

## Unfurling the Unfathomed: Kavita Kane's *Lanka's Princess*, an Incredible Transformation of Chandranakha to Surpanakha

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### ABSTRACT

This article examines "parental favouritism," as depicted in Kavita Kane's mythopoeic narrative *Lanka's Princess* (2017). The study based on the psychological paradigm favouritism of parents. In *Lanka's Princess*, the parent-child relationship is a dominant focus. This research focuses on two main issues: (1) how the concepts of parental partiality of love are depicted in the story, and (2) what effects these parental attitudes have on family relationships. Most myths perpetuate this notion, giving systemic patriarchy the dominant position beneath the veneer of divinity and supernatural activities. Mythopoeia, or mythical retelling, opposes this ideology by displacing hegemonic powers from their central positions and allowing the margin to express its views and opinions, as well as raise its voice against injustice. Surpanakha is a significantly less favoured child, according to the present analysis. Her brothers, whom her parents affectionately refer to as 'Sons,' are her parents' favourites. Her parents have an aversion to her, which they justify by pointing out a few of her defects. Surpanakha observes with astonishment and shock as her parent's affection towards Ravana, Kumbakarna and Vibhishana which incite Surpanakha's mental devastation by offering unreasonable justifications.

**Keywords-** Parental favoritism, Surpanakha, myths of beauty, nails, vengeance.

### I. INTRODUCTION

Parental favoritism is the practice of giving one child unfair preferential treatment over another. Surpanakha's family situation in Kavita Kane's *Lanka's Princess* depicts this practice to a greater extent. Ravana, Kumbhakarna, Vibhishana, and Surpanakha are the four children of Maharshi Vishrava and Kaikesi. However, the parents are unable to treat all four children equally in terms of love, care, and attention. They show a higher level of deep care and love for the Boys while paying less attention to Surpanakha in the same family context and under the same roof. Favoritism, or "playing favourites," according to psychologists, is a phenomenon that causes negative and often irreversible damage to family relationships, generates hostility among siblings and may foster aloofness between parent and child, all of which are common outcomes in Surpanakha's life and family. Now, the hypocrisy of family love refers to a parent's dedication to love for their children and its lack in their real-life activities and words when dealing with children.

Surpanakha's parents frequently demonstrate their impartial treatment of all children, while they openly declare that they love Surpanakha as much as the other three boy children, they frequently fail to demonstrate their dedication to Surpanakha in their activities and attitudes. Through their harsh, negative attitudes, they rather prove the truth of their unavailability of an equal amount of love as they show to Ravana, Kumbhakarna, Vibhishana. Their claim of affection for Surpanakha is contradicted by this inconsistency between words and actions. As a result, this kind of parenting approach

may be seen as family relationship hypocrisy in quality. According to psychology, when parents indulge in favouritism and hypocrisy in child-parent relationships, it leads to long-term animosity not just between the parent and child, but also between siblings. Surpanakha's behaviour in Lanka's Princess meets the psychiatrists' predictions, as we see her develop hatred toward her parents and hostility toward her siblings. From the tragic development of the novel, it was clarified how family determines the character formation of a person. Surpanakha was born as very pretty and innocent like any other girl child. She cannot be even labelled completely as Asura as her father was a sage. During her childhood, she was neither indifferent to Ravan nor her family. Later on, the bitter experiences of rejection and hatred she received from her family transformed her and this eventually drove her against them. It was a painful process of metamorphosis through which she was passing to adjust the sufferings. Kane may be presenting a current setting for revision of the unsuitable parenting style, which still has social and familial importance in the twenty-first century.

As in the famous Cinderella story, fairy tales have traditionally depicted terrible stepmothers and evil sisters. However, the difficulties of parental favouritism and sibling rivalry are not as easy as a compelling story seems. Even in this ostensibly enlightened society, it is unquestionably a topic that demands a lot of attention. Every component of society is reflected in the family, which is a microcosm of society. As a result, a dysfunctional family is harmful to society as a whole. Surpanakha's story demonstrates how a dysfunctional family can be harmful to its members, particularly children. We underestimate the consequences of poor parenting and sibling rivalry. The first consequence can be conflict within the family; it can also cause anger among siblings, leading to rivalry. Both the favourite and the disfavored child exhibit inappropriate behaviour as a result of parental favouritism. The less fortunate child may have low self-esteem and lose faith in himself. This might lead to an undesirable mental state, especially when it comes to aspirations and dreams. In the event of a more loved child, he or she would develop an egoistic attitude and expect the same treatment from the parents every time. In 2005, Shebloski, Conger, and Widaman conducted research through the University of California on the "Reciprocal links among differential parenting, perceived partiality, and self-worth: A three-wave longitudinal study" (Shebloski, Conger, & Widaman, 2005, Online). The research informed us that 65% of mothers have a favourite child, while 70% of fathers have a favourite child. And now this appears to be a major situation. In many circumstances, parents are not purposefully generating this favouritism, and they may not even be aware of their biased treatment. The children, on the other hand, will notice even minor instances of favouritism. Favoritism isn't necessarily dangerous, but it can be dangerous when it happens.

## II. AIM AND SCOPE

Religions and mythologies frequently extol the virtues of the docile, submissive, all-too-enticing woman, it is only natural that she should allow men to enjoy hegemonic power and prestige in society. Kavita Kane's focus on themes like parental favouritism and parent-child connections may have stemmed from her psychological dissatisfaction with today's parenting model, which she often links with Treta yuga.

## III. PARENTAL FAVOURITISM

Parental partiality is defined by Suito et al. (2009) as a 'parent affect' and 'perceptions of parental preference.' To put it another way, parental favouritism refers to the reality that one sibling is favoured more or less by their parents than the other. Favoritism, or parents' unfair or uneven treatment of their children, is where the concept of a "favourite" child originated. According to Kowal et al. (2006), when the reasons for differential treatment leave children with no sensible and agreed-upon impression, or when the explanation of differential treatment is not provided by demonstrating parents' genuine sincerity, children are more likely to form a general perception of favouritism or injustice.

It is typical behavior of parents they wave aside children's accusations that they are being treated unfairly. It is conceivable that favouritism exists when parents reject their children's complaints of injustice rather than engaging in a process of self-criticism. "Ignored allegations of injustice," according to Caspi (2011), are a crucial aspect of "judging favouritism." According to Libby (2010), parents that demonstrate partiality frequently explain their unequal treatment by claiming that the more preferred child is prettier than the less favoured or cared-for child. Cross and Stewart (2007) identify a few specific factors for parental preference. Favoritism is linked to "childish characteristics" such as blaming others, being perfectionist and manipulative, avoiding disputes, and being precocious, among others. They also believe that "children's temperament" is another factor that leads parents to presume positive feelings and trust in one child while negative feelings and inattention in another. When a child is negative and picky, it receives less attention from parents and is subjected to more avoidance or criticism from them, whereas an easygoing, cheerful, and joyful youngster, on the other hand, is acknowledged with more love and affection by the parents. Last but not least, Cross and Stewart claim that a child's "physical appearance" might lead to biased treatment by parents, however, this is not always the case. Cross and Stewart come up with a variety of ways in which parents can show parental preference. Here are a few examples:

1. When parents introduce their children to relatives or friends, they frequently remark things like "here are our straight- A Child," which is often accompanied by excitement, voice expression, and enthusiasm. It could be a foreshadowing of favouritism.
2. Favoritism is demonstrated when parents' punishment gives the impression that they are more lenient with one child than with the other.
3. Favoritism in that setting is evident when parents' conversational activity with one child is more engaging than with the other.
4. When parents offer one child more, nicer, or more expensive gifts, the other may perceive it as partiality.
5. When parents express more disapproval and negative feelings toward one child than the other, partiality is evident.
6. Favoritism is assumed when parents use more affectionate names and addresses to the more preferred child while using critical and disparaging names to the other.

When it comes to the effects of parental favouritism on family ties, such as parent-child connections and sibling relationships, they are always negative and detrimental. It divides family members into groups, and it can occasionally lead to new polarizations within and outside the family. According to Evans & Evans (2006), favouritism can be very harmful to a family. Favoritism, according to Cross and Stewart (2007), is an "anger generator" in children. It not only makes the less favoured child hostile and violent toward his or her parents, but it can also lead to feelings of envy and hatred among siblings. According to Rhodes (2012), the less liked child may harbour deep feelings of disdain or anger against her or his parents, and if he or she is unable to confront his or her parents directly, the furious feelings can be shown by acting unusually and unpredictably. Again, the less favoured child may choose to vent her/his frustrations on her/his siblings.

#### **IV. FROM MEENAKSHI/ CHANDRANAKHA TO SURPANAKHA**

In Hindu tradition, the epithet Surpankha has become a synonym for demons and unchaste women. Surpankha's character is considered in the Ramayana to be a monster whose nose is chopped off by Lakshmana at Ram's command for her attempt of adultery. Because she has challenged the current quo of Aryan hegemony, this misogynistic narrative portrays her as "inhuman." The Ramayana, an Epic, has been viewed as a morality tale for human behaviour. Because Ram is revered as Maryada Purshusuttaman, it is necessary to study Surpankha's mutilation from a feminist perspective, as the act reveals Ram's feelings on female sexuality in Indian society. However, it also looks at how these mythologies influence Hindu cultural views.

There are three reasons for resistance or disobedience, according to Frédéric Gros: "the widening of social injustices and wealth inequalities" (Disobey: The Philosophy of Resistance 1), environmental degradation, and pollution that leads to the earth's eventual inability to regenerate and revitalise, and the desire to create and sustain wealth generation at the expense of humanitarianism. In Surpanakha's case, it is familial and societal injustice that causes her to fight back. Her defiance of androcentric and systemic patriarchy has earned her the moniker witch with a sharp nail.

Yes, I am a monster!' screeched Meenakshi, her eyes flashing, baring her claws at her mother. 'See them? If anyone hurts me, I shall hurt them with these!! I am Surpanakha!' Her high-pitched voice was filled with rage. Her nails glinted in the sunlight (Lanka's Princess 13).

Surpanakha's Nakha, or nails, symbolize struggle and self-respect. Ravana, too, reluctantly acknowledges her ability to protect herself and her dignity. Surpanakha's nails are a distinguishing characteristic of her personality because they define her from the perspective of the rest of the world. She is a witch, a monster with long nails, to those she attacks in self-defense. Surpanakha's nails, on the other hand, are her signals of individuality, her refusal to be a passive subject in the androcentric culture, in the eyes of the reader who knows and empathises with the marginal's predicament. Those who take women for granted should be aware of their nails.

#### **V. SAMUDRIKA SHASTRA**

Even among the underprivileged, beauty and luck play a crucial part in allowing a female to obtain a position in a privileged zone. From the fleshy in the Samudrika Shastra to the slim-waisted in the classics, the Indian concept of beauty and seductive grace changes. However, one must realise that the Asian idea is no different than its western equivalents when it comes to praising the virtues of fairness over darkness in terms of complexion. As a result, a dark-skinned girl whose birth is accompanied by death or misfortune is pushed even further into the pit of injustice and discrimination. To atone for being 'unworthy and unseemly,' she is required to stay more silent and obedient there.

Women born with physical deformities are at the bottom of the marginalisation scale. Most of the time, their own families and society despise them, despising their mere shadows and expressing their contempt by subjecting them to physical, verbal, and psychological abuse. Such ladies swing between life and death with absolute unpredictability, unable to enter one and far too terrified to accept the other.

At the same time, widows, destitute women (whose husbands reject them), ill women, and adulteresses are all fated to occupy a marginal position as a result of their 'karma.' While the first two are pleased with sympathy, the ill and adulterous

are punished by ostracization. They are a blight on their community, and by avoiding them, the others are blessed and more deserving.

## VI. THE PRINCESS OF LANKA

Surpanakha, as earlier said, is born with a heightened sense of marginality as a result of her appearance. She is unquestionably a misfit in a culture ruled by preconceived conceptions of beauty. This is something her mother never fails to remind her of. "Beauty is understood as a harmonious whole, as an organic or quasi-organic whole, as a gestalt rather than a collection of individual components, and hence as a pleasurable object." To put it another way, according to philosophical aesthetics, there is a universally valid concept of beauty, as well as appropriate criteria" (Paul 15). Surpanakha gradually comes to believe that she is ugly and that she will never be compared to her mother or grandmother in terms of appearance or brains.

Surpanakha's grandmother Taraka, on the other hand, is the silver lining in her childhood, as she dispels the misconceptions that society attaches to beauty. She instructs her to appreciate the body and to give in to its desires. Surpanakha learns to follow her heart and be receptive to her sentiments of love from Taraka.

Never be ashamed of your body, your femininity, Meenu,' said Taraka, giving her a meaningful smile. 'Beauty should be flaunted, and don't start that you aren't one! Beauty lies in your head and heart, you have to believe it. But for that first, you have to love yourself. Love is magic; it has the mysterious, supernatural power of influencing your heart and mind and the soul and changing the course of events in your life. (24-25).

In the case of Surpanakha, love for oneself starts as self-defense – an attempt to safeguard one's self-respect be it her brother, her half-brother Kuber, or the bully Som. But soon it becomes a part of her personality. Her fierceness and volatile temper are outcomes of her love towards her image and these qualities help her remain natural – as natural as the Dandak forest that she haunts.

## VII. REVISITS RAMAYANA

Surpanakha is portrayed by Kane as someone always willing to defend those who are close to her. For example, she battles Som, the bully who teases Vibhishan, even though her family does not recognise her love and affection, or the bruises she receives as a result of the scuffles and fights.

Meenakshi looked from one angry parent to another. They were fighting again over their respective favourites—Ravan and Vibhishan. She touched her swollen arm tenderly. It still hurt. But what hurt her more was that neither of them had noticed the angry welt where she had been hit by Som, the big bully who had teased Vibhishan. Her eyes reddened with checked tears. (Lanka's Princess 11)

Surpanakha's reciprocal love for her grandparents is her saving grace, and it may be the only source of consolation she has apart from Kumbhakarna's love and understanding. Surpanakha's desire to become a powerful sorceress is fueled by her love for her grandma Taraka (Ketumani in other tales) and the support she receives from her grandmother.

Surpanakha is the sole character in the narrative who selects Vidyujiva as her life mate despite her family's opposition. She marries for love, and her spouse treats her as if she were his equal in every way. Unlike any other character in the novel, she is unapologetically honest about her views about love and sex. Vidyujiva is the one who brings out the lovely Meenakshi in her. When she discovers that Ravana has killed her husband, the vicious hell cat Surpanakha rears her head, wanting revenge, and she lashes out at her brother and family, accusing them of being traitors and monsters. Kumbhakarna and the rest of the family try to persuade her by claiming that he is a traitor. Surpanakha, on the other hand, knows that Ravana saw the Danavas as a threat to his asura empire, which is why he devised a plan to kill them and fabricate lies to do so.

When it came to love and family, she recognised that women have reduced to their most primal, most vulnerable selves. They were purified as a result of their ability to provide love. But what Kumbha didn't realise was that people may despise it in all its unadulterated purity. Her family had ruined her life. Her adoration. Her partner. Her little group of relatives.

She hated all of them just now. She had been unwanted in her family, and it was Vidyujiva who had saved her from them. He had given her the love that none of them could offer, that warmth, that peace, that sense of being wanted, the belongingness. Not her mother, not her brothers. (157)

Surpanakha's open and overwhelming affection for her son Sambhukumar has grown since her husband's death. But fate isn't kind to her, as her son is murdered while meditating in the woods. Her final ray of hope vanishes in the wind of doom and gloom, leaving her with nothing but spiteful rage, revenge, and bitterness. Surpanakha appears to be marginalised even by destiny.

Finally, after Surpanakha has reduced Lanka to ashes and Vibhishan has ascended to the throne, she interrogates Mandodari on morals and ideals. She even tells her that her marriage is convenient and that she would never be happy since

Vibhishan's wife Sarama will never approve of her. Surpanakha illustrates with every lash of her tongue that the marginal's attack is always more terrible than it appears since it carries the sharpness of oppression, prejudice, and social injustice.

### VIII. SUBVERSIVE JOURNEY OF A WOMAN UNHEARD

Thousands of people being slaughtered as a form of retaliation for an individual's wrongdoings is unjustifiable without a shadow of a doubt. Nonetheless, it is necessary to examine it from a balanced standpoint. If Surpanakha was wrong in wreaking havoc in Lanka and Ayodhya, what about Ram, who wreaks havoc in equal measure? Vibhishan's act of abandoning his brother and joining hands with Ram, so bringing about Lanka's devastation, cannot be justified either, even though he does not demonstrate open violence and hatred. Surpanakha's rage and violent nature, on the other hand, stand out as embodiments of plain evil, while others' activities seek shelter under the idea of assisting a hegemonic authority (Ram) who is regarded as a divine manifestation.

The woes of Surpanakha, the marginal, do not cease with her death. She is reborn as Trivakra or Kubja the hunchback, the object of ridicule and shame in society because she plotted vengeance with a twisted and morally crippled mind. Krishna, who explains the reason for her physical impairment, frees her from her curse once more.

'You were born a beautiful princess Meenakshi, the sister of the asura king Ravan, but your wickedness turned you into a monster—Surpanakha, the woman as hard as nails...' he explained. 'Do you remember me? The man who rejected you and, in your wrath, you took a terrible revenge on me, my wife Sita and my brother Lakshman...?' (11-12)

Even a supernatural manifestation like Krishna looks at Kubja with a masculine gaze, showing human tendencies in celestial manifestations. Surpanakha was not malicious, but she was wronged in every way, according to the reader who reads the complete tale. Even though her actions resulted in many fatalities, they were the consequence of a mistreated soul, not an evil entity. Kubja's change into a beautiful woman and her copulation with Krishna does not, however, signify that her suffering is over.

... in her final quest for Lakshman's acceptance, Surpanakha would be reborn, many centuries later, as Phulwati, the feisty daughter of a local chieftain, in love with Pabuji, the hero of war and the fiercest warrior of their clan and the reincarnation of Lakshman. They will decide to marry, but on the day of the wedding, he will be called to war, leaving his seven pheras unfinished and his bride alone, to never return, dying on the battlefield. It was like before, Krishna decided—Lakshman the eternal celibate warrior refusing to accept Surpanakha, and she, eternally unrequited in his rejection. (273).

The epilogue makes you raise your brows in the direction of divine justice. Is the fate of human beings decided by a humorous and anthropomorphic Godhead? Why doesn't Lakshman benefit from Krishna's sexual relationship, which compensates for his rejection of Surpanakha? Why can't Lakshman relive his pleasant moments with Surpanakha in new birth, thus atoning for his rejection and physical disfigurement? Isn't it true that a person's repentance has no bearing on Providence? Is the human world a place where anyone who questions divine order or its human equivalent will be forced to say, "Abandon all hope, ye who arrive here?" The ending certainly leaves room for a lot of questions, but whether the reader gets to find answers or not, Surpanakha remains a wronged damsel in distress rather than the arrogant and wicked princess of Lanka in the thoughts and emotions of readers.

### IX. CONCLUSION

Surpanakha was a strong, independent woman, a passionate lover, and a devout mother who was disgraced for her decisions. The tale begins and closes with a scenario of Rama's Krishna reincarnation, Kubja, welcoming and soothing Surpanakha, whom he had rejected in his previous birth. Surpanakha's prior miseries, the disfigurement she received at the hands of Lakshmana on Rama's command, and the penance she underwent in this incarnation, when she was born with a hunchback and faced prejudice and mocking, are all wiped by Krishna's touch. Krishna resurrects her deformed body and changes it into a new one that is beautiful and tranquil. Despite her reputation as a monster, she had a human side that was overlooked. She was a strong, independent lady who was also a passionate lover, a devout wife, and a loving mother. Surpanakha, the main character of Lanka's Princess, is empowered and given a voice to talk and react.

In this study, the parents are almost uniform in terms of preferential treatment towards their children. Surpanakha's castration narrative suggests a certain type of abysmal lady who endures a bad fate and has become a part of Hindu mythology. Kavita Kané has created an alternative story by deconstructing patriarchal beliefs and reimagining a censored woman's consciousness. Women's dismissive images are based on men's worry. There are numerous social evils existing even in the 21 centuries, still searching for resolutions. Literary works like *Lanka's Princess* not only serve the reading purpose but also ignite thoughts. The author's intention is not to reproduce the stereotypical version of the epic Ramayana, but assist the readers to analyse the same story through a different lens by spotlighting the unvoiced characters. Myths are not just stories rather they reflect every age and it indicates the problems. But retellings gave solutions to those problems

discussed. In fictionalizing the story of Surpanakha, Kane points out the consequential yet unnoticed practices of parental favouritism and sibling rivalry. As societal beings, we are responsible to tackle such social deformities.

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