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THE VIRTUOUS VOICES IN MODERN MYTHICAL NARRATIVES: A STUDY OF KAVITA KANE'S KARNA'S WIFE – THE OUTCAST'S QUEEN"

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ABSTRACT

Myths, with their intricate threads weaving through the tapestry of our past, present, and future, serve as the archaic stories that intricately connect our existence. Deeply ingrained in our collective consciousness, these narratives exert a significant sway on our thoughts, influencing our actions, beliefs, and the very core of our culture, traditions, and spiritual practices. Nonetheless, nestled within the expansive fabric of the great Mahabharata epic, the longstanding voices and accounts of women have often been obscured, relegated to the periphery, their vivid tales and poignant struggles overshadowed and neglected. This evident oversight sparks the essence of the current research undertaking, aiming to delve into the themes of oppression and justice as they unravel through the eyes of the primary female protagonist and other women illustrated in the literary masterpiece "Karna's Wife - The Outcast's Queen" by conducting an extensive analysis. Through a meticulous exploration, the central focus revolves around resurrecting the marginalized narratives of characters like Uruvi, a figment of Kane's imagination, embodying the resilience and indomitable spirit of women daring to challenge societal norms and structures. It becomes increasingly apparent that the oppression encountered by these characters was met with a spirited and multifaceted resistance from the female personas interwoven within the narrative, each grappling with the constraints of their outcast identity in unique and profound ways. The overarching objective of this comprehensive study lies in shedding light on the societal frameworks and historical backdrops wherein Uruvi and other female characters carve their paths, spotlighting their quests for acknowledgment, empowerment, and inclusion in a world fraught with bias and prejudice.

Keywords: Oppression, Patriarchal Psyche Myths Out-Casting

1. INTRODUCTION

Modern writers strongly believe that art possesses the transformative power to instigate social change, with a notable shift observed among female writers who have embraced activism as a noble endeavor intertwined with their artistic expression. This embrace of activism goes beyond mere protest or dissent; it transcends geographical boundaries to become a global movement for societal progress. The emergence of activism within the realm of literary writers represents a novel phenomenon, where these writers dedicate themselves to the betterment of society through their craft. Advocates of this approach in writing assert that their literary works serve a significant social purpose, emphasizing that it is through the fusion of art and activism that substantial changes can materialize for the enhancement of societal well-being.

These authors, drawing inspiration from the philosophies of thinkers such as Jacques Derrida, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Adrienne Rich, are reshaping the landscape of literature by breathing life into their characters. Noteworthy contributions

in this genre include works like Amish Tripathi's "Sita: Warrior of Mithila," Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's "The Palace of Illusions: A Novel," Mahasweta Devi's "Draupadi," and Pratibha Ray's "Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi." Among these luminaries stands Kavita Kane, renowned for her poignant portrayal of female characters. Her groundbreaking novel, "Karna's Wife: The Outcaste's Queen," sets the stage for her artistic journey, characterized by a fresh interpretation of mythological figures and a meticulous exploration of characters from the Mahabharata.

Mythology, much like history, serves as a vessel through which the past informs the present, influencing our culture, traditions, and religious practices in profound and multifaceted ways. These enduring myths have woven themselves into the fabric of our society to the extent that certain Hindu traditions, such as concepts of caste and creed, have seamlessly integrated into our daily lives. The pervasive influence of these myths is palpable across a wide spectrum of written works, reflecting contemporary trends in writing, reading, and interpretation. In this dynamic literary landscape, representations of women are actively being reshaped and reintroduced, both within the realms of literature and in broader societal contexts.

In "Karna's Wife: The Outcaste's Queen," the character Uruvi shines as a beacon of unwavering strength and determination. Her resolute nature is evident as she boldly embraces her identity and makes pivotal choices that defy societal norms. The narrative intricately weaves the tale of Uruvi, a woman of opulence who bravely selects Karna as her life partner, despite his outcaste status. Throughout the challenges she encounters, Uruvi's love and loyalty towards Karna remain unshakable, even amidst the turbulent backdrop of the Pandavas and Kauravas conflict. By portraying Uruvi's journey, Kane skillfully brings to light the overlooked narratives of women in the Mahabharata who have endured marginalization or erasure. Characters like Amba, Ambika, and Ambalika, all victims of Bhishma's abduction and coerced marriages to Vichitravirya, stand as poignant reminders of the injustices faced by women during those tumultuous times. Additionally, figures such as Hidimbi, abandoned after being wed to Bhima, and Dushala, who suffered under layadratha's reign, illustrate the myriad challenges women grappled with.

The novel also delves into the intricate dynamics between female characters in the epic. The bond between Uruvi and Bhanumati, Duryodhana's wife, serves as a compelling testament to the strength of female solidarity and camaraderie amidst adversity. Furthermore, the nuanced portrayal of Draupadi and Karna's relationship encapsulates a mix of affection and animosity, showcasing the complexity and depth of emotions that underpin interactions between characters in the Mahabharata. Through her portrayal of Uruvi and other female characters, Kane challenges the traditional narrative of the Mahabharata and offers a fresh perspective on the experiences of women in ancient India. Her novel is a testament to the power of storytelling and the importance of giving voice to those who have been silenced. Addressing deliberate exclusions in Mahabharata Kane aims to redefine storytelling traditions by reimagining mythological figures, supporting her arguments with a detailed exploration of various characters from the Mahabharata in a fresh way. Her character Uruvi stands firm in her choices, confidently asserting her identity .through Kavita Kane's Karna's Wife – The Outcast's Queen" was to find the marginalized elements in the novel of Kavita Kane.

The epics Mahabharata and Ramayana hold immense familiarity among the people of India. The Vedic literature, with its vastness and profound teachings of the seers and sages, posed a challenge for the common folk to understand. Consequently, the epics emerged as a medium to impart wisdom to the masses. Beyond being viewed solely as religious texts, these epics serve as a wellspring of divinity, joy, and fulfillment for Indians. They encapsulate moral lessons and motivations through their narratives. Hence, prominent writers like Maheswetha Devi, Girish Karnad, and Kavita Kane have delved into the lives of lesser-known characters from these epics, studying, analyzing, and integrating them into mainstream discourse. Among these authors, Kavita Kane stands out for her innovative approach in reimagining characters from Indian mythology. Her debut novel, "Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen," introduces the fictional character of Uruvi, offering a fresh perspective on the Mahabharata saga. Throughout Indian mythologies, women have taken on significant roles, yet certain female figures have been overlooked or marginalized. By shifting the focus from the central protagonists to these lesser-known characters, their untold stories are brought to light and celebrated.

For instance, the dedication and sacrifice of Lakshmana towards his brother Rama are well-known, but the story of his wife Urmila, who selflessly slept through Rama's exile to ensure Lakshmana's vigilance, remains obscure. Urmila's narrative is just one example among many unheralded heroines in mythologies, including Thara, Amba, Sathyavati, and Hidumbi. Kavita Kane's character Uruvi echoes this theme of overlooked heroines. "Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen," published in 2013, unveils the tale of Uruvi amid the epic struggle between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. Through Uruvi's perspective, Kane sheds light on the deeply ingrained issues of marginalization and casteism prevalent in society. The novel not only portrays the struggles faced by Karna and Uruvi as a Sutaputra and his queen but also delves into the

broader ramifications of societal discrimination. Kane's work serves as a profound exploration of marginalization, showcasing the transformation in Uruvi's life from opulence to ostracization. Kavita Kane's expertise in mythology fiction shines through her nuanced portrayal of these marginalized characters, contributing to a deeper understanding of Indian epics and society at large.

All of her work focuses on the unpraised heroines of Hindu mythologies. She had initially contemplated making Vrushali – Karna's first wife as the protagonist but realized she was limiting in the scope of the character. Uruvi was thus created out of dramatic licence. She is fierce, righteous, outspoken yet fallible. In an interview to The Hindu, Kane points out that: "I wanted a woman who would see him for what he was: a tragic hero with a flaw. A wife was the best to see him not just as a husband but as a political person, as a hero, a warrior, a condemned, conflicted and torn man...At first.

Kane's Karna's Wife – The Outcast's Queen also speaks about the marginalization in mythologies. The first few chapters of the novel speak about Uruvi, princess of Pukeya Kingdom, the only daughter of King Vahusha and Queen Shubra. She had inherited her mother's glorious beauty and her father's sharp mind, and both sizzled in her short flashes of temper. Uruvi is much loved, protected and pampered by her parents, and is brought up in comforts. She is a shrewd woman who will not hold herself back from questioning the wrongdoing whosoever it may concern. She falls in love with Karna and decides to marry him, even when she could have married Arjuna. These incidences become the epicenter and her life status changes. Her parents accept her decision, but the royal clan does not pardon her for marrying Karna, the son of a charioteer. Later, she does get adjusted and accepted in the house of Sutaputra Karna. This book also ephemerally touches the most debated topic of Draupadi's unrequited love towards Karna. The fight of right and wrong is a continued theme throughout the book.

Being the second wife of Karna, Uruvi received hatred from people around her they were never ready to accept her as a part of family, they consider her as royal blood and an outsider. His parents feared that she might take away Karna from them. She was not a typical wife, and she gave moral support for Karna in the war of Kurukhshetra. She also took care of the wounded soldiers. Uruvi always protected Karna, she have always asked him to move away from Duryodhana, because she knew that Karna is just a pawn for him. She always raised her voice for dharma, when Kauravas' insulted Draupadi, Uruvi supported Draupadi and went against Kauravas'. Draupadi's vastraharan created a turning point in the story, where Uruvi, who crazily loved and admired Karna, criticized him for fueling the situation and for wounding Draupadi with his words.

The portrayal of women in the Mahabharata unfolds as a fascinating area for analysis, offering valuable insights into the intricate tapestry of their strengths and weaknesses. Their unwavering assertiveness and unshakable self-confidence crafted them into resilient figures, capable of challenging the prevailing forces of Patriarchy and Gender-based discrimination that loomed over the epic. The Mahabharata, rooted in rich themes, not only serves as a timeless narrative but also serves as a mirror reflecting the poignant dilemmas confronted by marginalized groups within its storyline. The dynamic interplay between the marginalization and empowerment of women, as well as individuals from lower castes or those lacking formal education in ancient Indian society, surfaces prominently in the Mahabharata. For instance, Vyasa, the enigmatic architect of the epic, emerged from the margins as the dark-skinned, illegitimate offspring of Satyavati, belonging to the Nishada fisherman race. This subversion of societal norms is further underscored by the inclusion of characters like Satyavati, Vyasa, Krishna, Draupadi, and others whose dark complexions symbolize their exclusion from Vedic ideals, emblematic of their marginalized status. Noteworthy personas such as Satyayati, Vyasa, Vidura, Karna, Draupadi, Ekalavya, Ghatotkacha, and the eminent Krishna attain eminence in the narrative due to their exceptional qualities, challenging conventional hierarchies and societal norms. Through its enduring relevance, the Mahabharata continues to exert a profound influence on contemporary society, shaping diverse human responses and behaviors in a constantly evolving world. Recollecting pivotal figures like Bhishma Pitamaha, the revered mentors Drona and Parashurama, the sightless monarch Dhritarashtra, the virtuous Yudhishthira, the mighty Bhima, the heroic Arjuna, and the philosophical teachings of Krishna encapsulated in the Bhagavad Gita, the Mahabharata serves as a guidepost illuminating various facets of human existence. Nonetheless, the sacrifices of marginalized women in the epic, such as Hidumbi - Bhima's wife, Vrushali - Karna's first wife, Uthara - Abhimanyu's spouse, and Uruvi - Karna's beloved, often remain unacknowledged, their stories relegated to the sidelines of this grand narrative. Kavita Kane's creative vision, embodied in her reinvention of characters like Vrushali and the birth of Uruvi, demonstrates a nuanced exploration of untold tales embedded within the Mahabharata's expansive canvas.

One such woman was Satyavati, she was the Queen of the Kuru King Shantanu of Hastinapur and the great grandmother of Panadavas and Kauravas princes. She is also the mother of Rishi Vyasa, author and composer of Vedas

and Puranas. Her story appears in Mahabharata, the Hariyamsa and the Devi Bhagavata Purana. Daughter of the Chedi King Uparichada Vasu and a cursed Apsara turned fish Adrika. Satyavati was brought up as a commoner, she had been adopted by a fisherman Dasharaj Due to the smell radiating from her body she was known as Matsyagandha. As a young woman Satyavati met the wandering Rishi Parashara, who fathers' her son Vyasa out of wedlock. The sage also gave her a musky fragrance, which earned her names-Yojanagandha and Gandhavati. Later King Shantanu, fascinated by her fragrance and beauty, fell in love with Satyavati. She married Shantanu on a condition put forth by her father that their children inherit the throne, denying of Shantanu's eldest son and crown prince Bhishma. Satyavati bore Shanatanu two children, Chitrangada and Vichitravirya. After Shantanu's death, she and her sons with the help of Bhishma ruled the Kingdom. Although both her sons died childless, she arranged her first son Vyasa to father the children of the two widows of Vichitravirya through Niyoga. Born as a princess yet abandoned at birth, and raised as a fisher woman, she has her own battles to fight. In her quest to fulfill her desires, her pawn in her scheme of things is Bhishma, who was forced to vow a life of celibacy and relinquish the throne of Hastinapur. Satyavati does regret this later. She was wise, honest, trustworthy, and faithful. She always had the Kingdoms best interest at heart. Satyavati loved her children more than life. She desperately wanted to see her boys grow up, in prosper, and live a life full of contentment, pleasure and joy. Satyavati never got to see her children grow, though. a child to pass away before its mother is a tragedy beyond comparison. It is the greatest stress a person can face throughout their lifetime. Satyavati was forced to push her grief to the side in order to find a new heir to the throne. She never withheld her love, support or respect from him. Satyavati had never been able to be the mother she wanted to be to Vyasa, but she still loves him deeply and treasured the memories she had of him. Satyayati's heart never fully healed from the loss of her sons.

Another significant unpraised heroines of Mahabharata are Amba, Ambika and Ambalika, princesses of Kashi, Amba who was secretly in love with prince Shalva. One fine day king of Kashi declared the Swayawara of his three daughters. Amba was about to select Shalva as her husband. But suddenly Bhishma arrived in swayawara and abducted all three princess as a bride of his younger stepbrother Vichitravirya. Bhishma did it on the command of his step mother Satyavati, as king of Kashi did not send invitation to Kuru dynasty as he found Vichitravirya inferior to him. So Satyavati wants to teach him a lesson. Amba begged to Bhishma and Vichitravirya to let her go to Shalva. They allowed her to go because he already had two wives, but Shalva denied accepting her as she was touched by another man. Pity Amba returned towards Vichitravirya and asked him to marry her, but he denied, then she went to Bhishma, but he was not able to marry her as he had taken a vow of celibacy as per the wish of his step mother. A furious and mighty Amba refused to return to her father, she was looking for revenge against Bhishma who dragged her into the hell. She requested the help of many Kings, but nobody was ready to fight against Bhishma. Later Amba was pretty sure that only Mahadev can help her.

Shiva appeared in front of her seeing rigorous austerities and offered her a boon that she can kill Bhishma in her next life. Hearing this she jumped into fire and killed herself. Later she was born as King Drupada's son Shikandini in her next birth and helped her brother in laws Panadavas to defeat Bhishma in Kurukshetra. Her sisters Ambika and Ambalika, become childless widows soon after the death of Vichitravirya, later through Niyoga they gave birth to the heirs of Hastinapur. They have not enjoyed any sort of pleasure from their husband, and they couldn't conceive from him. Their life after his death was pitiful and miserable. Many are unfamiliar about the fact that Kaurayas were not just hundred brothers, they also had a sister whose name was Dushala. It is only when we take a deeper look into history that it turns out that Dushala leads a life full of misery and troubles. And even though she had hundred brothers and also five Pandavas as her cousins nobody really took care of her. As a child Dushala enjoyed all comforts that life could give and she was greatly pampered. However, her sufferings began in the later years of her life, when she got married to the King of Sindhu - Jayadratha. He was a known warrior with a rather peculiar disorder. He has a split personality disorder and due to this he often become impolite to women. And it was due to her husband's disorder that Dushala had a miserable life. However, things got way out of hand when one day, Jayadratha tried to abduct Draupadi. The Pandayas frees Draupadi and wanted to kill Jayadratha. Since Draupadi requested the Pandavas not to kill Jayadratha as he is their only sister Dushala's husband. Owing to their love for Dushala, Jayadratha was not killed by the Pandavas, but they punish him by shaving his head. That was quite insulting for Jayadratha and he decided to seek vengeance for what had happened to him. While Dushala was extremely ashamed and angry with her husband due to his dreadful behavior. Later at Kurukshetra War, Jayadratha killed Abhimanyu and revengeful Arjuna shot an arrow which cut Jayadratha's head. And in one single action, Dushala's world came crashing down. Another unknown character of Mahabharata is Bhanumati. Nobody is familiar about the goodness in wicked Duryodhana's wife Bhanumati. In Karna's Wife, Kane gave a significant role to Bhanumati.

Some versions of the Mahabharata elaborate on the character of Bhanumati, highlighting her strong objections to the mistreatment of Draupadi during the game of dice when Dushasanna attempted to disrobe her in the Kaurava court. According to Kane's analysis, Bhanumati is portrayed as Uruvi's closest friend, who consistently sought to guide and advise her husband. Bhanumati's perception of Duryodhana is multifaceted; she acknowledges his imperfections, such as his animosity towards the Pandavas, yet she also views him as a devoted husband, father, and ruler. Despite Bhanumati's efforts to change Uruvi's opinion of Duryodhana, Uruvi remains steadfast in her belief that Karna is merely a tool for Duryodhana's feud with the Pandavas. Bhanumati, however, underscores Karna's genuine love, care, and honor towards Duryodhana. The aftermath of the Kurukshetra war deeply affects Bhanumati, reminding us that she, like many other women, grieves the loss of her husband and son. The lesser-known aspect of the Pandavas' marital lives, concerning their wives besides Draupadi, reveals intriguing dynamics. These wives, however, are restricted from residing with their husbands in Indraprastha due to a mutual vow that Draupadi would be the sole queen, except for Subhadra, who receives special treatment as Krishna's sister. Hidimbi's story sheds light on the complexities of relationships, as she, a Rakshasa demoness dwelling in the forest, becomes intertwined with Bhima through a series of events leading to their marriage. Society's prejudices eventually force Bhima to part ways with Hidimbi and their son Gatothkacha, underscoring the societal barriers between demons and kshatriyas.

Bhima, the mighty warrior, never visited Gatothkacha and Hidumbi again, his memories of Hidimba and their son faded until Krishna reminded him during the initial stages of the Kurukshetra war. The Pandavas employed the formidable Gatothkacha as a powerful weapon in the conflict, ultimately leading to his tragic demise. Hidimbi, as the first daughter-in-law, remained on the outskirts due to the inherent disadvantages of being a Rakshasa woman. Subhadra and Uttara also played significant roles in the epic Mahabharata, with Subhadra benefiting from her close relationship as Krishna's sister. However, her life took a tumultuous turn when she faced the ordeal of Arjuna's exile, patiently waiting in Dwaraka for years while raising her son Abhimanyu alone as Arjuna fought in distant lands. Subhadra's deep admiration for Draupadi led her to dedicate her son to join the battle, seeking vengeance against those who had wronged Draupadi. Tragically, Abhimanyu met a brutal end on the battlefield, leaving his wife, the young Uttara, a widow at a tender age. Overwhelmed by grief, Uttara attempted to immolate herself on Abhimanyu's pyre, but it was the wise intervention of Krishna that prevented the tragedy as he revealed the unborn heir of the Kuru dynasty within her womb. Another unsung character, Vrushali, the devoted wife of the valiant warrior Karna, silently suffered through the turmoil of the Mahabharata war, a poignant figure in the grand tapestry of this epic tale.

Although she played a minor role in Mahabharata, she was an extraordinary woman. Even though she was from a charioteer clan, she granted permission for her sons to support their father Karna by taking part in Kurukshetra War. She was the support system of Karna. All of her sons were killed in the Kurukshetra war (according to Kane's Karana's Wife) and she gave her life after Karna's death by doing Sati. Thus, Kane, through her fictional character Uruvi gave sound for many unsung heroines in Mahabharata, who were completely neglected and left muted by the writers of different eras.

Women have been ignored in Indian mythologies. Barring a few exceptions, women find mere mentions in both Ramayana and Mahabharata. For instance, we have defamed Ravana and his entire family but are ignorant of his wife Mandodari's piousness and the key role she played in protecting Sita, in Ashok Vatika. Another such woman who has been disregarded all along but is worth knowing about Uruvi, the wife of Karna, and that is what Kavita Kane has attempted to do in her book, Karna's Wife - The Outcast's Queen, tell us the story of Uruvi. Her story runs parallel to the events of the Mahabharata. How each of those events shape her and her peaceful life, forms the upshot of Kavita's book. In Karna's Wife, the way in which Uruvi's story is blended with Mahabharata is remarkable. Kane has done a laudable job in bringing out the emotions of a wife who, despite knowing the future of her husband, is helpless., the author has maintained the structure of the great epic intact. Karna has been an incarnation of courage, virtues and true friendship. It is said that behind every successful man there is a woman.

This captivating novel delves into the intricate relationships surrounding Karna, shedding light on the woman who played a crucial role in his life. She stood by him faithfully, offering unwavering support despite his flaws and misguided actions. However, when Karna's unwavering loyalty to Duryodhana jeopardized his own well-being, she valiantly attempted to guide him onto a different path, only to be met with resistance. The poignant moment when Uruvi, Karna's conscience-keeper, made the heartbreaking decision to leave him after Draupadi's humiliation at the hands of the Kauravas is a testament to her strength and integrity. Even as the impending doom of the Kurukshetra war loomed large, Uruvi tried to dissuade Karna from participating, knowing the dire consequences that awaited him. Despite her best

efforts, Karna's steadfast allegiance to Duryodhana remained unshakeable, causing him to turn a deaf ear to Uruvi's counsel. Through Uruvi's perspective, this novel breathes life into forgotten characters, offering a fresh and empathetic retelling of their stories. The author's narrative skillfully explores new facets of the tale, such as the tragic death of Madri following Pandu's demise, a sinister scheme orchestrated by Shakuni, as well as the poignant union of Arjuna and Subhadra, which further fueled Duryodhana's animosity towards the Pandavas. Additionally, the novel delves into the heartbreaking stories of Ekalavya, wronged by Drona for the sake of Arjuna, and Ashwatthama, a deeply conflicted soul torn between loyalty to his father and his friendship with Karna and Duryodhana. Vidura's character adds a layer of complexity to the narrative, spotlighting the ostracism he faced due to his lineage, underscoring the intricate web of alliances and betrayals that shaped the epic saga.

The novel delves into multiple dimensions of characters like Kunti, shedding light on the lesser-known aspects of her character, particularly her abandonment of her first child Karna which tragically impacted his life. Furthermore, the intricate and undefinable relationship between Draupadi and Karna is explored in detail. Additionally, the narrative also uncovers the compelling tale of Gandhari, a beautiful and resolute woman compelled by Bhishma to marry the blind king Dridarashtra. Through the eyes of Kane's Uruvi, the unsung heroines like Bhanumati, Hidumbi, and Parshavya, Vidura's wife, are given a voice in the story, emphasizing the shift towards celebrating and acknowledging women's roles and stories that were traditionally overlooked. In the backdrop of this rich narrative are the shifting societal norms evident in the contemporary context of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, where women are increasingly empowered, wealthy, and enjoying more privileges than ever before.

2. CONCLUSION

By"Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen" Kavita Kane serves as a valuable literary exploration that intricately weaves together the often overlooked stories of virtuous women within contemporary mythological tales. Through the lens of Uruvi's narrative arc, the author skillfully resurrects and illuminates the rich yet neglected experiences of women as depicted in the epic saga of Mahabharata. By delving deep into the intricacies of Uruvi's character, Kane adeptly challenges and subverts the traditional and predominantly male-centric perspective that has long dominated the retelling of this ancient epic. In doing so, Kane provides a platform for the voices of these women to be heard and acknowledged, thus offering a fresh and empowering interpretation of a classic mythological narrative. Through Uruvi, readers are invited to contemplate the multifaceted layers of female agency, resilience, and tenacity that have historically existed within these tales but have often been overshadowed by the dominant male-driven narratives. In essence, "Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen" emerges as a poignant and thought-provoking testament to the enduring strength and significance of women within the realm of myth and legend, offering a timely and compelling reexamination of their roles in shaping the broader tapestry of epic storytelling.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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