Cultural violence in Kavita Kane's novels

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Abstract

Kavita Kane's novels often revolve around reinterpreting the stories of lesser-known women from Indian mythology, and in doing so, she exposes the various forms of cultural violence embedded in these traditional narratives. Cultural violence refers to aspects of a culture—such as norms, symbols, and traditions—that justify or normalize structural or direct violence against certain groups, often marginalizing or oppressing them. In Kane's works, this violence frequently manifests through the social, gender, and hierarchical inequalities that women and other marginalized figures endure within the patriarchal and rigid caste-bound structures of ancient society. Kavita Kane's novels serve as critical explorations of the cultural violence inherent in Indian mythology, particularly in the treatment of women, caste, and marginalized figures. Through her reimagining of these ancient stories, Kane questions the societal structures that perpetuate gender and social inequalities. Her works not only give voice to the forgotten or misunderstood characters but also challenge the cultural acceptance of violence that operates through tradition, mythology, and social norms. By reinterpreting these myths, Kane advocates for a more nuanced understanding of cultural narratives and pushes for the recognition of the marginalized voices that have long been silenced.

Keywords: Myth, Marginalised, Cultural, Violence, Inequality

Johan Galtung came up with the phrase "cultural violence," which describes how cultural norms, beliefs, and symbols validate and defend direct and structural violence. It is ingrained in societal conventions, religions, traditions, and beliefs that support oppression, discrimination, and injustice. Through the lived experiences of their characters, writers such as Kavita Kane frequently delve into the historical, political, and social aspects of cultural violence to examine these subjects in the literary environment. The difficulties of people trapped in power structures, frequently fighting against repressive cultural frameworks that affect their identity, social status, and independence, are commonly reflected in Kane's books.

Kavita Kane's novels are known for their nuanced portrayal of complex societal issues. She often uses a blend of historical and contemporary settings to explore themes of identity, power, marginalization, and resistance. Cultural violence emerges as a recurring theme, where characters are shaped by the oppressive cultural practices they are born into or encounter. Her writing presents how patriarchal, colonial, or caste-based structures affect not only the individual psyche but also the collective social fabric.

One of the significant ways Kane portrays cultural violence is through the historical and political contexts of her novels. For example, in works like *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty* and *The Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen*, Kane reinterprets characters from Indian mythology, often focusing on marginalized or sidelined voices, particularly women. These reimaginings bring out the cultural violence present in ancient texts, where rigid caste systems, gender norms, and religious duties often lead to systemic discrimination.

In *The Karna's Wife*, for instance, Kane highlights the character of Uruvi, a woman who marries Karna, a warrior of low caste. Uruvi's life is a reflection of the cultural violence that permeates the caste system in ancient India, where marriage outside one's caste is not just a personal decision but a transgressive act that threatens the social order. The violence Uruvi faces is not physical but cultural—ostracism, rejection, and social isolation are tools that enforce caste boundaries. Kane portrays how societal norms, tied to religion and tradition, perpetuate inequalities, making it impossible

for individuals to break free without facing severe consequences.

Through Uruvi, Kane exposes the deeply ingrained nature of cultural violence, where even love and personal agency are controlled by the dictates of societal expectations. The caste system, as depicted in Kane's novel, is not just a backdrop but a force that inflicts cultural violence by legitimizing discrimination and exclusion as part of the natural order of things.

Kane's focus on female characters also allows her to explore cultural violence from the perspective of gender. Many of her protagonists live in societies where patriarchy governs every aspect of life, from marriage and motherhood to social status and personal freedom. The women in her novels often grapple with cultural expectations that dehumanize them, reduce their autonomy, and position them as commodities to be controlled.

In *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty*, the character of Satyavati is a pivotal figure whose ambitions clash with the rigid patriarchal structures of her time. Satyavati is a powerful and complex character, yet her strength is constantly undermined by cultural norms that dictate a woman's role as secondary to that of men. Her struggle to secure a legacy for her children, especially in a system that sees women as little more than vessels for male heirs, highlights the cultural violence that women face when their worth is reduced to their reproductive abilities.

Kane's depiction of Satyavati shows the nuanced ways in which cultural violence works: women are not overtly oppressed through physical means but through the symbolic violence of tradition, mythology, and societal expectations that dictate their roles and limit their possibilities. The tension between Satyavati's personal ambition and the cultural constraints placed upon her represents the broader conflict of many women throughout history, whose potential is stifled by patriarchal structures.

Another form of cultural violence present in Kane's works is symbolic violence, a concept developed by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Symbolic violence refers to the imposition of meanings and norms that become internalized by individuals, leading them to accept their marginalized status as legitimate or natural. Language, myths, and stories in Kane's novels often serve as tools of symbolic violence, reinforcing social hierarchies and justifying discrimination.

In *The Karna's Wife*, the narrative of Karna as a hero is intertwined with the cultural legitimacy of the caste system. His constant struggle to gain recognition and honor, despite his low birth, reflects the ways in which societal narratives are used to uphold the status quo. The language of honor and duty becomes a tool of cultural violence, used to justify Karna's exclusion from the higher echelons of society, even as he proves himself worthy.

Similarly, the stories told about women in Kane's novels often serve as mechanisms of control. Myths and legends that glorify female subservience or demonize women who step outside traditional roles become a form of symbolic violence, making it difficult for women to challenge the status quo. By retelling these myths with a focus on the female perspective, Kane highlights the ways in which cultural violence is perpetuated through storytelling and language.

Cultural violence is deeply woven into the fabric of the societies depicted in Kavita Kane's novels. Whether it manifests through rigid caste hierarchies, patriarchal oppression, or symbolic violence embedded in myths and religious narratives, cultural violence serves as a backdrop against which her characters struggle for agency and self-expression.

 In *The Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen*, Kane brings the issue of caste-based discrimination to the forefront. The caste system is depicted as an oppressive force that defines social interactions, relationships, and even personal worth. Uruvi, the protagonist, is a high-born princess who chooses to marry Karna, a man of low caste, despite the social stigma attached to such unions. Their marriage represents a transgression of caste boundaries, a challenge to the cultural violence that deems certain lives less valuable based on birth.

Gender-based violence is a recurring theme in Kane's novels, where patriarchal structures enforce strict roles and expectations for women. In *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty*, Satyavati's journey is shaped by her struggles against the patriarchal norms that view women as mere instruments for political or dynastic gain. Cultural violence, in this context, manifests in the ways women are dehumanized and reduced to their reproductive capabilities. Women are often expected to sacrifice personal desires for the sake of family or social duty.

Kane's novels also explore symbolic violence, a subtler form of cultural violence that is perpetuated through language, stories, and religious ideologies. This is particularly evident in the way myths and epics traditionally present women as secondary to male heroes. In *Sita's Sister*, for example, Urmila's story is largely overlooked in the Ramayana, yet Kane gives her a voice, subverting the traditional narrative and offering a critique of the cultural forces that silence women. Symbolic violence, in this sense, is the erasure of voices and the enforcement of social hierarchies through cultural narratives.

Despite the pervasive nature of cultural violence, resistance is a central theme in Kane's works. Her characters resist in various ways—some through individual acts of defiance, others through collective action or the reclamation of

cultural narratives. One of the most common forms of resistance in Kane's novels is the individual act of defiance. Uruvi, for instance, resists the caste system by choosing love over social status. In doing so, she challenges the cultural violence that seeks to restrict her choices based on rigid societal norms. Similarly, Satyavati in *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty* defies patriarchal expectations by asserting her political will and shaping the destiny of her dynasty. These characters demonstrate that resistance often begins with personal choices that reject oppressive norms.

Kane also explores the idea of collective resistance through the bonds of community and solidarity. In *Sita's Sister*, Urmila's relationship with her sisters-in-law, particularly Sita, represents a form of solidarity among women who are subjected to patriarchal control. Their shared experiences and mutual support create a space for resistance, even in the face of overwhelming cultural violence. Through these relationships, Kane suggests that collective action and solidarity are powerful tools in challenging systemic oppression.

Perhaps one of the most profound forms of resistance in Kane's work is the reclamation of cultural narratives. By retelling ancient myths from the perspective of marginalized characters, Kane subverts the dominant narratives that uphold cultural violence. For example, in *The Karna's Wife*, Uruvi's story is a counter-narrative to the traditional glorification of male warriors in the Mahabharata. By focusing on Uruvi's perspective, Kane challenges the cultural violence that silences women and upholds caste-based discrimination. Reinterpreting these myths becomes an act of resistance against the symbolic violence that has historically marginalized certain voices.

Kane's protagonists are often women who, despite being constrained by cultural violence, find ways to resist and assert their agency. These characters serve as powerful examples of resistance and subversion, challenging the norms that seek to define them. Uruvi's resistance to the caste system is central to her character. By choosing to marry Karna, she defies the social norms that dictate who she can love and associate with. Her marriage becomes a form of rebellion against the caste-based cultural violence that seeks to limit her autonomy. Uruvi's journey is one of self-discovery, as she navigates the complexities of love, loyalty, and societal expectations. Her defiance of cultural norms is not without consequence, but it represents a powerful challenge to the rigid hierarchies of her world.

Satyavati's resistance is more strategic and political, as she seeks to assert her influence in a male-dominated world. As the mother of the Kuru dynasty, she uses her position to shape the future of her family, often in defiance of patriarchal norms that seek to control her. Satyavati's resistance is rooted in her ambition and determination to secure power for her descendants. In a society where women are expected to be submissive and self-sacrificing, Satyavati's assertion of power is a radical act of subversion.

Urmila's resistance is more subtle, but no less significant. As the wife of Lakshman, Urmila is often relegated to the background in traditional tellings of the Ramayana. However, in *Sita's Sister*, Kane gives Urmila a voice and agency, allowing her to resist the cultural violence of erasure. Urmila's resistance is rooted in her emotional strength and her ability to endure the pain of separation from her husband, while also supporting her family. By reclaiming her narrative, Urmila challenges the cultural norms that silence women's voices.

Resistance in Kane's novels is not without consequence. Characters who defy cultural norms often face social ostracism, personal loss, and emotional turmoil. However, Kane's portrayal of these consequences highlights the strength and resilience of her characters.

For Uruvi, resistance comes at the cost of social isolation and a life filled with conflict. Yet, her defiance of the caste system is a powerful statement against cultural violence, even if it does not lead to immediate social change. Satyavati's resistance, while successful in securing power for her descendants, also leads to personal sacrifice and emotional hardship. Similarly, Urmila's quiet resistance comes at the cost of years of separation from her husband, yet her strength lies in her endurance.

Resistance and subversion of cultural violence are central to Kavita Kane's novels. Through her characters, Kane explores the ways in which individuals and communities can challenge oppressive cultural norms and reclaim their agency. Whether through individual acts of defiance, collective solidarity, or the reclamation of cultural narratives, resistance in Kane's works is multifaceted and deeply personal. Her characters, particularly the women, serve as powerful examples of how cultural violence can be resisted, even in the face of overwhelming societal pressure.

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