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The Enterprising Self: A Study of Kavita Kane's *Lanka's Princess*

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Abstract

Recreation of the story of Ram is an ever proliferating process persisting through the ages. The cultural context, the social ambience and the target audience influence the representational paradigms and determine whether the accepted premise is to be reiterated, modified or contested and subverted. As economic liberalisation of 1991 ushered in an epochal shift that hugely altered the socio-cultural dynamics of the nation, the premise of Ramayan too, gets modified in response to the changed ethos. Kavita Kane in her novel *Lanka's Princess*, imaginatively recreates Surpanakha's life in a way that resonate with suggestions of the neoliberal enterprising self. She neither presents her as a villain or a victim following the trajectory charted out by the writers of preceding Ramayans, but portrays her as an autonomous individual who dexterously orchestrates her life and manipulates others' to gratify her vindictive ire.

Keywords: Enterprising subject, Ramayana, Surpanakha

The economic liberalisation of 1991 heralded a culture of enterprise that is at stark variance with the staid complacency and the rhetoric of restraint and simplicity of the previous generations. According to Nandini Gooptu, the significance of the reforms initiated in the year 1991entailing a free market and minimised government interference in the economy lies 'in the creation of new Indians whose powerful, newly liberated, capacity to aspire is in itself an asset… [who] declare a determined affirmation of faith in the possibility of change and success 'right now' and in 'our times' (Gooptu 3). These new age Indians are people of action, makers of their own fortune, who instead of passively relying on government endowments 'take the responsibility themselves, roll up their sleeves, and plunge into action' (Gooptu 3). Liberalisation thus engendered an enterprise culture that relies on the agency of self-sufficient aspiring individuals. Gooptu further mentions that this specific enterprising subject is meticulously reared through the creation and perpetuation of the narrative of economic and social progress in the post-millennial social scenario. This discourse projects alluring images of social and economic extravagance and endorses performance oriented work ethos. It promises rapid upward mobility to its incumbents at the display of professional dedication and competence. Economic liberalisation therefore came to subsume a psycho-social milieu of ambition, self-promotion and aggressive competition. It fosters a constricted space of gross materialism, where community concerns do not feature

and where personal advancement is the sole concern of its subjects. 'Ideal neoliberal enterprising self', writes Gooptu, " is goal-oriented, self-directed, committed to acquiring skills and competences required for self-advancement ,one who is optimistic, creative, takes initiatives, embraces opportunities, seeks autonomy and self-fulfilment' (Gooptu 45).

A neoliberal subject is an autonomous entity oriented towards the self- one who is self-made and directed towards the gratification of the self. This, she asserts 'has led to more young people claiming the right to define their own lifestyles and legitimising their ideas, plans, and actions on the basis of their own needs, motives and interests' (Bansal 11).This current obsession with the self, the aggressive individualism, the propensity to justify one's own psychic and behavioural traits have also come to punctuate the post-millennial creative outputs. J.S Anjaria and U. Anjaria observe:

> Artefacts of enterprise circulate wide in contemporary India. They are found everywhere: in self-help guides…in popular fiction, where it produces new plots and character motivations; in film, where it enables new kinds of protagonist; in mainstream politics…in social activism (Anjaria and Anjaria 192)

Kavita Kane's Surpanakha is symbolic of this prevalent trend. Though her novel is set in distant past, contemporary sensibilities permeate the texture of the narrative. Surpanakha evinces the traits indispensable to the survival of an individual in the enterprise culture. She is quite unabashed in proclaiming the fierce side of her nature and she legitimises her selfish interests and motives with perfect éclat. In contrast to the previous "Ramayan" narratives where she features either as a villain or as a victim, Kane creates a highly enterprising individual in her Surpanakha. She defines her alleged monstrosity in terms of her propensity to brash actions in defiance of moral concerns. Jonathan Shapiro Anjaria and Ulka Anjaria elaborating on the post liberalisation literary and filmic protagonists adumbrate:

> The enterprising protagonist is in control of his or her destiny and unfettered by social structures or sentimental ties to family and community…They are thus severed from Rushdie's post-colonial melancholia; personal 'development' comes not from reconciling oneself to an allegorical life, but from…the refusal to be a victim, and the rejection of fate…New protagonists embody this new ethos … 'to take in hand, to take hold of. (Anjaria and Anjaria 197)

Kavita Kane's *Lanka's Princess* is distinctly identifiable with the new trend. Kane's Surpanakha is reconceptualised as an immensely self-determined individual whose vindictive motives become the primary reason of the Ram-Ravan war and the subsequent destruction of Ravan's kingdom. She is endowed with a distinct selfhood who serves as an active agent in engineering her life. In contrast to the previous "Ramayan" narratives and discourse where

she surfaces primarily in relation to her mutilation, Kane's novel envisions her life in new light with an overwhelming emphasis on her subjective agency.

Surpanakha elicits critical attention more in connection with the assessment of Ram's character and issues pertaining to female sexuality in the Indian context, than for her own sake. Kathleen M. Erndl in her essay 'The Mutilation of Surpanakha', comments:

> From a narrative point of view, this episode proves a crucial turning point in the story, the catalyst which sets off a chain of events, notably Ravan's abduction of Sita, around which the remainder of the epic in turn revolves. It is also crucial from an ethical point of view, for she sheds light on Rama's character and on attitudes toward female sexuality in Indian culture. (Erndl 68)

Surpanakha's significance in the Indian context is restricted to her mutilation that functioned as a powerful impetus to the Ram-Ravan war and the feminist discourse that the act of violence engendered. Surpanakha's life remains eclipsed by the overhauling presence of her brother Ravan which is why she is popularly designated as Ravan's sister and never as the princess of Lanka. It is where Kane intercedes with the objective of conceiving Surpanakha's life in totality.

The novel attempts to imaginatively recreate probable episodes of the "Ramkatha" and provide Surpanakha with more narrative space than the dominant figures of the epic. The novel even incorporates a glimpse of Surpanakha's next birth as Kubja. Kane in her exegesis of the novel talks about her discreet interest in the woman who akin to Draupadi in the Mahabharata is alleged to be the reason behind the war. In her drive to unearth more of the character who in spite of playing a decisive role in the sequence of action remained shrouded in obscurity, Kane ventured into the task of formulating the story of Surpanakha. Kane even finds her name 'Surpanakha' quite intriguing, given the overt suggestion of ferocity expressed through it. The novel thus is also an exploration of the transformation that 'Meenakshi' undergoes to metamorphose into 'Surpanakha'. From the very title of the novel, Kane seeks to individualise her. She is identified as 'Lanka's Princess', a recognition that is hardly ascribed to her and not as 'Ravan's sister' which serves as the more common determiner of her identity. Her childhood is imaginatively construed by Kane as an unhappy one, because of the commanding presence of her brothers especially Ravan. Kane locates the root of her alleged pathological malevolence in her unhappy childhood when she was disfavoured and discriminated against for being a girl. The hostility and disregard that she was subjected to from her very infancy by her own family members become instrumental in breeding deep-rooted animosity in Surpanakha.

In this novel, Kane proposes to debunk the notion of Surpanakha's alleged monstrosity as instinctive and inborn. She was not born Surpanakha, but transmogrifies into one owing to an utterly inhospitable familial milieu that replaced her finer sensibilities with rancour and vindictive rage. In traditional "Ramayan" narratives Surpanakha is a *rakshashi*

by birth, who is attributed with all the stereotypical features of a mythical she-devil in being physically hideous, sexually assertive, capable of shape shifting and performing magic. The counter "Ramayan" discourse on the other hand interrogates the demonic representation of the *rakshashas* as beings who promulgate a world view that is in contradiction to the Hindu Brahminic universe endorsed in the epic. Arshia Sattar in her "Introduction" to her abridged translation of Valmiki's *Ramayana*, notes that many scholars interpret the *rakshashas* as the other of Hindu society upon which all its fears and terrors are located (Sattar xxxv). Viewed from such a perspective the epithet of '*rakshashi*' therefore becomes suggestive of a woman whose behavioural traits are in diametrical opposition to the socially attested conception of an ideal woman. If Sita epitomises the iconic woman, Surpanakha is her alter ego. Kathleen M.Erndl illustrates her understanding of Surpanakha by positing her against Sita:

> Sita and Surpanakha exemplify two types of women who appear almost universally in folklore and mythology: Sita is good, pure, light, auspicious, and subordinate, whereas Surpanakha is evil, impure, dark, inauspicious, and insubordinate…Sita is the chaste good woman; Surpanakha the "loose" bad woman. The good woman is one who remains controlled, both mentally and physically…and whose sexuality is channelled into childbearing and service to her husband…The bad women is one who is not subject to these controls. (Erndl 83)

In Kane's novel the term *rakshashi* attains a different connotation altogether. She is no monster in the traditional sense of the term. Kane's delineation of Surpanakha's physical attributes is much in keeping with Kamban's description of the guise she assumes before approaching Ram. Her appearance is in no way repulsive; on the contrary her grandmother on one occasion even compares her to Menaka, the epitome of feminine charm. Ravan and Kaikesi in their severe denunciation of Surpanakha's pugnacity, vilify her as a monster, capable of barbarously attacking anyone. Ravan justifies the deprecatory appellation of Surpanakha: 'You ugly wretch! Surpanakha, that's what she is…a witch with long, sharp claws' (Kane 8). Kaikesi on the other hand while berating the belligerent tendencies in her, associates monstrosity with the non-feminine traits that she exhibits.

Surpanakha appears monstrous to her own family members on account of her temperamental aggressiveness. Ravan in mercilessly killing Surpanakha's pet-lamb displays a similar virulence but is never adjudged a demon, but Surpanakha's violent outburst over Ravan's action is immediately labelled as diabolical and aberrant. Surpanakha's malevolence thus is not instinctive but is the result of the persistent ill-treatment that Kaikesi and Ravan mete out to her. She assails Ravan when he exults after killing the innocent animal. She breaks out in a frenzied rage when Kaikesi bombards her with brutal incriminations for assaulting her brother:

> '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. A new sensation crawled up Kaikesi's spine-icy cold fear. She stepped back in alarm at the hate on the little girl's puckered face… (Kane 9)

Kane records Meenakshi's gradual degeneration into Surpanakha as she suffers under the ceaseless castigations of her mother and brother. Surpanakha turns ferocious in retaliation of the cruelty that she is suffers. Kane interprets her alleged monstrosity as a threatening defensive comportment she assumes to combat the surrounding perils. In Kane's novel, therefore, Surpanakha is a *rakshashi* because she gets unapologetically violent in her defence and counters vehemently every unjustified onslaught on her. Surpanakha embraces her derogatory appellation as a befitting name for one who is supremely empowered on account of her piercing fingernails:

> Meenakshi looked down at her bloodied nails …*If this could protect me, then well I am Surpanakha, she* thought with perverse pleasure. (Kane 8)

Surpanakha's acceptance of her monstrosity deepens with every realization of the wrongs done to her, the crux of which is always Ravan. From her very infancy she antagonises Ravan for reasons as several as the preference he enjoys in the family, the family discords that his concerns always induce, his ultimate role in sundering their father and to say nothing of the torment he himself inflicts on her . Her repugnance for Ravan reaches its culmination when Ravan kills her husband Vidyujiva. Kane illustrates her descent into the morass of vengefulness that would reach satiation only with the destruction of Ravan and everything that he holds dear. The narrator records her thoughts:

> *My revenge would be my respite. Ravan has to die for this murder…From today I would be the Surpanakha…and you* (Ravan*) shall pay for it dearly-with your life. And your precious Lanka too…I shall bring all this and your beautiful world down, besides your ego…They will burn…Your cherished Ashok garden will be reduced to ashes. Just like your life*. From henceforth she was Surpanakha: she was shrugging off the cloak of Meenakshi forever (Kane 175-179).

Surpanakha dismisses all traces of her former identity to resolutely stick to her current plan of action. Her acceptance of her lethal self is similar to Neelakantan's Ravan's submission to all the forbidden emotions of the human mind to attain his ends. Kane is quite assertive in her claim that she has not 'tainted the sinner as a saint or black as white' (Kane, Interview). Just as Neelakantan's protagonist is imprudent in his indulgences, Surpanakha too, audaciously nurtures her vindictive ire to engineer the annihilation of Ravan and jeopardise the happiness of every individual by whom she has been outraged in some way or the other. Kane's improvisation of Surpanakha's person is in consonance to the ' discourse of individual choice and responsibility (that) has been found to influence the work culture and human resource

policies of the new globalizing economy in India' (Oza 97).This culture of individualistic self-governance, is contradictory to a ' culture of dependence and passivity'(Gooptu 4) and relies on 'initiative, energy, independence, boldness, self-reliance, a willingness to take risks and to accept responsibility for one's action and so on' (qtd in Gooptu 4). The neoliberal subject is downright autonomous, who is an independent active agent, one who determines 'the course of one's existence through acts of choice' (qtd in Gooptu 8). Kane too endows her protagonist with a subjective agency who charts out her life in her own terms and even prepares herself for the worst of the tragedies that might befall her as a consequence of her impetuousness. She decides to be outright ruthless in her aim of contriving a painful death for Ravan.

Surpanakha has frequently featured in creative writings and critical discussions on account of her mutilation, and in most creative literature she appears as a passive sufferer of her plight. In Sarah Joseph's story "Mother Clan", for example, Surpanakha vociferates her extreme anger and hatred for Ram and Lakshman for stripping her off her womanhood. She is ' treated as a passionate, sensual woman, very close to nature and the elements ,who has been marginalized, ignored ,and humiliated' (Sankaranarayanan xxiii) . In Poile Sengupta's play, *Thus Spake Shoorpanakha, So Spake Shakuni,* once again, Surpanakha is heard to voice her anguish. Kane on the other hand, fabricates her entire life and empowers her substantially so that she becomes the arbitrator of the events that transpire around her. Kane creates her Surpanakha in the light of a 'complex modern woman…She was her own evil, her own downfall' (Kane Interview). The war between Ram and Ravan is portrayed as Surpanakha's connivance that she designs to bring about Ravan's death. She walks out of Ravan's palace following Vidyujhiva's death to insidiously steer her plans to their culmination. After the accidental death of her son Kumar whom she had thought of nurturing into a formidable warrior to take on Ravan, she plans to manoeuvre a confrontation between Ram, Lakshman and her brother to bring him down. Given the legendary prowess of the two brothers she considers them to be the most befitting opponents to be deployed against Ravan.

She charts out the entire plan where the central characters of the traditional "Ramayan" discourse become mere pawns ,while Surpanakha who acted as the initial catalyst of the incidents leading up to the war, becomes the primary orchestrator of the events. She plans to entrap Ravan using Sita as the bait- the woman whom he had once aspired to win and marry but could not. Given his brother's smouldering passion and his injured ego, she knew only too well how Ravan would be ever eager to lay his hands on her, but only under the garb of a lofty purpose that Surpanakha hopes to provide him with. She decides to befriend the brothers and latter accusing them of dishonouring her would clamour for justice before Ravan, which grievance she presumes would be a sufficient provocation for him to abduct Sita under a noble pretext of avenging his sister's disgrace. She is aware of her brother's self-love, his ego, his diplomacy whose every action though directed towards self-gratification is artfully camouflaged as an exalted deed and in the present context Surpanakha resolves to create for him an ideal pretext. Here Kane emphatically confutes the conceptions of Ravan as a responsible brother and a noble king that the anti- "Ramayan" pro- Ravan discourse often

project. In E.V Ramasami's elucidation of the "Ramayan" narrative, for instance, there is reference to 'Ravana's duty to revenge her (Surpanakha's) honour' (Richman 187). Though, there is an explicit indication of his possessiveness with regard to his family, it his self-seeking tendencies that dominate his character, in Kane's narrative.

With the aim of making Surpanakha the arbitrator of her own life, Kane makes a significant deviation from the preceding "Ramayans" in her delineation of the episode of Surpanakha's mutilation. The traditional narratives describe Surpanakha's meeting with the two brothers as a chanced one, when she wanders in the Dandakaryanya. Kane in her novel describes their meeting as a premeditated ploy, planned by Surpanakha herself to lure them into a confrontation with Ravan. Surpanakha, however, finds her plan going awry as she gets enraptured by Ram and Lakshman. Their virility excites the dormant passions in her.

Kane illustrates in details Surpanakha's musings as she indulges in an intensive scrutiny of the implications of the frenzied desire that the sight of the two brothers provoked in her. She rationalises her cravings as quite natural in a woman who had been languishing in loneliness after the death of her husband .She is also indignant of her carnal cravings that got incited by the same men who had killed Taraka, her grandmother who had been her lone source of emotional succour. She is not portrayed as a creature constitutive of only physical appetite. She, on the contrary is shown to be wrathful of her unbridled passions that Ram and Lakshman have indecorously provoked in her withering body.

Kane depicts Surpanakha as thinking individual who is not a blind helpless slave to her carnal desires as a *rakshashi* is supposed to be, but one who consciously chooses to satiate her needs as her bodily demands presses upon her. She recalls Taraka's words who had schooled her into appreciating the carnal obligations. She reverts into her former younger self and approaches the two men with all her seductive wiles. While Valmiki is ambiguous regarding Surpanakha's physical appearance when she accosts Ram and Lakshman, Kampan specifies that she transforms herself into a woman of ethereal beauty. Kane's Surpanakha revives her own former self as she plans to confront the two brothers. Kane's delineation of the ensuing conversation is mostly in keeping with Valmiki's depiction of the same with Ram citing his marital status and rejecting her advances and diverting her attention to Lakshman. Lakshman too, swears by his commitment to his wife Urmila. Lakshman even refers to his current position as a slave in service of Ram and Sita under which condition he would not be able to attend to her needs if she plans to choose him. He argues in favour of Ram as a better option for her to get married to. Thus the two brothers engage in a jest at Surpanakha's expense, which as the preceding "Ramayans" depict, Surpanakha is unable to appreciate. Valmiki's portrayal of Surpanakha in a conceited light, as one who cannot appreciate jest concurs with her *rakshasha* temperament that is 'cruel and egoistic…not capable of humour' (qtd in Erndl 71).Her inability to register such jokes crops from her non-human nature that disqualifies her from reciprocating human banters. Paula Richman elucidating on K.Ramaswami Sastri's exegesis of the episode ,observes that ' Surpanakha had no sense of humour because she was a raksasi rather than a human female…although one wonders

whether Surpanakha would have found the joke funny in any case' (Erndl 71). At this particular juncture Kane deviates from the preceding instances as her Surpanakha registers the joke and even gets furious for being laughed at.

In Valmiki, Surpanakha's lack of sense of humour makes her to take Lakshman's tongue in cheek suggestion of eliminating her alleged rival Sita, at face-value, following which she attempts to attack her. Kane's Surpanakha too, prepares to launch an assault on Sita, but not out of ignorance of the jibe, but impelled by jealousy and agonized by frustrated hopes.

As she is about to charge at Sita, Ram intervenes to protect her and commands Lakshman to punish 'this unvirtuous ruttish rakshashi' (Kane 201), Lakshman grabs her by her hair and the two engage in a scuffle before Lakshman gets the better of her. Amidst the fracas she reverts to her former self and Ram instructs Lakshman to maim her so that 'She will remember her dishonourable crime and not attack a helpless woman again' (Kane 202).The brutality explicit in Ram's command shocks her heart and Kane records the myriad questions that bombard her mind as the punishment is pronounced by Ram. Through the doubts that beset her, Kane articulates the ethical and critical questions that Surpanakha's mutilation always provokes:

> *How could someone so beautiful be so ugly and cruel? What were they furious about-? Me attacking Sita or me assaulting their chastity, their moral righteousness? Was it their apprehension for my uninhibited behaviour, assuming it to be an overt vulgarity …was that why they had laughed at me, ridiculing me in their contempt and amazement …condemning me for my feminine profanities?* (Kane 202)

She wonders at the enormity of savagery rankling underneath such a refined veneer.

As Paula Richman observes, the problematic of 'reconciling episodes such as the mutilation of Surpanakha with the concept of Ram as the perfect human being or as an incarnation of Vishnu' (Erndl 72) has been a perturbing one for critics and commentators. The champions of "Ramayan" discourse have always been in dilemma while trying to integrate the brutality that Ram metes out to Surpanakha with his fabled divinity or righteousness. Creative writers have often devised ingenious strategies to negotiate with the ethical ambiguity prompted by Surpanakha's disfigurement. In Kampan's *Iramavataram*, it is not Ram but Lakshman who is made responsible for the act ,while in *Adhyatma Ramayana* imbued with the Bhakti tradition, Ram is endowed with full knowledge of the episode in advance, which is treated as a 'childish prank', a 'divine play' (Erndl 76) in the greater order of things. The devotional aspect also pervades Tulsidas's *Ramcharitamanas* where Surpanakha's mutilation is conducted as a befitting punishment for a woman gone berserk. *Radhesyam Ramayan* furthers the moralising overtone with the additional suggestion that through her disfigurement 'Rama is doing her a favour by preventing her from sinning again'

(Erndl 80). As Surpanakha ponders over Ram's proclamation of her punishment she is at a loss to figure out what actuated such ferocity on their part. The act of mutilation both in the traditional "Ramayan" narratives and Kane's fiction is executed in the name of protecting Sita from the attempted assault of Surpanakha. In Kane the relevant passage reads:

> 'Go, woman go! But as a woman, I ask, how can you harm another?' he snapped viciously…For whom, us, we men? You fight for us?' (Kane 203)

These words convey the sense that men in general and Lakshman in particular are the arbitrator of justice while women are puny inconsequential creatures involved in meaningless altercations over men. Lakshman's reprimand implicitly conveys the indispensability of men folks in women's lives not only as regulatory authority but also as protective figures required to safeguard women from each other. Surpanakha's mutilation, however, also illustrates 'Hindu attitude towards female sexuality and its relationship to such polarities as good and evil, pure and impure, auspicious and inauspicious' (Erndl 84). In Hindu world view, a married woman who is under the aegis of her husband, whose sexuality is contained within the marital domain, is favoured over one who is independent of male auspices and sexually uncommitted. The latter category of women, free from male authoritarian restraints are hailed as ominous and treated as objects of alarm. Therefore Surpanakha, a widow, who is no more under the protective custodianship of a husband and wanders freely in the Dandaka forest, becomes an unpropitious being. Paula Richman observes in this context:

> …widows are considered dangerous and inauspicious…Their chastity is also suspect, since they are no longer under the control of husband … Surpanakha's unmarried state is thus the major source of her evil nature…it is Surpanakha's status as an independent woman which is denounced. (Erndl 84)

To add to Surpanakha's status as a widow, is her flagrant exhibition of sexual temerity as she attempts to seduce Ram and Lakshman. Her mutilation thus can be interpreted as a punitive measure undertaken to curb the sexual intemperance of an immodest woman and as warning to the tamed women as to what might befall them in case they transgress the limits of decency.

Kane, in spite of conforming to the established narrative of "Ramayan" in delineating Surpanakha's mutilation, deflects from the traditional narrative by instilling a note of self-criticism in her voice. Kane's Surpanakha is highly individualised who is in full awareness of her culpability and the notoriety of the allegation of molestation that she has planned to charge the brothers with. As she wonders about the punishment that is about to befall her, she does not grovel in self-pity but shudders at the 'brutality of that very act she had intended to use as a weapon against them' (Kane 202). Even after her nose and ears are chopped off, she is described as being relentlessly taunted by a 'folly' that 'she had manoeuvred herself into' (Kane 204). She holds herself responsible for her present plight, but also is in no mood to condone Ram and Lakshman for disfiguring her. She seems to be in an

impasse with her plans taking a wrong turn, but the fierce individual that she is, she decides to manoeuvre her consternating predicament to her advantage. She approaches Ravan with the motive of provoking him into a confrontation with the two brothers. She narrates the cruelty she has been subjected to, slyly punctuating her account with references to Sita's beauty. She tampers with the facts as she incorrectly reports that the reason behind her disfigurement is her attempt to abduct Sita for her brother's sake. She hopes to incite him by hurting his ego and inflaming his intractable lust for women. She describes her mutilation as a 'sign of dishonour to the clan of Asuras and the royal house of Ravan' (Kane 208). She manipulates everyone to the best of her advantage to ensure Ravan's end. She ignites the ambition of kingship in Bibhishan's mind and deludes him into forsaking Ravan to join Ram. She also manages to create a rift between Ravan and Kaikesi and turns acerbic at all. She gloats in the frenzy of revenge: 'Ravan would never know that it was she who had been the traitor…his sister' (Kane 234).

She does not even spare Ram, Lakshman and Sita. In Kane's fictionalised representation of Surpanakha's life, she is ascribed the pivotal role in determining their future. In traditional "Ramayan" narratives, the circumstances which lead Ram to banish Sita, varies from one telling to another.

Kane thus makes Surpanakha, the arbitrator of her own life, the cardinal factor behind most of the significant events of the "Ramayan". This she does, not to condone her actions but to project through her the image of a fierce individual who takes the reins of her life in her own hands though for the worse and never shies away from shouldering the liabilities that ensue from such a humongous endeavour of orchestrating one's own life and manipulating everyone's around. It also requires mention, that at such times when "Ramkatha" has resurfaced in the political terrain of the nation with great vehemence with the figure of Ram as the central deity, it is quite significant that these writers have not only chose the alleged villains like Ravan and Surpanakha as their protagonists but have also refrained from projecting them negatively. They have rather conceived them in the light of the culture of individualism. Figures that have once elicited extreme emotions of either gross hatred or profound sympathy in being perceived as heroes, villains or victims are now construed as appropriate subjects in neoliberal enterprise culture.

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