

# Transition of Draupadi from Damsel in Distress to Deity of Retribution in Kavita Kane's *Karna's Wife*

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**Abstract--**As per Kavita Kane, “Draupadi remains one of the most unloved woman in Mahabharata, who is more associated with hate and revenge and fury than the softer emotions which she was not allowed to indulge in(Kalidoss).” The character of Draupadi is that of an invulnerable woman who encountered all the odds and came out as a self-willed and boisterous woman giving an execrable time to her antagonists. She is married to five Pandavas who are considered to be the mightiest but still she suffers ignominy at the hands of the Kauravas in front of her husbands who are the ones responsible for putting her at stake. It would be engrossing to see how Draupadi suffers at the hands of the men and how she retaliates to her defamation and what does it lead to? Does she sit in a corner of her room for the rest of her life, heartbroken over what her husbands have done to her or chooses to give a resounding comeback?

**Key Words--**Transition of Draupadi; Retribution in Karns's Wife; Damsel of Distress; Draupadi's Sufferings

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Kavita Kane believes that myth is “ancient fiction” and that “ this genre conveys the underlying persistent tension between the fantastic and the real, the winner and the loser, hope and despair, between magic and the mortal and of course the perennial war between good and evil.” Draupadi “occupies a strange place and is considered an exceptionally strong woman and exemplary wife. She brings upon the great war of the Mahabharata for the sake of her honour, as she swears revenge for the “vastraharan”, when she is stripped in an open court(Express).”

Draupadi “suffers intense pain and grief, fury and humiliation, but her extraordinary strength is in her final act, where she forgives Ashwathama, the killer of her sons and her brothers, showing the entire range and scale of strong emotions and grace a woman is capable of, rising high above all, battling for her rights and pride till the very end. That is what makes her exceptional(Express Parenting).”

According to Shobhaa Dé, “marriage is an adventure. It's about trust, companionship, affection and sharing.” Simone De Beauviour in *The Second Sex* argues on the patriarchy saying “He is the subject; he is the Absolute. She is the other.” Man is the “self” and woman the “other”. The self, i.e. the man, treats the other, i.e. the woman, as a supplement. In her second chapter of *The Second Sex*, Simone De Beauviour says, “ women are limited in every role they can play in society, and are thus forced to adopt certain traits and coping mechanisms that have made them even more inferior in society.” Her work has helped us make a “distinction between sex and

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gender(Culture Trip).” In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Mary Wollstonecraft asserts, “A woman who has lost her honour imagines that she can’t fall any lower, and as for recovering her former status—that is impossible; no exertion can wash away this stain.” In the *Laugh of the Medusa* by Hélène Cixous, she asks, “Where is the ebullient, infinite woman who, immersed as she was in her naivete, kept in the dark about herself, led into self-disdain by the great arm of parental-conjugal phallocentrism, hasn’t been ashamed of her strength(Cixous, 876)?” In Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble*, “The very subject of women is no longer understood in stable or abiding terms. There is a great deal of material that not only questions the viability of “the subject” as the ultimate candidate for representation or, indeed, liberation, but there is very little agreement after all on what it is that constitutes, or ought to constitute, the category of women.” Kavita Kane has worked mostly on mythological texts and the reason for this is her belief that “mythology can be a huge canvas for contemporary thought. It is not telling us some old tales, as so carelessly assumed, of Gods and Goddesses, but of Man and his follies and fallacies (Kaushik).”

In the Indian culture, “the position of women” still endures to be the one “fraught with difficulty. While the relationship of families and individuals to tradition is not rigid or stereotypes, the identity and assimilation of Indian women is still framed by traditional family and cultural paradigms that both idealize the mythic feminine-maternal and devalue women(Jaswant and Meenakshi, 1991).” Being a strong woman is not liked by many just as was the case with Draupadi. The woman who stays quiet and takes all the unnecessary torment is considered to be good, loyal and full of values. But the one who tries to raise her voice becomes a subject of deprecation. “The concept of woman as subservient to men and as man’s property is deep rooted in Indian tradition(Karthika).”

Draupadi was also a woman who tried to “question her position and oppression and didn’t bow down to the stereotypical notions of the system(Premlatha and Gandhave,2019)” which made her a woman who was strong beyond the shadow of a doubt. Even though in the Hindu culture, we worship goddesses, “there is an obvious discrepancy between the respect paid to these divine images and the daily realities of the lives of Hindu women(Diesel)” where they are ridiculed and persecuted. Draupadi’s apologue is a “saga of suffering and disgrace but she took everything in her stride and vanquished each one of the perpetrators of her humiliation and agony(Vat and Imtiyaz, 2016).” It is Draupadi’s “ability to overcome adversity in a venerable manner that sets her apart from other women(Elizabeth).” Draupadi has been “the subject of many contemporary writings wherein she gets a new lease of life in the hands of feminist writers who see her either as a victim of patriarchal social ideology or as a woman who is strong and resists oppressive power structures with strategies unique to her personality(Behera).” The character of Draupadi is one who never gives up and “by weaving different situations around her, she portrays woman-power through her(Krishnaveni).”

## **II. TRANSITION OF DRAUPADI FROM DAMSEL IN DISTRESS TO DEITY OF RETRIBUTION**

Daughter of King Drupada, Draupadi, the princess of Panchala, is a “dusky, doe-eyed” woman who is the “consort of the five Pandavas” (7). The five Pandavas are known for their honesty, valour and kindness. She is also known as “Yajnaseni” who is the “one born out of fire” (31). Draupadi looks “ravishing” in her swayamwara and has one condition for choosing an eligible groom and that is “she would only wed the best archer, the prince who

shoot his arrow on target to pierce the eye of a rotating wooden fish. He could aim only by looking at its reflection in a bowl of water, not directly at it” (31). But when Karna lifts his bow and is “about to string it”, Draupadi’s voice commands him to stop. She disgraces Karna, “ You may be a king now, O King of Anga, but you are not of royal birth. I am king’s daughter and will not wed a base-born man.” She goes on to humiliate him further saying, “I insist on being called a veeryashulka, a bride to be won by the worthiest and the very best. I will not allow a low-born sutaputra to participate in the challenge. Please do not proceed” (31). These lines shows Draupadi’s stance. She is a haughty princess who do not want to settle for anything less in life and do not want to make any compromises. But in her arrogance, she fails to think that her derogatory remarks can really exert influence on someone and that she’s injuring Karna’s dignity by saying so.

Draupadi rejects and mortifies Karna “at her swayamwara- for being a sutaputra, which makes him low in social hierarchy”(19). Karna is known as the son of a charioteer, Adhiratha, who had found him by the river when his real parents had casted him .He was “a beautiful orphaned baby, with bewitching kundals (earrings) and a golden kavach (armour) to. Protect him, who had mysteriously strayed into a river and into the lonely lies of Dhritarashtra’s charioteer, Adhiratha , and his wife Radha” (12). Duryodhana, who is a Kaurava, stands by him when everyone else demeans him for his low birth. He befriends Karna and even makes him the King of Anga so that no one dares insult him again. From that day onwards, until Karna’s last breath, he is ready to do anything and everything for Duryodhana’s sake. Uruvi, the princess of Pukeya falls in love with Karna, insanely and marries him, going against everyone. Karna can never forget his insult at the hands of Draupadi in her swayamwara and even while attending Uruvi’s swayamwara, he “heaved a long sigh, trying to shut out a memory that was wrenching his soul... Draupadi’s swayamwara” (30). The words by Draupadi “wounded him as nothing else had ever done. It stung him” (31).

Karna remembers how Draupadi “openly mocked” him saying that he “could not be allowed to win her hand in marriage” (43). He professes, “I can never forget it- her words, her haughtiness, the people in the hall sniggering... I can never forget that hateful day. She was responsible for my son’s death too” (43). Karna lost his son, Sudhama, as he is “killed in the scuffle after the swayamwara.” (43) He is also annoyed at the fact that Draupadi just “went off with her new husband Arjuna, without bothering to look back at the havoc she had wreaked” (43).

In the words of Karna’s wife, Uruvi, Draupadi is “tall, dark and voluptuous. Her magnificent eyes were heavily kohled, yet luminous. She had a fine nose, her mouth red and generous, curving slightly downwards. Her skin was smooth, and her coal- black wavy hair tumbling down her rounded shoulder. She had not tied her thick hair in a bun as most women had at the event; clearly, she knew it was her best feature” (106). Draupadi has been further described as not being a “delicate woman, but like a goddess of summer, exuded raw sensuality” (106). Karna, Uruvi and everyone else have come to the Pandavas palace at Indraprastha for the Rajsuya Yagna. Draupadi likes Karna and Uruvi catches her eyes gaping at her husband. Draupadi “was looking pensively at Karna, her otherwise dark, flashing eyes, soft with immeasurable tenderness” (107). Whenever Draupadi finds a chance she keeps glaring at Karna, stealthily. While showing her guests Duryodhana, Karna and Uruvi around the palace, Draupadi tells everyone to follow her as in the palace, “what appears to be is not what it actually is” (109). But Duryodhana is

dubious of Draupadi's intent and chooses to follow the opposite of what she directs. He once gets hit by a wall and in the second incident, falls "waist- deep in water, drenched and dishevelled" (109). Draupadi "burst out laughing" and this makes Duryodhana wrathful "crazed enough to hit" her but Karna stops him. Draupadi still cannot contain her chuckling and "was still smiling mockingly" unknown of the future that "it would be her last smile for a long time to come" (110). Uruvi wonders, " Would Draupadi's unkind laugh spark off a raging fire of hate, war and bloodshed?" (112) The way Draupadi mocks Duryodhana, makes him "more livid and resentful" as he "ranted and raged for days after that" (112).

One day, King Yudhishtira along with the four Pandavas, are "invited to play a game of dice at Hastinapur" (114) where the Pandavas loose incompetently. King Yudhishtira "lost game after game, gambling away his entire kingdom, his wealth, his army, his four loyal brothers and even his wife, Queen Draupadi in a series of gambits to retrieve one by staking another" (114). This gives an opportunity to Karna to take vengeance for the dishonour at the hands of Draupadi. He goads Duryodhana's brother, Dushasana, to "drag Draupadi into the court and disrobe her" of all the "clothes she was wearing"(114). But to everyone's astonishment, when Dushasana starts disrobing Draupadi's sari, "it seemed endless, stretching into expanses of cloth- until, at last, the exhausted Kaurava prince gave up, despairing at the never- ending length of the sari" (115). Draupadi is also called a 'whore' as she is the wife of five men. During this discomfiture, Draupadi faints and it "was the Almighty who saved the poor woman from the wicked Kuru princes"(115). Draupadi who is "fatefully subjected to unforgettable indignities, raises a dumbfounding issue: was Yudhishtira at liberty to stake her, when he himself had lost his own liberty: did her still own her when he staked her(Buitenen)?"

When Uruvi comes to know about this incident, she bawls at Karna with numerous allegations of being flagrant, disreputable and contemptible and decides to go to her parents' house the very next morning. Karna knows he is wrong but explains his part mentioning, " I recalled Draupadi as she was at her swayamwara-hateful, haughty and taunting. I remembered how her words hurt me and I think I went completely crazy after that. All my loathing for her welled up in me and I was beside myself" (117). Karna further explains, " I wanted her to be humiliated the way she had publicly shamed me in front of all those kings. I wanted her to suffer the same ignominy, that same indignity. And then I said those terrible words. I called her a whore, I called her a woman available for all" (117-118)! Draupadi's act of nastiness causes her such torment and disparage.

After losing everything at the game of dice, the Pandavas are "prepared to leave for exile" as they have lost their kingdom at Indraprastha and have to " go into exile for thirteen years in the forest" (121). To avenge her offence, Draupadi wanted her husbands to fight for her. She avers, " I deserve justice. And I want revenge. And if war is the answer, so be it" (124). Uruvisoughts Draupadi to stop "the insanity that is about to begin" (124-25) which will bring everything to an end. But Draupadi is filled with so much torment and vexation that she turns down Uruvi's request mentioning, "How can I save anyone when I couldn't save myself? Who can salvage my lost honour? Who can give me back my prestige?" (125) She wants to throw the book at all those who have hurt her and caused her so much disgrace and mental agony. She claims, "let all those who made me suffer burn in the hell of hate, pain and humiliation, as I am burning now. I shall make each one of them endure the worst." " The assault was

theirs; vengeance is mine” (125). Draupadi is an iron-willed and uncompromising and she is ready to give a rough time to the traitors. Her “determination” is her “lifeline”. It’s her “sustenance” (125).

Remembering that horrendous night, Draupadi asserts, “ My husband had wagered and lost everything- even me, his wife- and upon Duryodhana’s command, I was ordered to appear at the court as a maidservant to the Kuru princes. I was born to the great King Drupad, I am the daughter-in-law of the famous King Pandu, I am married to the Pandavas who are powerful warriors and I have given birth to sons who will be heroes. How can I be a servant” (126)? She is dismayed at the fact that her husbands put her at stake without caring about her integrity and she was made a butt of everyone’s jokes and criticism.

When Draupadi is dragged and abashed in front of everyone at the Hastinapur court, no one dares to stop the Kauravas though all the elderly people are present in the court like BhishmaPitamaha, Dronacharya, Kripacharya including her own husbands, the Pandavas. Everyone is but a mute spectator to the vicious evil. She tells the Pandavas at the court, “ My father had faith in the strength of your mighty arms and thus gave me to you. In an open assembly, I am being dishonoured, but you sit with folded arms. Are you not ashamed” (127)? Then comes Draupadi’s nightmare when she is being denuded in public. Hunching her head in ridicule, Draupadi remembers, “ and then to my horror, Dushasana snatched my sari and started to unwrap it. I was being stripped in public- amidst the elders and the nobles and the kings- yet no one stopped him from committing this atrocity” (128). And it is Krishna who protects her from this catastrophe and her sari becomes limitless as “Dushasana finally stooped unwrapping yards and yards of the sari, which did not seem to end” (129). Since that incident, Draupadi decides not to tie her hair until she “washed” her “hair with this man’s blood” (129). Draupadi announces, “I would have revenge. I would destroy those who destroyed me!” (129)

Everyone like BhishmaPitamaha, Dronacharya and King Dhritrashtra, fears Draupadi’s disclosure and tries to appease her promising to return her husbands whatever they have lost including their kingdom. But Draupadi is a woman of self-regard and says, “ I proudly the king that they would win back the kingdom that was rightfully theirs by their own efforts. I do not need an endowment from them” (130). Only an unflinching woman like Draupadi could take such a decision by not accepting anything and compromising her amour- propre. She even extricates her “ hapless husbands from slavery” (130) and when she does this gritty act “ even Karna, who had earlier flung such terrible words” (130) at her “could not help exclaiming that no woman had accomplished” (130) what Draupadi has done. When Draupadi talked about Karna, her “face go warm and tender” (130) and “there was no rancour, no anger” (130) which makes it clear that she has feelings for Karna. Draupadi is a woman “who had five husbands but with no one to protect her, who is alone and uncared for” (130). Her plight is distressing as her husbands “could neither protect her nor give her the respect and honour that a woman, wife or mother should get” and even after being espoused to all five of them, she “remained alone, unaided, undefended, uncared for and even unloved” (130).

Even when Draupadi is abashed unethically in the court in front of everyone, she takes a gibe at all the elders present, by bowing to them and greeting them so that they feel more and more debased and apologetic. This is Draupadi’s attribute even in her ruthless time and “even in her extreme humiliation, she had the courage to strike back at her offenders” (131) and she “thirsted for revenge” (131). Draupadi is the kind who will not “let them forget

it” (131). She “had been born out of anger and revenge” and she will “make others live in the same fire she had lived through” (131).

Draupadi is a “yagnaseni” (131), the one who “leaped out of the sacrificial fire her father had invoked to seek revenge on his friend-turned-mortal-foe, Dronacharya” (131). And no one can put an end to the exasperation in her. She will get even with all those who afflicted her then be it in the form of a war. It is a paradox that Draupadi becomes a “pawn in her own game” (132). She has no idea that her “scornful rejection of Karna because of his low birth” (132) has “sown the seeds of hate and humiliation” (132) in him. Also, her “malicious remark, echoed by her sneering laugh” (132) has “provoked Duryodhana into a frenzy of feral hate” (132). Draupadi is also clear about the war which she is going to affirm once they are back from their thirteen years exile. Even if her husbands are not with her notion of war, she will ask her brother, father and sons to fight it for her. She is a fearless and tenacious woman who is apperceive of how to hammer away her adversaries.

Draupadi hankers for “all what she had lost- her self-respect and the honour and protection she expected from her husbands” (132). Remembering what she had done to Karna in the past, at her swayamwara, Draupadi says, “ Karna did what I possible would have done myself were I in his place” (133). She further adds, “ I realize now that I, too, must have made Karna die a little that day at my swayamwara when I insulted him in the presence of a full royal court” (133). Draupadi is now aware of what Karna must have gone through that day and she has been birched for whatever wrong she did to him. These lines show Draupadi’s affection for Karna even after all what he has done to her and she’s “ready to forgive her oppressor” (133). Nevertheless, being a “victim” at his hands, she is “ready to exonerate him” (133). When Draupadi is being vilified by Karna, she “bore it with much dignity as she could, for she believed she had reaped what she had sown, that it was her hurtful words that had sown the seeds of revenge in Karna” (134). Draupadi is not a wimp and she accepts the fact of humbling someone and getting pulled down too.

Now comes the reason of not marrying Karna though she loves him. One of the reasons which she gave earlier was of Karna’s low birth and the other one is because of “her brother’s outright rejection of Karna as a suitor” (134). Draupadi has an anticipation for her “brother’s life” as her “disapproving brother Dhrishtadyumna would have been no match for the warring skills of Karna, an athiratha, a warrior capable of fighting sixty thousand foes single-handedly, and would have been easily killed in a duel between the two” (134). So, she comes to her brother’s rescue by renouncing her love for Karna and marries Arjuna. She thinks very high of Karna and so is “more hurt than angry with him” (135). She expected Karna to back her as he is “known for his goodness, his kindness, his righteousness”(135) yet he did not. She “didn’t expect her husbands” to get her out of those state of affairs “for they had got” her into the “nightmare in the first place” (135). Draupadi has the right to pay back in spades and her strength of purpose is laudable. She knows war will bring annihilation and agitate the harmony in everyone’s life but still she yearns for it for the sake of her self-regard and self- reliance. Being a woman does not let her throw cold water on her resolution to bring down the men who went out-of-line in light of her being unguarded and vulnerable.

Draupadi has five sons; “Prativindhya, the son of Yudhishtira, Srutasoma from Bhima, Srutakirti from Arjuna, Satanik from Nakul and Srutakarma from Sahadeva. After the return of the Pandavas from their exile, a war is being proclaimed between the Pandavas and Kauravas. It is fought for eighteen days and both the sides lose some very significant people from their lives. At the end of it, the Pandavas win. When Karna and Duryodhana are killed ruthlessly by the Pandavas then Duryodhana’s son, Ashwatthama, resolves to take an eye for an eye and plans to kill the Pandavas. He “set fire to the Pandava camp” (293) not knowing that he has massacred “five sleeping sons of Draupadi and her two brothers, Drishtadyumna and Shikhandi” (293). Draupadi has lost her father, sons and brothers and she concurs that the war has been baneful for everyone including the Pandavas who have won it but lost a considerable amount in the form of their sons. She sighs to Uruvi, “ My loss cannot be your solace but all of us are suffering- no one has been spared!” (298) And Draupadi seems to have simmered down as she is “unusually quiet, more temperate than before, the fire in her completely quenched. She was more like ash after a devastating fire” (298). She is not happy about the entire status quo and “stooped and lifeless, wretchedly unhappy” (298). The war and the loss of her near and dear ones has made Draupadi waveless. She forgives everyone, even Ashwatthama, and kicks off to a new and modest life. Forgiveness is like “leaving hell and touching heaven” (306) and is devoutness.

### III. CONCLUSION

Draupadi is delineated as an astonishing woman in this manuscript by Kavita Kane. She has been construed in such a vivid manner that she strikes a chord with readers of every generation. Draupadi is an intrepid, venturesome, mighty, dauntless and unfaltering woman in the novel. In the beginning, she is a damsel in distress who is publicly slighted because of her own husbands whom she banked on. But then her dauntlessness leads her to turn the tables on all those who perpetrated such humiliation upon her. She transforms herself into deity of retribution and ensures annihilation of the entire Kaurava clan in the battle of Mahabharata. Though she loses a great deal in the form of her father, brothers and sons, but her revenge is complete when her husbands finally win the war killing all those who had been the prime movers in bringing stigma to her. At the end of the war, she becomes a more tranquilized woman and lives an uncomplicated life thereafter. Kavita Kane’s deft handling of the mythical character of Draupadi exudes charm of contemporaneity since she is projected as a resolute woman who does not bow down to atrocities committed upon her but firmly stands her ground and gives a resounding reply to her detractors.

### IV. SCOPE

The present research paper aims attention at the role of women in the Indian society and also her treatment in mythology in Kavita Kane’s work. It takes up the theme of a woman who first suffers but then wreak vengeance. The character of Draupadi in Kavita Kane’s *Karna’s Wife* is assayed here. The research takes account of all the substantial characters in the novel and also takes account of their rationale and social graces. Thus, it has assisted the researcher to comprehend all the facets in the novel.

## V. LIMITATIONS

The purpose of the research paper is to fixate on the ‘Transition of Draupadi’ from a woman who was in desolation to a deity of retribution. The research adopts the theme of a woman’s sufferings and the dignity of the woman in Indian society and mythology. So, the analysis environs on the appurtenant prospects. It is in the best interest to abide by the underlying conventions of the theme of the research paper. The expressions that have no congruity with the theme or the subject of the paper have been set aside of the domain with forethought.

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