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REINTERPRETATIONS OF SURPANAKHA IN KAVITA KANE'S *LANKA'S PRINCESS*

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Abstract: More than thousand years now, women continue to live as submissive creatures, leaving their degrading and disgracing conditions to fate even, in Hindu mythology women are treated to be less important characters. In the work, Lanka's *Princess* Kavita Kane positively presents Surpanakha and also throw light on the childhood trauma experienced by her. The research attempts to present the truth that lies behind Surpanakha's personality and behavior through a psychoanalytic lens. Kane deviates from the stereotypes and gives a new voice to Surpanakha. The psychological behavior of Surpanakha reflected at the end when her traumas which got buried in her subconscious got triggered by the incidents which would be her husband's death. This made her take decisions which ended in a tragedy. Finally, this research's attempt to provide insight to Surpanakha's character is done through a Psychoanalytic perspective.

Index Terms – Surpanakha, Mythic Fiction, Psychoanalytic Study, Childhood Trauma.

I. INTRODUCTION

Mythology serves as a great platform for various moral values. Hindu mythology which produced great epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata have given more epic heroes and values which exist even in the 21st century. Till now the value of mythology is celebrated throughout the world. Mythology has taken a new form as Mythic fiction, whereas mythology stories have been retold in new perspectives.

Mythic fiction focuses on epic characters but some fictional elements are added to make those plots interesting. Many authors have adopted this style of rewriting mythology and gave a new voice to devious characters. Kavita Kane is one such author who gave new voice to characters, especially women characters. One such character is Surpanakha and Kane beautifully justified her character.

Various authors of mythical fiction have portrayed Surpanakha's personality in radically diverse ways. The authors have reshaped Surpanakha's character and warped the long-standing perception of her through their retellings. They have offered numerous interpretations by changing Surpanakha's personality from that of a demon to that of a woman.

In the Valmiki Ramayana,

Surpanakha is described as an awful-looking and rude character: A Rakshashi called Soorpanaka who had the strength of uprooting...who was black like a blue gem by her vile tricks, who had dense hair on her head with the red color of copper, who had a huge fat body which has limitless growth and full of passion. (Translated Version of Kamba Ramayanam 2739-2741). In the Kamba Ramayana, Kambar depicted her as a stunning woman with golden eyes who could alter her appearance at pleasure. She had thick red hair, and was characterized as being huge, plump, and full of hatred.

Every human's character is decided by their actions. Even though they are good, the reaction that they give for certain situations decides their character. Surpanakha who possessed good behavior gradually changed due to her traumatic experiences. Childhood trauma can create an adverse effect on every human's life. It

acts as a catalyst in human life where the good also turns to be a bad one. No one is born bad, the situation and the neglect that they face during their childhood make them as bad adults in society. Behavior analysis suggests the distinction between secure and insecure attachment. These two attachments were created by past reinforcement and wrong learnings. A kid's life is categorized under these two circumstances where this idea of secure and insecure attachment clarifies why kids have been labeled as having insecure attachment which leads to a lack of trust and suitable moral growth.

Trauma completely transforms the survivor's existence, causing immense disruption. An individual's identity and self-esteem become fragmented as a result. Trauma changes a victim's perspective of their surroundings even if it is unspoken in society. Childhood trauma can create an adverse effect on every human's life. It acts as a catalyst in human life where the good also turns to be a bad one. No one is born bad, the situation and the neglect that they face during their childhood make them as bad adults in society. Behaviour analysis suggests the distinction between secure and insecure attachment. These two attachments were created by past reinforcement and wrong learnings. A kid's life is categorized under these two circumstances where this idea is that of secure and insecure attachment clarifies why kids have been labelled as having insecure attachment which leads to a lack of trust and suitable moral growth.

Throughout their early years, children who have experienced abuse, neglect, and many placements, frequently with different caregivers, have resorted to survival tactics, such as manipulating and coercing strangers into giving them what they want. Children may go through a string of traumatic experiences, a term used to denote the painful or frightening incidents that occur when a child's safety and survival needs are not met during their early years of reliance and fragility. These events can occur directly from the adult caregivers or indirectly as a result of their inattention to detail. Because of this, when these kids interact with adults, they pick up a completely new set of behaviours and are unable to acquire a collective set of behaviours that are referred to as attachment.

At the beginning of the novel, we can witness how the author portrays the character Surpanakha. Kaikesi's heart sank when she heard the news of Surpanakha's birth. She was totally upset with the birth of Surpanakha where Kaikesi was drowning in a flood of disappointment and easy tears. "It was a daughter, not a son" (Kane 1). These words explain how Kaikesi's dream of capturing Lanka was shattered as she gave birth to a girl, not a boy. Though she had three sons she was not satisfied with and happy with the birth of Surpanakha. As a mother, the words that came out of Kaikesi's mouth depict her anger and ignorance towards Surpanakha. Several perspectives exist on discrimination: the familial and the societal, which mutually support and feed one another. Prejudice frequently begins at birth. Whether someone is dominant or marginal is mostly

Surpanakha's lack of affection started right from her birth. As a child, she was not loved enough by her mother. Life gets fulfilled when we receive the right amount of love and care from our parents. Kaikesi didn't even hesitate to claim her own child as ugly. "She hardly looks beautiful or like me. In fact, she's quite ugly!"(Kane 2). Kaikesi failed to serve as a good mother for Surpanakha, whereas we could witness many incidents where she was proud of her sons and not her daughter. The words that Kaikesi uttered were not just words they showed hatred towards Surpanakha.

Even her brother failed to address her politely. Ravan always acts rude toward her, he never considers her as his own sister but rather always bullies her. "Surpanakha, that's what she is. Not Chandranakha as mother calls her, but a witch with long, sharp claws. Next time I'll break your bloody arm, Surpanakha!!"(Kane 8). Ravan's words echoed in Surpanakha's ears. Surpanakha and her pet Maya don't deserve this treatment, he strangled Maya the pet goat of Surpanakha which made her act infuriated. Ravan showed her power towards an innocent creature, the pet of his sister.

Whenever chaos appears Surpanakha a delicate creature is automatically tagged to be a bad one. Ravan was the one who always indulged in fights but Surpanakha was blamed for the things that she had never done.

“Why can you not behave like a girl? Always fighting and squabbling, hitting boys and throwing stones and scratching the eyes out of anyone who provokes you. Surpanakha, that’s the right name for you, you monster!” (Kane 9). Already she had been wounded and she was bleeding but Kaikesi acted rude toward her for not stopping Ravan from fighting. She didn't deserve this kind of treatment, being a girl among three boys doesn't mean getting blamed every time for other mistakes.

Surpanakha who, as a victim of patriarchal domination and a gender-biased society, is compelled to give up her identity as a Meenakshi and transforms into a Surpanakha at the hands of her horrible family. Because she is a victim of her mother, brother, and family, she is forced to question her family's treatment of her as a girl kid inside the family due to her circumstances.

“See them? If anyone hurts me, I shall hurt them with these!! I am Surpanakha!” (Kane 9). Her high-pitched voice was filled with rage. Everyone around her questioned her like a *cuKanerit*. The first time, she was so frustrated that she painted herself as the devil. After that, she became well-known as Surpanakha. She doesn't recall ever laughing as a little child. Her expression remained harsh for a long time. She needed affection and attention. Life is not the same for all and Surpanakha's character proves that. All these traumas Surpanakha's father, mother, and brother didn't realize that their neglect was going to turn her into a monster. “ Yes, I am a monster!” (Kane 9). Meenakshi shrieked in anger, her eyes flashing, baring her claws at her mother. Surpanakha couldn't withstand this biased treatment anymore. As a girl child the treatment that she received was unfair. Her own family's treatment made her believe that she is unfit for her family. Her own mother hates her existence because of her gender.

The word monster echoed in her ears often and each time when she came across these words it brought a rush of memories. Kaikesi's eyes spit venom and hatred additionally, the word monster that she utters whenever she sees Surpanakha. This gradually turns Surpanakha into a psychic girl where she starts to address herself as a monster. “ I am the monster of the family, and I am never made to forget that!” (Kane 23). Surpanakha didn't want to reveal the identity of her mother. Though she went through many problems within the family, Surpanakha thought that telling about Kaikesi's treatment would not be right. Indulging Taraka in family problems would be inappropriate and it would be betrayal. Taraka who was the grandmother of Surpanakha thought that she should be called by her name Meenakshi. Taraka never addressed Meenakshi as Surpanakha as she thought that it was wrong to address her as Surpanakha. Meenakshi who didn't receive proper love from her family started to seek love from her grandmother. Surpanakha lost her grandmother and again she became alone.

But fortunately, the kind Meenakshi within her is brought back to life by Vidyujiva. She married him against her family's wish but that doesn't lasted for days. The pain again smeared her heart, she was left alone again. Vidyujiva, whom she considered her love, was killed but her own family. Though all justified his murder she couldn't convince herself about her husband's death. Surpanakha's words started to hurt everyone, she blamed everyone for Vidyujiva's death, especially Ravan who killed him with his own hands.

You killed whatever I had. And it is because of only one man — Ravan. Ravan hated him, Ravan dreaded him, Ravan was threatened by him and what does Ravan do to anyone who challenges him? He removes them like he did with his father. He finishes them like he murdered my husband! Which brother makes his sister a widow for his ambition, his fears? (Kane 172-173).

Surpanakha couldn't control her anger; her husband's loss made her infuriated and she cried so badly. Kaikesi, Ravan, and the rest tried to console her not with supportive words, rather they justified the murder of Vidyujiva as right. This has been a turning point in her life that her husband's demise triggered all her past traumas and she plans to kill her brother Ravan for her husband's death. As a girl she lost everything she had. Now, she turned into an actual monster as her family termed in her childhood.

Situations have a big influence on how people behave. People don't realize that people might have both good and terrible traits; instead, they think that people are good or bad based on their actions and reactions. Surpanakha's psychological conduct became evident towards the end of the study when her subconsciously stored traumas were aroused by her husband's death. This forced her to make choices that had tragic results. By going beyond flat representations and recognizing the complexity of Surpanakha's personality and deeds, this nuanced reading of her character subverts conventional wisdom and provokes a reevaluation of how legendary figures are viewed. By stressing the psychological trauma that Surpanakha experienced, the study

highlights the significance of comprehending the underlying causes of characters' actions and promotes a more thorough and compassionate method of studying mythical figures

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