

Gender Perspectives of Kavita Kane in the novel Sita's Sister through the Character of Urmila

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Abstract

Kavita Kane, an Indian journalist turned revolutionary writer, spotlighted feministic view through the retold Indian mythologies which reinforce women subjugation at all levels of society. The present research focuses on how the system ignored women when it came to taking a decision including her marriage. Her consent was immaterial though it directly affected her life. In this paper, Kavita Kane's views on gender roles are presented from the point view of Urmila, a character in the Indian epic The Ramayana. The protagonist in the novel Sita's Sister, Urmila, supports her husband's acts without questioning to run the show in the family as well as in ruling the kingdom but raises her voice when all the scholars go on discussing the duties and rights of the men according to the Dharma. She questions how Dharma can ignore the other gender that are half under the sky. The study is conducted using gender theory as it opens up unfamiliar views for how to understand people in their diverse contexts including gendered structures and norms.

Key words: gender, women subjugation, marriage, neglected roles.

1. Introduction

Gender perspectives encompass the multifaceted ways in which societal roles, behaviors, and expectations are influenced by one's gender identity. Understanding and appreciating these perspectives is essential for achieving true equality and inclusivity in all aspects of life. Gender is not a binary concept, but rather a spectrum that encompasses a diverse range of identities, including but not limited to cisgender, transgender, non-binary, and genderqueer. Recognizing this spectrum is crucial for dismantling traditional notions of male and female, and for acknowledging the experiences of all individuals, regardless of where they fall on this spectrum (Hooks, 8).

Throughout history, societies have constructed norms, roles, and expectations based on gender. These constructs have often led to stereotypes and biases that shape the way individuals are perceived and treated. For example, the idea that men are inherently assertive and women are nurturing has resulted in unequal opportunities in areas such as leadership, STEM fields, and caregiving roles (Simon, 115). Understanding these constructs is the first step towards dismantling them and fostering a more inclusive society.

Gender perspectives intersect with various other aspects of an individual's identity, including race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, and socio-economic status. Recognizing these intersections is crucial for understanding the unique challenges faced by different individuals. For instance, a black transgender woman may experience discrimination and marginalization on multiple fronts, highlighting the need for an inclusive approach that addresses all aspects of her identity. Likewise, they play a significant role in economic empowerment. Women and gender minorities have historically been underrepresented in the workforce, particularly in leadership positions and high-paying industries (Wollstonecraft, 45). Addressing this imbalance requires policies and initiatives that promote equal access to education, job opportunities, and fair wages for all genders.

Gender perspectives also have a profound impact on healthcare. For instance, women's health needs have historically been overlooked or inadequately addressed. Additionally, transgender individuals often face unique healthcare challenges, including access to gender-affirming care. Understanding these perspectives is essential for creating a healthcare system that is inclusive, respectful, and responsive to the diverse needs of all individuals. This research endeavors to explore the intricate gender dynamics embedded in the narrative, shedding light on how Urmila's character challenges traditional gender roles and expectations. This study employs a qualitative research approach, utilizing close reading techniques to analyze the text and extract pertinent information regarding Urmila's character.

2. Analysis

Urmila, often overshadowed by her more renowned siblings, emerges as a character grappling with her own identity and worth. Kane delicately portrays Urmila's internal struggle to carve out a space for herself, offering a poignant reflection on the societal dismissal of women's

voices. Urmila's relationship with Lakshmana is portrayed as a poignant interplay between love and duty. As Lakshmana leaves for the forest with Lord Rama, Urmila's choice to stay behind is laden with sacrifice and devotion, but it also highlights the societal expectations that can constrain a woman's agency within a marriage. She emerges as a character who defies conventional norms, showcasing agency and autonomy in her decisions. Despite being left behind by her husband, Lakshmana, who accompanies Lord Rama to the forest, Urmila chooses to stay loyal and devoted to her husband's mission. This illustrates a level of independence and strength not commonly attributed to female characters in ancient Indian epics.

Kane deftly showcases Urmila's intellectual prowess and her passion for learning. Through her dedication to various forms of knowledge, Urmila shatters the stereotype of women being confined to domestic roles. This aspect of her character underscores the potential for women's intellectual contributions in ancient Indian society. Urmila's journey challenges conventional notions of sacrifice within the context of the Ramayana. Her decision to bear the weight of her husband's absence without resentment, while also pursuing her own spiritual path, serves as a powerful subversion of traditional gender roles and expectations. Kane portrays Urmila's relationship with Sita as one of empathetic understanding and mutual support. Urmila's unwavering support for her sister, even from a distance, highlights the strength that can be derived from female relationships in the face of adversity.

Urmila's character stands as a beacon of feminist resilience, offering a counter-narrative to the submissive female archetypes prevalent in ancient epics. Her agency, intellectual pursuits, and unwavering devotion serve as a testament to the multifaceted nature of women's experiences. Her role as the 'abandoned' wife challenges traditional patriarchal expectations. Instead of succumbing to sorrow or bitterness, she channels her energies into self-improvement and meditation. Her pursuit of knowledge and spiritual growth positions her as a unique and empowered female character within the Ramayana narrative.

The novel explores the nuanced relationship between Urmila and her sister, Sita. Urmila's support for Sita during her exile and her understanding of Sita's plight offer a perspective rarely depicted in traditional retellings of the Ramayana. This portrayal serves to underscore the strength and solidarity that can exist between women, even in challenging circumstances. Urmila's character also brings to light intersectionality within ancient Indian society. As a

princess, wife, and sister, she navigates various roles and responsibilities, offering a glimpse into the complex intersections of gender, class, and familial ties in the Ramayana.

The gender perspectives presented through Urmila's character hold relevance in contemporary discussions surrounding autonomy, agency, and empowerment of women. Her story serves as an inspiration for women seeking to challenge societal norms and assert their own identities. Promoting gender perspectives in education is crucial for fostering a more inclusive society. This includes curriculum that challenges traditional gender roles, encourages critical thinking about societal constructs, and celebrates the achievements of individuals from all genders. Additionally, creating safe and inclusive spaces for students of all gender identities is essential for their well-being and success.

One of the notable aspects of Kane's portrayal of Urmila is her departure from the traditionally passive role assigned to women in the Ramayana. Urmila is depicted as a character with agency and a strong sense of self. Through her actions and decisions, she subverts expectations, ultimately reshaping her narrative from one of quiet obedience to one of self-discovery and empowerment. The novel also delves into the complexities of sisterly relationships, particularly the bond between Sita and Urmila. Kane uses this relationship to explore the ways in which women support and uplift each other in the face of patriarchal structures. By emphasizing their connection, the author highlights the strength derived from female solidarity and challenges the notion of women as isolated figures.

Kane endows Urmila with a rich inner life, showcasing her intellectual prowess and emotional complexity. Through Urmila, the author challenges stereotypes that limit women's capacity for intellectual engagement and emotional depth. Urmila's introspection and philosophical musings provide a counterpoint to conventional portrayals of female characters in the epic. Urmila's role as the "forgotten" wife of Lakshmana is a central theme in Kane's narrative. This aspect allows for an exploration of the sacrifices and struggles faced by women in supporting their partners, often at the cost of their own recognition and agency. Urmila's story prompts a critical examination of the societal expectations placed on women within marital relationships.

Throughout "Sita's Sister," Kane provides a critique of patriarchal norms that govern the lives of the female characters. Urmila's experiences serve as a catalyst for questioning and

challenging established gender roles, illustrating the potential for resistance and transformation even within deeply entrenched social structures. Kavita Kane's novel "Sita's Sister" presents a powerful reimagining of the Ramayana through the lens of Urmila, offering a fresh perspective on gender dynamics within the epic. Through Urmila's character, Kane challenges traditional narratives, providing a platform for exploring the agency, relationships, and struggles of female characters. The novel stands as a testament to the enduring relevance of these themes in contemporary discussions of gender and literature.

3. Conclusion

Kavita Kane's portrayal of Urmila in "Sita's Sister" breathes new life into the Ramayana, providing a platform for a more nuanced understanding of gender dynamics. Urmila's narrative arc challenges established norms and offers a fresh perspective on women's roles in ancient Indian mythology. Urmila's agency, autonomy, and subversion of patriarchal norms provide a refreshing perspective on women's roles in ancient Indian mythology. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of gender perspectives within literary works and highlights their enduring relevance in contemporary contexts. This further donates to a broader discourse on gender perspectives within literary works, emphasizing their enduring relevance in contemporary gender studies and discussions. Embracing gender perspectives is a vital step towards achieving true equality and inclusivity in our societies. By recognizing the diverse range of identities and experiences that exist across the gender spectrum, we can work towards dismantling harmful stereotypes, biases, and constructs. This journey requires collective effort, from policymakers and institutions to individuals in their daily interactions. By fostering understanding and empathy, we can build a more equitable world where all individuals, regardless of gender, can thrive and fulfill their potential.

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