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SURPANAKHA: AN INCENDIARY JOURNEY OF THE DESTINED CHARACTER IN KAVITA KANE'S *LANKA'S PRINCESS*

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Abstract

The research article examines the incendiary journey of the destined character in Kavita Kane's *Lanka's Princess*. Surpanakha is portrayed as very strong female character in this novel. For the development of many cultures and religion, customs and civilizations, myth will be the foundation. Surpanakha's journey from a beautiful girl to an enraged Surpanakha with sharp nails are beautifully explored in this novel. the novel portrays the convolution of human attitude and behavior to understand the meaning of life and their self-identity. The actions of Surpanakha shows that it is her need for justice, because during her childhood days, she faces ignorance, ill-treatment, the death of her husband, the death of her so, all these things only make her very cruel. Surpanakha is the victim in the hands of her mother, brother and the whole family and the situations forces her to suspect her own family. Though she changed her spirit into a Rakshashi, she loved everyone with deep within her. It is understood that, Kavita Kane also depicts the good side of Surpanakha skillfully in this novel. Surpanakha is a strong, dynamic, powerful, forceful character, a liberated woman, a dutiful wife and an affectionate mother. Her character and personality are totally influenced by her mother and brothers throughout her life.

Key Words: Vengeance, Violence, Affection, Love, Hatred, Mythology

Kavita Kane is a popular Indian novelist in English Literature. She is particularly known for writing fictions related to mythology like Ramayana and Mahabharata. After the success of her novel, *Karna's Wife*, she determines to become a full-time author and she has written many novels like *Sita's Sister*, *Karna's Wife*, *Ahalya's Awakening*, *Menaka's Choice*, *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty* and *Sarasvati's Gift*. In the Indian society, mythology plays a significant role, because of its impact and its influence on the people paves a way for the people to understand the cultural pattern, religious framework, social and political issues. Now a days,

feminist writers break the monotonous writing pattern and themes, and they have started to focus on mythology by using female characters in Indian mythology, whom others considered them as a destined character. By refolding, retelling and recreating the women characters, Kavita Kane has written her fiction from the perspective of women.

Kavita Kane in her novel, *Lanka's Princess* figures out the unheard voice of Surpanakha as well as her incendiary journey of her life. She is portrayed as very strong female character in this novel. For the development of many cultures and religion, customs and civilizations, myth will be the foundation.

Especially, in Indian myth is recognized as the construct of contemporary relevance and people are emotionally connected with the mythological characters even, they compare themselves with those mythological characters. Kavita Kane says, I always believed that mythology can be a huge canvas for contemporary thought. It is not telling us some old tales, as so carelessly assumed, of Gods and Goddess, but of man and his follies and fallacies (Exo 43 L229).

Actually, the original name of Surpanakha is Meenakshi, the reason for this name Meenakshi is for her fish-shaped eyes. *Lanka's Princess* highly discusses about her mother's rejection, her brother's Ravan's hatred towards her, and her life at Ashram and at last her finding and enveloping herself in her husband's love. Surpanakha's journey from a beautiful girl to an enraged Surpanakha with sharp nails are clearly explored in this novel. She always in a dilemma, because she does not know whether she should possess good qualities which is manifested by her father Vishrawas and her two brothers, Kumbhakarna and Vibhishan or the evil things which is directed by her brother Ravan and her mother Kaikesi. The rejection and hatred which she has faced during her childhood days, totally changed her and she keeps on watering her wishes for vengeance, revenge and cruel activities. Like, someone adds fuel to the fire, she completely transforms herself as Lanka's princess into a cunning and an assertive woman. The main thing is that how, her anger, vengeance, and assertion destroys everything is examined well. And also, the novel portrays the convolution of human attitude and behaviour to understand the meaning of life and their self-identity. The novel begins with the statement, 'It's a girl!' [Kane, 1]. Though Kaikesi having three sons, she feels extremely disappointed after giving birth to a daughter. Here, Kavita Kane clearly explicates the feeling of Kaikesi through the following words:

Kaikesi had three sons from him and was hoping for a fourth, but it turned out to be a daughter... Kaikesi looked down at the baby and could not help cringing or quench the well of bitterness. This girl has cheated me of

my plans, she thought angrily, a faint stirring of unease making her more restless. [Kane, 2]

So, in the earlier days itself, Surpanakha is heavily hated by her own mother. She always longing for her mother's love and affection. At once, as five years old Surpanakha saved her brother Vibhishnan from the fight. That time also she gets scolding from her mother, and she states, "Vivhishnan is a boy, and he's older to you. He doesn't need your protection!" [Kane, 5]. Her brothers Kumbhakarna and Vibhishnan are always protective towards their sister but they could not stand against their brother Ravan, a self-obsessed person. Only Ravan's attitude towards Surpanakha makes her realize that she should be very strong and self-reliant. When Ravan kills her pet animal, she reveals her power by using her nails, she hurts her own brother. From that situation only, her name has been changed from Meenakshi to Surpanakha. Ravan screams in the pain and blood flows from his hand. He says that,

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.

She replied immediately,

... Yes, I am a Monster!... if anyone hurts me, I shall hurt them with these!! I am Surpanakha [Kane' 9].

When Kuber, her step-brother tries to kidnap her, again she has used the nails as a weapon and provokes her identity with full acceptance of who she is. After many years, as a young girl who is always ignored by someone, for the first time finds love and carrying Vidyujiva, a renowned King. He love Surpanakha truly only because of her intellect, strength, smart behaviour not for her dark beauty. He always addresses her as 'my tigress', because of her courage and her sexual assertiveness. So, her husband compares her with a violent and courageous tigress. On the other side, her mother remarks, "she's scrawny and much darker than me!... How is the dark monkey going to bring us good fortune? No one will ever marry her" [Kane, 3].

Vidyujiva is a good person and for political issues, Ravan murders Vidyujiva. On hearing this news, Surpanakha gets angry and the pain she endures only makes her into acute hatred towards Ravan. Even she promises to take revenge against her own family. 'She was like that tigress. If she saw a way out, she would have run, but she was trapped in her grief, cunning into furry. My revenge would be my respite. Ravan has to die for this murder' [Kane, 175]. She confesses to her family members that; she will make each one of her family members' life into a hell and she takes an oath as Surpanakha. She creates another mess to take revenge against Ravan. She tempted her brother to abduct Sita, then only Rama will fight against Ravan to safeguard Sita. Surpanakha plans this entire plot and it becomes a double-edged sword. During the war, she loses many of her loved ones like, Kumbha, Meghnad but she did not affect by those lose, because her vengeance only stands supreme. Then she glanced at Ravan and confess,

... I did not want Kumbha to die or his young twin sons to, I don't want my Meghnad killed as well. It had been Ravan alone who was supposed to die on the battle field. But he would be the last to die. Before him, all those whom I had once loved would be sacrificed [Kane, 254].

The actions of Surpanakha shows that it is her need for justice, because during her childhood days, she faces ignorance, ill-treatment, the death of her husband, the death of her son, all these things only make her very cruel. This is the complete change over from the beautiful-eyed Meenakshi into the sharp-nailed Surpanakha. On the other side, it is understood that, Surpanakha is the victim in the hands of her mother, brother and the whole family and the situations forces her to suspect her own family and their attitude towards her as a child. Taraka, a maternal grandmother of Surpanakha is the only person who always comforts her and gives confidence with soothing words and gestures.

Beauty lies in your hand and heart, you have to believe it... love that smooth dusky skin, love the petite, fragile figure of yours, those big, honey-drop eyes... you make the world believe what you are, not

believe what the world believes of you [Kane, 22-23].

Nothing can be worse and hurting, when a mother humiliates her own young child for her appearance and complexion. Even she was admonished by her own father. Because, Ravan is the beloved child of Kaikesi, Vibhishnan is the cherished child of her father Vishrawas and Kumbhakarna is the favourite of everyone in the family. She is the one who is left out from these persons. Her brother got married instead of focusing on her wishes for the marital life. She was jealous of Ravan's wife, Mandodari because before their marriage. They will do everything for their sister's well-being. Her brothers married queens from the powerful families and from powerful kingdom. They forget to take care of Surpanakha's welfare. She then thinks about her husband and their sweet memories. She was amused and surprised when Vidyujiva courageously confesses his love for her. She is charmed by Vidyujiva's words of love. "I love you because there is no reason. I just hopelessly, irrationally did!! (Kane, 115). After that all her misfortunes and the death of her husband, she determines to stay away from Lanka and decides to keep herself in the Dandaka Forest. The forest gives her some kind of feelings like, sense of freedom, and she starts to love that place, animals, plants and also humans. Soon the forest became her home and she spends good time with Dandaka Forest. She moves away from Lanka along with her son, Kumar. She trains up her son to take revenge against Ravan and her son also pledged to take revenge for his father's death. One day while she is wandering in Dandaka forest alone, she is supposed to meet Rama and Lakshman. She is mesmerized on seeing the beauty of Rama and Lakshman. She felt some kind of emotion of shame for lust and she decides to find solace in lust. At that time she remembers the words of her grandmother., " ...there was no shame in desiring a man" [Kane, 194]. After a long time, she desires to have a sexual intimacy with either of the two men. But both of them rejected her approach. First, she approached Rama, but he says that, he is accompanied along with her wife Sita. Next, she approaches Lakshman and he says that, he got married Urmila and she is waiting for his arrival in

Ayodhya. Suddenly Lakshman's sword cut off her nose and ears and blood sheds on her skin. So Surpanakha brilliantly uses this reason to create a mess between Rama and Ravan. She could not bear the humiliation which she faced by both Rama and Lakshman. She is the one who is the significant reason for the arise of war. But still the anger burns within her and she promises herself that,

... I shall have him killed, even if it meant annihilation of my family, this palace, this kingdom, my race. He and they and all have made me suffer as I had never thought it was possible to suffer [Kane, 214].

In the original epic, Surpanakha is explores as a vamp, but here, Kavita Kane reveals that she too had a human side, because she is very affectionate towards her brothers, a loving wife and she is very fond of her nephews and a loving and carrying mother. When she hears the news of Ravan's death, she is taken back to her childhood days and she recollects the memories with her brother. Though she is unfortunately changed her spirit into a rakshashi, she loved everyone with deep within her. It is understood that, Kavita Kane also depicts the good qualities of Surpanakha in this novel. Though Lakshman killed her son in the war, she hesitates to kill Lakshman's son, Angad.

All she had to do was to smother him with a pillow... but her stiff fingers could not close on the small cushion. It mocked her...was that how brave an asura she was? Was she as wicked? Has she stopped so abysmally low? Had her vengeance made her such a hideous monster?... her heart contacted, feeling strangely moved and sad, and conscious of a slight remorse...it unnerved her, like a long, gushing wound with the gurgle of blood spurting out. She almost stepped back, flinching [Kane, 282-287].

This scene reveals the character of Surpanakha's kind attitude towards a child. Her character and personality are totally influenced by her mother and brothers throughout her life. She is recognized as a demoness; her human side was also neglected by the people. Surpanakha is a strong, dynamic, powerful, forceful character, a liberated woman, a dutiful wife and an affectionate mother.

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