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Transcreation of marginalized women characters in the novels of Kavita Kane: An analytical exploration

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Abstract

Transcreation is often used by writers to give voice to previously marginalized or overlooked characters. Transcreation often revives the overlooked or silenced voices, particularly of women, the minor characters, or those deemed to be “villains” in the original narratives by providing a more inclusive and multidimensional portrayals of mythological characters. This research paper aims to interpret the transcreation of marginalized Women characters taken from Hindu mythology in the novels of Kavita Kane (often published as Kavita Kane/Kané). She recreates and retells the stories of Ahalya, Menaka, Tara, Urmila, Shurpanakha, Uruvi and Satyawati offering new interpretations that foreground their stories and struggles. She reimagines these marginalized female characters in her novels giving voice to them which is often found absent in classical Sanskrit texts. Kane tried to pick up these marginalized characters by giving them due space in her writings, who were traditionally considered as secondary or silent figures. Kane amplifies the voices of these women by presenting them as central figures in her novels and giving them major roles in the mythological narratives. Through her novels, she transcreates ancient women characters giving them new life and voice, who were left in margins of Hindu mythology. By Transcreation, she renovates minor women characters in her writings from Hindu Mythology and explores new interpretations, addressing overlooked voices, and responding to contemporary social issues of gender discrimination. She establishes them as contemporary modern women in her writings.

Keywords: Kavita Kané, Transcreation, Recreation, Mythic Retelling, Feminist Approach

Introduction

Kavita Kané is an Indian author and journalist known for her rewriting of Indian mythology, particularly from the perspective of the transcreation of marginalized female characters. Her novels often amplify the voices of these women by presenting them as central figures in her novels. She gives them new life and voice in the mythological narratives with their emotional depth and complexity by focusing on their untold roles in ancient epics like the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. Her retelling of Hindu mythology brings a feminist approach to classical literature. In Kavita Kane’s novels, she maintains the process of transcreation by adapting a story or message from one context, often cultural or linguistic, to another, while preserving the essence, emotions, and nuances of the original. Kavita Kane’s recreation of minor female characters can be compared to the original classical texts of Ramayana and Mahabharata. She not only retells the stories; she reimagines and reshapes the lesser-known female characters who were marginalized or overlooked in the original or translated works of classical literature.

Transcreation has emerged in translation studies to denote acts that go beyond literal or even idiomatic translation: it fuses translation, cultural adaptation and creative rewriting to recreate an intended effect in a new context rather than replicating word-for-word content. This approach is especially apt for mythic retellings where the aim is to preserve a tale’s emotional or ideological effect while reframing its teller ship and implications.

Transcreation and recreation: The term Transcreation is widely used to describe the process of recreating content across languages and cultures while preserving its original intent, emotion, and impact. Unlike literal translation, which focuses on word-to-word or structural accuracy, transcreation emphasizes cultural adaptation so that the message resonates with the target audience in the same way it does with the original audience. In

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practice, transcreation goes beyond linguistic transfer. It often requires reimagining idioms, metaphors, slogans, humour, or even entire narratives to make them culturally meaningful. A literary text might be transcreated rather than simply translated to retain its emotional power, aesthetic beauty, or persuasive appeal in another cultural setting. Transcreation is especially used in literature not only to convey meanings taken from source work but also to trigger the same response—whether laughter, curiosity, trust, or empathy—that the original audience would feel. Thus, transcreation is both a creative and interpretive act. It requires the skills of a translator and the imagination of a writer, ensuring that the essence of the message remains intact even if the form undergoes transformation.

Mythic retelling and transcreation: Feminist retellings interrogate the androcentric authorizing of mythic narratives by attending to female interiority, social constraints, and the gendered costs of epic heroism. Scholars working on retellings show that such texts can act as corrective historiographies—offering counter narratives that revalue women's labour, suffering, desire and resistance. In the South Asian context, recent scholarship registers such retellings as interventions in cultural memory and contemporary gender discourse. Transcreation in Kané's novels functions as cultural work: it reconstructs memory, supplies moral alternatives, and participates in a politics of recognition. It also creates ethical debate—readers must ask whether re-voicing is recuperation or appropriation, therapy or revisionism. Kané's practice shows the literary power of adaptation when deployed as feminist historiography: her novels open spaces for empathy and conversation while simultaneously re-shaping the mythic canon for contemporary socio-political concerns.

Methodology: This study uses qualitative close-reading and comparative textual analysis. I select representative novels by Kane that center different kinds of marginalized women: Urmila (the “silent” sister in Sita's shadow), Uruvi (Karna's wife—an outsider by caste in the Mahabharata), Surpanakha (a demonized figure in the Ramayana), and Satyawati (a “fisher queen” and matriarch in the Mahabharata). Primary texts are Kané's novels and secondary sources include reviews and academic articles that analyze her method and the broader cultural reception of her work.

Mythic transcreation: Mythic transcreation in Kavita Kané's novels is her method of rewriting Hindu epics from the margins, turning silent, side-lined, or vilified women into central figures with agency and depth. This research will focus on exploring how Kavita Kane employs transcreation techniques to reinterpret and elevate the narratives of marginalized women, analyzing narrative strategies, thematic elements, and the transformation of cultural discourse within her novel.

Marginalized Women and Hindu Mythology: Kavita Kane has carved a distinctive space in Indian English literature by focusing on marginalized women of Hindu mythology, voices that were often ignored, vilified, or silenced in traditional stories of the Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Puranic stories. Through her novels such as *Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen*, *Ahalya's Awakening*, *Tara: The Enchantress*, and *Saraswati's Gift*,

she practices a form of transcreation—reimagining old tales with fresh perspective and cultural sensitivity, while retaining their emotional essence.

Karna's Wife: *The Outcast's Queen*, which was her debut novel, focuses on Uruvi, the wife of Karna, a pivotal yet somewhat neglected character in the Mahabharata. It is a story of Karna's wife Uruvi, the Princess of Pukeya, the lonely girl of a powerful lord. Karna's wife goes traditional norms of the story of Mahabharata. She loves Karna at first sight since Draupadi's swayamvara. Being a princess and Kshatriya, Uruvi's love for this low-caste (Sutputra) prince against her father's will is untraditional and considered as against social norms of caste hierarchy. She gives priority to her individual love over social norms. Her decision that she will wed Karna or else she will not wed anyone, is a recreation of modern approach in her characterization.

'I know I love a man the world hates. I know I am hurting you and that I am asking far too much. And I know it's all so hopeless. But I needed to tell you the truth. Father, I could never marry a person you do not approve of. But it's also true that I cannot garland just any man at my swayamwara. For me it is either Karna or no one. If I cannot have him, I would rather stay unmarried'.¹

Uruvi's mother who was close to Kunti, has already decided to marry her little girl to Arjuna but Uruvi weds Karna against the will her parents. Thus transcreation of her character as a central figure in the novel gives voice to her progressive and modern approach to life which was overlooked in the mythological texts.

In her novel, *Lanka's Princess* is about Surpanakha, the demoness from the Ramayana, whose story often gets overshadowed by other events. In the prologue or opening chapter of her novel, *The Lanka's Princess*, Lord Krishna approaches Kubja, a hunchbacked and ugly woman of Mathura city, and recognises her as a rebirth of Surpanakha whose childhood name was Minakshi which means the one with beautiful, fish-shaped eyes but due to her wickedness she was titled as Shurpanakha, the woman as hard as nails. Lord Krishna discloses the truth before Kubja that he is Ram, now born as Krishna and he has come to her to resolve the grave mistake he committed in his previous life - by rejecting her. He relates the story of her previous life as Surpanakha, the princess of Lanka who was born as the youngest child of Rishi Vishravas and his second wife Kaikesi. On being asked the cause of her present miserable life, Lord Krishna narrates the previous life story of Kubja as Surpanakha. Thus we see the transcreation or rebirth of Surpanakha as Kubja in *Lanka's Princess*. In the epilogue or last chapter of the novel we see Kubja turns into Phulmati by the grace of lord Krishna.

In her novel, *Sita's Sister*, she retells the story of Sita's sister, Urmila, who has been one of the marginalized characters in the Ramayana. As Sita decides to go into exile, her younger sisters left behind on the palace in Ayodhya with their husbands except Urmila. She had been left behind in the palace waiting for her husband, Lakshman, who decided to accompany his brother, Ram in exile to the forest for fourteen painful long years. She might have insisted to accompany her husband, Lakshman, just as Sita

¹ Kané, K. (2013). *Karna's wife: The outcast's queen*. Rupa Publications.

accompanied Ram but She did not so. She is an embodiment of sacrifice standing against the wrong and fighting for the right. In the novel her character is transcreated with a modern feministic outlook. She protested against the patriarchy system but her voice was not heard. Kane gives her platform to raise her voice when she says to her husband Lakshman:

*"Does the man have no duty toward his wife and mother? You may be the best of princes, the perfect sons, the ideal brothers, probably the ideal king too, but never the good husband!"*²

Thus Sita's Sister is a novel that portrays characters of all the women in the Ramayana, unlike Valmiki's Ramayana that is only focused on the story of Rama and Sita. Amid all these women characters, it is Urmila who has been mouthpiece of author outspoken but graceful, revolutionary but admirable.

The Fisher Queen's Dynasty by Kavita Kane is a retelling of the life story of Satyawati, a major yet often ignored character in the Mahabharata. Being a grandmother of the Kuru dynasty and the mother of Ved Vyasa, Satyawati plays a pivotal role while shaping the Kuru dynasty's destiny in the epic Mahabharata but her significant role is often overlooked in traditional tellings. In this novel, Kane brings Satyawati as a foremost character portraying her as a powerful, ambitious, and complex woman character. The novel begins with Satyawati's appearance as a fisherwoman who was born and raised on the banks of the Yamuna river. Her life takes a turning point when she catches the attention of the sage Parashara Muni, with whom she has a son, Vyasa. This event sets up goals of her future dream to royalty which comes to the fore when King Shantanu, the ruler of Hastinapura, falls in love with her. Satyawati grabs this opportunity. She agrees to get married with Shantanu provided that their children, rather than his eldest son Bhishma, will inherit the throne. This condition makes a major crucial change in the plot of Mahabharata, as Bhishma takes a vow of being unmarried for whole life so that her demands may met.

Once Satyawati becomes queen, she plays a pivotal role in the succession of the Kuru dynasty. She ensures that only her offsprings, Chitrangada and Vichitravirya will become the heirs to the throne. After their untimely deaths and without leaving any successor to the throne, Satyawati calls upon her first born son, Vyasa, to perform niyoga, a practice, primarily followed during the ancient period. She called upon her eldest son, Ved Vyasa, to father the children of the two widows of Vichitravirya through niyoga. This act of Ved Vyasa results in the birth of Dhritarashtra, Pandu, and Vidura, which sets up the stage for the events or plots of the Mahabharata. The novel sheds light on the major role of women in shaping dynasties, showing how Satyawati's decisions prepared the stage for one of the greatest epic, Mahabharata.

In her novel, *Ahalya's Awakening*, Ahalya is a figure frequently reduced to an object lesson—her seduction (or trickery) and subsequent curse make her a cautionary tale about fidelity and female purity. Kavita Kane's *Ahalya's Awakening* revisits one of the most poignant and often misunderstood stories from Indian mythology — the tale of

Ahalya, wife of sage Gautama, who was cursed and silenced after being deceived by Indra. In traditional narratives, Ahalya is remembered mostly as a fallen woman, reduced to the role of a victim or a cautionary figure. Kane, however, reclaims her voice, presenting her as a woman of resilience, dignity, and inner strength. The novel does not merely retell the myth but interrogates it. Kane places Ahalya at the centre of her own story, allowing her to articulate her desires, pain, and quest for selfhood. Instead of portraying her as a passive sufferer of fate, the narrative depicts Ahalya as a woman who challenges the rigid moral codes of a patriarchal order and redefines herself through reflection and self-realization. Kane's writing is sensitive and evocative, weaving together mythology and modern sensibilities. The novel resonates strongly with contemporary readers, particularly women, who may see in Ahalya's story their own struggles against judgment, confinement, and silencing. The narrative becomes a dialogue between past and present, suggesting that myths are not static but can be reimagined to reflect enduring human concerns. In essence, *Ahalya's Awakening* is a novel of reclamation and empowerment. By giving voice to Ahalya, Kavita Kane not only redeems a misunderstood character but also highlights the universal need for dignity, choice, and self-discovery. The novel becomes a tribute to all women who have been muted by tradition yet continue to rise and define themselves anew.

Kavita Kane's Tara: The Enchantress is another powerful addition to her body of mythological retellings, where she consistently seeks to reclaim forgotten or side-lined women from ancient epics. In this novel, Kane brings into focus Tara, the wife of monkey king Vali, a character from the Ramayana who is often overshadowed by the grand narrative of Rama, Sita, and Ravana. The novel reimagines Tara not only as a central figure but also as a woman of intelligence, grace, and remarkable influence. In the original epic, Tara is remembered for her wisdom and political foresight, particularly during the conflict between Vali and Sugriva. Kane builds on these elements to portray her as a strong, articulate voice navigating love, loyalty, and duty in a world dominated by male heroism. Through Tara's perspective, Kane raises deeper questions about agency, morality, and the price of silence. Tara is neither a passive consort nor a mere ornament in the story; rather, she emerges as a strategist, a peacemaker, and at times, a rebel against the injustices inflicted upon her. Her dilemmas and decisions reflect the universal struggles of women caught between personal desire and societal expectations. Kane's narrative style combines accessibility with lyrical intensity, making Tara both relatable and inspiring. By weaving mythology with modern sensibilities, she reminds readers that voices like Tara's, often ignored in traditional stories, deserve recognition for their strength and complexity. Ultimately, *Tara: The Enchantress* is a work of reclamation. It highlights Tara's forgotten role and repositions her as a central character who embodies courage, intellect, and emotional depth, reaffirming Kavita Kane's larger project of giving silenced women in mythology their rightful space in literature.

Conclusion

Kavita Kane's novels have an essence of reimagining and retelling the Indian myths with a new world of creation

² Kané, K. (2014). *Sita's sister*. Rupa Publications.

carrying the message from ancient texts. Kavita Kane's novels exemplify transcreation as an imaginative and politically engaged act. By choosing marginalized women from Hindu mythology and giving them voice, interiority and agency, she reshapes canonical narratives and invites contemporary readers to reassess deeply ingrained moral binaries. Her trans creative strategies—shifted focalization, socio-historical embedding, and ethical re-evaluation—allow an interrogation of both ancient epics and modern gender politics. While her works are subject to critical debate regarding sentiment, marketability and possible anachronism, they nonetheless perform significant cultural labour: they reanimate forgotten voices and create literary spaces where the marginalized can be heard. Thus we come to the conclusion that Kavita Kane's novels are the retelling and recreation of the marginalized women characters of Hindu Mythology with a feminist approach to their life.

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