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Retelling the Tale of Surpanakha in Kavitha Kane's *Lanka's Princess*

Title: Lanka's Princess

Author: Kavitha Kane

Genre: Alternate Hindu mythology

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Pages: 298

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Introduction:

Indian Literature is a rich reservoir of myth and legends. Both orally and in written form the mythological stories are passed from one generation to other. Writers from time to time pen these tales and record them. Modern Indian writers in English beginning from Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni to Amish Tripathi portray the legendary mythological characters of the past in relation to modern day aspect. This retelling of myth is welcomed among readers of all age. Kavitha Kane in *Lanka's Princess* has sculpted Surpanakha in a way she gives voice to her. In the male dominated epic most of the female characters are suppressed and *Pani-t-thee* (2005) by Mangai is one fine example. Mangai gives voice of reason to Ambaa in her *Pani-t-thee* (Frozen Fire) by rewriting a classic that has been unfair to women; it revives the mythical character of Amba of a major Indian epic, the Mahabharata.

Plot:

Ravan's infamous sister Surpanakha was perceived as an ugly and untamed demon. Also, there is common notion that Lakshman sliced off her nose which led to the war. In her teens she was dusky and seductive with her fish shaped eyes. She was originally named Meenakshi. She fell in love with Vidujiva and married him against the pleadings of her family. Vidujiva being a traitor tried to kill Ravan but then was killed in the battlefield because of his infidelity. On hearing this, there occurs metamorphosis of Meena into Surpanakha, epitome of hatred and revenge. Though her brothers were all destined to win in war and fame she charted it out with misery and fallings. Ravan abducted Sita which eventually led to the bloody war and the whole Ravan's family gets murdered. In the end she gets moksha from Lord Krishna. This depicts the reality of mankind being a puppet in the hands of eternal.



Characters:

Kane showcases varied characters from the epic and also has blended them with imaginary characters. Ravan, Sita, Ram, Lakshman, Kaikesi, Kumbha, Vibhishan are all familiar characters known for their sub plots in the epic *Ramayana*. The plot revolves around the motive, aspirations, vengeance and emotions of Surpanakha. Scenes which includes Ravan portrays the weak and sensitive side of him. He barely shows his demonic character instead he is portrayed as a loving brother who longs to see his sister happy and satisfied. Lord Krishna appears as muse with whom the novel begins and ends. There are many minor characters such as Vidujiva, sons of Ravan and more who helps to take the storyline to next level.

Style:

Straightforward and lucid. Descriptions of palace and the three worlds, battlefield, bloodshed appears to be vivid and picturesque. The plot paralleling the philosophy is the hallmark of Kavitha Kane's novels. Kavitha has done justice in portraying Surpanakha (misunderstood character in the epic) by making the readers see the reality lying beneath her. The events unfold through the women's point of view which elevates the work of art. Usage of italics then and there cures monotony. Also, it is used to denote the thoughts running in the minds of the characters. An abstract from the novel goes as, "*I shall have him killed, even if it meant annihilation of my family, this palace, this kingdom, my race. He and they all have made me suffer as I had never thought it was possible to suffer. Her heart was slamming against her ribs. I would do it, I would, she told herself*" (214). Surpanakha's thoughts run in italics and the normal font signifies the reality.

Perception:

The novel runs on the track of element of suspense. The element of suspense is traced in "She had won her battle, she had won her love. But she did not know what she was going to lose" (125). The quotes text prophesises the ups and downs are part and parcel of life. Moreover, mentally prepares the minds of readers to get ready for the twists and turns which follows. The writer has nowhere made a statement that Surphanakha was an epitome of virtue but plainly presents her vice and demonic character. But the reason for her mean, vindictive and twisted working of her mind is explained. Kavitha submits the detailing and let the readers to become the judge of the protagonist's nature. The pride and fall of Surpanakha echoes Greek philosopher, Heraclitus's dictum "A man's character is his destiny" (192). People are moulded by their actions and circumstances but then their character brings their destiny. Ravan and Surpanakha falls under this category. Lord Krishna presents himself in the beginning and in the end to deliver the philosophical messages. This moralistic approach from the writer has given a lesson for lifetime.

Conclusion:

The novel serves as a fine example of giving voice to the voiceless. Also gives prime importance to the character which is often misunderstood as symbol of hatred and perpetrator of war. It is one definite read to delve deep into the character of Surpanakha. Kavitha Kane



has won the hearts of reader by bringing feministic aspect into the genre of alternate mythology.

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