

# A Perspective Study of Infamous Classic Women in the Novels of Vaishnavi Patel's 'Kaikeyi' and Kavita Kane's 'Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen'

N. Nafiza Begum<sup>1</sup>, V. Vijaya<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of English, Dr. MGR Educational and Research Institute

## Abstract

Indian Mythology has many complex characters that reflect contemporary issues. Vaishnavi Patel and Kavita Kane, renowned women writers, have reinterpreted the epic tales of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata through a modern perspective. This paper examines human behaviour using a psychological approach in Patel's "Kaikeyi" and Kavita Kane's "Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen". Patel's "Kaikeyi" explores the protagonist's optimistic traits, her childhood longings, and her feminist qualities. Traditionally depicted as a villain in the Ramayana, Kaikeyi is recognized as Rama's stepmother who instigates his exile. However, before assuming this role, she experienced a difficult and challenging childhood in the Kingdom of Kekaya. The novel sheds light on the darker aspects of Kaikeyi's past, providing a deeper understanding of her character. Kavita Kane's interest lies in unveiling the complexities of classic women in her literary works. In "Karna's Wife", Uruvi, the protagonist, is portrayed as the marginalized wife of Karna, who belongs to the Sutapura lineage. Uruvi, a princess from the Kshatriya family of Pukeya kingdom is depicted as an optimistic character with great skills, knowledge, and mental strength. These two novels focus on the lives of classic women, their behavioural changes, and their insecurities in different situations. Women are inherently multifaceted and encounter various challenges throughout their lives. Different approaches are required to address these challenges. According to Sigmund Freud, the human psyche consists of three aspects that interact and influence each other to create complex human behaviour. Freud's psychological theory can be used to analyse the characters of Kaikeyi and Uruvi in these novels. The study attempts to highlight the need for women to overcome feelings of insecurity, emotional dependence, to achieve self-realization, and build resilience, which are essential qualities in the contemporary era.

**Keywords:** Myth, Influence, Insecurity, Human Psyche, Emotional Dependence, Marginalized, Self-realization

## Introduction

In Hindu mythology, the morals and values of ethical life are portrayed through various characters. The two great epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, contain many significant figures that represent the different aspects of human life. This paper examines the untold female characters in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata in the perspective of Vaishnavi Patel's "Kaikeyi" and Kavita Kane's "Karna's Wife:

The Outcast's Queen". The narrative techniques employed by these female writers are both mesmerizing and captivating.

Vaishnavi Patel's Kaikeyi is her bestselling debut novel where she delves into the intersection of Indian mythology, feminism and empowerment. On the other hand, Kavita Kane, an Indian writer and former journalist, is renowned for her work in mythological fiction. Her bestselling novel, "Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen", showcases her ability to bring new life to ancient tales. Both novels focus on the lives of classic women, exploring their behavioural changes and insecurities in various situations.

### **The Princess of Kekaya**

Kaikeyi, the princess of Kekaya kingdom, was born on a full moon day, an event considered auspicious in Indian culture. It is believed that those born on this day are blessed by the gods, with their prayers destined to be fulfilled. Kaikeyi being born on such a significant day holds the expectation that all her desires will be heard by the gods and goddesses. She is the only daughter of the Kekaya King, with seven brothers, including her twin brother, Yudhajith. However Kaikeyi feels neglected as a girl child, perceiving that her father, the king, prioritizes spending time with her brothers in the throne room over her.

One day, Kaikeyi and Yudhajit are informed of their mother's banishment by the king, a moment that marks a turning point in Kaikeyi's life, plunging her into darkness and misfortune. She longs for her mother's love more than her father's attention. This early experience of insecurity profoundly affects Kaikeyi, leaving her emotionally dependent on her mother and unable to overcome her absence.

Woman often grows stronger when faced with loneliness and separation, but Kaikeyi, unaware of the inner strength she possesses as a woman, remains desperate for her mother's presence. Eventually Kaikeyi finds a resemblance of motherhood in Manthara, a maid she knows since childhood. Manthara becomes a source of comfort for Kaikeyi, who feels more at ease in her presence. 'Finally, Manthara came to comb my hair and put me to bed. I was relieved to see her. At least I would not lose her too.' (Kaikeyi 23)

Kaikeyi discovers her bonding with others through the Binding Plane, a mystical power that connects her deeply with others in the future. She first realizes her connection with Manthara, through the magical strings that appear whenever she whispers the mantra she learned from a scroll in the library. This Binding Plane also enables her to persuade her brother Yudhajit to take her horseback riding and participate in other activities.

As Kaikeyi grows older the King Ashvapati decides to arrange for swayamvara and informs Kaikeyi about Dasharatha, the king of Ayodhya. However, Kaikeyi is initially reluctant to marry Dasharatha her position as a third wife. Her memories of her mother's sudden banishment make her wary of marriage. Despite her concerns, Yudhajit eventually convinces Kaikeyi to accept the marriage.

"You will be the lady of a great kingdom," Yudhajit said...

Kosala is a greater kingdom than ours, perhaps the greatest Bharat knows.

It has the most fertile land, the most powerful army.

Just think. One day your son could have that." (Kaikeyi 93)

Kaikeyi, determined to understand her bond with the king of Ayodhya, uses her magic spell during the swayamvara. A golden string appears before her, revealing a strong connection with Dasharatha. On this basis, Kaikeyi accepts to marry him, but only under certain conditions. 'If I should bear you a son, he will be named your heir, regardless of any other sons you may have in the future. I may be your third wi-

fe, but my child will be first.’(Kaikeyi 97)

The magic spell influenced the king to agree the conditions of Kaikeyi including bringing Manthara to Ayodhya with her. Kaikeyi unaware that her life would be heavily manipulated by Manthara, she accepts her presence in the palace. Manthara, a woman filled with negative thoughts, begins to manipulate Kaikeyi, who becomes emotionally dependent on her after her mother’s absence. As a result, much of what transpires in the Ayodhya kingdom is due to Manthara's influence over Kaikeyi.

Despite her use of magic, Kaikeyi treats everyone in the palace with love and care. She gradually accepts her bonds with Kausalya and Sumitra, Dasharatha’s other wives. She later accepts Dasharatha more as a friend than a husband. Their bond grows stronger during the war with the asuras in Indralok, where Kaikeyi serves as his charioteer and saves him from death. Impressed by her bravery, Dasharatha entrusts Kaikeyi with significant responsibilities, involving her in the women’s council, war efforts, advocacy, and court affairs. Kaikeyi, with her skills and empowerment, stands out among the women of the kingdom, advocating for their rights and well-being.

### **Characterisation of Uruvi**

Uruvi the princess of Pukeya kingdom was born into Kshatriya lineage and married Karna who belonged to Sutaputra caste. Although she is the daughter of King Vahusha and Queen Shubra, Uruvi shares a deep emotional bond with Kunti, the wife of Dhritarashtra, the king of Hastinapura. Kunti is also very fond of Uruvi and hopes she will become the daughter-in-law of one of her five sons, the Pandavas. Uruvi is cherished by everyone in Hastinapura, including her grandfather Bhishma, with whom she has a special relationship. She often playfully questions him about his white beard and attire, showing her inquisitive nature.

Uruvi is an optimistic woman with great skills, abilities, mental strength and knowledge in various fields, including astronomy, Ayurveda, herbal gardening and healing. During the time of Kurushetra war, her education proves invaluable in treating many wounded soldiers. Uruvi is a strong-willed woman who openly challenges societal norms and the notion of war victories, especially after witnessing the immense loss of life. She questions Bhishma, saying, ‘How can you feel so triumphant when you have hurt and killed so many?’ (Karna’s Wife 16).

When the time comes for Uruvi's swayamvara, Kunti eagerly hopes that Uruvi will choose one of her five sons as her husband. Uruvi's parents, too, expect her to choose Arjuna, whom they believe is the perfect match for her. Everyone at the swayamvara is confident that Uruvi will select Arjuna as her partner. However, to everyone’s surprise, Uruvi chooses Karna, defying the expectations of her family and society. Despite her strong bond with Kunti, Uruvi makes her own choice in selecting her life partner.

“I grew up with your sons. They are more like my childhood friends. And I do love them. I know you were hoping that I would marry Arjuna but I can’t, I can’t!” Uruvi realized it was futile giving explanations or self-justifications. ‘I am sorry. She cried, hugging Kunti close.’ (KW 27)

As a princess from the Kshatriya lineage, Uruvi was expected to marry within her caste. However, she is more drawn to Karna for his bravery and god-like appearance. Karna, who had once been insulted by Draupadi for being a Sutaputra during her swayamvara, is now invited as the King of Anga. Uruvi’s decision shocks everyone, including Karna himself, who is skeptical about her choice.

“I have been brought up in the suta tradition and have got married to a suta bride. I am a married man, happy with my wife Vrushali, the gentlest person ever. But you, you are a kshatriya princess. How will you be able to live with a sutaputra?” ‘A sutaputra who was born to show valour and to achieve glory,’ Uruvi corrected him gently, unfazed by his self-castigation.”

(KW 37)

Uruvi admires Karna more as a warrior than as the King of Anga. After their marriage Uruvi, once a Kshatriya princess, becomes the Sutaputra lineage. She loses the affection and respect she once enjoyed in Hastinapura, but she accepts this reality out of her love for Karna. Uruvi, a rebellious woman, argues with her parents and convinces them to accept her inter-caste marriage. Uruvi never allows anyone to influence her decisions and she stands firm for her choices, even when it is against the wishes of Kunti and her parents.

Uruvi is a woman of truth and righteousness. She strives to deviate Karna away from the evil influences of Duryodhana and Shakuni, sensing the dark fate that awaits her. Her fears are realized when Karna is killed in the Kurukshetra war. After Karna’s death, Yudhishtira invites Uruvi to return to Hastinapura, but she refuses and decides to remain with Karna’s family. Uruvi’s decision reflects her strength and self-reliance, proving herself to be a woman of determination and independence.

### **Feeling of Insecurity vs. Acceptance of Uncertainty**

Insecurity arises when a person experiences betrayal, negative events, and feelings of being unloved, or emotional dependence. According to the National Science Foundation, 80% of the human brain tends to adapt to negative thinking and 95% of our thoughts are repetitive. Many women experience insecurity in relationships, which often drives them toward negativity. Despite efforts to focus on positivity, the subconscious mind frequently gravitates toward negativity, a common aspect of human psychology.

The study of the characters Kaikeyi and Uruvi clearly illustrates the marital lives of women and the behavioural changes they undergo. However Kaikeyi is different from Uruvi, she encouraged Manthara’s manipulation to take root in her life. Her feeling of insecurity after her mother’s banishment allowed Manthara to develop a strong bond with her. Despite all the privileges granted by Dasharatha, Kaikeyi felt insecure when he informed her of Rama’s coronation. Though Kaikeyi loved Rama as much as Bharatha and initially rejoiced at the prospect of his ascension to the throne, Manthara’s influence changed her perspective. Kaikeyi’s emotional dependence on Manthara made it difficult for her to ignore her words. Unable to adapt to the situation and accept the uncertainty in her life, Kaikeyi was driven to negative thoughts.

In contrast, Uruvi consistently stands up for her rights and choices. From the moment she first saw Karna, Uruvi fell in love with him, disregarding his lineage, and decided to marry him. Even after Kunti’s persuasive attempt against marrying Karna, doesn’t change Uruvi’s decision.

“Forget that I want you as my daughter-in-law. Try to foresee what this marriage may lead to. Karna is already married, with children. His other wife is a suta, of his caste, but you are not. You will be the outsider in their home. Can you ever live happily with him and his family? You don’t even know what life is like away from these palace walls, and you are willing to give up everything to be just another woman in Karna’s life, competing for his attention. Will you be able to deal with the problems such a marriage will bring?” (KW 28)

After her marriage, Uruvi faced uncertainties such as the loss of previous relationships, cultural differences, and the challenges of forming new bonds. However, Uruvi was mature in handling these situations and never allowed anyone to persuade her otherwise—an essential quality everyone should strive to develop. Uruvi's self-reliance made her feelings of insecurity vulnerable, leading her to choose to stay with Karna's family.

Freud's three aspects of psychological theory can be applied to the protagonists in these novels. Kaikeyi's insecurity, rooted in her unconscious mind, led her to be influenced by Manthara, which worsened her negative feelings and decisions. Over time, her unconscious fears became more pronounced through Manthara's manipulation. In contrast, Uruvi used her conscious mind to stay firm in her decisions and assert her rights, demonstrating how a conscious and rational approach can lead to more positive outcomes. This illustrates how human behaviour can be extremely pessimistic under the influence of the unconscious mind and more optimistic when guided by conscious thought.

### Conclusion

Life is inherently uncertain, and it's crucial to acknowledge this reality while building resilience in the face of separation, desperation, and loneliness. Difficult situations can both strengthen and expose vulnerabilities. To overcome life's challenges, it is essential to cultivate qualities like courage, confidence, self-love, and self-reliance. Developing these traits empowers women to rise above feelings of insecurity and emotional dependence, fostering greater strength and independence. By embracing these qualities, individuals can navigate life's unpredictability with grace and determination, ultimately transforming challenges into opportunities for growth and self-discovery.

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