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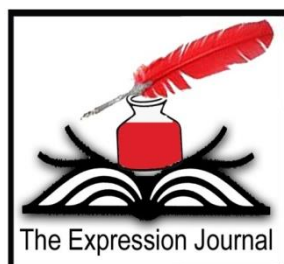


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Exploring Enigmatic Perspectives of Characters and Major Themes in Kavita Kané's Literary Realm

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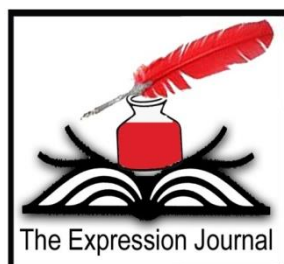
Abstract

Kavita Kané is a famous Indian writer well recognized for her retelling of Indian epics from a modern perspective. She is an Indian author and former journalist who was born on August 5, 1966. After the widespread and financial success of her first novel, *Karna's Wife: The Outcast Queen* (2013), she made the decision to focus only on writing. One of the authors of the new retelling age is Kavita Kané. All of her books are based on the Indian epic. As a transformative force in reimagining these classic characters, Kané gives a modern perspective to the unsung women of these epics, who live their lives with enthusiasm and freedom. The enigmatic personalities, intellectual faculty, and uniqueness of the lesser-known characters have gripped Kavita Kané. She has redefined characters by emphasizing their active presence in her narratives, which encompasses Kané, Kavita. *Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen*, *Sita's Sister*, *Menaka's Choice*, *Lanka's Princess*, *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty* and *Ahalya's Awakening*. She highlights characters such as Uruvi, Urmila, Menaka, Surpanakha, Satyawati, and Ahalya, reinterpreting their roles within a society. Kavita Kané has contributed immensely to reviving the subordinated and unsung women characters of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. She refuses to essentialize the female identity and brings to the fore the wedge that exists between the sign 'woman' and the real woman with her multifarious facets. Instead of portraying women characters in black and white, she treads the tricky terrain and delves into the grey shades, the conflicts within the fragmented personalities that illustrate women's multiple reflections. This study looks at Kavita Kané's writings, where the author stresses the agential role of the unsung women in the epics, altering them.

Keywords

Kavita Kané, Mythological Retelling, Women Characters, Feminist Reinterpretation.

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Kavita Kané began her writing in 2014 and has published nine works so far. She states that her father owned over 10,000 books, and reading was an essential part of their lives. She has obtained a master's degree in English literature and mass communication from the University of Pune. For her, journalism was the only practical job for writers; she finally chose to pursue a career in journalism. She has worked for a number of print media, including *Magna Publications*, *Daily News and Analysis*, and *The Times of India*, for a total of twenty years. In Indian literature, there are several versions of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, each with a different depiction of various characters. Many of Kavita Kané's select works feature marginalized female protagonists. Having grown up in Patna, Delhi, and Pune with her parents and two sisters, she acknowledges that books were the best friends for them all. Reading and spending time with her family are two of her interests. She loves theater and movies. She resides in Pune with her two daughters, Kimaya and Amiya, and is married to a mariner named Prakash Kané.

Ratneshwar Mishra writes in his paper "Myth and Contemporary Maithili Literature" (2010) that "myth corresponds neither to religion nor to science." It, on the other hand, soothes both heart and mind and bridges the gap between intellect and emotions, actuality, and ideal, human, and non-human". In all broad definitions, the narrative part of the term myth is usually highlighted.

Contemporary Indian literature is a dynamic landscape that balances ancient roots with the complexities of modern, globalised life. Authors today often explore the friction between traditional values and the pressures of rapid urbanization and changing social structures. Writers such as Amish Tripathi and Ashwin Sanghi lead a trend of mythological thrillers, retelling ancient Indian legends in a fast-paced, contemporary style that appeals to the curiosity of modern youth. A thematic study of a novel is a literary analysis technique that concentrates on locating, examining, and interpreting the main concepts also known as themes that permeate the book. Thematic analysis examines what this book is actually saying

about life, society, or human nature rather than focusing only on the plot or characters. Themes are usually expressed as complete ideas, not just single words such as ‘love’ rather ‘love can lead to both growth and destruction.’ A thematic study helps in understanding the deeper meaning of a novel; it connects literature to real life and it also recognizes social, political, psychological, or moral issues. It addresses questions like what idea does the author want us to think about and why did the theme matter in the societal portrayal?

India’s greatest epics, the Mahabharata and Ramayana, tell tales of gods and goddesses, bravery, betrayal, adventure, compassion, sacrifice, bravery, and love. In *Bhima’s Wife* (2025), Kavita Kané keeps Hidimbi at the center to show the great war unfolding that brings death and destruction to everyone. The central themes such as the forgotten wife and misrepresentation, motherhood, social marginalization, love, sacrifice, and betrayal are bringing Hidimbi out of the shadows of the *Mahabharata*’s core narrative. *Saraswati’s Gift* (2021) is a very interesting story written by Kavita Kané, which delves into the life of the Goddess Saraswati and Brahma. Readers have expressed that Kané motivates every reader to sustain balance in our social life, like how the goddess Saraswati emphasizes themes of empowerment and education. Kané’s books not only serve the purpose of entertaining people through their interesting plots but also teach the values of life by focusing on solid characters like the Goddess Saraswati. A celestial apsara that has historically been reduced to an instrument of divine manipulation is reinterpreted in *Menaka’s Choice* (2015). Menaka’s autonomy and personal challenges have been overlooked in favour of her beauty. The theme of separation, sacrifice, and maternal love highlights the personal costs of divine politics and social expectations. *Karna’s Wife: The Outcast’s Queen* (2013) tells the extraordinary story of Karna, the unsung hero of the Mahabharata, through the eyes of his wife, Uruvi. A central theme is the rigid caste system and the deep social prejudice that invites readers to reflect on how society treats those who break traditional hierarchies.

Bhima’s Wife (2025) is a retelling of the *Mahabharata* that gives a voice to the forest princess Hidimbi, the first wife of the Pandava prince Bhima and the mother of the martyr Ghatotkacha. This book serves as a reminder that history is created not just by those who win wars, but also by individuals who endure, sacrifice, and pursue their own goals even when no one is looking. Hidimbi’s story endures because it is truthful rather than because it is loud. The novel reimagines her as the forgotten queen whose sacrifices were essential to the Pandavas’ success but were largely erased from traditional history. The work focuses on issues like duty against emotion, identity, choice, sacrifice, and the morality of war. The story critiques how the civilized world brands forest dwellers as Rakshasas (demons). Despite being the eldest daughter-in-law of the Pandavas, Hidimbi is erased from royal history because of her identity. The novel emphasizes that Hidimbi does not see herself as a victim of Bhima’s departure but as a self-sufficient leader of her people. While the Pandavas fight for a throne, Hidimbi’s war is raising her own son, Ghatotkacha, alone in the forest without paternal or royal support. The narrative questions the morality of the Pandavas, who only seek out Hidimbi’s son when they need his supernatural powers to win their war.

I make my own story, I will write it in my language, my emotions, my perspective. You would rather hear the unusual story, where I am seen as unsuitable to walk the lofty corridors of royalty, but who knows who sees me as what, be it Pritha Devi or Ballav or his brothers, what is important is how I see myself. (Kané 98)

Readers observe life outside of the royal courts and battlefields thanks to Kavita’s skillful weaving of layers of emotion and viewpoint. She serves as a reminder that several universes cohabit beneath the same sky, each formed by unique hardships, allegiances, and

sacrifices. Readers are able to experience Hidimbi's yearning, fortitude, and resiliency because of the story's depth, emotion, and intense engagement. We can sense Hidimbi's suffering, longing, strength, and resolve via Kavita's clear yet powerful language. Readers see her love for her people, her bravery as a leader, her compassion as a mother, and her grace in letting go when the time comes as her story progresses.

Saraswati, the feminine force worshipped as the Goddess of learning. Unlike Shiva-Parvati or Lakshmi-Narayan, she is viewed as a single goddess and is referred to be a lost river. Saraswati is a name derived from the Sanskrit word 'saras' which means flow. This etymology is significant because it emphasizes her connection to the flow of information and wisdom. In *Saraswati's Gift* (2021), Kavita Kané seamlessly weaves together the realms of mythology and modernity. It creates a rich tapestry that combines ancient wisdom with modern relevance. This retelling of the life of the Goddess of Knowledge portrays her not just as a silent deity but as a fiercely independent thinker who prioritizes the pursuit of wisdom over domestic or divine expectations. In a conversation between Saraswati and Yamuna, Saraswati remarks, "They know us as rivers, mere water bodies, not as life-giving sources within and outside" (Kané 128). Yamuna expressed her fear when she replied:

Yes, I fear humans, I fear our future, I fear for our very existence... we are sisters, our tributaries coming from the same source where the waters are pure and fresh. But Man has polluted us. I have become dark and ugly—all green and sluggish now. (Kané 128)

The conversation above portrays the greatness of the rivers that humans fail to realise. Kané wanted people to look at rivers as life-giving sources rather than just water bodies. When Saraswati brought Vadavagni from heaven to earth, crossing Krtasmara, a mountain with dominant ideologies. She tries to understand river ecosystem coexistence, but the mountain fears human behaviour and says:

A river in my land means people, human settlement and a new civilisation. I don't want them to disturb my peace... Man is a plunderer... He shall destroy the trees and the foliage and the animals living in this kingdom. He has done it before, leaving many hills and tracts wasted and barren in the wake of his destruction. (Kané 107).

Although a river is inevitable for the plants and animals to survive, the mountain is stubborn in its idea of driving the river away, as it has seen the effect of human beings on it. The central theme is that wisdom is the ultimate tool for liberation and that intellectual pursuits are a valid and heroic life path. The novel critiques the societal pressure on women to prioritize domestic harmony over personal growth and intellectual passion. The pursuit of knowledge is the central theme in both myth and modern contexts. Saraswati symbolizes the timeless pursuit of enlightenment, understanding and wisdom.

Menaka's Choice (2015) by Kavita Kané tells the tale of the most desirable celestial beauty who despised all of Heaven's splendour. Not only was she the most attractive apsara, surpassing Urvashi in beauty, but she was also the smartest and funniest of them all, making her Lord Indra's favourite. She was seductive not just with her gorgeous physique but also with her knowledge. The Samudra Manthan gave rise to Menaka, the divine celestial apsara. Her career as an apsara was the same, but she changed it when she fell in love with Vishwvasu, a Gandharva. She married him, breaking the norms, and had a daughter named Pramadvara. Because of all these complications, Indra's infatuation to Menaka resulted in the most heinous crime. Though she was born to seduce, all she wanted was a family. The novel reclaims Menaka's story and places 'choice' at its centre, instead of portraying her as merely a temptress sent by the Gods. Kané sees Menaka as an empowered protagonist, providing a

nuanced exploration of her psyche and presenting her as a multifaceted individual with autonomy, desires, and inner conflicts. Menaka is torn between her duty to Indra and her personal emotions for Vishwamitra. Menaka's role as mother to Shakuntala adds emotional depth in the plot of the story. She expresses her individuality and intelligence by saying:

I shall introduce myself as who and what I am- Menaka, the banished apsara ... I shall convince him that I have been thrown out from Heaven by you as a punishment for having dared to love the Devagandharva Vishwavas and sired a child from him. And how you cursed him and recount all what you did to extract all the needed sympathy...that way, there is no untruthfulness in my story. (Kane 106)

Throughout the narrative, Menaka remains in control, and is never reduced to a weak or submissive figure. Menaka adamantly refuses to leave Kaushik despite Indra's order. When Indra later arrives to take Menaka back to heaven, she gives him two choices: either fight Kaushik or leave Menaka with Kaushik to bear their child. Menaka outwits Indra with this cunning move, allowing her to spend more time with Kaushik. She fearlessly confronts those in power, questions societal norms, and prioritizes her own happiness and the well-being of those she loves:

She allowed her words to sink in. She had played out well, goading him, enticing him though exaggerated promises and persuasion, and finally scaring him just enough to provoke him into agreeing with her. She had him completely in her grip, and she would twist him as necessary. (Kané 159)

Sita's Sister (2014) is a portrayal of Urmila, a vibrant young princess and the only legitimate daughter of King Seeradhvaj Janak and Queen Sunaina, the rightful heir to Mithila and a respected scholar like her father. Urmila is the most neglected character in Valmiki's Ramayana, often overshadowed by other important characters and recognized mainly as Sita's sister and Lakshman's wife. She appears briefly in the story of 'Bala Kanda' during her marriage and then disappears without further mention, making her sacrifices largely unnoticed and forgotten. Through this narrative, Urmila embodies various roles such as a caring sister, devoted wife, responsible daughter, dutiful daughter-in-law, efficient administrator, talented artist, and a thoughtful critic, eventually becoming a prominent scholar. Urmila's sacrifice is harder than Sita's. Both Sita and Urmila are newly married. Though exiled, Sita has the satisfaction of staying with her husband which Urmila hasn't. Everybody praised Sita for her sacrifice. What about Urmila's? In order for others to fulfil their dharma, she, a recent bride, separated from her husband for fourteen years. Her stay in the palace was no way less than an exile. Sita says:

You make my exile a simple task compared to what you are doing. Not only are you going to be separated from your husband for the next fourteen years, but you don't want your husband to even think of you lest he digresses from his goal to serve his brother. I bow to you, sister, for your vanvaas, your exile here in the palace shall be way harder than mine in the forest. Give me your strength and I know I shall succeed too. (Kané 99)

Urmila is not just an overlooked figure in Valmiki's Ramayana, but also in the versions by Kamban and Tulasi Das. In his work Upekshita, Rabindranath Tagore referred to Urmila as the most forgotten heroine of the Ramayana. Additionally, Maithili Sharan Gupta retold the Ramayana from Urmila's perspective in his work Saket. Similarly, Sita's Sister is another notable work by Kavita Kané, in which the author tells Urmila's story from her point of view. Shatrughna acknowledges Urmila's pain and says

You saved us! All these years, Bharat and I might have looked after Ayodhya and the people, but it was you who looked after us, kept the family together and saved it from a living hell.... You made this palace a better place. You made it a home one wants to return to every single day. You blessed it with your patient love, your indomitable spirit and your everlasting hope for peace. (Kané 182)

Kané uses the method to depict Urmila as a current contemporary woman who negotiates her way through circumstances to obtain what she wants rather than be passivized as a lady who makes beautiful sacrifices. Even Sumitra appreciates Urmila's selfless sacrifice. She says:

We were blind and mute to your pain, your hopelessness. And yet you gave us your all. For years, we were being torn apart by mutual distrust and resentment but all of us pretended that all was well, that denial was the best policy, except you. You made us face the truth. You showed us the mirror to the real us, not a reflection of what the world—and we ourselves—believed about us. We thank you for making us happier, better people. (Kané 19)

Urmila's dominating mode of resistance is to question. Naturally, she suffers, but primarily as a result of her choices to remain in the palace and to marry Lakshman despite being aware of his priorities. She does not have the luxury of being with her husband, in contrast to Sita.

In *Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen* (2013), Kané attempts to retell the Mahabharata from a contemporary perspective. The novel critiques how birth-based identity determines status, opportunity, and dignity. Both Karna and Uruvi endure humiliation, rejection, and loss after their marriage. Pukeya's princess Uruvi had grown up in Hastinapur, playing with the Pandavas and against the Kauravas. Her mother and Queen Kunti were the best of friends, and there had always been an understanding between them that Uruvi would be married to Arjuna someday. Unlike his foster father, who was a charioteer, Karna aspired to be an archer and a warrior. With this dream, the young Radheya, also called the son of Radha, went to master Dronacharya, the best martial arts teacher in Hastinapur and the master of the Kauravas and Pandavas. But because he was not a kshatriya, the guru refused to teach him. The Pandavas' wife, Draupadi, publicly humiliated him in her swayamvara, and the renowned master Dronacharya refused him a formal education. She turned him down as a suitor since he was a charioteer's son (sutaputra), saying

As Draupadi, the yajnaseni, the one born out of fire, I insist on being declared a veeryashulka, a bride to be won by the worthiest and the very best. I will not allow a low-born sutaputra to participate in the challenge. (Kane 31)

Uruvi falls head over heels in love with Karna when she first glimpses him during this archery competition in Hastinapur. Uruvi chooses Karna against societal expectations, asserting her independence in love and marriage. King Vahusha, her father, attempted to persuade Uruvi by saying:

Do you think you will upgrade his status by marrying him? No, you will only worsen yours. You know how it goes in our society. Anuloma or the practice of marrying a man of higher caste is legitimate. But you are well aware that the reverse practice of pratiloma, that of marrying a man of lower caste, is prohibited by the shastras. (Kane's 18-19)

The novel explores themes such as caste discrimination, feminine agency, love and loyalty, identity, fate, moral complexity, and resilience, transforming a familiar epic tale into a deeply personal and socially reflective narrative.

A number of revisionist women writers, including Anuja Chandramouli, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Koral Das Gupta, Amrita Patil, have examined the status of women by allowing them to actively participate in the retelling of ancient texts. They concentrate on the oppressed and subjugated ancient female population, revitalizing their narratives through a fresh perspective and presenting them prominently. They recount stories, themes, and people from various perspectives. To do the characters, themes, and narratives justice, this is done. Occasionally, they do this in order to abandon the dullness of the latter portion and conclude the narrative with a specific scene from the original story that perfectly captures the protagonist's personality. Kané places a strong focus on female subjectivity and allows them to express their stories in their own voice. She supports their actions and portrays them as equals in today's world. She explores their emotions and struggles, giving them a significant place in her writings. In addition, she brings attention to some lesser-known characters from the Ramayana and Mahabharata, narrating their stories through the main protagonists. Kané dismantles the traditional male-dominated storytelling and introduces a new approach to writing through the female perspective. Her characters are strong, determined, and brave. They speak out against injustice and behave honourably and morally in a society that frequently oppresses women. These characters do not present themselves as passive or oppressed, but rather as confident and assertive individuals in a male-dominated world. Upon closer examination, they are found to be intelligent, bold, resolute, and empowered women who act as agents of change, offering a new vision of what it means to be a modern woman.

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