



Silenced Voices Reclaimed: A Comparative Study Of Sita And Uruvi In Devdutt Pattanaik And Kavita Kane's Mythological Retellings

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Abstract

This paper examines the reinterpretation of two prominent female characters from Indian mythology, Sita and Uruvi, depicting the modern mythological retellings by Devdutt Pattanaik and Kavita Kane. While Sita, from the Ramayana, has been the subject of extensive literary and cultural analysis, Uruvi, the lesser-known wife of Karna from the Mahabharata, finds voice in Kavita Kane's fiction. This study explores how both authors reclaim these silenced voices, providing agency and individuality to the characters. By analyzing Pattanaik's *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana* and Kane's *Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen*, this paper highlights that today's mythological fiction has become a medium of feminist revisionism that challenges traditional patriarchy, rewrites historical silence, and offers nuanced female perspectives.

Keywords: Mythological retelling, Sita, Uruvi, feminism, voice, agency, Indian mythology.

Introduction

In Indian mythology, as depicted in the Ramayana and Mahabharata, male protagonists such as Rama, Krishna, Arjuna, and Karna have traditionally taken center stage, while female characters like Sita and Draupadi are often portrayed merely as symbols of purity and endurance. Mythology, often built and preserved through patriarchal lenses. It has historically marginalized female voices. Recently, however, modern Indian writers have begun to reinterpret these ancient tales from the viewpoint of marginalized figures, especially women. Devdutt Pattanaik and Kavita Kane are the two leading writers who reshape this narrative space. Devdutt Pattanaik's *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana* (2013) and Kavita Kane's *Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen* (2013) are examples of works that give voice to overlooked female characters Sita and Uruvi, depicting them as multifaceted, independent individuals rather than passive sufferers. While Pattanaik focuses on reinterpreting and illustrating the subtle dimensions of well-known figures like Sita, Kane gives a provocative voice to marginalized women like Uruvi, who previously existed on the periphery of the myth.

This paper compares and contrasts the portrayals of Sita and Uruvi in contemporary retellings, focusing on how their voices are reclaimed and reinterpreted. Both characters reflect defiance, independence, and silent strength that defies the traditional depictions found in canonical epics. This feminist reshaping offers a broader understanding of the female experience in mythology, and reclaims spaces historically denied to women. By examining the narrative styles, thematic elements, and character portrayals of Devdutt Pattanaik and Kavita Kane, this study contends that these retellings do more than simply narrate old tales. They challenge, critique, and reinvent mythology for today's audiences.

Myth, Gender, and Reclamation

Indian mythology has long influenced cultural imagination and prescribed gender roles and moral ideals. Sita, Draupadi, and Savitri are depicted as ideal women: dutiful, pure, and sacrificial. However, these portrayals often exclude complexity, portraying women as paragons of virtue or as sources of destruction. Contemporary feminist criticism of mythology points out this binary representation and calls for reinterpretations that present female characters as independent rational agents.

Therefore, the reinterpretation of mythology became a political act. Devdutt Pattanaik and Kavita Kane were writers who engaged in this phenomenon through different approaches. Pattanaik, a mythologist and illustrator, combined storytelling with interpretation to make mythology more understandable and diverse. Kane, a former journalist, uses fiction to center forgotten women, turning them into protagonists with agency and depth. These reinterpretations challenge traditional narratives and offer new perspectives on female characters in Indian mythology. By reimagining these stories, authors like Pattanaik and Kane contribute to a broader cultural shift in how women are perceived and represented. Their work not only entertains but also educates readers about the complexities of gender roles and the importance of diverse narratives in shaping societal attitudes.

A) Sita in Devdutt Pattanaik's Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana

In Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of Ramayana (2013), Devdutt Pattanaik reframes Sita's journey not as a victim, but of independence and wisdom. Unlike Valmiki's Sita or Tulsidas's idealized figure, Pattanaik's Sita is self-contained, philosophical, and assertive. She is not simply a victim moved by Rama's actions, but a thinker who believes deeply in dharma, gender roles, and autonomy. Pattanaik's portrayal challenges traditional interpretations, presenting Sita as a complex character with agency and intellectual depth. This reimagining invites readers to reconsider the role of women in ancient epics and question long-held assumptions about female characters in mythology. By emphasizing Sita's inner strength and philosophical nature, Pattanaik's work contributes to a broader discourse on gender representation in literature and the evolving understanding of classical texts in contemporary society.

A. 1 Agency and Autonomy

Pattanaik highlights moments when Sita makes conscious choices, such as choosing exile over the palace, questioning Rama's decisions, and finally choosing to return to Earth rather than submitting to another trial. While silent on the surface, these choices are vehement declarations of selfhood. According to Pattanaik, "Sita is not weak. She is composed. Her silence is not submission; it is a strategy." Through Sita, the author questions patriarchal readings of Ramayana. Agni Pariksha, has often been observed as a test of purity; it is reinterpreted as Sita's moment of resistance. She submits to the fire not to prove herself to Rama but to challenge societal notions of honor and female worth. This reinterpretation of Sita's actions challenges traditional narratives and invites readers to reconsider the agency of female characters in mythology. By presenting Sita as a strategic and composed figure, Pattanaik offers a feminist perspective on the Ramayana that resonates with contemporary discussions on gender roles. Moreover, this analysis encourages a broader examination of how ancient texts can be reread and reinterpreted to reveal hidden layers of meaning and relevance to modern society.

A. 2 Inner Strength and Dharma

Sita's understanding of dharma, questions rigid gender roles; while Rama adheres to external law (Rajdharma), Sita represents an inner dharma—one rooted in compassion, reflection, and moral clarity. This dichotomy reframes Sita not as a submissive consort but as a moral counterpoint to epic's masculine heroism.

B) Uruvi in Kavita Kane's Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen

While Sita is a well-known figure, Uruvi is a fictionalized character derived from passing mentions in lesser-known versions of the Mahabharata. In *Karna's Wife*, Kavita Kane reclaims this silent figure and places her at the center of the narrative. The novel presents Uruvi as an educated, outspoken, and politically aware woman who challenges both Karna's moral decisions and larger injustices of the epic. Uruvi's character serves as a lens through which the reader can critically examine the complex moral landscape of the Mahabharata. Her interactions with Karna provide new insights into his motivations and inner conflicts, offering a fresh perspective on this tragic hero. Through Uruvi's eyes, Kane explores themes of caste discrimination, gender roles, and the consequences of unwavering loyalty in a world governed by duty and destiny.

B. 1 Rewriting the Margins

Uruvi's presence in Kane's narrative represents an act of reclamation. In its dominant versions, Mahabharata often marginalizes women outside the Kuru lineage. By constructing Uruvi's character, Kane offers a new lens through which Karna's life and choices are interrogated—not by his rivals but by a woman who loves him yet refuses to be complicit in his silence and loyalty to Duryodhana. Kane writes, "To love someone is not to accept everything they do, but to challenge them when they falter." Uruvi became a voice dissent within the world of epic valors and male egos. This perspective challenges the traditional portrayal of women in the epic as passive observers or victims of circumstance. Through Uruvi's character, Kane explores the complexities of love, loyalty, and moral responsibility in the context of the Mahabharata. Her presence serves as a catalyst for deeper introspection into Karna's motivations and the consequences of his actions, offering readers a fresh interpretation of this iconic figure.

B. 2 Feminist Voice and Ethical Inquiry

Uruvi constantly questions the morality of Karna's loyalty, particularly during events such as the disrobing of Draupadi and killing of Abhimanyu. Her moral compass remains steady, making her a powerful ethical voice in the narrative. She is not a passive wife but a political and moral commentator. In challenging Karna, Uruvi also critiques patriarchal norms that valorize loyalty over justice, war over dialogue, and silence over dissent. Her character embodies modern feminist sensibility, which seeks not only love and respect, but also intellectual and moral partnerships. Uruvi's character serves as a bridge between ancient epic and contemporary ethical discourse, highlighting the timeless nature of moral dilemmas. Her presence in the story challenges the notion of blind loyalty and emphasizes the importance of individual conscience in navigating complex social and political landscapes.

C. Comparative Analysis: Sita and Uruvi

Both Sita and Uruvi represent reclaimed voices, but their methods differ. Sita's power lies in philosophical depth and silent strength: Uruvi's vocal defiance and ethical confrontation. However, both disrupt the traditional narrative of women as passive participants in the myth. Their contrasting approaches highlight the diverse ways women can assert agency within patriarchal structures. Sita's quiet resilience challenges the notion that power must be loud or confrontational, while Uruvi's outspokenness demonstrates the importance of direct opposition to injustice. Together, they offer a nuanced perspective on female empowerment in mythological retellings, encouraging readers to reconsider the roles and capabilities of women in these ancient narratives.

D. Feminist Reinterpretation in Contemporary Myth Fiction

Contemporary mythological fiction, particularly by female or feminist learning authors, is increasingly being used to question the gender dynamics embedded in traditional narratives. These retellings are not mere fictional embellishments but political acts of reclamation. They allow female readers to identify with the heroines who think, feel, resist, and question.

By placing Sita and Uruvi in conversation, we can observe a shift from myth as a static tradition to a living discourse. In Devdutt Pattanaik's retelling, Sita gains dignity of complexity. In Kavita Kane's fiction, Uruvi claims the right to question. Together, they symbolize the evolution of myths from male-centered to more inclusive, dynamic storytelling.

Conclusion

Sita and Uruvi, although shaped by different authors and narrative structures, share a journey of voice reclamation. Their character arcs challenge the patriarchal silencing of women in Indian mythology and offer readers alternative ways to engage with myths. Sita's introspective rebellion and Uruvi's intellectual confrontation both reflect feminist ideals of agency, resistance, and justice.

As contemporary Indian literature continues to reinterpret myths, voices such as those of Sita and Uruvi become essential. They allow myths to remain relevant, not just as cultural memory but as a space for reimagining justice, gender, and identity. In reclaiming these silenced voices, Pattanaik and Kane do more than retell myths: they rewrite the rules of who speaks and why.

These retellings serve as a bridge between ancient narratives and modern sensibilities, inviting readers to question long-held assumptions about gender roles and power dynamics. By giving voice to previously marginalized characters, authors like Pattanaik and Kane contribute to a broader cultural dialogue about representation and inclusivity in literature. Their work demonstrates the enduring power of mythology to shape societal values and challenge established norms, even in the 21st century.

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