
Deconstructing Gender Archetypes: Reimagining a Silenced Surpanakha in Kavita Kané's *Lanka's Princess***Ananya Anuraj Kadalayil**

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Abstract

Lanka's Princess, by Kavita Kané, is a retelling of the Ramayana from the lens of women who are frequently misunderstood or disregarded, especially Surpanakha. Usually, Surpanakha is portrayed as spiteful, aggressive, and villainous. The novel focuses on the emotions, struggles, and thoughts of Surpanakha, steering through a society that restricts the power and freedom of women. Instead of a basic villain, she turns into a character framed by injustice, personal desire, and societal pressure. Kavita Kané deconstructs gender archetypes, reviewing the idea of "good" or "bad" in traditional mythologies. The story of Surpanakha underscores the biased beliefs put on women and reflects how the norms of patriarchy influence their actions and choices.

By retelling the story through Surpanakha's perspective, Kavita Kané urges people to reconsider the classic narratives and appreciate these characters as complex and real human beings. *Lanka's Princess* is studied within the feminist aspect of Indian literature, reflecting how alternative narratives can test existing prejudices and propose new methods to comprehend female morality, agency, and identity. This paper reveals that re-evaluating the character of Surpanakha opens up an area to review how gender roles have been built and applied in mythology.

Keywords: Surpanakha, Ramayana, gender archetypes, feminist reading, mythological retellings

Introduction

In India, narratives of Mythology have never just told stories from the past. These continue to outline social expectations, moral ideas, and values of culture, particularly in link with gender. The narrative which has an enduring and unique influence is the Ramayana. The epic has established certain ideas of how men and women must be in society, repeated across periods through literary texts, oral traditions, theatre, and mainstream media. Oftentimes, the male characters are allowed sophistication and moral freedom, while the women characters are commonly restricted to smaller roles that describe obedience, restraint, and virtue.

In Ramayana, the female characters are not given less importance as individuals and more as symbols of morality. Sita is advocated as the symbol of purity and patience, while women who do not represent these qualities are sidelined. One of the most unacknowledged

characters in the Ramayana is Surpanakha. Usually showed as lustful, immoral, and violent, she is rarely studied beyond the incident that causes her disfigurement. Surpanakha's wishes are seen as an offense, and her misery is standardised as a punishment. Patriarchy is portrayed in such a situation in which female independence, particularly freedom of expressing sexual desires, is seen as hostile and suspicious.

In recent literary discussions, there has been a visible change towards re-evaluating traditional myths from different views. Modern writers of Indian literature in English have begun questioning the opinions valued and the voices suppressed in such narratives. Retellings in feminist ways strive to reclaim stories that have been outshined by narratives of heroic males. The retelling of the stories make way for critique, interpretation, and dialogue without disrespecting the originality of the epics while also revealing the assumptions of gender and society. It is within this context of feminist reinterpretation that Kavita Kané's *Lanka's Princess* must be situated.

Kavita Kané, in *Lanka's Princess*, retells the life of Ravana's sister, Surpanakha, by providing her a history of her own that originates long before the incidents of the epic, Ramayana. Born as the daughter of Rakshasi Kaikesi and Sage Vishrava, Meenakshi grows up emotionally neglected and feeling unwanted, when compared to her brothers like Ravana who are trained for leadership and power. Meenakshi is left searching for love and personal identity in a patriarchal household as a result of her father's distance and her mother's ambitions. She is renamed as Surpanakha as she grows older, highlighting not only her change but also the toughening of her emotions after getting rejected continuously.

The novel tells of the marriage between Surpanakha and Vidyujiva, her short experience of love, and the tragic loss she undergoes when Vidyujiva is killed by Ravana. This incident intensifies her grief and isolation. Her wish for company later brings her to meet Lord Rama and Lakshmana in the forest, becoming a central aspect to her destiny. In this text, Surpanakha approaches Rama in a genuine and not in a lustful way, longing for love after loss and loneliness. The disfigurement she undergoes, as a punishment, is showcased as extremely unfair and tormenting. The narrative ends by showing Surpanakha not as a monster but as a woman whose voice is quietened and pain is ignored as a result of a strict ethical rule.

Lanka's Princess by Kavita Kané arises from a tradition of progressive making of myths. The novel is a retelling of the Ramayana through the eyes of Surpanakha, letting readers to interact with her inner thoughts rather than criticising her, based on her actions. Kané portrays Surpanakha as a woman who is neglected, vulnerable, and desiring for love and acceptance. Her desire and anger are not defects of character but as a response to society continuously denying her agency and respect. The novel confronts the strict ethical classifications that have labelled women in traditional mythologies.

By focusing on the voice of Surpanakha, *Lanka's Princess* puts forward questions that easily differentiate vice and virtue, dominating storytelling of epics. The text indicates the unfair ethical principles forced on women, where boldness is stamped as anger and yearning is seen as misconduct. The punishment Surpanakha is given reveals the methods in

patriarchy that aims to control women who say no to submission or being silenced. Thus, the retellings by Kané urges a review of how aggression against women is accepted in such narratives.

Lanka's Princess is approached through the lens of feminism in literature to review how archetypes of gender are built and tested in retellings of mythology. Re-reading Surpanakha has a wider relevance to culture apart from being an exercise in sympathy. Expectations such as self-sacrifice and obedience are reinforced through stories of Mythology. Like the feminist aspect in *Lanka's Princess*, alternative ways of mingling with these stories are offered, inspiring readers to examine the beliefs that are inherited and identify the humanity of women who survive past the romanticised rules. As a result, the novel leaves space for a more nuanced and inclusive considerations of gender in Indian Mythological narratives.

Therefore, this paper states that Kavita Kané's *Lanka's Princess* plays a role as a crucial involvement in storytelling of mythologies. By reimagining Surpanakha, the novel gives voice to a woman who is silenced, not only reshaping a known story but also urging readers to reconsider the framework of morals through which women have been judged.

Methodology

This paper applies an interpretative and qualitative method to study Kavita Kané's *Lanka's Princess*. It centres on a close analysis of the text to determine how the novel retells Surpanakha's character and examines classical gender roles as seen in the epic of Ramayana. The research analysis perspectives of the narratives, language, and development of character to study how the experiences of Surpanakha are shown in the novel.

Therefore, the methodology combines a) Close reading of Kavita Kané's *Lanka's Princess*, b) A feminist view on patriarchy and gender, c) Comparing the portrayal of Surpanakha in the Ramayana, d) Reference to mythological retellings using essential discussions, and e) Case studies to give more observant comprehension into the key areas in the narrative. Further, this study seeks to recognise *Lanka's Princess* as a text that questions judgements of Patriarchy and gives voice to a woman who has been disrespected in mythology.

Key Findings

Giving Voice to a Silenced Woman

Lanka's Princess reestablishes narrative help to Surpanakha who is refused voice or depth in history. In the traditional narration of the Ramayana, Surpanakha's character isn't given much importance. In the one and only episode she appears, Surpanakha is labelled as morally flawed and disruptive. The retelling by Kavita Kané changes focus by giving Surpanakha a chance to voice out her opinions, revealing her emotional wounds, inner conflicts, and deep desire for belongingness.

From the lens of feminism, this text challenges the structure of patriarchy and myth-making, where women are not given freedom to live their life according to their wishes. Surpanakha is placed as a woman shaped by rejection and neglect. Thus, the novel reshapes the act of storytelling as ethical, demanding attention to the voices that have been misrepresented or silenced.

Challenging Morality in Mythology

Lanka's Princess puts forward powerful questions the ideologies of morality forced on women in narratives of mythologies. Classic epics oftentimes split the female characters into either the virtuous woman who sacrifices, or the immoral woman who shows anger or desire, in which Surpanakha is closely associated with.

The portrayal of Surpanakha by Kané disturbs the strict separation by showing her actions as motivated by strong emotions. Her desire for recognition and love is described as deeply humane. This feminist retelling exposes how such categories work as tools for control, punishing deviation and rewarding submission. Thus, the novel reveals how women who speak out are more judged than those conforming to the feminine ideals prescribed by society.

Punishing Women for Desire

Surpanakha's attraction towards Rama is not seen as hostile but as an honest expression of desire. Yet, this incident leads to harsh punishment. This violence against Surpanakha's body works as a threat against the independence of women.

When looked at through the lens of feminism, this incident mirrors how the cultures of patriarchy control the bodies and desires of women. *Lanka's Princess* questions the reasoning of this violence by describing it as traumatising, humiliating, and inconsistent. Kavita Kané urges readers to think why such actions have been accepted as moral, exposing the untold gender bias intertwined within the narratives in history.

Women Being Emotionally Ignored

Emotional neglect is also highlighted, an important role in forming the identity of Surpanakha. Contrasting her brothers who are trained for ambition and power, Surpanakha grows up without any validation or emotional support. In a family that gives authority and priority to male members, Surpanakha's needs are not given any importance.

From the standpoint of feminism, this ignorance shows a broader social structure in which the emotional experiences a woman goes through are dismissed or minimised. *Lanka's Princess* reveals the anger and restlessness of Surpanakha as a result of deprivation of attention rather than innate flaws. This tests the habit of narratives of mythology to adapt the suffering of women rather than paying attention to the systems that create it.

Who Decides a Woman Is Wicked?

Reshaping the idea of wickedness is one of the core ideas of this novel. In the original text of Ramayana, Surpanakha is responsible for causing the battle of Lanka. *Lanka's*

Princess confuses this text by placing her actions within the framework of humiliation, loss, and trauma.

This transformation exposes how the society blames women for problems they haven't caused. This novel rejects the generalisation of Surpanakha as a channel for annihilation and instead shows her as a victim in a moral framework dominated by men. This narrative urges the readers to reconsider how guilt and responsibility are distributed unevenly in storytelling of mythology.

Retelling Myths from a Woman's Perspective

Lanka's Princess demonstrates the power of retellings of feminist narratives in Indian literature. Rather than dismissing the idea portrayed in Ramayana, Kavita Kané mingles with it analytically, uncovering its exclusions and silences. Feminist retellings allow traditions to stay relevant while becoming inclusive at the same time.

By highlighting the humanity of Surpanakha, *Lanka's Princess* asks readers to look past traditional beliefs and identify difficulties where generalisation once was prominent. Thus, the novel provides a more subtle comprehension of morality, gender, and voice in narratives of Indian Mythologies.

Case Studies:

Case Study 1: Tonsuring a Widow as Social Erasure

In the Sabarkantha district of Gujarat, a disturbing incident took place when a 30-year-old widow was harassed and forcibly tonsured by the villagers after being accused of accepting a lift from a married man. This act was a culturally loaded punishment rather than an act of consequent violence. In many communities in India, widowhood has been escorted by rigid rules that devoid women of noticeable indications of femininity such as ornaments, long hair, colour, and adornment of the body, making them invisible in society. Therefore, tonsuring of the hair works as a crucial eraser of femininity, establishing the prospect that a woman is incapable of desire, visibility, and agency without the ownership of a man.

This is found in *Lanka's Princess* by Kavita Kané, where the mutilation of Surpanakha serves as a tool to discipline women who deviate from the rules of sexuality as formed by the society. The punishment given to Surpanakha is a reaction to her expression. Her body is changed to devoid her of feminine qualities and to label her as a villain. In both these cases, the female body becomes a vehicle upon which the authority of patriarchy is intensely rewritten, disclosing how freedom of women comes with symbolic and physical torture.

Case Study 2: Facial Mutilation for Refusing Marriage

In Bhopal's Gandhi Nagar area, a 22-year-old woman's nose was cut-off by a man after she declined his proposal to marry him. This patriarchal violence was an aimed assault on an important part of a woman's body. In South Asian traditions, the nose symbolises

beauty, honour, and respect in society. Cutting the nose is to cause a permanent ruin of identity, marking the woman as “tainted” for having a choice.

This act mimics Surpanakha’s mutilation in the epic of Ramayana due to her expressing her desire. Kavita Kané’s *Lanka’s Princess*, a feminist retelling, urges the readers to view this act as brutality against the female gender caused by the entitlement of men. The Bhopal case shows how violence still exists in Modern India. Patriarchy uses violence as a means to disfigure a woman’s body and her identity when she uses her right to refuse.

These case studies expose the harsh continuity between classic and contemporary. Women who choose what they want, refuse what they don’t, or simply break the rules prescribed by patriarchy are tortured by targeting femininity itself. When compared with *Lanka’s Princess*, these real incidents highlight Kavita Kané’s main interference that Surpanakha’s character is not a glitch in mythology but a repetitive archetype, reshaped and silenced by traditions that are threatened by independence of feminine desires.

Conclusion

Kavita Kané’s *Lanka’s Princess* calls for a change in how characters in mythology are approached, requesting readers to go beyond standardised labels of morality and towards a deeper inquiry of ethics. The novel connects mythology with contemporary cases, making this retelling important. The novel shows how power frames command and how women who break the rules are seen as excessive or a threat. In this context, Surpanakha becomes less a character of disobedience and more a perspective through which methods of exclusion can be recognised.

Kavita Kané’s *Lanka’s Princess* reopens mythology for further discussion apart from being a simple retelling. The narrative inspires readers to mingle with epics as developing stories capable of reinterpretation and reflection. Thus, this text provides a more refined cultural and literary comprehension, allowing an area for empathy, ambiguity, and identification of voices silenced for a long time.

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