



Narrating The Silenced: A Narratological Study Of Kavita Kane's *Sita's Sister* Queen

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Received: 12.06.2023

Accepted:23.07.2023

Published: 07.08.2023

Abstract

Contemporary Indian mythological fiction has emerged as a significant literary space for reinterpreting ancient epics through marginalized perspectives. Kavita Kane's *Sita's Sister* (2014) revisits the *Ramayana* through the voice of Urmila, the often-forgotten wife of Lakshman. Rather than presenting Urmila as a silent figure confined to the background of the epic, Kané reconstructs her as an emotionally and intellectually complex protagonist. This article examines the narrative techniques employed in *Sita's Sister* using Gérard Genette's narratological framework. It analyses the role of the disembodied narrator, internal focalization, narrative delay, flashback, diegesis, mimesis, and setting in shaping Urmila's psychological journey. The study argues that Kané's narrative strategy transforms the traditional epic into a feminist retelling by allowing the marginalized female voice to become the centre of narration. Through carefully structured narrative devices, the novel challenges patriarchal interpretations of the *Ramayana* and foregrounds female agency, emotional resilience, and identity.

Keywords: Narratology, Gérard Genette, Internal Focalization, Mythological Retelling, and Feminist Narrative.

Indian mythological fiction has undergone a remarkable transformation in recent decades, moving beyond heroic male-centred narratives to recover the voices of women who remained silent in traditional epics. Kavita Kane occupies a prominent place in this literary movement by reimagining mythological women as independent individuals with psychological depth and moral agency.

Kavita Kane is a renowned Indian author, journalist, and columnist best known for her feminist reinterpretations of Indian mythology. Before becoming a full-time writer, she worked as a journalist for over two decades with *The Times of India*, where she gained extensive experience in writing on culture, literature, and current affairs. Kane rose to prominence with her debut novel, *Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen* (2013), which retells the *Mahabharata* through the perspective of Uruvi, Karna's wife. Since then, she has authored several acclaimed mythological novels, including *Sita's Sister*, *Menaka's Choice*, *Lanka's Princess*, *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty*, *Ahalya's Awakening*, and *The Surpanakha Woman*. Her works focus on giving voice to women who have been marginalized or overlooked in traditional epics, portraying them as strong, intelligent, and emotionally complex individuals. Through her engaging narrative style and feminist perspective, Kavita Kane has established herself as one of the leading contemporary writers of Indian mythological fiction, significantly contributing to the reimagining of ancient narratives for modern readers.

Kavita Kane has received widespread recognition for her contribution to contemporary Indian mythological fiction, particularly for her feminist reinterpretations of epic narratives. Some of her notable accolades include: She was longlisted for the Tata Literature Live! First Book Award (2014) for her debut novel, *Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen*. She has been recognized as one of India's leading mythological fiction writers, known for bringing marginalized female characters from the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* to the forefront. Her novels have consistently been national bestsellers and have been widely appreciated by readers and literary critics for their fresh perspective on mythology. She was featured among Forbes India's "Most Influential Indian Authors", acknowledging her impact on contemporary Indian literature. Her works have been translated into several Indian languages, expanding their reach to a wider readership. Kane has been invited as a speaker at major literary festivals, including the Jaipur Literature Festival, Tata Literature Live!, and other national and international literary forums, where she discusses mythology, feminism, and creative writing. She is widely regarded for pioneering feminist mythological fiction in India by giving voice to women such as Uruvi, Urmila, Menaka, Surpanakha, Ahalya, and Satyawati, whose stories had remained largely unexplored in traditional epic narratives. Her books are frequently prescribed for academic research, postgraduate studies, M.Phil., and Ph.D. research in English literature, Women's Studies, and Cultural Studies across Indian universities. These achievements have established Kavita Kane as one of the most influential contemporary authors in the field of Indian mythological retellings, celebrated for combining literary artistry with feminist reinterpretation of ancient epics.

The following section gives the summary of *Sita's Sister*. *Kavita Kane's Sita's Sister* (2014) is a feminist retelling of the *Ramayana* that brings the forgotten character Urmila, the wife of Lakshman and younger sister of Sita, to the forefront.

While the traditional epic mainly celebrates the sacrifices of Rama, Sita, and Lakshman, Kane highlights Urmila's silent suffering, resilience, and emotional strength during the fourteen years of exile.

The novel begins with the childhood of the four princesses of Mithila—Sita, Urmila, Mandavi, and Shrutakirti. Urmila is portrayed as intelligent, spirited, artistic, and independent, in contrast to the calm and composed Sita. She shares a close bond with her sisters and is deeply influenced by the wisdom of her father, King Janaka.

After Sita's marriage to Rama, Urmila marries Lakshman. Although she loves him deeply, she soon realizes that his greatest loyalty belongs to his elder brother, Rama. When Rama is exiled for fourteen years, Lakshman decides to accompany him without consulting Urmila. Unlike Sita, Urmila remains in Ayodhya, where she bears the pain of separation and loneliness while fulfilling her responsibilities toward the royal family.

During the years of exile, Urmila becomes the emotional pillar of Ayodhya. She supports Queen Sumitra, comforts her sisters, and maintains harmony within the palace despite experiencing neglect and personal grief. Through her patience, wisdom, and quiet endurance, she emerges as a symbol of inner strength rather than passive sacrifice.

The novel also explores the perspectives of other women, including Kaikeyi, Mandavi, and Sita, presenting them as multidimensional individuals rather than stereotypical figures. Kane challenges the traditional portrayal of Kaikeyi as merely a villain and instead reveals the political and emotional complexities behind her decisions. Likewise, Sita is depicted as compassionate yet determined, while Mandavi struggles with Bharata's self-imposed separation.

One of the most powerful moments in the novel occurs when Urmila openly questions the men of the Ikshvaku dynasty for neglecting the emotional needs of their wives in the name of duty and righteousness. Through her voice, Kane critiques patriarchal ideals that glorify male sacrifice while overlooking the silent suffering of women.

When Rama, Sita, and Lakshman finally return to Ayodhya after fourteen years, Urmila reunites with Lakshman. Their reunion is marked not only by love but also by mutual understanding and emotional maturity. Urmila's years of endurance and self-discovery transform her into a confident and compassionate woman whose sacrifices are finally acknowledged.

Overall, *Sita's Sister* reimagines the *Ramayana* from Urmila's perspective, presenting her as a courageous, thoughtful, and resilient woman. By giving voice to a neglected character, Kavita Kane challenges patriarchal interpretations of mythology and celebrates the silent strength of women whose contributions have long remained unrecognized.

In *Sita's Sister*, Kane reconstructs the neglected character of Urmila, presenting the *Ramayana* through the perspective of a woman whose sacrifice has often remained unnoticed.

Unlike Valmiki's *Ramayana*, where Urmila appears only briefly, Kane makes her the emotional and narrative centre of the novel. This transformation is achieved not merely through thematic revision but through sophisticated narrative techniques. Using Gérard Genette's narratological concepts, this article examines how focalization, narration, narrative delay, flashback, diegetic and mimetic narration contribute to reconstructing Urmila's identity.

The novel opens with a childhood episode in which Urmila, Mandavi, and Kirti search for Sita while playing hide-and-seek. The narrator remains disembodied and anonymous but aligns closely with Urmila's perception throughout the narrative. Every event unfolds through Urmila's emotional and psychological experience.

When Sita is discovered holding the great bow, neither Urmila nor the readers understand its significance. The narrator deliberately withholds the explanation, creating narrative delay that is resolved only years later when Sita marries Rama. This technique allows readers to experience discovery alongside Urmila rather than through retrospective explanation. The narrator also mirrors Urmila's emotional anxiety during the search: "Sita might be a little timid, but she was very strong in the face of mishaps and crises..." (2). The narration does not merely describe events but shares Urmila's fears and uncertainties, thereby strengthening internal focalization.

Although the narrative remains largely centred on Urmila, the narrator occasionally steps outside the immediate narration to interpret emotional situations. A notable instance occurs when Lakshman tells Urmila that Rama will always remain his first priority. The narrator reflects: "He had devoted his life to his brother... Was it a gesture of rejection or resignation?" (68).

Rather than presenting definite answers, the narrator offers multiple interpretative possibilities. This technique reveals a narrator who possesses emotional insight but not complete omniscience. The narration remains psychologically exploratory instead of authoritative. Such narrative intrusion enriches characterization by inviting readers to participate in interpreting Lakshman's motives while simultaneously revealing Urmila's emotional conflict.

Kane carefully balances diegetic narration with mimetic representation. Diegesis is employed to summarize long periods, introduce family histories, and explain the political and social background of Ayodhya. It enables smooth transitions between different phases of Urmila's life without interrupting the narrative flow. Mimesis dominates emotionally intense moments. Dialogue replaces narrative summary, allowing readers to witness Urmila's emotional transformation directly.

The most powerful mimetic sequence occurs during "The Meeting," when the royal family attempts to persuade Rama to return from exile. After Bharata also chooses separation, Urmila finally voices years of suppressed suffering. She asks: "If you could not keep the vows you made to your wives, why did you brothers marry?... You may be the ideal king too, but never the good husband!" (222). This dialogue becomes one of the strongest feminist moments in the novel. Rather than merely describing injustice, Kane dramatizes it through direct speech, allowing Urmila's voice to challenge patriarchal ideals embedded within the epic tradition.

Flashback functions as an important narrative device after Rama's exile. Instead of appearing as isolated memories, these episodes emerge as fully developed narrative segments.

The flashbacks portray moments of domestic happiness shared by Urmila and Lakshman—their meals, conversations, and everyday companionship. These memories stand in painful contrast to Urmila's present loneliness. One particularly moving scene depicts Dashrath blessing the newly married couple: "Bless us that we live and eat together as a family for now and forever" (229). The irony becomes evident because this blessing is never fulfilled. Similarly, Kaikeyi's joy that "The family eats together" (231) contrasts sharply with Urmila's later solitude. These flashbacks deepen emotional intensity by juxtaposing remembered happiness with present suffering. Rather than merely recalling the past, they expose the tragic consequences of separation.

Kane transforms setting into an extension of Urmila's emotional consciousness. Ayodhya is never described merely as a magnificent palace. When happiness prevails, the palace appears vibrant and secure. During separation, however, the same palace becomes silent, empty, and emotionally oppressive. This shifting representation reflects Genette's concept of focalization, where physical surroundings acquire meaning through the consciousness of the focal character. The palace therefore functions not simply as a geographical location but as a psychological landscape reflecting Urmila's inner life.

One of the novel's greatest narrative strengths lies in maintaining complete consistency of perspective. Urmila remains present in every major scene, making her the central reflector throughout the novel. The narrator never abandons her perspective to provide independent accounts of events elsewhere. This sustained internal focalization ensures that readers experience the *Ramayana* not through Rama or Lakshman but through the emotional journey of the woman left behind. Kane thereby transforms the traditional epic into a feminist narrative without altering its fundamental storyline. Instead, she changes the perspective from which the story is experienced.

To conclude, *Sita's Sister* demonstrates how narrative technique can reshape mythological storytelling. Kavita Kane employs a disembodied narrator, internal focalization, narrative delay, diegesis, mimesis, flashback, and psychologically responsive settings to reconstruct Urmila's forgotten voice. These techniques enable readers to experience the *Ramayana* through the emotional consciousness of a marginalized woman rather than through its celebrated heroes.

Using Gérard Genette's narratological concepts, the novel illustrates that narrative perspective is not merely a stylistic choice but an ideological intervention. By shifting the centre of narration from epic heroes to neglected women, Kane challenges patriarchal traditions and creates a more inclusive interpretation of mythology. *Sita's Sister* therefore stands as an important example of contemporary feminist mythological fiction in which narrative form becomes a powerful instrument for recovering silenced histories.

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