka becomes pregnant again, she cherishes every moment with this child, feeling she missed out on with her first. The baby symbolizes the essence of her love for Vishwamitra. She expresses her hope for him to continue his meditation and fulfill his ambition of becoming a Brahmarishi. However, Menaka's devotion faces a test when she realizes that their joy may be temporary.

Ultimately, Menaka reveals the truth to Vishwamitra, that she was sent by Indra to tempt him. Despite her genuine love, she decides to leave him, believing her departure will help him achieve his goal. The decision is painful and courageous, as she sacrifices her happiness for his success. When she returns to heaven, Menaka is tormented by memories of Vishwamitra and their daughter. Although she cannot die, she suffers an existence filled with endless sorrow, longing for the life they once shared. Her grief is softened, however, when she learns that Vishwamitra has attained his goal and become a Brahmarishi.

Surpanakha, Ravan's sister, has faced rejection and ridicule since birth. Her mother, Kaikesi, despises her for her dark complexion and unconventional beauty. Constantly belittled, Surpanakha learns to rely on herself, using her nails as weapons of defense. When Ravan kills her pet in a fit of rage, Surpanakha retaliates by scratching his neck. In response, Ravan mockingly calls her "Surpanakha," meaning "sharp nails." She embraces the name, seeing it as a symbol of her strength and resilience.

Surpanakha finds solace in the unconditional love of her grandmother and father. Although she is self-conscious about her appearance, she develops a fierce and haughty attitude to mask her insecurities. Her fascination with magic grows, but she is hesitant to pursue it openly, fearing her father's stern disapproval. One day, Kuber tries to take Meena away to escape Ravan's arrogance, but Meena fights back, using her nails to injure him. Surpanakha adopts her new identity with pride, embracing the idea of fighting for her dignity, even if it means using unconventional methods.

Meena encounters an unknown man at Ravan's wedding, who initiates a conversation with her. She feels a deep emotional connection to him and they both admire each other. This man, Vidyujiva, is an enemy of Ravan. Meena becomes consumed by thoughts of him, recalling every word he says. She longs for his exclusive companionship and is thrilled when they reunite at Kumbha's wedding. She mentally prepares herself to approach him and, during their reunion, he asks for her hand in marriage. Overwhelmed with joy, she accepts, as she has endured many hardships and feels unworthy, but now a man wants her and loves her. This brings her immense happiness.

Meena is in her room one day when she suddenly thinks about him, and he enters her chamber. She desires to trust him, care for him, and give herself to him. They share a personal moment together. However, Ravan threatens that if she doesn't marry someone else, he will kill Vidyujiva. Meena holds Ravan responsible for all her suffering. She confides in her siblings about her feelings for Vidyujiva, admitting her love and desire for him. She warns that she will expose Ravan's secret if he doesn't allow the marriage. Fearing her revelation, Ravan agrees to the marriage. Meena succeeds in her argument and finds love, unaware of her brother's hidden motives. She yearns to escape from Ravan, her mother, and her painful past, but Ravan refuses to let her go. After twelve years of marriage, she gives birth to a son, whom they name Sambhukumar. Both she and Vidyujiva are overjoyed by the arrival of their child.

During the war, Vidyujiva goes into battle, and Meena anxiously awaits news. She later learns of his death, and Ravan informs her of it, deepening her grief. She interrogates Ravan and begins to suspect that he might be responsible for Vidyujiva's death. She blames Ravan, believing he is the only one capable of such a crime. Her entire family opposes her, further ruining her life. Vidyujiva had been the one to provide her with the love and happiness she had longed for, and now she has lost everything. Her son remains her only solace. Meena longs for vengeance against Ravan, wishing for his death to avenge her husband. She eventually transforms into Surpanakha, seeking revenge on her family. She wants them to experience the same pain she feels.

Surpanakha leaves Lanka and lives in the forest with her child. One day, she hears a scream that sounds like her son's voice, and she realizes he has passed away. With her last hope gone, she desires to avenge her losses but has no regard for her own life. Filled with grief and rage, she vows to seek vengeance on the person responsible for her son's death. She soon discovers that Ram and Lakshman were involved in the killing of her son. Determined, she plans to use Ram to bring down Ravan. She decides to abduct Sita as part of her plan but is thwarted by Lakshman, who intervenes. In the ensuing struggle, Lakshman cuts off her ears and nose. Humiliated, Surpanakha acts irrationally, attempting to hide her shame.

Surpanakha's revenge extends to both Ravan and Lakshman. She manipulates Ravan into carrying out her scheme and finds satisfaction in her success when Ravan kidnaps Sita. This act of revenge, however, leads to the eventual downfall of Lanka. After the war and Ravan's death, Surpanakha achieves her first vengeance on her family. Next, she spreads rumors about Sita, causing her to be banished, further satisfying Surpanakha's desire to separate Sita from Ram. She later attempts to create discord between Lakshman and Urmila and even considers murdering Lakshman's son. However, the sight of the child reminds her of her own lost son, and she can't bring herself to harm him. Surpanakha begins to feel sympathy for them and releases them, acknowledging her past mistakes.

Satyavati, who is known as Kali due to her dark complexion, reigns as the queen of Hastinapur as Shantanu's second wife. A fisherwoman by birth, her father, King Uparichar Vasu, rejected her because he didn't want a daughter. Despite her father's rejection, she bravely takes to the sea, alone in a boat. One day, Rishi Parashar visits her house, and she accompanies him to the sea. She agrees to have a child with him, and the encounter leads to the birth of a son. However, Satyavati is more ambitious than content with the role of a simple woman. She dreams of ruling, not just being a rishi's wife. After the birth of her son, she ensures that the fishy smell of her body is removed, transforming herself into a woman of great allure.

Satyavati aims for higher status, desiring to be a queen rather than live a simple life. She meets Shantanu, the King of Hastinapur, on the riverbank, and manipulates him into marrying her. She enslaves him with her charms, and they eventually marry. After their marriage, Satyavati takes pride in her role as queen but becomes uneasy about being older than her husband, whom she is supposed to mother. She desires more power and secures the throne for her son, Chitrangad, who is only a child, by manipulating Shantanu to pass on the crown to him.

After Shantanu's death, Satyavati's true nature begins to surface. She desires to be a ruler, not just a queen. She takes control of the affairs of the palace and the kingdom, ensuring her sons' future reign. She is unwilling to lose her power and works tirelessly to safeguard her family's rule. When Chitrangad dies in battle, she is devastated but remains focused on securing her family's legacy. She turns to her second son, Virya, and pushes him to marry quickly, hoping to secure an heir. Following Chitrangad's death, Satyavati hastens Virya's marriage, again manipulating the situation to maintain her grip on the throne. She arranges for the princesses from Kasi to marry her sons and begins laying out a strategy to secure the future of her lineage. However, her ambitions lead to the destruction of many lives, as she uses her power to manipulate others for her own benefit.

Satyavati's relentless pursuit of the throne causes chaos in her family. Her actions eventually lead to the ruination of her descendants, leaving her to witness the consequences of her ambitions. She sacrifices everything, including her relationships with her husband, children, and grandchildren, in her quest for power. Her life becomes a cautionary tale of the cost of ambition and the destructive consequences of her desire for control over the throne.

Thus, Kavita Kane's novels portray a fascinating array of female characters who defy traditional roles and embrace complex narratives of strength, resilience, and empowerment. Through her reimaginings of mythological figures, she presents women who challenge societal norms, confront personal sacrifices, and redefine their identities in the face of adversity. Uruvi, the courageous wife of Karna in *Karna's Wife: The Outcast Queen*, embodies love, loyalty, and moral integrity, standing firm in the face of her husband's tragic destiny. Her emotional depth contrasts with the submissive archetype of the traditional wife, making her one of the most compelling female protagonists in Kane's works.

Similarly, Urmila in *Sita's Sister* portrays silent strength and selflessness, enduring fourteen years of separation from her husband Lakshman to uphold her familial responsibilities. Her intellectual prowess and emotional maturity shine through, especially when she is forced to navigate the grief of her sister's abduction and her own personal anguish. Urmila's resilience reflects Kane's ability to reveal the unnoticed strength of women often overshadowed by male counterparts in traditional retellings.

In *Menaka's Choice*, Kane delves into the inner turmoil of Menaka, an apsara torn between her duty to Indra and her love for Vishwamitra. Menaka's journey from obedience to rebellion showcases her quest for personal agency and maternal love, making her a figure of tragic heroism. Her sacrifices for Vishwamitra's spiritual growth add layers of depth to her character, making her much more than a mere seductress or divine figure.

Surpanakha's transformation from a victim of ridicule to a vengeful force in *Lanka's Princess* highlights the destructive power of rejection and societal mockery. Despite her initial lack of self-worth, Surpanakha uses her pain as fuel for revenge, navigating the fine line between empowerment and self-destruction. Her complex emotions and quest for vengeance underscore Kane's focus on female characters who redefine themselves in challenging circumstances.

Satyavati, in *The Fisher Queen Dynasty*, is an ambitious and manipulative queen who embodies the dangers of unchecked desire for power. Her manipulation of men, including her husband and sons, to secure her family's legacy paints her as both a tragic and morally ambiguous character. Satyavati's journey demonstrates the destructive consequences of prioritizing power over relationships, leaving a legacy marked by chaos and loss.

Kane's works demonstrate that the strength of women in mythological narratives often lies in their ability to transcend the constraints of their time, whether through loyalty, intellect, love, or vengeance. These female characters, while sometimes shaped by their roles within the patriarchal structures of their worlds, ultimately defy and reshape these boundaries in ways that highlight their agency. Through Uruvi, Urmila, Menaka, Surpanakha, and Satyavati, Kane crafts narratives where women's voices are no longer relegated to the background but become central to the unfolding mythological epics. Their struggles, sacrifices, and triumphs resonate with contemporary readers, offering new perspectives on the timeless themes of power, identity, and resilience in a patriarchal world. In revisiting these ancient myths, Kavita Kane not only humanizes these characters but also empowers them to reclaim their stories, providing a refreshing and thought-provoking view of female strength in mythology.

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