



## **Karna's Wife by Kavita Kane, "The Outcast's Queen," and the Female Protagonist's Courage: An Analysis of the Historicity of the Characterization**

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### **Abstract**

This research paper analyses the portrayal of the female lead in Karna's Wife-The Outcast's Queen by Kavita Kane. In her retelling of the Mahabharata, whose plot was set in the Vedic age of India, the author purposefully invented the character Uruvi to showcase the virtues of Karna to the world. The premise of this study is that while Uruvi's portrayal appears to have lost some of its historical validity in a relatively small number of circumstances, her personality trait of bravery continues to be an inspiration for people in modern society. The goal of the research is to understand and analyse how the protagonist thinks and behaves in situations that serve as socio-psychological triggers for the character's responses in the novel. The qualitative approach is used since the study is transformative and analytical in character. To determine the historicity of the characterization and determine the value of the novel in terms of bringing about a progressive qualitative change among the populace, the analysis of the text is carried out by citing empirical historical evidence that is readily available in a number of public domains.

**Keywords:** Epic period, historical accuracy, bravery, inter-caste marriages and femininity

### **Introduction**

The character Uruvi from Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen is an example of how characters in books or other literary works can act as spokespersons for their authors. This character was purposefully invented by the author to express her dissatisfaction with the Mahabharata's story. In order to examine Karna's untapped personality traits—which were greatly liked and revered by Indians but mostly overlooked by mainstream writers—the author creates this fictional figure. Author Kavita Kane endows the character Uruvi with a number of great personality attributes. Uruvi is brave, and she exhibits this admirable quality throughout the narrative in many settings. Even today, the fictional figure of Uruvi continues to serve as a source of inspiration for others, therefore the study of this novel's Uruvi characterization is important and pertinent to the modern world. The fact that Uruvi chose Karna (as her spouse), who was degraded by birth in the caste-based society, as well as her courage in challenging the elders' prejudiced viewpoints and her tireless efforts to spare Karna from certain death on the Kurukshetra battlefield, all attest to Uruvi's fearlessness.

Being in love with Karna, a warrior who is considered to be of low birth by society, Uruvi voluntarily selects the Pratiloma marriage. When Uruvi confesses her choice to marry Karna, who comes from a lesser caste than the Kshatriya caste, her parents (and later everyone else) are made aware of this courage in Uruvi. In an era when caste discrimination was prevalent, crossing social boundaries required more bravery than any other endeavour. When Karna shows up to the archery competition in Hastinapur that Bhishma had ordered to be held, Uruvi, the only daughter of Pukeya kingdom's monarch Vahusha, falls in love with him

right away. Even if she learns that Karna is not a Kshatriya on the same occasion, her affection for him endures. Uruvi chooses to wed Karna herself, despite her father's warning that doing so would be "a living death" (Kane, p. 19). Despite the shastras forbidding the "practise of pratiloma," which is defined as "marriage to a man of a lower caste," Uruvi attempts to navigate the turbulent currents of life with her sweetheart (Kane. p. 19). According to a study by GK Studies, pratiloma weddings were "forbidden" in sacred writings. (Marriages: types, 2013). According to Karla Hoff's research, "Historically, a man's social abilities were recognised from the caste into which he was born, and his caste specified the jobs that he might engage" (Karla Hoff. 2016). Every member of Indian society has inherited this distinctive tradition attribute. The religious dogmatism that permeates the culture is what causes Uruvi to encounter her parents' vehement anger. However, Uruvi persuades her father that she is "not ashamed to have fallen in love with Karna" using her exceptional logical and negotiating skills. She bravely begs her father to treat Karna with the same respect as any other decent person (Kane. p. 21 – 22). She also cautions her parents that if he doesn't approve of her marriage to Karna, she will remain a spinster forever. This episode serves as evidence of Uruvi's fearless bravery.

In the Vedic era, women frequently had the option of choosing to remain single or wed a guy from a different caste. Uruvi's statements in this episode are therefore historically accurate, even if these two phenomena were uncommon at the time. Women had the right to live as spinsters, according to Shuani in her article titled Status of Women in Ancient India (Shuani). One of the factors that led King Vahusha to consider the situation and approve Uruvi's marriage to Karna,

a non-Kshatriya, was this social custom. In the time of the Mahabharata, it was standard practise to marry a member of a lower caste. Hypergamy, including Anuloma and Pratiloma, was common during this time period, as evidenced by a number of examples in the Mahabharata story itself. Puja Mondal claims that, despite being uncommon at the time, "anuloma," or marriages between men of higher Varna or rank and women of lower Varna or caste, "were sanctioned" (Mondal). However, "all Hindu law [makers] vehemently opposed and discouraged" the Pratiloma weddings that take place between males of lower Varna and women of higher Varna (Mondal). The Kshatriya princess Uruvi selected the Pratiloma marriage, demonstrating her unfathomable bravery. She, who is depicted as being nineteen years old in this novel's rendition of the Mahabharata, deliberately picks a difficult path in life by marrying Karna, who is made king of Anga but is not respected as a Kshatriya. She only knowingly chooses not to marry Arjuna, the prince.

However, Uruvi regrets her decision to choose Karna because he was already married to Vrushali. Despite having a respectable position in the household, Prema Ramachandran and Rachana Sharma argue that "polygamy was a recognised practise and women were considered hardly more than an adornment, trivial belongings, and easily expendable" (Rama Chandran, 2013). However, the novel claims that Uruvi feels "like an invader, invading on the joys of" Vrushali, Karna's wife (Kane. p. 46). Given this situation, the representation of Uruvi's character comes across as quite improbable given that polygamous marriages were a very typical social occurrence during the Mahabharata period. The same truth is represented in the way the author describes Vrushali's emotions when greeting Uruvi, the newlywed, "to her new home" in the episode (Kane. p. 46).

Uruvi was emotionally prepared for Vrushali to respond in a disdainful manner, but instead, "none came and [she] felt her own defences melting away" (Kane. p. 46). This depiction of Vrushali's reception of Uruvi illustrates the social climate at the time, when polygyny was widely accepted in society. Vrushali, on the other hand, makes Uruvi feel uneasy, and she "at last [looks] up to glance right into her rival's liquid eyes..." (Kane. p. 46). This characteristic of Uruvi's conscience-driven attitude is what makes it seem implausible and out of character with the social mores and fundamental behavioural traits that were prominent at the time. Contrary to popular belief, it is also possible that concepts similar to those of Uruvi existed during this time period. While analysing and evaluating the general traits of a period in the distant past, this remains a special truth that cannot be equated with the general truth. In order to give credibility to her [the author's] assessment of Karna's personality attributes through this honourable character, Kavita Kane purposefully gave Uruvi this personality feature.

Uruvi progressively develops jealousy after initially being afraid of Vrushali sharing her spouse Karna. She has an irrational desire to claim Karna as her own since she is captivated with the sensation of possessiveness toward him. The APA Dictionary of Psychology states that "romantic connections are a prototypical source of envy" and that "jealousy is a negative emotion in which a person resents a third party for seemingly taking away the affections of a loved one" (VandenBos. 2007). She experiences emotional anguish as a result of her inability to control her love for Karna. Despite being a woman who is driven by her conscience, she "felt a red-hot envy each time Karna gazed at Vrushali" (Kane. p. 52 – 53). But as time goes on, Uruvi overcomes her

sentiments of resentment and settles down in Karna's home, helping Vrushali take care of his family. According to the author's biography, "being married and Karna's wife was beautiful for [Uruvi]. It was gratifying to manage his home with Radha and Vrushali's nice advice (Kane. p. 55). With these remarks, the author alludes to Uruvi, the protagonist who possesses an intrinsic sense of bravery and fortitude.

Uruvi is portrayed by Kavita Kane as the kind of ideal figure who can stand up to deceit and injustice. In one scene, Uruvi attacks Duryodhana for attempting to hurt one of the Pandavas, Nakul. This trait is described by Kane in the context of Duryodhana's realistic assessment of Uruvi, his close friend's wife, who saw him as a key player in the upcoming conflict with the Pandavas. When he pushed Nakul down from a high branch one tranquil afternoon, the little princess nearly clawed his eyes out, according to his memory (Kane. p. 57). Uruvi assaults and scratches Duryodhana cruelly, leaving him with a bleeding face and murderous scratches on his chest, arms, and legs because she is unable to control her wrath after seeing the horrific act that Duryodhana committed (Kane. p. 57). Lord Krishna is quoted as saying that "it is a sin to do injustice, but it is a greater sin to tolerate injustice" in Chahat Aggarwal's study (Aggarwal. 2020). The worldview of famous people, regardless of their age, reflects the repressed and unspoken beliefs of the time. Due to the fact that these towering individuals shatter the current stillness and express the era's concealed ideas in the same way as people's dislike of yagnas do. In a later period, at the end of the Vedic era, Gautama Buddha made a similar statement. Despite being a mythical character, Uruvi lived during Krishna's lifetime. In light of this, Uruvi's attack on Duryodhana is plausible. In addition to demonstrating Uruvi's inherent noble quality of standing up for justice, this incident also demonstrates her fearlessness.

Gautama Buddha made a similar statement in a later era, which coincided with the end of the Vedic era. Even though Uruvi is a fictitious character, she lived during Krishna's lifetime. So, given this situation, Uruvi's attack on Duryodhana seems plausible. Aside from her inherent noble quality of standing up for justice, this episode also demonstrates Uruvi's courage. According to Varma, learning about the Mahabharata can assist modern-day citizens understand the "social structures and political concepts over [the] long time, spanning from [the] long period, stretching from [the] c. 500 BCE until roughly 500 CE" (Varma. 2017). Wikipedia research indicates that the Varna system, one of the social structures, actually exist during the Vedic era and that the Mahabharata reflects this fact. Therefore, the portrayal of the casteist discriminatory treatment that Uruvi endured at the hands of royal ladies in Hastinapur's court has historical validity.

After observing that "Queen Gandhari did not invite her for a formal post-wedding feast, while Yudhishthira's wife, Devyani, was overtly cold to her, not even gazing at her when they met," Uruvi, however, responds to their disdainful attitude (Kane. p. 58). For Uruvi, the royal ladies' contemptuous looks were unfamiliar. She had the same experience prior to her marriage to Karna when other royal women mistook her sense of self-worth for arrogance. She overcomes this awkward circumstance by delving deeply into "art, literature, and medicine" (Kane. p. 59). She struggles to comprehend her new position as the wife of a "Pariah," nevertheless (Kane. p. 58). She maintains her sense of self-worth despite everything. In actuality, she "starts to tease them by [going] up to them and [laughing] with them, putting on an appearance of

cordiality" (Kane. p. 60). She only acts in retaliation to the royal ladies' social reprimands. It is plausible to believe that Uruvi was the victim of societal punishment in the story. Despite the fact that she was born to King Vahusha and Queen Shubra of the Pukeya kingdom, she is mistreated and raised by a Suta family after her marriage to Karna. This situation is a reflection of the widespread use of the abhorrent Varna system during the later Vedic period. At the start of the Vedic era, there was no Varna system. Despite the patriarchal nature of the society at the time, there was not even female gender oppression. The women participated in religious ceremonies and conflicts on an equal footing with the men. According to Rahul Sankrityayan, the caste system did not begin to be used until the Aryan and Dravidian races began to coexist (Sankrityayan. 2009). People rigorously adhered to endogamy in their marital relationships, which was regulated by the governing classes and religious authority. In the later Vedic era, women who had previously participated in all socioeconomic activities of society started to focus solely on appearing attractive in their husbands' eyes. They passed the time by exchanging rumours about persons who disregarded the boundaries set by society. It is a common occurrence for women who are denied the opportunity to participate in social production to be restricted to the four walls of their homes where they extol the valour of their husbands or uphold traditional cultural values. The episode where Uruvi was mistreated by the royal ladies represented this.

The custom of not interrogating the elderly has long been observed in the majority of nations around the world. Through the influence of religion, this behaviour has been deeply ingrained in people's social interactions. In the present era, asking questions to learn more and to discover the truth has great value. However, this virtue occasionally faces opposition from orthodox ideas supported by conformist political forces. Characters like Uruvi continue to serve as an inspiration for people to uphold the truth and challenge the supremacy of ignorant views and practises in all facets of their social lives in the current socio-political climate. She questions Drona's excessive favouritism of Arjuna. She criticises his dishonesty, harsh repression of Karna, and lack of compassion. In contrast to the middle ages, the patriarchy during the Vedic era was less strict. In the Vedic era, women who were denied an education during the mediaeval ages had access to a high level of education on par with men. Twelve to fifteen of the more than 1000 hymns in the Rig Veda were assigned to women, according to Umara Zainab. 2021) (Zainab This data demonstrates the sociocultural phenomenon that during the Vedic era, women had access to freedom of speech and thought. As a result, the portrayal of Uruvi interrogating the elderly seems plausible.

When Uruvi meets Bhishma Pitamaha in the story, she exemplifies the quality of unflappable bravery. Women enjoyed the same freedom to converse and argue with men throughout the Vedic era. The tale of Gargi, who questions Yagnavalka about whether God exists, attests to the fact that women in the Vedic era enjoyed this freedom. When Yagnavalka responds that God does not exist, Gargi asks, "On what, then, is air braided back and forth? On the aforementioned regions, What then is the thread that connects the worlds of the intermediate regions? On the Gandharva's worlds (Gargi Vachnavi). The novel's plot consistently represented this socioeconomic reality. She challenges her grandfather, Bhishma Pitamaha, alleging that he is biased because Arjuna is his favourite. She critiques his prejudicial view of Karna, who was raised by a charioteer. She

challenges him to defend his opinion regarding her union with Karna. She states that Karna is generous, which is why she admires him. He is not ashamed of being a sutaputra and makes no effort to hide this fact. Even now, he is just as committed to his family as the King of Anga and hasn't abandoned them. I cherish him. Is my marriage to him out of the ordinary? (Kane. p. 62). As she and Bhishma continue to argue, she claims that Karna is subjected to prejudice because of his "low-born" status and asks him, "Is that not so unfair, that it has blown up into a tremendous wrong"? (Kane. p. 62). These phrases serve as a testament to her bravery in challenging even the elderly supporters of justice.

Even though Uruvi is much in love with Karna, she doesn't hesitate to interrogate and debate him about his relationship with Duryodhana. Duryodhana is not a good man, according to Uruvi (Kane. p. 84). Uruvi expressly says that he can never join Duryodhana's family in response to Karna's statement that "he cannot be his friend because of his defects." Karna continues to remind her of Duryodhana's numerous instances of assistance while they argue. However, Uruvi challenges Karna's motives for disclosing the secret behind Duryodhana's selfless assistance to Karna, claiming that Karna Duryodhana "purchased his body and soul." She also cautions him against becoming "blinded by gratitude" (Kane. p. 84). This conversation between Uruvi and Karna demonstrates Uruvi's fortitude to challenge even her husband out of conscience. In Uruvi, bias is unheard of, and it is illustrated in this situation. She is aware of her husband's predicament and does an unbiased analysis. She shows her ability to distinguish between right and wrong, good and evil. She tells Karna straight out that due to his "blind love for [his] friend," he is unable to "see no [distinction] between good and bad, right and wrong" (Kane. p. 85). According to Pallavi Thakur, "the institution of marriage in the Vedic age did not require women to abnegate themselves. In marital life, Atharvada affirms equality between husband and wife. 2017; Thakur. In this situation, Uruvi looks to be an equal life partner in her marriage, and the Thakur research attests to the historical validity of Uruvi's bravery in challenging her partner.

Uruvi emerges as a voice for the oppressed, denouncing the sinister behaviours that are currently taking place in society. She makes a context-specific criticism of Sati's depraved practise. When no other queen had joined their husband on the funeral pyre before Queen Madri, she questions why she would choose to do the same. (Kane. p. 92). The author's awareness of the time period during which the evil practise first appeared and the author's disapproval of the evil practise, Sati, are both shown by these statements. The historical evidence reveals that Sati was not practised throughout the Vedic era. Joshi Nikhul claims that the Mahabharata was written in the fourth century BC (Joshi. 2017), however the Vedic period, which is when the Mahabharata is thought to have been written, is thought to have lasted from 1500 BC to 1000 BC. In this time, depraved practises like the caste system and Sati were not common. In contrast to what Pallavi Thakur claims, her research indicates that there was "no practise of Sati in Vedic age," and that the horrible practise of Sati first began to be used in the "Smriti Age" (Thakur. 2017). Because of this, the author purposefully stated in the Uruvi character's dialogue, "... when no queen before her had joined their husband in the funeral pyre?" (Kane. p. 92). When a character like Uruvi is endowed with numerous humanitarian and noble traits, Uruvi's indignation for the terrible practise of Sati is understandable and realistic.

The morally upright Being the wife of a supporter of the Pandavas' adversaries, the Kauravas, who are backed by Lord Krishna, makes Uruvi feel bad. She feels guilty primarily because Karna is referred to as one of the "terrible foursome," or dushta chathushtayam. Uruvi despises consenting to this inflated assessment of Karna's personality by others. She is in great pain and sobs within herself, "He is not wicked." Karna is not the bad guy. I adore him because he is good and noble (Kane. p. 95). While in the company of Bhishma Pitamaha and Krishna, she is unable to walk without feeling guilty, "[avoiding] them or [glancing] at them secretly as if wishing to dash off and hide" (Kane. p. 95). Being the wife of Karna, who the world views as one of the dushta chathushtayam, causes Uruvi, who was unable to stand Dushasana's disrespectful treatment of him, to "blurt out" in front of Karna. Uruvi is unable to "reconcile herself to the apologetic manner of living." After some time, she comes to the realisation that she "had to learn to survive, and the only place she could hide was in the recess of her thoughts, her silent tears slipping softly down the shadowy curves of her face, soaking into the darkness" (Kane. p. 95). Uruvi never feels ashamed of her, other from the fact that she is the wife of someone who supports Duryodhana. Even this trait of feeling guilty for her consort's allegiance to evil shows her courage to face her conscience, which is "commonly described as leading to emotions of sorrow when a person undertakes an act that clashes with their moral ideals" (Conscience...). The bravery to oppose the atrocities the powerful unleashes on the weak is one of the admirable qualities of those who are conscience-driven. They occasionally have the courage to own up to any mistakes they may have made. The portrayal of this incident demonstrates Uruvi's intrinsic bravery.

Any author who chooses to depict either a historical event or a fictional one must develop some fictional characters who can express their opinions on the theme and narrative that have been selected. Thus, it is not unjustified to create the new character Uruvi and mix him or her in with other figures from mythical fiction who are also virtually fake. In addition, the author acknowledged that "[her] protagonist Uruvi is a fake figure" in order to describe and evaluate the psychology of "one of the most enigmatic characters in Indian mythology" (An Interview with... 2013, p. In an interview with... in 2013, she further defended the creation of the character of Uruvi by claiming that "Karna, however adored and unconditionally popular, is rather a mystery and his private life is absolutely unknown." She also stated that she used mythology "as a literary device to illustrate modern challenges and sensitivities" when she decided to write this retelling novel (Kartika. 2020). So, whether writing historical fiction or mythical fiction, the author is free to add new characters while telling the past. So with her portrayal of Uruvi, Kavita Kane has done this job well. Her personality traits are in line with the main tenet of the time period in which the story of this novel is situated to a large extent.

### Conclusion

Throughout the book, Uruvi is shown as the picture of bravery. The majority of the noble traits exhibited by the female protagonist are consistent with the traits of the Mahabharata's era. Uruvi's "pratiloma" union with Karna, her bravery in defying Duryodhan's desire to harm Nakul, her methods for defending her self-respect by defying the royal ladies who despise her for her newly attained lower social status, which was applied to her from the moment she married Karna, her bravery in challenging even Bhishma for his

skewed and unjustified opinion about Karna's talent. All of these aspects of Uruvi's personality, which highlight the dominant traits of the time period, are historically accurate. In some instances, the character's portrayal, meanwhile, seems unhistorical. Her feelings of remorse for entering Vrushali's home space as a second wife and her willingness to provide medical care to those in need on battlefields seem unhistorical. By asking whether any women had ever committed suicide through the pernicious practise of Sati "before," the author questions the historicity of Madri's Sati. Consequently, this study's hypothesis is that the fictitious character's characterising (among the other mythological fictional characters in the novel), It was reiterated throughout this paper by the objective analysis with the support of empirical evidence that Uruvi has historical authenticity, despite the fact that in a very small number of contexts it seems to have lost historicity, and the personality trait of courage that the character was endowed with continues to be an inspiration for people in contemporary society.

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