

Valiant Karna through the eyes of Uruvi, a Tale Unveiled through Kavita Kane's *Karna's Wife: the Outcaste's Queen*

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Abstract

Kavita Kane, an Indian women writer of the century, is well known for her mythology fiction. Her debut attempt in this genre was *Karna's Wife: The Outcaste's Queen* (2013). She presents before us a tale never often told by others, a turbulent tale of Uruvi, Karna's wife. It is quite surprising that Kavita Kane found Uruvi as the wife of Karna and Vrushali and Supriya never interested her. (They are mentioned in Mahabharata as Karna's wives). Uruvi (Ponnaruvi) as mentioned in Tamil interpretations of Mahabharata can be an epithet of either Vrushali or Supriya. The novel is set against the background of the Mahabharata; at the centre of the story is Uruvi's tumultuous and troubled relationship with her husband, who she loves deeply but cannot forgive for what he did to Draupadi. Through Uruvi's eyes we see a different side of the warrior Karna. He is presented to us as a lonely, unhappy man, who lives his entire life devoid of true happiness, in the quest of rightness and the desire to earn respect and legitimacy.

Keywords- *Outcast, Culture, Resign, Realm, Fight, Courage*

Introduction

The *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* are the two epics which have shaped, nurtured and influenced society, culture and value systems in this country for ages. They have indeed become an integral part of the fabric of our social life. And literature being the most sensitive reflection of the sensibility of a society and its cultural system, it is no wonder that in these two epics and more particularly the *Mahabharata*, we find our civilization, our national ethos and our multifaceted culture reflected in a manner which is indeed unique. In almost all of our regional languages there have been variations on the major themes of the two epics and for hundreds of years poets in different regions of India, have recreated and composed the two epics in the regional languages with additions,

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alterations and omissions. Of the two epics it is the *Mahabharata* which has influenced modern Indian literature more profoundly.

So many authors in almost all the Indian languages have used the *Mahabharata* in different contexts as it provided a number of mythical and archetypal patterns of fundamental importance. Our epics and the characters in them are so haunting that we often can narrate their destiny even in the dark chambers of our sleep. Indian writers find our great epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* as a source of inspiration for their writings. Yes, it's an endless source of inspiration. Hence we find hundreds of interpretations to them from time immemorial. Aren't the epics male oriented? Why so? These questions might have perturbed the women writers of the century. Writers like Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Prathibha Rai, Kavita Kane, Amrutha Patil etc have come up with their own interpretations of the epics through the eyes of characters often neglected. They found that the women characters in Indian mythology have traits that surprise us at times and at other times appear inexplicable.

To the Indian readers, the most fascinating and tragic character in the whole of *Mahabharatha* is Karna. While it is true that almost all the major characters in the epic are defeated by life or destiny, no one faces it more tragically than Karna. Disowned from birth, endeavouring all his life to have a sense of belongingness and individual identity, he found no answer to the anguished question "who am I?" even as he lay dying. Karna was ever enmeshed in this central question. Having no definite position in the society, all his life he struggled to gain what he thought was his rightful status. The bitterness, the anger, the anguish and the sense of defeat overtook him at different stages of the unfolding epic. Reading Karna's story often one gets the feeling that all human efforts are fruitless even though not devoid of meaning. Man's hopes, aspirations, desires, expectations, friendships, love everything looks so helpless with the ineluctable force of destiny or fate.

Kavita Kane's *Karna's Wife: The Outcaste's Queen* is a story about Karna through the eyes of his wife Uruvi. Uruvi was the Kshatriya princess, daughter of Vahusha and Shubra, who chose Karna the 'Sootaputra' over the princely alliances offered to her. It was believed that it would be Arjuna her childhood mate whom she would choose. But it was Karna, the man in her dreams, this was the man 'she had loved since the day she had seen him'. In Karna she had found an appearance and personality so close to perfection that she could convince herself that her quest has been fulfilled. As a young woman in love, Uruvi saw in Karna all the qualities of a hero who was not being permitted to be one. His flaws made him too much interesting. Her mother wanted her to marry

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Arjuna. But Uruvi was madly in love with Karna, “Ma, I do not love him and I will not marry him (Arjuna) just because you and everybody else find it so appropriate” (24)

From childhood itself Uruvi’s father Vahusha allowed her to break free of norms while her mother tried hard to restrain her from defying conventions. The daughter detested the unsaid decree which demanded that a girl of a good family should be hidden away till it was time for her to get married. She played with her friends in Hastinpur, sang and danced with her cousins, rode horses with Pandavas and the Kauravas and climbed trees with Bhima. Vahusha was shocked to hear the mind of his daughter when it came to the context of marriage.

Uruvi said,

I know’, she said quietly, looking at her father. ‘I know I love a man the world hates. I know I am hurting you and that I’m 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 swayamvara. For me it’s either Karna or no one. If I can’t have him I would rather stay unmarried (18)

The moment she chooses Karna, there comes a veil between her and Hastinapur. Karna too was dumbfounded by the choice of Uruvi. After the Swayamvara he found himself helpless before her fragile beauty, a beauty infused with fierce determination. She was that kind of girl, a man could easily lose his head over. But his doubt distracted him. He could not fathom why this princess has stooped to marry an outcaste like him. He persisted.

Princess, you have decided to follow a hard path. I cannot promise you the life a royal princess deserves. I am a wanderer myself, stuck in an eternal search. I am a vagabond who doesn’t know where am I going. My past beckons my present, but I can see only a blurred future. All my life, I have been slighted as a person of low birth and the stigma will rub off on you as well. Yet I am not ashamed of Who I am. I’m proud to be Radheya, the sutaputra, the son of Adhiratha and Radha. (42)

Yet, she stands by Karna. She watches Karna’s first wife and children and grows into the household. Karna was very attentive and devoted but Uruvi sensed a certain detachment in his devotion. She found something missing; he is with his family, yet apart. Although surrounded by people who love him, Karna is so alone, never satisfied. It seems that he is always searching, always

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wondering who his natural parents are. The love story of Karna and Uruvi is used as a backdrop of the whole Mahabharata playing in the fore.

Karna's loyalty to Duryodhana and Duryodhana undying love for Karna always perplexed Uruvi. When Duryodhana calls him his brother, Uruvi burst out, "He is not and he can never be". (81) Uruvi wanted him to keep Karna out of his family disputes and solve his family matters in their own way and keep Karna away from your family matters .She felt that Duryodhana is playing on Karna's loyalty and his deep sense of gratitude, "Can you deny that you see him as the only opponent against Arjuna in the battlefield? Do you deny that Karna is just a pawn in your game against Pandavas.?" (81)

She questions Karna's blind addiction to Duryodhana. She tries to convince Karna that in his blind love for Duryodhana, he cannot see nor distinguish between good and evil, right and wrong. But Karna believes that it is Duryodhana who sides with him always and has given him the respect that he is worthy of. For that he should be eternally grateful full Duryodhana.

All I ever wanted was respect, Uruvi. And Duryodhana has given me that. I aspired for nothing else. I wanted to be recognised for my merits. Not for what i was born as. Not for my lineage, or rather lack of it. (87)

The moment she chooses Karna, there was a glaring change in the attitude of the people of Hastinpur. As a wife of Karna, Uruvi had resigned herself to the reality that she had to live with her enemies. Her father had cautioned her, so had Kunti. It was not just a word of warning, it was their last plea to protect her from certain lifelong misery, from her relentless ill treatment she could not escape from. By not obeying them, she had hurt them as much as she hurt herself. . She detested being known as the wife of one of the dushta chatushtayam, a description that filled her with shame. 'No, She cried, 'he is not a villain. He is good, he is noble and I love him for that" But the world was not listening to her silent cries. She would have to carry the burden of this stigma as well. She had to suffer the way people looked at them, at her, at Karna, the false sympathy she had to often put up with.

When Karna's unflinching loyalty to Duryodhana leads him towards the path of destruction, she tries to persuade him, unsuccessfully. When Draupadi is tarnished in the royal court by Kauravas, she acts as Karna's conscience-keeper and leaves him, "how many more crimes is he (Karna) going to commit in the name of his friend and for the sake of great friendship? (181)

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When it becomes evident that the Great War would lead to Karna's death, she tries to dissuade him from participating. Many such episodes which directly affect her, but on which she has no control over, are beautifully narrated, "Karna, each day I live in the fear that I shall lose you..." she whispered brokenly. 'You will lose me only through death, Uruvi,' he added calmly, drawing her close. 'Through nothing and nobody else!'

The fight of right and wrong is a continued theme through out the book. Karna blind support to Duryodhan with almost certainty of a war and finally death looms large. This is something that occupies Uruvi's mind and heart. She does finally resign to her fate and keep trying to make the best of the situation. However Karna's blind allegiance to Duryodhana, the eventual cause of his downfall, is beyond her power to change. There are enough indications that Kavita Kane has been influenced by the current situations while chiselling Uruvi's character. Maybe Uruvi existed and was one the initial representation of empowered woman. She does come across as someone well ahead of her time, not only an outcast but also maybe not fitting into that era social structure and norms.

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