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Uruvi's odyssey from margins to center: A Feminist study of Kavita Kane's Karna's Wife

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Abstract

In Mahabharata, Karna's Wife, Uruvi is nowhere mentioned or familiarized as a mainstream character. In Karna's Wife, Kavita Kane attempts to portray Uruvi's perspective by telling her side of the story through her thoughts, actions and conversations. Uruvi, a fictional character created by Kane, and bring her to the centre from the margins by giving her a feminine voice. She is depicted as a strong and independent Kshatriya Princess who is in love with an Outcaste, Karna, breaking the shackles of the patriarchy.

Keywords: Mahabharata, feminine, patriarchy, margins

Introductions

Kane tries to retell *Mahabharata* by giving it a modern point of view. She makes Uruvi, a marginalized character in the epic, the main character of her story, Uruvi is a strong woman who dares to make bold choices and has the courage to stand by her decision and her husband. She is a warrior's wife who questions war and fights to live her life and to save her family. The novel traces the journey of Uruvi from her childhood to being a woman, Uruvi is depicted as a contemporary woman who has own free-will, she makes her own decisions and has the freedom to act upon the choices she made in her life. Uruvi showcases Mahabharata from the feminine perspective which rejects patriarchy and raises her voice against the injustice and the issues which remained untouched in the epic "Karna's mysterious birth, Kunti's silence, Karna's attempt to dishonor Draupadi, Bheeshma's silence enveloping Karna's origin and even Krishna's role in Karna's death" (Anish 2017: 8) ^[1].

Analysis

In Kavita Kane's Karna's Wife, Uruvi is depicted as a mainstream character who recounts her side of the story through her thoughts, conversations, and actions. This novel is not only from a marginalized women character but also from a pariah's wife perspective. Uruvi despite being the princess of Pukeya marries Karna who is a sutaputra. She broke the patriarchal stereotype by marrying a pariah despite being having a huge gap in their social status. She remains firm to her decision of marrying Karna despite nobody is of favor of this marriage. Her love for Karna was pure as she even accepted to become his second wife. Kane has made the epic relevant in the present scenario by retelling it through the gaze of Uruvi who is brave enough to make bold choices.

The novel tells the story about a girl who is loved and pampered in her house and lived the life of a princess transforms into a woman who is married to a sutaputra Karna who has devoted all his life to his friend Duryodhana yet chooses to live her life on her own conditions. Uruvi negotiates her space by resisting the exploitative patriarchal systems. She breaks the authority of patriarchy by her questions, reasons, and actions and makes a space for herself with altering existing structures. She reasoned with her father and convinced him that Karna has all the qualities that she desires in her husband. She says

I am in love with a good man, who is honest and brave. I want to marry him. I am asking for your permission and want your blessings to do so. What am I doing wrong? Am I not allowed to choose the person whom I love? (Kane 2013:18) ^[3].

She seeks her father's blessings because she knew that she can never be happy if she marries Karna against her father's wishes. She even told her father "it is either Karna or no one. If I can't have him, I would rather stay unmarried." (Kane 2013:18) ^[3]. She is brave enough to take stand for him when he is not even aware that she is in love with him by saying "not the wrong man, the wronged man."

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(Kane 2013:18) ^[3] It is important to understand that it is not just women but all the marginalized categories are oppressed by the patriarchal system. King Vahusha, Uruvi's father, a big influence in her life, too reflects the oppression of patriarchal system while arguing against Karna because he is an outcaste and therefore she cannot marry to a person belong to lower caste. Uruvi being the only daughter of King Vahusha and Queen Shubra of Pukeya is always loved and pampered by providing her all the comforts since her childhood-

She is an heiress to her father's legacy, his intelligence, and her mother's flaming beauty...though the burning fire in her eyes, the warmth of her smile, and the passion with which she articulated her thoughts were enticing, she was too spirited to be restrained, too proud to be cautious, and far too forthright to think of the consequences of her actions (Kane 2013: 8) ^[3].

The oppression of patriarchy becomes evident after one critical choice that Uruvi makes – to choose Karna as her husband, being his wife to her is a pursuit for a meaning to her life. A rigid caste system followed by patriarchy clearly reflects in the initial resistance from her parents and their endeavors to persuade Uruvi not to marry Karna. Caste system emphasizes on patriarchal hierarchy and puts various restrictions on individual freedom. In the essay *Conceptualising Brahminical Patriarchy in Early India*, Uma Chakravarti, uses the word 'Brahminical patriarch' to explain how a rigid caste system controls the sexuality of women. As all unfair practices do, the caste system too victimises and dominates women. Caste system controls the sexuality of women by restricting them to marry outside their caste group. "The lower caste male whose sexuality is a threat to upper caste purity has been institutionally prevented from having sexual access to women of the higher castes so women must be carefully guided" (Chakravarti 1993: 579) ^[2]. Uruvi's life after marriage is a demonstration of the patriarchal control and by marrying Karna, Uruvi resists this control. Uruvi's marriage to Karna, who belonged to a much lower varna is a pratiloma marriage where in a woman of a higher varna marries a man from a lower varna (McGrath2009: 38) ^[4].

Uruvi confesses her love to Karna without hesitation or shyness. She is very clear about her feelings whereas Karna was suspicious of why a princess wants to marry a Sutaputra against all the odds of the society. She declares her love" I grew up loving you. I had decided to marry you a long time ago even though I know that I didn't even exist for you till now". (Kane 2013:41) ^[3] Uruvi is not like other ladies who indulge themselves in gossiping about other women, she rather has an interest in art, medicine, and literature. But by marrying a Sutaputra other women got a chance to hurt her by looking down on her as she is no longer a Princess but an only wife of a pariah. She faces all these women with smiles and grace and thinks that they are jealous of her because she married the man she loved which these ladies are not capable of doing. Even King Vahusha couldn't be more proud of her daughter

Courage is very odd. Any other person would have locked herself in her home to hide from this deliberately cold treatment and the unkind remarks. But not my Uruvi; she's a lioness all right! (Kane 2013:61) ^[3].

Uruvi despises the friendship between Duryodhana and Karna. She confronts Karna and tries to make him understand that there is a thin line between right and wrong.

In your blind love for your friend, you cannot see nor distinguish between good and bad, right and wrong...he needs you to fight his final battle with the Pandavas. Without you, he can never win against them. Without you, the Kauravas are nothing. Assured of your unwavering loyalty, Duryodhana can afford to be arrogant and forceful. (Kane2013:85) ^[3] She even warns Duryodhana to stay away from her husband as he was using him as a tool to take his revenge from his brothers.

Isn't that why you made him the King of Anga in the first place? So that he is forever indebted to you? It's no friendship you claim, Duryodhana, it's a devious arrangement, its emotional extortion! (Kane 2013:81) ^[3].

Uruvi revolts in her own manner when she came to know that it was Karna who has instigated Dushana to drag Draupadi by her locks and told him to disrobe her. It becomes impossible for Karna to bear her wrath. She takes stand against the injustice done by her husband and decides to leave him at once. Her fury is visible in her words

Did it make you feel proud, great warrior, to pull a woman by her hair and haul her through the royal hall? Did it make you feel proud, great warrior, to strip her of her pride? Did it make you feel powerful, great warrior, to disrobe her? To deride her as a prostitute? Did it make you feel happy to hear her beg and weep? What sort of man are you?" she cried. 'How could you do what you did? How could you say that as a wife of more than four husbands, she is nothing but a "whore"? That the Pandavas were like sesame seeds removed from the kernel and she should now find other husbands? (Kane 2013:116) ^[3].

Her straightforwardness with respect to Ekalavya or Karna is clear demonstration of Uruvi's desire for an egalitarian society beyond the harsh realities of either wars or individual battles by both men and women against patriarchal agencies. Her continuous effort to maintain harmony and her passion for healing is a declaration of her ultimate desire to mend the world and live in peace. Uruvi depicts the shade of feminism advocated by Lakshmi Kannan who comments, "at its most basic and fundamental level feminism is all about human rights" Uruvi too portrays a concern beyond gender and aims for a world of equality, respect and dignity for all. Uruvi and Karna had different perspectives or views on war. The war ground for Karna meant a sacred ground to seek honor and truth whereas for Uruvi it meant nothing but just a wasteland, where the dead and wounded fell. Uruvi did her part by devoting herself in healing th wounded and maimed soldiers. Karna's brother, Shona confronts Uruvi regarding the shame she brought to Karna by healing the soldiers as his brother fought battles one after another. Despite his objection, she quietly continued with healing and replies to Shona thus "There are two sides in a war; the triumph and the terror...I can see only the horror, the suffering, the aftermath of war. And I am sure that looking after the sick, the maimed and the crippled is not going against dharma. I don't think so, nor do my parents and Karna- and they matter most to me" (Kane 2013:213) ^[3].

Conclusion

After the death of Karna, Uruvi negotiates her life firmly and decides to live her independently. She refused the male domination by not going to Hastinapur as Karna's queen and even reject the request of allowing her son to become the next king. Uruvi decided to go back to Pukeya to live

with her parents breaking the patriarchal conventions. She kept the right to make decisions, to herself yet not breaking down existing structures through violent confrontations. She rather chooses the art of healing to nurture the emotional scars of war which portrays her hatred and resistance towards war.

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