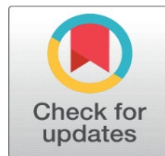
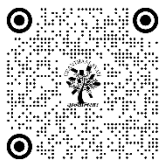


RECLAIMING MYTHOLOGICAL VOICES: THE REIMAGINING OF URUVI AND DRAUPADI AS NEW WOMEN IN CONTEMPORARY INDIAN LITERATURE

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DOI

[10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i6.2024.3369](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i6.2024.3369)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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ABSTRACT

The evolution of female representation in literature is deeply intertwined with the progression of societal values and the shifting frameworks surrounding gender roles and expectations. In recent years, the reinterpretation of mythological narratives through a feminist lens has emerged as a powerful vehicle for re-examining and redefining traditional portrayals of women. This research delves into the transformation of two iconic female figures—Uruvi from Kavitha Kane's *Karna's Wife* and Draupadi from Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions*—who are reimagined to embody the complexities and challenges of the "New Woman" in contemporary Indian literature. The concept of the New Woman, as explored here, encapsulates the pursuit of autonomy, self-realization, and a conscious rejection of the restrictive boundaries historically imposed by patriarchal frameworks. Through these characters, Kane and Divakaruni employ feminist literary frameworks, particularly those addressing autonomy, identity, and resilience, to present female protagonists who defy passive, traditional archetypes.

The narrative arcs of Uruvi and Draupadi reflect an intricate tapestry of agency, moral authority, and individuality, positioning them as powerful counter-narratives within a predominantly male-centered mythological tradition. By embedding these characters with the traits of self-determination and ethical complexity, both authors not only challenge patriarchal conventions but also expand the cultural discourse surrounding women's agency, emphasizing their resistance to both overt and subtle forms of control. The authors' approach represents a nuanced critique of gender constructs within South Asian literature, depicting these heroines as resilient figures who navigate the constraints of their social environments with both intelligence and empathy.

1. INTRODUCTION

The "New Woman" emerged as a powerful social and literary archetype in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, symbolizing a radical departure from conventional female roles and ideals. Rooted in a desire for autonomy, self-expression, and the rejection of oppressive patriarchal norms, this construct illuminated women's evolving aspirations for independence, education, and a more nuanced identity beyond domesticity. This archetype, which challenged the constraints of Victorian morality and gender expectations, offered women a narrative framework through which they could explore and assert their agency, advocating for the redefinition of femininity in both personal and public spheres. Within this tradition, the "New Woman" became a complex figure embodying social, intellectual, and economic freedom—a figure who not only inhabited the literary landscape of the West but also echoed across global cultural contexts, finding new interpretations and expressions within Indian literature.

This study situates the characters Uruvi from Kavitha Kane's *Karna's Wife* and Draupadi from Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* within this transformative framework, exploring how they embody and expand the "New Woman" ethos in an Indian mythological context. Uruvi and Draupadi are not merely passive figures or symbols of traditional femininity; they are dynamic, assertive, and self-possessed women whose narratives reflect the complex realities of contemporary Indian womanhood. By challenging deeply entrenched patriarchal ideologies, these characters reimagine what it means to be a woman in a society that has historically constrained female agency within rigid boundaries of duty, honor, and subservience. Through their defiance, resilience, and self-determination, Uruvi and Draupadi illustrate how the principles of the New Woman have been integrated into the fabric of Indian literature, creating a discourse that speaks both to India's mythic past and to its ongoing struggles with gender equality.

The feminist critique and gynocriticism theories advanced by scholars such as Elaine Showalter (1985) provide a robust framework for examining how Kane and Divakaruni portray Uruvi and Draupadi as active agents of change. Showalter's gynocriticism, which centers on women's experiences and voices in literature, helps elucidate how these characters not only reflect but also resist and reshape the oppressive structures surrounding them. By placing these narratives in the context of feminist literary critique, we gain insight into how the authors leverage mythological characters to engage in a larger critique of gender and identity, ultimately promoting a vision of womanhood that is as diverse and multifaceted as it is defiant.

Further, the foundational theories of Sally Ledger (1997) and Ann Ardis (2000) on the New Woman help deepen our understanding of how Uruvi and Draupadi embody personal freedom, intellectual growth, and moral complexity. Ledger and Ardis's explorations of the New Woman underscore the significance of self-determination within cultural settings that often view female independence with suspicion or disdain. In this light, Uruvi and Draupadi are not only literary figures but also representations of women's evolving roles within society, navigating a cultural landscape that oscillates between reverence for tradition and the pressing need for progress. Through their personal journeys, these characters highlight the inherent tensions and contradictions of modern Indian womanhood, offering readers a compelling vision of female empowerment that resonates with feminist ideals.

Thus, this paper contends that Uruvi and Draupadi are profound examples of the New Woman reimagined in South Asian literature, where ancient mythological figures are reinterpreted to reflect contemporary struggles for gender equality and individual agency. Their stories challenge conventional tropes, reshape traditional myths, and expand the discourse on identity, agency, and gender dynamics within the Indian literary canon. Through this exploration, we aim to illuminate how Indian literature continues to adapt and respond to feminist thought, creating spaces for re-envisioning historical narratives in ways that celebrate female empowerment and complexity.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Indian mythology, especially epic narratives like the *Mahabharata*, has long provided a rich tapestry of stories and characters that reflect cultural and societal values. Traditionally, the portrayal of female figures in these mythological texts has often been limited to archetypal roles, such as the dutiful wife, devoted mother, or sacrificial figure, which served to reinforce a patriarchal framework. However, contemporary literature has increasingly sought to reimagine these characters, reshaping the narrative to highlight the nuanced and multidimensional aspects of their personalities. Scholars have identified a notable trend within revisionist literature, where female perspectives are brought to the forefront, allowing for an exploration of complex emotional landscapes, ethical dilemmas, and the latent potential for resistance against the oppressive forces of patriarchy.

Revisionist retellings of mythological stories have become a fertile ground for interrogating traditional gender roles and the social expectations surrounding women. This wave of literature, often rooted in feminist discourse, seeks to dismantle established stereotypes and provides a platform for the voices and experiences of women who were historically relegated to the periphery. In examining texts like *Karna's Wife* by Kavitha Kane and *The Palace of Illusions* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, it becomes evident that these works not only recontextualize mythological figures but also reimagine them as embodiments of the New Woman—an archetype that confronts and transcends restrictive social norms. By portraying characters such as Uruvi and Draupadi as empowered, independent thinkers capable of making complex moral choices, these novels encourage readers to question conventional perceptions of femininity and autonomy within the Indian cultural framework.

The concept of the New Woman, originating in Western literature as an emblem of intellectual independence, economic freedom, and personal agency, has found resonance in the context of Indian literature, where it serves as a vehicle for subverting patriarchal norms and expanding the boundaries of female representation. Sally Ledger (1997) and Ann Ardis (2000) extensively discuss the New Woman archetype as a cultural and literary response to the limited roles prescribed for women, noting how this figure embodies aspirations that challenge societal expectations and champion individual growth and freedom. The adoption of this archetype in Indian literature—especially through mythological characters like Uruvi and Draupadi—provides a means to explore Indian womanhood in all its complexities, shedding light on the intersections of tradition, modernity, and personal autonomy.

Additionally, Showalter's feminist critique and gynocriticism (1985) offer an essential framework for understanding how these characters subvert traditional narratives. Gynocriticism, which advocates for a female-centered literary tradition and analytical approach, is particularly apt for examining the transformation of Uruvi and Draupadi. By focusing on their inner lives, perspectives, and relationships, Showalter's framework helps reveal the ways in which these characters resist societal constraints, embodying feminist ideals that celebrate resilience, intelligence, and defiance. Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality theory also provides valuable insights into how these characters navigate overlapping systems of oppression, such as caste, gender, and social class, adding depth to the portrayal of their struggles for agency within rigidly stratified societies.

Together, these critical perspectives allow us to appreciate how Indian literature is evolving to meet the demands of contemporary feminist thought. The characters of Uruvi and Draupadi, by virtue of their strength, courage, and self-determination, serve as exemplary models of the New Woman in an Indian context. Their narratives challenge social hierarchies, underscore the importance of female solidarity, and expand our understanding of agency within a cultural milieu that has traditionally silenced women's voices. Through these revisionist narratives, authors like Kane and Divakaruni not only offer a critique of the past but also a vision for a future where women's experiences are honored and their narratives center stage.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative, comparative analysis that draws on feminist literary theory to examine the characters and themes within *Karna's Wife* and *The Palace of Illusions*. The methodological framework combines textual analysis with theoretical exploration, particularly through the lenses of Showalter's feminist critique and gynocriticism, the New Woman theories of Ledger and Ardis, and the concept of intersectionality as developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw. By applying these critical perspectives, this analysis uncovers how Kane and Divakaruni construct their female characters to embody feminist values, offering new insights into gender dynamics, individual empowerment, and the subversion of patriarchal narratives within Indian literature.

The study begins by employing Showalter's feminist critique and gynocriticism, focusing on the ways in which the inner lives and emotional landscapes of Uruvi and Draupadi are depicted. This approach emphasizes the role of narrative perspective in redefining female characters who were originally constrained by traditional archetypes. By highlighting their individuality, emotional agency, and intellectual depth, the gynocriticism framework reveals the ways these characters challenge patriarchal limitations and assert their identity within a society that often seeks to confine women's roles.

In conjunction with this, Ledger's and Ardis's discussions on the New Woman offer a comparative framework through which to understand how Uruvi and Draupadi embody traits associated with this archetype. By juxtaposing these characters with traditional mythological portrayals, the analysis identifies moments where they defy societal expectations, asserting their rights to agency, self-expression, and intellectual freedom. This comparison illuminates how the New Woman ideal has been adapted to reflect Indian socio-cultural realities, expanding the discourse on female autonomy and self-determination.

Furthermore, Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality provides a critical lens through which to examine how Uruvi and Draupadi navigate multiple, intersecting identities—such as caste, gender, and social status—in their pursuit of agency. Intersectionality enriches the analysis by situating their struggles within broader structures of power and privilege, illustrating how their experiences as women are shaped by and respond to overlapping forms of marginalization. This perspective also highlights the universal yet diverse challenges faced by women, emphasizing the importance of an intersectional approach to understanding the complexities of female agency in Indian literature.

Through these combined methodologies, this study aims to provide a nuanced and multidimensional analysis of Uruvi and Draupadi as embodiments of feminist ideals. By examining their character arcs, thematic roles, and narrative functions, this research demonstrates how Kane and Divakaruni challenge traditional narratives, offering reimagined depictions of mythological women who resist subjugation and redefine identity within a patriarchal world. In doing so, this paper contributes to ongoing discussions on gender, power, and identity in Indian literature, underscoring the potential for mythological retellings to serve as vehicles for feminist discourse and social transformation.

Uruvi in *Karna's Wife*: Agency, Autonomy, and Ethical Complexity

Individuality and Defiance of Tradition

In *Karna's Wife*, Kavitha Kane crafts Uruvi as an embodiment of agency and individuality, qualities that starkly contrast with the restrictive social norms governing her world. Uruvi's choice to marry Karna—a warrior of low social standing who is stigmatized due to his uncertain lineage—is not just a personal decision but a profound act of defiance. By following her own desires rather than conforming to societal expectations, Uruvi reclaims her right to make autonomous decisions, thus asserting her independence and aligning herself with the archetype of the New Woman. Unlike the archetypal mythological women who are often cast in roles defined by submission and passivity, Uruvi's bold actions exemplify a remarkable self-possession and courage. Kane's portrayal of Uruvi not only situates her as a woman of strength and resilience but also as an agent of change, one who challenges patriarchal expectations by refusing to be relegated to a background role. Her assertive individuality becomes a powerful testament to personal freedom, autonomy, and the rejection of imposed social hierarchies.

Uruvi's choice disrupts the established social order and brings her into direct confrontation with the rigid societal structures of her time. Her defiance is not simply symbolic; it is a proactive act that redefines her identity and sets her apart as a woman of conviction and inner strength. Kane's depiction of Uruvi transforms her from a passive participant into a force within the narrative, one who actively shapes her life through choices informed by her values and aspirations. By forging her own path and defying convention, Uruvi emerges as a complex, multifaceted character—a literary embodiment of the New Woman archetype, who is unafraid to challenge societal norms and to carve out a space of agency and self-expression in a patriarchal landscape.

Ethical Dilemmas and Moral Agency

Kane delves into the complexities of Uruvi's character by positioning her within a series of moral and ethical dilemmas that test her integrity and values. Uruvi's marriage to Karna brings her face-to-face with ethical challenges, particularly regarding his unwavering loyalty to Duryodhana and his controversial role in Draupadi's disrobing. Unlike many traditional portrayals of mythological wives who support their husbands unconditionally, Uruvi's discomfort with Karna's actions and her ethical reservations reveal her as a figure of deep moral consciousness and critical thought. Her love for Karna does not render her blind to his faults; instead, it fuels a sense of responsibility to confront and challenge his decisions when they conflict with her own moral compass.

Through her complex emotional responses and moral inquiries, Uruvi grapples with the tensions between love and justice, loyalty and ethics, compassion and condemnation. Kane's portrayal of Uruvi's internal struggles amplifies her character, presenting her not as a silent supporter but as an active moral agent in the narrative. Her capacity for ethical reasoning and self-reflection elevates her from a mere romantic figure to a thoughtful and autonomous character, who possesses the strength to voice her objections even in the face of patriarchal expectations. In challenging her husband's actions and voicing her disapproval of his complicity in the injustices enacted upon Draupadi, Uruvi becomes a symbol of ethical resistance, demonstrating that love and loyalty do not necessitate the abandonment of one's moral principles. Kane's Uruvi thus becomes an emblem of female agency, asserting that women, too, possess the capacity for moral authority and ethical self-determination.

Compassion and Emotional Resilience

Uruvi's compassion and emotional resilience form additional layers to her character, rendering her both empathetic and strong-willed. Her relationship with Karna is marked by a profound depth, extending beyond the simplistic devotion often ascribed to mythological wives. Uruvi's love for Karna is thoughtful and introspective, informed by a critical engagement with his choices and a desire to see him live up to his own potential. Unlike traditional portrayals that often

depict female devotion as blind and unquestioning, Uruvi's compassion is discerning; she loves Karna not in spite of his flaws but with a full awareness of them, and she challenges him to rise above his affiliations and insecurities.

Her emotional resilience allows her to endure both personal sacrifices and societal judgment, embodying a form of strength that transcends physical power and embraces a more subtle, enduring fortitude. This nuanced portrayal of love and loyalty, balanced by introspection and moral clarity, sets Uruvi apart as a character of substance. Kane's portrayal of Uruvi's compassion humanizes her, allowing readers to witness the vulnerabilities and complexities of her emotional life. This depth of character transcends traditional portrayals of mythological heroines, who are often reduced to one-dimensional symbols of virtue or loyalty. Instead, Uruvi becomes a fully realized individual who navigates her personal and relational challenges with grace, empathy, and inner strength, embodying a new model of womanhood that values emotional intelligence alongside moral and ethical integrity.

Gender, Power, and Solidarity

Kane's Uruvi not only confronts the patriarchal limitations of her society but actively navigates and negotiates her own space within the gendered power dynamics of her marriage and the larger social structure. Her critical stance toward the treatment of women, epitomized by her condemnation of Draupadi's public disrobing, highlights her commitment to justice and gender equality, underscoring her awareness of the broader societal implications of such acts. Uruvi's condemnation of these injustices signals her refusal to remain silent in the face of systemic violence, marking her as a woman of principle and courage, one who is unafraid to challenge patriarchal oppression.

Through her interactions with other female figures such as Kunti and Draupadi, Uruvi navigates the intricate terrain of female solidarity, competition, and empowerment. Her relationship with these women is not reduced to mere rivalry or conflict but is presented as a dynamic interplay of mutual respect, empathy, and shared resistance against a society that often pits women against each other. Kane's portrayal of these female bonds adds a layer of complexity to Uruvi's character, showcasing her as a woman capable of both compassion and confrontation. Her solidarity with other women reflects a feminist consciousness that defies the isolating effects of patriarchy, fostering a sense of collective resilience and empowerment. In challenging traditional portrayals of female relationships, Kane's Uruvi transcends the passive roles typically assigned to women in mythological narratives, emerging as a powerful advocate for gender justice and equality.

In sum, Uruvi's character in *Karna's Wife* epitomizes the intersection of autonomy, moral agency, emotional resilience, and gendered resistance. Kane's reimagining of Uruvi positions her as a multifaceted figure who challenges the passive, submissive roles traditionally ascribed to women in mythology. By presenting Uruvi as an embodiment of the New Woman archetype, Kane celebrates a version of femininity that is unapologetically assertive, morally engaged, and emotionally intelligent. Uruvi's journey is not just a personal quest for agency and self-expression; it is a broader statement on the transformative power of female agency and resilience within a cultural framework that has historically marginalized women's voices. In *Karna's Wife*, Kane successfully redefines Uruvi as a symbol of feminist resistance and a testament to the enduring strength of women who seek to transcend the limitations of tradition and rewrite their own narratives. Through Uruvi, Kane delivers a powerful commentary on gender, power, and the potential for women to assert their identities in defiance of patriarchal boundaries, embodying a timeless spirit of courage, integrity, and solidarity.

Draupadi in *The Palace of Illusions*: Power, Identity, and Self-Determination

Individuality and Assertion of Agency

In *The Palace of Illusions*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni reimagines Draupadi as an empowered, assertive individual, granting her a voice and agency that traditional retellings of the *Mahabharata* often obscure. Draupadi's character is shaped by her ardent pursuit of self-identity, as she navigates the challenges of being a queen, wife, and woman within the rigid constraints of a male-dominated society. Divakaruni's Draupadi does not passively accept her roles; instead, she is deeply engaged in self-reflection and consistently asserts her desires, opinions, and autonomy. By granting Draupadi control over her narrative, Divakaruni not only allows her to articulate her thoughts and emotions but also enables her to challenge the cultural limitations imposed upon her. In doing so, Draupadi epitomizes the New Woman archetype, using her voice and intelligence to confront and navigate the patriarchy that seeks to confine her.

Draupadi's sense of agency is reflected in her political acumen, wit, and self-awareness, which allow her to negotiate the complexities of her polyandrous marriage to the Pandavas. Instead of resigning herself to a passive role, she carves out a space for herself as an influential figure, making strategic decisions that impact the epic's trajectory. Draupadi's character thereby transcends the conventional roles often relegated to women in mythological narratives, refusing to be a silent observer to her fate. She demonstrates her individuality and political insight by consistently advocating for her rights and voicing her disapproval when she is treated unjustly, challenging societal expectations with a tenacity that redefines her as a symbol of defiance and self-determination. Through Draupadi, Divakaruni critiques the reductive roles traditionally assigned to women, reframing her as a powerful, self-possessed woman who actively shapes her own destiny rather than succumbing to the wills of those around her.

Moral and Ethical Complexities

Draupadi's character in *The Palace of Illusions* is marked by a series of profound moral and ethical quandaries, revealing her to be a nuanced and multidimensional figure. One of the most compelling aspects of her character is her internal conflict surrounding her desire for vengeance after the humiliation she endures at the hands of the Kauravas. Her public disrobing becomes a pivotal moment that shapes her quest for justice, and this quest often borders on a desire for retribution, conflicting with her commitment to *dharma*, the overarching principle of righteous duty. This tension between personal vengeance and ethical responsibility illustrates Draupadi's inner turmoil and complexity, as she grapples with the competing demands of emotion and duty. Rather than embodying a singular, idealized notion of virtue, Draupadi is portrayed as a woman struggling with the same moral ambiguities that define the human experience, making her a relatable and dynamic character.

Further complicating her moral landscape is her unspoken love for Karna, a sentiment that remains unresolved yet deeply affects her loyalties and allegiances. This emotional complexity adds a layer of personal conflict, as her unexpressed affection for Karna exists in tension with her duties as a wife to the Pandavas. Draupadi's internal struggle between loyalty to her husbands and her latent feelings for Karna reflects her depth as a character, underscoring the multifaceted nature of her identity. Divakaruni's portrayal thus transcends the simplistic categorizations often ascribed to mythological heroines, presenting Draupadi as a woman who is as morally and emotionally complex as any of her male counterparts. By exploring these ethical and personal conflicts, Divakaruni humanizes Draupadi, presenting her not merely as an epic figure but as a woman of immense emotional depth and moral integrity who navigates her challenges with dignity and resilience.

Empathy and Emotional Depth

Draupadi's empathy and emotional resilience further define her character, rendering her both compassionate and courageous. Despite her own grievances, she remains acutely aware of the suffering of others, especially those marginalized within the socio-political hierarchy. Her empathy for the downtrodden and oppressed adds a layer of emotional intelligence and human compassion to her character, presenting her as a woman whose strength lies not only in her defiance but also in her capacity to understand and connect with others on a deeply humane level. Her compassion is evident in her interactions with others, particularly in moments when she advocates for justice, not solely for herself but for those who lack the power to do so.

Divakaruni's portrayal of Draupadi's empathy offers readers a nuanced perspective on her character, allowing them to view her not merely as a victim of circumstance but as a resilient figure who transcends her hardships with grace. This empathetic dimension complicates Draupadi's character, positioning her as a symbol of both resilience and compassion. Her emotional strength becomes a central aspect of her identity, distinguishing her from other mythological figures who may lack this depth. Draupadi's compassion, combined with her unwavering resolve, establishes her as a character who navigates the trials of her life with both grace and grit, reflecting an enduring spirit of humanity amidst adversity. Through this depiction, Divakaruni challenges conventional portrayals of epic heroines, redefining Draupadi as a woman whose strength is characterized not only by her courage but by her ability to empathize and connect with the suffering of others.

Power and Identity within Patriarchy

Divakaruni's use of a first-person narrative grants Draupadi the authority to tell her own story, reclaiming a voice often suppressed in patriarchal retellings of the *Mahabharata*. By allowing Draupadi's perspective to dominate the narrative, Divakaruni subverts traditional interpretations and emphasizes the importance of female voices in the retelling of historical and mythological narratives. This narrative choice imbues Draupadi with a sense of autonomy, enabling her to assert her own interpretations of events, emotions, and motivations, and providing readers with an intimate insight into her thoughts and desires. Through Draupadi's voice, Divakaruni critiques the patriarchal structures that have traditionally monopolized epic narratives, offering a fresh, feminist perspective on the *Mahabharata* that foregrounds the significance of women's agency and identity.

Draupadi's journey within *The Palace of Illusions* is a testament to her struggle for self-definition and power within a patriarchal framework that often seeks to undermine her autonomy. She consistently resists the limitations imposed upon her by societal expectations, asserting her identity and claiming agency even within the constraints of her roles as wife and queen. Draupadi's refusal to remain silent in the face of injustice—particularly during pivotal moments, such as the public humiliation in the Kaurava court—illustrates her resilience and defiance against the dehumanizing effects of patriarchy. By depicting Draupadi as a woman who challenges passive roles, Divakaruni reimagines her as a figure of strength and assertiveness, capable of wielding power and authority even in the face of overwhelming adversity.

In sum, Divakaruni's Draupadi in *The Palace of Illusions* is a profoundly complex figure, defined by her individuality, ethical depth, empathy, and defiance of patriarchal limitations. Through her reinterpretation of Draupadi, Divakaruni offers a nuanced portrayal of a woman who is not merely reactive but proactive, who navigates the ambiguities of love, power, and identity with a sense of agency and purpose. Draupadi's journey is emblematic of the New Woman archetype, representing the evolving role of women in literature as individuals who assert their identities, exercise agency, and challenge the constraints of their cultural contexts. By recontextualizing Draupadi's narrative within a feminist framework, Divakaruni redefines her as a symbol of resilience and empowerment, creating a character whose strength lies not in conformity but in her unyielding pursuit of self-determination and justice. Through Draupadi's voice, *The Palace of Illusions* becomes a powerful commentary on gender, power, and identity, illustrating the capacity of women to transcend traditional roles and assert their rightful place within both the personal and public spheres of life.

Comparative Analysis: Uruvi and Draupadi as New Woman Archetypes

Rejection of Traditional Gender Roles

Uruvi and Draupadi, in their respective narratives, embody the rejection of traditional gender roles that have long defined female characters in Indian mythology. Both characters rise above the stereotypical representations of women in the *Mahabharata*—figures relegated to silence, submission, or mere secondary roles to the male protagonists. Uruvi, in Kavitha Kane's *Karna's Wife*, asserts her independence by choosing Karna, a man of lower social standing, over societal norms that dictate marriage to those of equal or higher status. Her decision is an act of autonomy that directly contradicts the patriarchal structures of caste, class, and gender, marking her as a pioneering figure of agency and rebellion. Similarly, Draupadi in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* asserts her voice and presence within a world where women are often voiceless or defined solely by their relationships to men. Her polyandrous marriage and her ability to navigate the complexities of her relationships with the Pandavas challenge traditional views of female subservience within marriage. Draupadi's bold actions and defiance of patriarchal expectations, particularly her refusal to be a passive victim of the Kauravas' humiliation, situate her as an assertive, self-determined individual.

Both Uruvi and Draupadi's stories, thus, center on their ability to express their desires, make independent choices, and act as moral agents. These actions, in contrast to the conventional depictions of women as passive and docile, highlight their rejection of the prescribed roles they are supposed to play in the traditional social order. In doing so, Uruvi and Draupadi not only defy the constraints placed upon them by their respective cultural and religious contexts but also embody the spirit of the New Woman—an archetype defined by agency, self-expression, and a rejection of male-dominated conventions. The New Woman, as portrayed through both characters, stands as a symbol of resistance to patriarchal oppression, a figure who challenges and redefines the gendered boundaries of her time.

Feminist Reinterpretations of Mythology

Kane and Divakaruni's retellings of the *Mahabharata* serve as vehicles for feminist reinterpretations of Indian mythology, challenging traditional gendered narratives and offering alternative representations of women's experiences. By elevating Uruvi and Draupadi, both authors engage in a subversive rewriting of a text that has historically been centered on male perspectives and male-dominated narratives. In Kane's *Karna's Wife*, Uruvi's journey is a reclamation of female subjectivity—one that is actively involved in shaping the course of events rather than merely being a passive witness. Her presence in the epic reframes the patriarchal narrative by centering the lived experiences of a woman who navigates the complexities of marriage, loyalty, and ethical dilemmas in a world dominated by men. Similarly, Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* offers Draupadi as a woman of intellect, emotional depth, and political insight, presenting her not as a mere object of male desire or a victim of her circumstances but as an active participant in the shaping of her own life's narrative. Draupadi's voice—once silenced in traditional retellings—takes center stage in Divakaruni's version, allowing her to reclaim her agency and reshape her legacy.

These feminist reinterpretations go beyond simple character revisions; they reshape the entire fabric of the epic. Both authors reconfigure the epic's structure by foregrounding female agency and highlighting the limitations imposed on women, not only in the context of their mythological stories but in the broader social and cultural frameworks in which they live. By providing female characters with narratives that assert their desires, intelligence, and autonomy, Kane and Divakaruni dismantle the dominant patriarchal framework within the epic. Their feminist re-visioning offers a powerful commentary on the gendered dynamics of storytelling, illustrating the ways in which mythological retellings can offer alternative perspectives that challenge exclusionary practices and offer more nuanced, inclusive representations of gender and power.

Intersectionality and Complexity

A critical aspect of the stories of Uruvi and Draupadi is their ability to illustrate the complexities of intersectionality. While both characters defy gender norms and challenge patriarchal oppression, their experiences also reflect how gender-based oppression intersects with other social categories, such as class, caste, and religion. Uruvi, in her choice of Karna, navigates the intersection of gender and social class. Her marriage to a man born of a lower caste challenges not only the gendered expectations of women but also the rigid social hierarchies that govern marriage and relationships in ancient Indian society. Her defiance is not merely a rejection of gender norms but a challenge to the caste system, positioning her as a revolutionary figure in the fight against multiple forms of oppression.

Similarly, Draupadi's narrative reflects the intersection of gender and caste, particularly in her relationships with the Pandavas and the Kauravas. As the daughter of a royal family, Draupadi's identity is intricately bound to issues of power, caste, and privilege. Her beauty and status make her a symbol of desire and power, but they also render her vulnerable to exploitation and violence, as seen in the infamous disrobing incident. In this way, Draupadi's character illustrates the complexities of navigating societal expectations that are shaped by both gender and caste, and her struggle to assert her agency is made all the more difficult by these intersecting forms of oppression.

By examining these characters through the lens of intersectionality, Kane and Divakaruni offer a more comprehensive and nuanced portrayal of gender oppression. Their stories demonstrate how the struggle for gender equality cannot be divorced from other forms of social justice, including those rooted in caste and class. The intersectional framework, as explored through the lives of Uruvi and Draupadi, deepens our understanding of the multifaceted nature of social oppression, revealing the ways in which gender-based discrimination is often compounded by other systems of inequality. In this regard, both characters challenge not only the patriarchal structures that govern their lives but also the broader social systems that maintain the status quo.

In conclusion, the comparative analysis of Uruvi and Draupadi reveals how both characters exemplify the New Woman archetype—figures who challenge traditional gender norms and navigate the complexities of autonomy, morality, and social oppression. Through their feminist reinterpretations, Kane and Divakaruni reframe the *Mahabharata* as a site of resistance, offering a more inclusive and intersectional approach to gender and power. By presenting Uruvi and Draupadi as empowered, morally complex, and intersectionally aware women, these retellings not only contribute to feminist discourse but also offer a vision of gender justice that challenges both the patriarchy and the social hierarchies that structure their worlds. Through these characters, Kane and Divakaruni offer a powerful critique

of traditional gender roles, presenting new possibilities for how women's stories can be told and reimagined in the context of both ancient myths and contemporary feminist thought.

4. CONCLUSION

The feminist reimaginings of Uruvi and Draupadi in Karna's Wife and The Palace of Illusions mark a pivotal transformation in the portrayal of women within Indian literature, particularly in mythological retellings. Through their nuanced and layered depictions, Kavitha Kane and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni reclaim the narratives of two historically marginalized female characters from the Mahabharata, positioning them as central figures in their own right. By presenting Uruvi and Draupadi as embodiments of agency, resilience, and moral complexity, the authors challenge deeply ingrained patriarchal traditions that have long relegated women to passive and secondary roles. These reinterpretations transcend the boundaries of traditional storytelling, offering a compelling critique of the social, cultural, and literary frameworks that have historically constrained women's identities and autonomy.

Both Uruvi and Draupadi emerge as dynamic representations of the New Woman archetype, standing in defiance of the restrictive norms that have shaped women's roles in literature and society. Uruvi's steadfast autonomy in Karna's Wife and Draupadi's fiery assertiveness in The Palace of Illusions highlight their refusal to conform to the passive, submissive archetypes often associated with women in mythological narratives. Instead, they are portrayed as morally complex, self-determined agents navigating the challenges of identity, power, and social justice within a patriarchal framework. Their journeys offer readers a powerful lens through which to explore the intersections of gender, power, and resistance, urging a re-evaluation of the roles women play in both ancient and contemporary narratives.

Kane and Divakaruni's feminist reinterpretations not only amplify the voices of silenced female characters but also contribute to a broader discourse on gender and social justice. By foregrounding the internal struggles, ethical dilemmas, and moral agency of Uruvi and Draupadi, the authors illustrate how mythological narratives can be repurposed as tools for feminist critique and transformative social commentary. These characters embody the tensions between tradition and modernity, challenging ancient gender norms while resonating deeply with the ongoing struggles faced by women in contemporary society. Through their stories, the authors underscore the enduring relevance of feminist engagement with literature, advocating for a literary canon that reflects the complexity and strength of women's experiences.

Moreover, these reimagining demonstrate the transformative power of literature in challenging and dismantling patriarchal structures. By reinterpreting mythological and historical narratives through a feminist lens, Karna's Wife and The Palace of Illusions break free from the constraints of traditional storytelling and offer alternative visions of gender and identity. These works contribute not only to the reclamation of women's voices in the literary canon but also to the broader project of questioning and dismantling the oppressive systems that continue to shape the lives of women. In doing so, they inspire readers to critically examine the cultural and historical forces that have perpetuated gender inequality and envision a future where women's stories are celebrated in all their richness and complexity.

In conclusion, the feminist reinterpretations of Uruvi and Draupadi by Kavitha Kane and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni exemplify the transformative potential of mythological retellings in advancing gender equality and social change. By reimagining these iconic characters as symbols of resistance and empowerment, the authors challenge the reductive narratives of the past and pave the way for a more inclusive and equitable literary tradition. These works not only honor the legacy of Uruvi and Draupadi but also reaffirm the importance of feminist perspectives in literature. They serve as a powerful reminder that stories—when re-examined through a lens of justice and equity—can transcend time, inspiring readers to rethink, reimagine, and ultimately reshape the narratives that define our collective history. Through these texts, Kane and Divakaruni offer a lasting contribution to the discourse on gender, power, and identity, leaving a profound impact on the evolution of female characterization in Indian literature.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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