

**VOICING THE SELF: A TRANSNATIONAL FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF  
KAVITHA KANE'S LANKA'S PRINCESS AND MANINI J ANANDANI 'S  
MANDODARI QUEEN OF LANKA**

*Dissertation*

*Submitted to the University of Calicut in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the  
award of Degree of Master of Arts in English Language and Literature*

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### **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that this dissertation entitled **Voicing the Self : A Transnational**

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### **Chapter I**

#### **Introduction**

Mythology revolves around a collection of myths, and it often involves retelling these ancient stories. These myths are deeply rooted in tradition, and they continue to inspire writers across Indian literature. Mythological fiction combines ancient legends with imaginative storytelling, creating captivating worlds filled with gods, heroes, and mythical creatures. This genre offers a blend of fantastical

elements and cultural insights, making it rich and timeless. Two of the greatest mythologies in Indian literature are the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. Mythology includes a set of myths or tales within a specific cultural or religious background. These stories typically feature gods, heroes, and mystical occurrences and serve to clarify natural events, societal customs, and human actions. The *Ramayana*, an esteemed epic in Indian mythology, tells the story of Prince Rama's life and adventures. Written by the sage Valmiki, it follows Rama's quest to save his wife, Sita, who has been kidnapped by the demon king Ravana. This tale emphasizes principles of duty, righteousness, and loyalty.

The *Ramayana* is more than just a myth - it serves as a cultural and spiritual foundation that shapes Hindu values, art, and traditions. Its stories are honoured in celebrations like Diwali and portrayed in traditional dance, theater, and art throughout India. Indian literature boasts a tradition of talented mythology writers who have skilfully reimagined and retold these ancient myths and legends. Among them, Devdutt Pattanaik stands out as a famous mythologist and writer. His accessible retellings of Indian mythology and folklore explore Hindu myths with a modern twist. In addition to Pattanaik, there are many male and female

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writers contributing to the vibrant tapestry of Indian literature. Notable authors include M.T Vasudevan Nair, Anand Neelakandan, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, and Anuja Chandra Mouli. These writers delve into India's rich mythological heritage, offering fresh perspectives and reinterpretations. Two influential female writers in this genre are Kavitha Kane and Manini J Anandani.

Both are known for their feminist viewpoints and their ability to breathe new life into ancient myths through modern retellings. Interestingly, both writers focus on female characters from the *Ramayana*. Their novels provide fresh insights and perspectives, enriching the mythology of this epic tale. Two important female characters in Hindu mythology, Surpanakha and Mandodari, play contrasting roles in

the epic *Ramayana*, showcasing different aspects of morality, agency, and consequence. Although both are connected to the demon king Ravana, their stories and characters differ, providing a deeper understanding of the complexities of human (and rakshasa) behavior.

Surpanakha, Ravana's sister, serves as a symbol of unrestrained longing and revenge in the *Ramayana*. Her fateful encounter with Rama and Sita in the forest sets off a series of events culminating in the epic's climax. Surpanakha's initial infatuation with Rama reveals her yearning for connection, but her inability to handle rejection transforms her into a source of conflict. When Lakshmana disfigures her, it starkly illustrates the repercussions of unchecked desires and hasty decisions. Surpanakha's manipulation of her brother Ravana, driven by wounded pride, ultimately leads to Sita's abduction and the brutal war between Rama and Ravana. Through Surpanakha, the *Ramayana* delves into the ruinous impact of uncontrolled emotions and the never ending cycle of vengeance.

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On the other hand, Mandodari, the chief queen of Ravana, is a symbol of wisdom, loyalty, and moral strength. Despite her high status, Mandodari is portrayed as the voice of reason and conscience in Ravana's court. Her efforts to dissuade Ravana from his evil ways demonstrate her dedication to righteousness and her care for her husband and kingdom. Mandodari's unwavering loyalty to Ravana, despite his faults, highlights her complex character torn between duty and moral beliefs. Her sorrow over Ravana's downfall not only reflects her personal grief but also the tragedy of a ruler consumed by arrogance and foolishness.

Mandodari's story serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of moral choices and the consequences of compromising one's values.

The connection between Surpanakha and Mandodari, both linked to Ravana through blood and marriage, represents the contrast between destructive urges and ethical principles. Surpanakha drives the story towards its inevitable ending with her



actions, while Mandodari's unwavering moral values offer a counterpoint to the ensuing chaos and sorrow. Through their characters, the *Ramayana* demonstrates the intricate balance of desire, obligation, and fate, providing enduring insights into morality and the intricate nature of human (and divine) conduct. *Lanka's Princess* by Kavita Kané is a captivating novel that delves into the life of Surpanakha, a lesser known character from the Indian epic, *Ramayana*.

In this thought-provoking work, Kane skillfully shifts the spotlight to Surpanakha, offering readers a fresh perspective on her story. Surpanakha, the sister of the demon king Ravana, is often depicted as a vengeful and manipulative figure in traditional retellings of the *Ramayana*. However, in *Lanka's Princess*, Kane presents a nuanced portrayal of this complex character. The novel primarily unfolds from Surpanakha's point of view. Through her eyes, we witness her experiences,

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emotions, and motivations. This shift challenges preconceived notions and invites readers to empathize with her. Kane takes us on a journey through Surpanakha's life—from her childhood in the kingdom of Lanka to her encounters with Prince Rama and his brother Lakshmana in the forest. We learn about her desires, struggles, and the events that shape her destiny. Surpanakha's infatuation with Rama sets off a chain of events that ultimately leads to the devastating war between Rama and Ravana. Kane explores the complexities of love, jealousy, and betrayal, revealing the impact of these emotions on Surpanakha's choices. As a woman in a male-dominated world, Surpanakha grapples with her identity.

Kane portrays her inner turmoil and quest for acceptance, shedding light on the challenges faced by powerful female figures. By centering the narrative on Surpanakha, Kane humanizes her character. Readers are encouraged to reevaluate their perceptions of this misunderstood figure from Indian mythology. Surpanakha is an overlooked character in the story of the *Ramayana*, despite being Ravana's sister. She was born in Lanka as the daughter of Kaikeshi and Vishravas. They named her

Meenakshi because she had eyes resembling those of a fish. Meenakshi was the first girl born after three sons. Unfortunately, her mother didn't hold much affection for her, resulting in neglect. Kaikesi, her mother, cared more for her sons.

In secret, her mother referred to her as 'Chandranakha' due to her perceived ugliness and sharp nails. Only her grandmother truly loved her. This asura grandmother even bestowed upon her the powers of a witch. Despite her difficult upbringing, Kaikesi continued to favour Ravana, which fueled resentment in Surpanakha. Her sharp nails and challenging circumstances eventually transformed her into the fearsome Surpanakha. During her childhood, Ravana troubled her immensely. In an act of defiance, she decided to marry Ravana's enemy, Vidyujiva, marking the

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beginning of her grudge. However, Ravana later killed Vidyujiva, further intensifying Surpanakha's resentment. The pivotal moment that solidified her transformation into Surpanakha occurred when Lakshmana killed her own son. Surpanakha's life became one of isolation, labelled as a monster. Kavitha Kane raises thought-provoking questions: Is she truly a monster, or is she a victim of a man's world? While the world attributes her actions to being the cause of the Rama-Ravana war, nobody truly understands the depth of her struggles.

She fights alone for her rights, navigating the emotional complexities of Lanka's era,

Ravana's rule, love, and betrayal. Ultimately, she seeks to justify her actions.

*Mandodari Queen of Lanka* by Manini J. Anandani is a captivating novel that provides a unique perspective on the character of Mandodari, the queen of Lanka and

wife of the demon king Ravana from the Indian epic, *Ramayana*. Mandodari, considered one of the most beautiful Apsaras, was married off to the mighty Ravana, the legendary king of Lanka. Born as the daughter of Asura king Maya and Hema, she was the reincarnation of Madhura. Despite her beauty, Mandodari faced struggles after her marriage. Her pious nature challenged her husband's growing aspirations, and she grappled with insecurities. As Ravana's wife, Mandodari navigated the

complexities of their marriage while also wrestling with her own desires, ambitions, and convictions. She advised Ravana to follow the path of righteousness, even as he made blunders that ultimately led to the downfall of Lanka.

Throughout the narrative, Mandodari emerges as a multifaceted character, not merely defined by her relationship to Ravana. She possesses her own agency and strength.

Portrayed as a compassionate and insightful queen, Mandodari sought to uphold justice and righteousness, even in the face of her husband's tyranny. The novel delves into her relationships with other key characters, including her son Indrajit (also

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known as Meghnad) and her daughter-in-law Sita. These interactions provide depth and complexity to her character, revealing inner struggles, loyalties, and sacrifices. As the epic unfolds, Mandodari grapples with loyalty to her husband and devotion to dharma (righteousness). She ultimately confronts the consequences of Ravana's actions and the devastation wrought by the war with Lord Rama. Despite Ravana's wicked deeds and injustice, the author portrays Mandodari as a woman who loves her husband, regardless of the magnitude of his crimes. The story highlights the destruction faced by her family and country due to Ravana's actions.

Transnational feminism talks about the structure of social change and social transition among the global world. It refers both to the practices of women's movements around the world and to a theoretical perspective in which women theorize and strategize for women's rights and gender justice across national boundaries. It recognizes the interconnectedness of gender inequality across borders and cultures. It seeks to address not only the struggles faced by women in different parts of the world but also the complex ways in which systems of power intersect with gender, race, class, sexuality, and other identities. Transnational feminists work towards promoting solidarity 'you must never behave as if your life belongs to a man. Do you hear me?... your life belongs to you and you alone' (Adichie 75). challenging global structures of oppression, these lines reflect transnational feminism

by emphasizing individual agency and autonomy for women ,challenging patriarchal norms that subordinate women to men a woman 's life should be defined or controlled by male authority, promoting a feminist perspective that transcends cultural and national boundaries and advocating for social justice. The study attempts to analyze Kavitha Kane's *Lanka princess* and Manini J Anandani's *Mandodari Queen of Lanka* in the context of transnational feminism. Gender

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discrimination, patriarchal subjugation, tackling with stereotypes and forging new identities are explored theoretically.

*Lanka princess* explores themes of feminism gender, power dynamics in ancient Indian society. It can be seen in this story that a woman is neglected because of her colour and gender in a patriarchal set up. She is a marginalized character, who is denied of her agency. Society treats her with contempt. She is ultimately punished for expressing her agency. Her story can be interpreted as a commentary on the constraints placed on women who dare to challenge societal norms and expectations. Surpanakha's character highlights the importance of questioning traditional gender roles and advocating for women's autonomy and empowerment. Through her narrative, Kane invites readers to reconsider the portrayal of female characters in mythology and to recognize the inherent feminist themes within their stories.

In *Mandodari Queen of Lanka* by Manini J. Anandani, the character of Mandodari presents a nuanced portrayal of feminism within the context of ancient Indian mythology. Mandodari is often overshadowed by her husband, Ravana, yet she demonstrates strength, intelligence, and resilience in navigating the patriarchal society in which she lives. As queen, Mandodari faces numerous challenges and constraints, but she also exercises agency and influence, particularly in moments of crisis. Her character challenges traditional gender roles and expectations, highlighting the complexities of power dynamics within relationships and society.

Through Mandodari's story, Anandani offers a feminist interpretation that invites readers to reconsider the roles of women in mythology and to appreciate the strength and agency of female characters.

The project is structured in five chapters, starting with an introduction. It is divided into an introduction, three core chapters, and a conclusion. The first chapter

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delves into the Mandodari agency and patriarchal resistance. The second chapter explores colonial narratives and gender subversion in the stories of the Lanka princesses. The third chapter focuses on reimagining narrative decolonial reading and feminist solidarities in both novels. The final chapter serves as a conclusion, summing up the project

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## **Chapter II**

### **Resisting Structures of Patriarchy**

Manini J. Anandani is one of the most prominent and dynamic female writers. She is a passionate feminist and mythologist known for her contemporary Indian literature in English. While her works focus on women's fiction, her approach to feminism is optimistic. Manini J. Anandani, the acclaimed author of *Mandodari Queen of Lanka*, is a talented Indian writer known for her captivating storytelling and imaginative narratives. With a passion for literature and a talent for reinterpreting classic tales, Anandani has established herself as a prominent figure in the literary world. Anandani's writing career started with a profound love for mythology and ancient Indian epics. Inspired by the vast landscape of Hindu mythology, she set out on a mission to shine a spotlight on overlooked characters, allowing them to share their own unique stories and perspective.

Anandani's *Mandodari Queen of Lanka* delves deeply into the intricacies of Mandodari, the spouse of Ravana, the demon king in the epic *Ramayana*. Through

thorough research and creative vision, Anandani vividly captures Mandodari's character, delving into her feelings, challenges, and resilience amid the turbulent events of the *Ramayana*. Anandani's writing is defined by its lyrical prose, vivid imagery, and deep understanding of human nature. She skillfully merges mythology and fiction, revitalizing ancient tales and encouraging readers to view well-known stories from a new angle.

Her novels delve into themes of deprivation, isolation, and oppression faced by women, offering a thoughtful and nuanced exploration of these issues. Mandodari is a key figure in the Hindu epic *Ramayana*. She is the spouse of Ravana the ruler of Lanka. Portrayed as a noble and upright queen, Mandodari consistently advises

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Ravana against his misdeeds. Her unwavering loyalty and moral character shine through even in the face of her husband's imperfections. Mandodari, although unrecognized by the world, is a compelling character in the epic *Ramayana*. The novel *Mandodari Queen of Lanka* delves into her perspective, portraying her as the Princess of Mayarashtra who becomes the first wife and favourite of Ravana the antagonist. Alongside the goddess Sita Mandodari holds significance in the story of *Ramayana*. *Mandodari Queen of Lanka* by Manini J. Anandani offers a modern fictional retelling of Ravana's wife shedding light on her complex character. Mandodari, one of the pancharatnas and a beautiful apsara, was originally cursed by Parvati to live as a frog for twelve years before transforming into a girl and being named Mandodari. Known for her beauty, humility, and individuality, Mandodari's story is truly captivating. 'princess don't go hurting. Princess are born to marry a handsome prince and...'  
(Anandani 1).

This highlights a conventional and stereotypical perception of gender norms, specifically focusing on the expectations placed on women in fairy tales and historical accounts. It suggests that women are only expected to fulfil domestic and marital responsibilities, restricting them from participating in activities that are often seen as

bold or daring, like hunting. She is portrayed as a virtuous and righteous queen remaining loyal to her husband despite his imperfection. Mandodari exemplifies moral integrity and acts as a voice of reason, trying to advise Ravana against his misdeeds. Even after her husband's defeat she continues to represent dignity and faithfulness.

While she holds a position of influence within the kingdom of Lanka, her power is often overshadowed by Ravana's dominance. Despite this, Mandodari is portrayed as a wise and virtuous woman who tries to advise Ravana against his destructive

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actions. Her ability to subtly influence Ravana's decisions through her counsel and wisdom showcases her impact on power dynamics. Despite her limited agency in comparison to Ravana, Mandodari's character demonstrates the potential for influence within patriarchal structures. Her moral strength and unwavering support for righteousness further solidify her legacy as a symbol of integrity and resilience.

In the *Ramayana*, Mandodari's portrayal is complex showcasing a woman who adeptly handles intricate power dynamics in patriarchal systems specifically as both the queen of Lanka and the wife of Ravana. Even though she knows her husband's shortcomings, she stands by him, emphasizing her dedication to her marital responsibilities and the societal roles expected of her as a queen. In a patriarchal society that typically limits women's roles Mandodari stands out for her agency and influence. Instead of being a passive bystander she actively participates in conversations with Ravana using counsel and persuasion to try to sway his decisions. By successfully influencing Ravana, Mandodari showcases her subtle yet important impact on the power dynamics of the royal court. The conflict between loyalty and duty is exemplified in Mandodari's unwavering support for Ravana despite his actions conflicting with her moral values. This internal struggle highlights the complexities of marriage and societal expectations for queens.

Mandodari's agency is constrained by the patriarchal norms and structures in the

society depicted in the *Ramayana*. Despite her intelligence, wisdom, and moral integrity, her power is always secondary to Ravana's showcasing the unequal power dynamics ingrained in patriarchal systems. Mandodari embodies dignity and strength as she faces adversity.

Despite being marginalized in patriarchal systems, she remains dignified and true to her values, standing as a moral compass in the turmoil of Ravana's rule.

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Mandodari's portrayal in the *Ramayana* delves into the complexities of gender norms, personal agency, and loyalty in patriarchal societies. Despite facing societal limitations and male domination, she showcases resilience, intelligence, and moral strength, shedding light on the intricate challenges women encountered during the times and highlighted the themes of sexual and gender discrimination.

In the hierarchical structure of Lanka, Mandodari's position can be explained by her roles as both queen and wife, each with specific duties and responsibilities within the societal framework of the *Ramayana*. In her role as Queen of Lanka, Mandodari holds a position of power and influence. Her main responsibility is to support and aid her husband, King Ravana, in ruling the kingdom. This entails supervising court matters, running the palace, and taking part in important royal events. Mandodari is seen as a symbol of grace, wisdom, and poise, serving as an example for women throughout the kingdom. In her role as Ravana's wife, Mandodari is tasked with the responsibilities of a consort and partner. She is expected to offer emotional support, maintain household harmony, and secure the continuation of the royal lineage by bearing children. Mandodari's unwavering loyalty and devotion to Ravana are crucial aspects of her role as his wife, despite any reservations she may have about his behaviour.

Mandodari's position in the hierarchy of Lanka is determined by her connection to Ravana. Despite being queen, her authority is overshadowed by her husband's power.

Nevertheless, her intellect, sagacity, and ethical principles enable her subtly but



meaningfully impact Ravana's choices, illustrating her autonomy within the confines of patriarchal customs. The hierarchy of Lanka reveals Mandodari's struggle with navigating gender roles, power dynamics, and responsibilities in the *Ramayana*, shedding light on the difficulties women encounter while trying to fulfill their duties

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as queens and wives in patriarchal societies. Analysing Mandodari's story from the *Ramayana* through an intersectional perspective involves looking at how gender, caste, and power shape her identity and agency. As a woman, Mandodari faces societal constraints and expectations due to her gender. Despite being queen and wife, her power is limited by patriarchal norms that prioritize male authority. Her agency is restricted by her roles as a wife and mother, requiring her to navigate complex power dynamics in both familial and societal spheres.

In ancient India's hierarchical society, caste determines social status and opportunities. Mandodari's high caste status as queen provides her with privileges and resources but also subjects her to scrutiny and expectations regarding her lineage's honour. Her caste intersects with her gender, influencing how she negotiates power within society's patriarchal structures. Mandodari's experience is complicated by her roles as queen, wife, and mother.

Despite her formal authority as queen, her power is overshadowed by her husband, King Ravana. As a wife, her agency is tied to her relationship with Ravana, requiring delicate negotiations to maintain influence. Balancing her maternal instincts

with her duties as queen and wife adds another layer of complexity. Mandodari shows resilience and resistance despite the constraints of gender, caste, and power dynamics. Through her counsel to Ravana and subtle influence on his decisions, she asserts her agency and tries to mitigate the consequences of his actions. Her moral integrity and strength challenge the injustices of Ravana, demonstrating her ability to navigate and resist patriarchal structures. Overall, Mandodari's narrative illustrates the intricate

intersections of gender, caste, and power in ancient Indian society, highlighting the complexities of women's experiences and their negotiation of identity, agency, and resistance within patriarchal frameworks.

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In the *Ramayana*, Mandodari showcases acts of resistance and defiance, challenging societal expectations despite her limited position. Providing counsel to Ravana, Mandodari consistently advises him against his wrongful actions, including his relentless pursuit of Sita and his conflict with Lord Rama. Despite being his wife, she boldly opposes his decisions, questioning his authority and trying to steer him towards doing what is right thereby questioning Ravana's authority. Mandodari bravely questions Ravana's decisions, boldly confronting him over his abduction of Sita. Her act of defiance highlights her strong character and refusal to tolerate injustice. In a bid to sway Ravana from his destructive ways, Mandodari appeals to his conscience and moral compass. She emphasizes the repercussions of his actions and urges him to prioritize the kingdom and its people. Mandodari's strategic resistance includes protecting her children from the harm caused by Ravana. Despite her loyalty to her husband, she puts her children's safety first, showing her readiness to oppose Ravana for their sake.

In the story, Mandodari remains morally upright and holds on to her principles despite facing challenges. Her unwavering dedication to what is right and just acts as a quiet form of rebellion against the oppressive rule of Ravana. Mandodari's acts of defiance in the *Ramayana* portray her as a brave and principled character who stands up against unjust power structures that subordinated her power and agency. The *Ramayana* portrays Mandodari's defiance of traditional male-dominated beliefs through various instances. She questions Ravana's decisions, specifically his abduction of Sita. This showcases her independence of thought and refusal to blindly follow him. Mandodari also advocates for peace and reason, urging Ravana to release

Sita and avoid conflict with Lord Rama, demonstrating her commitment to diplomacy and non-violence.

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Furthermore, she vehemently opposes Ravana's plan to sacrifice their son, Indrajit, emphasizing her maternal instincts and determination to protect him. Mandodari also speaks out against injustice, particularly towards Sita, contrary to societal expectations, showing her empathy and courage. These examples portray Mandodari as a strong, principled woman challenging patriarchal norms and standing up for her beliefs and autonomy. Mandodari's rebellious actions in the *Ramayana* are crucial for a feminist interpretation of the epic, showcasing themes of empowerment and liberation in various ways. Mandodari's agency and autonomy are evident in her questioning of Ravana's actions and her promotion of peace. Instead of simply following Ravana's orders, she actively communicates, challenges his decisions, and stands up for her own beliefs and values. Mandodari shows empathy and solidarity by defending Sita and speaking out against injustice. Her actions demonstrate her support for other women, aligning herself with the oppressed and marginalized to advocate for their rights and dignity.

In the *Ramayana*, Mandodari's unwavering protection of her son, Indrajit, demonstrates her maternal strength and determination to ensure his safety. By disobeying Ravana's orders to shield her child from harm, she challenges patriarchal norms that expect women to be submissive. Mandodari's actions assert women's right to question and resist oppressive structures, contributing to a narrative of female empowerment and liberation in the epic. Her defiance serves as a testament to women's capacity to challenge and transform societal injustices, ultimately promoting a feminist interpretation of the story. Mandodari's agency is highly significant in a feminist interpretation of the *Ramayana* for various reasons.

By challenging traditional gender roles and defying societal expectations of women being submissive, Mandodari showcases that women are capable of making

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independent choices even in a patriarchal society. She provides a representation of female experiences in the narrative, offering a unique perspective on the challenges and injustices faced by women in a male-dominated world. Mandodari's resistance against oppression serves as a source of empowerment for female readers, inspiring them to stand up for their rights and challenge societal norms. Additionally, her agency adds complexity to the portrayal of feminine identity in the *Ramayana*, highlighting women as multi-faceted individuals with their own desires and beliefs. Through her actions, Mandodari promotes feminist values of equality, autonomy, and empowerment, emphasizing the importance of dismantling oppressive systems that restrict women's freedoms. In a feminist perspective, Mandodari's empowerment is noteworthy as it challenges the stereotype of passive female characters in mythology. By highlighting her strengths, agency, and role in the narrative 'I am not a possession to be owned or controlled. I am a human being with dreams and ambitions' (dangarembga's 118). This powerful statement reflects themes of identity, autonomy and empowerment that are central to the novel's narrative .

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### **Chapter III**

#### **Colonial Narratives and Gender Subversion**

Kavitha Kane is one of the most renowned Indian writers known for her unique writing style that combines feminist themes with mythology. Her writing aims to explore the connection between the mind and soul. Kavita Kane, the distinguished author of *Lanka's Princess*, is a highly regarded Indian writer known for her engaging stories that blend mythology and historical fiction. Through her love of storytelling and meticulous attention to detail, Kane has captured the hearts of readers with her fresh perspectives on familiar figures and events from ancient Indian epics. From her innate love of literature and fascination with the intricate tapestry of Indian mythology, Kane began a literary journey driven by her curiosity to delve into the

hidden stories and viewpoints within these eternal tales. Fueled by her imagination and profound respect for the cultural legacy of her country, she ventured to recreate the myths and legends that have influenced Indian civilization for centuries.

In her book *Lanka's Princess*, Kane explores the world of the *Ramayana*, a beloved epic in Hindu mythology, to bring attention to Surpanakha, the often ignored sister of Ravana. With careful research and expert storytelling, Kane crafts a captivating narrative that dives into Surpanakha's inner thoughts, passions, and challenges, presenting readers with a new outlook on this mysterious character. Kane's writing is known for its lyrical prose, vibrant imagery, and deep exploration of human emotions and relationships. She expertly weaves historical truths with creative storytelling, animating ancient figures and painting the grand landscapes of India in rich detail.

Kavita Kane, known for her novel *Lanka's Princess*, has captivated readers with a series of highly regarded books that delve into various aspects of Indian history

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and mythology. Her passion for storytelling and her talent for immersing readers in past eras have earned her praise from audiences in India and beyond. Continuing to shine in the literary world, Kavita Kane showcases her captivating narratives and dedication to preserving and revitalizing the myths and legends of her heritage. With each new story, she invites readers on a journey of discovery and ensures that the timeless tales of Indian mythology remain engaging and significant for future generations.

In her novel *Lanka Princesses*, she sheds light on the character of Surpanakha from *Ramayana*, giving her a transformation like never before. Kane's dynamic writing style gives a powerful voice to Surpanakha, evoking feelings of exile and exploring the themes of womanhood and feminism. Her work is a powerful blend of expression and exploration. In her historical fiction books she creatively retells the stories of influential female figures from Indian mythology and history. Her novels

provide new insights into these characters, presenting a unique perspective on their lives. Some of her well-received works include *Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen*, *Sita's Sister*, and *Menaka's Choice*.

*The Lanka Princesses* echoes the themes of works like *The Palace of Illusions* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, offering a perspective of the Mahabharata through Draupadi's eyes, or "The Forest of Enchantments" from the same author, focusing on Sita's viewpoint in the *Ramayana* and *The Tigress of Mysore* by Sujata Massey, a tale centred around the warrior queen Kittur Chennamma. Each of these novels provides a distinct exploration of women in Historical /mythological settings. Surpanakha holds a crucial role in the Hindu epic, *Ramayana*, being the sister of Ravana, the demon king of Lanka. Her encounter with Rama and Lakshmana in the forest is a turning point in the story. She tries to seduce Rama, who remains loyal to his wife, Sita. In a

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fit of rage, Surpanakha tries to harm Sita, resulting in Lakshmana disfiguring her. This incident sparks a series of events leading to the epic battle between Rama and Ravana, with Surpanakha's actions often seen as the trigger for the larger conflict between good and evil in the *Ramayana*.

Surpanakha, the 'notorious' character from the *Ramayana* and sister-in-law of Ravana, is portrayed as an evil figure. Kavita Kane's narrative follows the transformation of Meenakshi into Surpanakha, highlighting the significant role, society plays in shaping an individual for better or for worse. Kane provides a detailed account of Surpanakha's life, marked by suffering and obstacles. Meenakshi, originally known as Lanka's queen or princess, was the daughter of Vishrava and Kaikesi, with two brothers named Vibhishana and Kumbhakarna. Lanka's Princess presents Surpanakha as a complex character who challenges traditional gender norms in the *Ramayana*. Instead of portraying her as a stereotypical villainous temptress, Kane delves into Surpanakha's motivations and desires, showcasing her longing for acceptance and love within her family.

Surpanakha is depicted as a woman who defies societal expectations, showing boldness and assertiveness in her interactions with others, particularly Rama and Lakshmana. Despite her loyalty to her brother Ravana, Surpanakha's desire for independence sets her apart from traditional submissive female characters in ancient epics. Through Surpanakha, Kane offers a feminist perspective that celebrates agency, autonomy, and complexity, challenging the conventional portrayal of women in mythology. Surpanakha's characterization as a defiant figure who breaks traditional gender roles makes her a compelling and thought-provoking character in *Lanka's Princess* and the larger *Ramayana* narrative.

Meenakshi's birth brought an unexpected child into her family. At the beginning of the story, it is evident that her mother Kaikesi displays a sense of alienation towards her. 'It's a girl!' (Kane) 1. Motherhood holds precious treasures. The bond between a mother and daughter is sacred and essential. A daughter is the foundation of both womanhood and motherhood. However, in the case of Kaikesi, her perspective of her own daughter, Meenakshi, is entirely different. She harbours negative feelings towards her from the moment she is born, viewing her as a symbol of disappointment and dissatisfaction, evident in her words. "It was a daughter, not a son, her heart sank, her aspirations drowning in a flood of disappointment and easy tears" (Kane 1). Kaikesi expressed disappointment in realizing that all her expectations have been completely dashed. Meenakshi is being neglected as if she were an unlucky child. 'This girl has cheated me of my plans, she thought angrily, a faint stirring of unease making her more restless' (Kane 2). The episode is a clear reflection of racial and gender discrimination. She carries the disregard inherited from her mother directly.

She's scrawny and much darker than me! 'Yes, she's dark,' smiled Vishravas, and again she heard the doubt in his voice. 'But she's a newborn and all babies can't be as bonny as Kumbha Or Vibhishana!' Kaikesi flushed guiltily. 'Yes, because of me!'

she said bitterly. ‘you had said that each of our children will be remarkable, that each shall change the future of our race, Our family. How is this dark monkey going to bring us good fortune? No one will ever marry her!’ There were more chances that this little girl would not get married because of her asura blood” (Kane 3).

Meenakshi is symbolically named after her beautiful fish-like eyes and mahogany skin tone. When Kaikesi noticed her daughter's unusual nails, she wanted to name her Chandranakha. However, it was her mother who first referred to Meenakshi as Surpanka or monster. “Why can you not behave like a girl? Always

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fighting and squabbling, hitting boys and throwing stones and scratching the eyes out of anyone who provokes you. Surpanakha, that's the right name for you, you monster!” (Kane 9). Kaikesi, Meenakshi's own mother, exhibits gender and racial discrimination, creating a toxic dynamic between mother and daughter. Kaikesi's actions, including mistreating her daughter, are unforgivable and contribute to the negative impact on Meenakshi's character. Meenakshi unknowingly internalizes this harmful behaviour, fostering the development of negative traits.

“Yes, I am a monster!’ screeched Meenakshi, her eyes flashing, baring her claws at her mother. See them? If anyone hurts me, I shall hurt them with these!! I am surpanakha!’ Her high -pitched voice was filled with rage. Her nails glinted in the sunlight.” (Kane 9). This marks the initial phase of Meenakshi's transformation into Surpanakha. She faced severe neglect even within her own home during childhood, experiencing ignorance even from Ravana. Kaikesi displayed more freedom, affection and love towards Ravana, gifting him a necklace of nine pearls and dubbing him Dasamukh - the ten-headed one. Surpanakha's childhood in Lanka was filled with sorrow and loneliness, leading to a loss of self-reliance and identity.

Meenakshi grimaced at her reflection in the mirror. What she saw never pleased her. It did not today too. There was a change in her physical appearance, but not a pleasant one. She was now twelve years old —yet she



was still dark, skinny, gangly child of a girl with a burgeoning bosom, too large for her tiny waist and slight, short figure. She scowled and instinctively pulled her bodice tighter as if trying to hide a deformity. She closed her eyes in frustrated prayer. Her lack of charm and her plainness had never been so pronounced. She had been praying, waiting, hoping for a miracle, but this wasn't the year of miracles, she realized. It was a sign that she would always

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remain an oddity, an outcast; she would never be a part of her family of good lookers (Kane 20).

This portrays a diminishing self-awareness of her unique identity, leading to a sense of inferiority. She has become immobilized by her struggle to differentiate herself from others.

With dishevelled hair and wild eyes, she is constantly compared to others. She received words of comfort and praise only from her grandmother, Tharaka. “You are beautiful with the most exquisite eyes —that's why you were named so!”(Kane 21). The best instruction for Surpanakha comes from her grandmother, who believes that skin colour holds no significance when it comes to femininity. Dark skin is just a colour and does not diminish one's beauty. Tharaka emphasizes the importance of female anatomy, informing Surpanakha that the female body nourishes and sustains new life for infants, thus making complete the journey of womanhood.

In her novel, Kavita Kane presents a unique representation of Surpanakha, the Princess of Lanka that diverges from the conventional depictions shaped by colonial perspectives. In the colonial era, Indian mythological figures like Surpanakha were frequently viewed through a Eurocentric perspective that emphasized stereotypes and exoticism. In *Lanka's Princess* Kane provides a portrayal of Surpanakha that aims to restore her agency and complexity as a character, pushing back against common colonial portrayals that painted her as a simple villain or seductress. Through Kane's narrative, Surpanakha's motivations, desires, and relationships are explored, presenting

her as a multi-faceted and intricate figure rather than a flat caricature.

In addition, Kane's depiction of Surpanakha breaks away from colonial stereotypes of Indian women, specifically those that portray them as passive and submissive. Surpanakha's strong will, independence, and ability to make her own

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choices in the story challenge the colonial perception of femininity, showcasing the resilience and power of female figures in Indian myths. Overall, *Lanka's Princess* provides a fresh interpretation of Surpanakha that distances itself from colonial influences, presenting her as a multidimensional and empowered character with her own autonomy and motivations. Through this portrayal, Kane contributes to the decolonization of Indian mythology and literature, offering a more authentic and nuanced representation of characters like Surpanakha. Throughout history, colonial narratives have shaped how characters like Surpanakha from the *Ramayana* are interpreted. A major consequence of this influence is the tendency to depict Surpanakha as a simplistic villain or seductress, mirroring the colonial stereotypes of alluring and perilous women from the East.

These representations frequently uphold patriarchal conventions and rationalize colonial rule by depicting non-Western societies as uncivilized and in need of Western intervention. Kavitha Kane challenges colonial interpretations in *The Lanka Princess* by portraying Surpanakha as a complex and multifaceted character with her own agency and motivations. Kane explores Surpanakha's backstory, desires, and relationships, providing a more nuanced perspective that goes beyond the traditional colonial stereotypes. By humanizing Surpanakha, Kane challenges the demonizing colonial narrative surrounding her character. Colonialism plays a significant role in moulding depictions of gender, power, and agency in the *Ramayana*, impacting the perceptions of characters like Surpanakha. Conventional analyses tend to highlight male authority and female obedience, mirroring colonial beliefs about gender norms and power structures. However, Surpanakha's resistance to these conventions, especially in her encounters

with Rama and Lakshmana, disrupts colonial narratives by asserting female empowerment and independence. Looking at Surpanakha through a feminist lens

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reveals the deep impact of colonial interpretations. These narratives not only uphold stereotypes and support patriarchal beliefs but also push women's voices to the margins, within the *Ramayana* and beyond. In *The Lanka Princess*, Kane disrupts these colonial depictions of Surpanakha, empowering female characters in Indian mythology and adding to feminist discourse. To summarize, colonial narratives heavily influence the way characters like Surpanakha are viewed in the *Ramayana*, affecting perceptions of gender, power, and agency by perpetuating colonial stereotypes and patriarchal ideals. Kavitha Kane's depiction of Surpanakha in *The Lanka Princess* challenges these views and provides a feminist perspective that aims to empower and add depth to female characters in Indian mythology.

Kavitha Kane's *Lanka's Princess* delves into the intertwining impacts of colonialism and patriarchy by focusing on the character of Surpanakha. Through Surpanakha, Kane sheds light on the complex dynamics between colonial and patriarchal oppression, showcasing both the entrenchment and resistance within these systems of power. Colonialism enforced Western values and narratives that marginalized indigenous cultures and perpetuated stereotypes and hierarchies. Similarly, patriarchy imposed male dominance and control, subjugating women and dictating their roles and behaviors. As a character, Surpanakha embodies the challenges of navigating both colonial and patriarchal oppressions. She faces marginalization due to her gender in patriarchal society and her demon heritage in the colonial context of the *Ramayana* narrative. Surpanakha's desires and actions defy both colonial and patriarchal norms, making her a rebellious figure within the story.

Kane uses Surpanakha to illustrate how individuals can resist and challenge oppressive systems. Her agency, assertiveness, and refusal to conform to societal expectations are acts of defiance against colonial and patriarchal oppressions.

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Surpanakha's character symbolizes the potential for liberation and empowerment even within oppressive structures.

Additionally, in her portrayal of Surpanakha, Kane prompts readers to ponder the connections between colonialism and patriarchy and how they impact marginalized individuals. Through Surpanakha's story, Kane reveals the complexities of oppression and how individuals confront and defy these oppressive systems. In *Lanka's Princess*, Kavitha Kane delves into the tensions between colonialism and patriarchy through Surpanakha's character, highlighting her agency and resistance to challenge prevailing narratives.

Ultimately, Kane encourages readers to reevaluate their perceptions of power, oppression, and liberation. Kavitha Kane's *Lanka's Princess* portrays Surpanakha as a strong character who challenges colonial and patriarchal oppression by demonstrating defiance and autonomy.

Despite facing marginalization and violence, Surpanakha uses different strategies to regain agency and empowerment in the narrative. Surpanakha exhibits a strong sense of self and assertiveness by rejecting societal expectations set by colonial and patriarchal systems. She fearlessly voices her desires and questions the established order, especially in her encounters with Rama and Lakshmana. Through her determination to not be silenced or oppressed, Surpanakha demonstrates her independence and resistance to restrictive norms. After experiencing violence and humiliation, Surpanakha is determined to seek revenge and justice against those who harmed her. Rather than remaining passive, she fights back to regain control and assert her strength. Her quest for justice showcases her unwillingness to be a victim and her resolve to ensure that wrongdoers face consequences for their actions. Surpanakha strategically creates alliances and establishes support networks to enhance her position and achieve her objectives.

Despite encountering marginalization and solitude, she actively seeks like minded allies who can help her challenge oppressive systems. Her skill in building relationships and utilizing resources reflects her resilience and ingenuity when faced with challenges.

Choosing to embrace her identity and heritage, Surpanakha rejects the colonial and patriarchal narratives that aim to belittle her demon lineage. She takes pride in who she is and refuses to feel ashamed, finding power in her roots. Surpanakha's acceptance of her identity is a form of defiance against attempts to erase or downplay her cultural heritage. Going against gender norms, Surpanakha challenges traditional expectations of women and defies patriarchal norms that limit them to passive roles. Through her actions, she asserts her independence and refuses to be confined by societal gender norms. Surpanakha's defiance highlights her determination to reclaim power and autonomy in a society that marginalized and oppressed her.

In Lanka's Princess, Surpanakha demonstrates her resilience, resourcefulness, and determination in reclaiming agency and empowerment. She fiercely resists both colonial and patriarchal oppression, becoming a powerful symbol of resistance against oppressive structures. Surpanakha's acts of defiance and autonomy inspire readers to challenge injustice and reclaim their own agency in the face of adversity. Examining *The Lanka Princesses* by Kavitha Kane through a feminist lens would entail analysing the representation of women in the novel, their autonomy, and their significance in the story. This approach would involve delving into topics like male-dominated systems, societal gender norms, and the defiance or perpetuation of conventional gender roles. Furthermore, one could investigate how the author challenges or upholds stereotypes through the characters and the plot as a whole.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Reimagining Narratives: Decolonial Readings and Feminist Solidarities**

Manini J. Anandani and Kavitha Kane offer modern reinterpretations of characters from the *Ramayana* in their works. Anandani's portrayal of Mandodari delves into the complexity of her role as Ravana's wife, while Kane's *The Lanka Princess* explores the life and struggles of Surpanakha, Ravana's sister. These fresh perspectives provide nuanced insights into these female characters, challenging traditional narratives and encouraging readers to rethink their importance in the epic story. Manini J. Anandani's *Mandodari Queen of Lanka* and Kavitha Kane's *Lanka Princess* present modern re-imaginings of Mandodari and Surpanakha in literature. These reimagined portrayals challenge dominant colonial and patriarchal narratives by focusing on the unique viewpoints and experiences of these female characters. Anandani's *Mandodari Queen of Lanka* likely delves into the inner turmoil, agency, and resilience of Mandodari, the wife of Ravana.

The characters Mandodari and Surpanakha in the books *Mandodari Queen of Lanka* by Manini J. Anandani and *Lanka's Princess* by Kavitha Kane are portrayed with several striking similarities, enhancing their roles within the story of *Ramayana*. Despite facing challenges, both women - Mandodari as Ravana's faithful queen and Surpanakha as his formidable sister are depicted as strong and resilient figures, showcasing their inner strength and determination. The relationships they have with Ravana are intricate and varied. Mandodari, while faithful to her husband, often challenges his impulsive choices, demonstrating her wisdom and moral principles. Surpanakha's connection to Ravana is built on loyalty but is also marred by personal tragedy, such as her disfigurement by Rama and Lakshmana, which fuels her desire for revenge.

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Both characters are depicted with complex emotions, delving into their vulnerabilities, aspirations, and internal conflicts. This portrayal humanizes them beyond their traditional mythological roles, providing a more profound and nuanced insight. Furthermore, they wield influence in their own ways; Mandodari through her

efforts to advise Ravana and soften his actions, and Surpanakha by triggering significant plot twists through her grievances. Their stories are filled with sorrow - Mandodari's anguish as Lanka falls and Surpanakha's individual losses - highlighting the poignant and human sides of their narratives. These parallels underscore how modern retellings breathe life and agency into these crucial female figures, enhancing contemporary interpretations of the epic.

By humanizing her character and delving into her emotions, desires, and struggles, Anandani challenges the colonial and patriarchal narrative that often depicts Mandodari as simply a victim of her husband. The novel offers a nuanced portrayal of Mandodari as a complex individual with her own agency and voice, challenging traditional depictions of her as passive and submissive. Alternatively, Kavitha Kane's *Lanka Princess* presents Surpanakha, Ravana's sister, in a new light as a complex character with her own agency and motivations. Through delving into Surpanakha's past, desires, and relationships, Kane challenge the traditional patriarchal narrative that paints her as the source of conflict in the *Ramayana*. Instead, the novel offers a more compassionate portrayal of Surpanakha, shedding light on the challenges she endures and the intricacies of her character beyond being a mere plot device in the epic story.

In modern reinterpretations in art and media, visual depictions of Mandodari and Surpanakha have the potential to disrupt traditional narratives. By using imagery and symbolism, artists and filmmakers can explore the complex inner lives of these

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characters, challenging stereotypes and presenting new viewpoints that challenge colonial and patriarchal ideologies. In general, contemporary interpretations of Mandodari and Surpanakha in literature, art, and media offer diverse perspectives that question dominant colonial and patriarchal narratives. Focusing on the lives and viewpoints of these women characters, these reinterpretations help reconsider gender roles and power dynamics in ancient epics like the *Ramayana*, enhancing our comprehension of these age-old tales. These novels provide insightful views on their

hardships and experiences, emphasizing the significance of female solidarity in overcoming societal obstacles and asserting independence in a patriarchal world

In Kavita Kane's *Lanka's Princess Surpanakha* is presented, as a complex character who defies societal expectations and stands up for her own desires. Surpanakha's relationships with other female characters, such as Mandodari, Sita, and Urmila, are marked by empathy, mutual understanding, and shared experiences of oppression. Together, these women are able to challenge the patriarchal norms of their society and draw strength from their solidarity. In *Mandodari Queen of Lanka*, Mandodari forges connections with fellow female figures like Surpanakha and Sita, drawing strength and understanding from their collective struggles with discrimination and mistreatment. These alliances embolden Mandodari to question societal norms and assert her own independence in the midst of hardship.

My marriage with Vibhishana was a political necessity. Thinking about Dashaanan's many wives that I had envied and he had claimed to be 'political necessities' made me laugh now. For the first time, I was a queen before I was a wife. I had braced myself for the women to look at me differently after my marriage to Vibhishana, but nothing changed. If anything, they respected me. Bajrajala, Meenakshi, Dhanyamalini and Nayanadini and I were bound by the

same grief. We had all lost our husbands and our sons. We had all survived to live a life of sacrifice (Anandani 265).

After ascending to the throne, Mandodari showcased the strength and unity of women who have overcome similar obstacles and hardships. Both novels highlight the importance of feminist collaborations among women in fighting against patriarchal oppression and asserting their own power. By coming together in solidarity, showing empathy, and offering mutual support, the female characters in these tales navigate the challenges of their societies and create opportunities for themselves within oppressive systems.



In both the novels, Mandodari and Surpanakha play pivotal roles in uniting feminist groups from different cultures and nations. Their stories inspire resistance, empowerment, and solidarity among women facing similar challenges in patriarchal societies, emphasizing the need for unity and support among them. In Anandani's novel, Mandodari is portrayed as the epitome of a tormented wife in the ancient *Ramayana* tale. Despite her position as the queen of Lanka, she faces the oppressive rule of her husband Ravan and battles with her own moral dilemma as she witnesses his cruel actions. Mandodari's story strikes a chord with women of diverse backgrounds who have endured oppression in their own relationships. Her compelling narrative serves as a catalyst for empowerment, highlighting her inner conflicts and eventual rebellion against Ravan's wrongdoings. Mandodari's path to empowerment serves as a source of inspiration for women to challenge patriarchal dominance and assert their own autonomy.

In *Lanka's Princess*, Surpanakha symbolizes the resistance against societal norms and patriarchal suppression. Discriminated and subjected to violence for her non-traditional goals and ambitions as Ravan's sister, Surpanakha's story showcases

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the shared struggles of marginalization and bias that women endure worldwide. Through her connections with other female figures, Surpanakha promotes feminist unity by establishing bonds of solidarity and empathy. Her narrative serves as a testament to the power of women coming together to empower and liberate themselves from oppression. “She would not surrender to the dark tide of her ineluctable destiny”(Kane 184) emphasizes Surpanakha's determination to persist despite the inevitable fate awaiting her.

The stories of Mandodari and Surpanakha go beyond cultural and national borders, connecting with women from various backgrounds who have faced oppression and marginalization. Their tales ignite a sense of defiance by exposing the injustices that women endure in patriarchal societies and motivating collaborative

efforts towards empowerment and solidarity. Through showcasing the value of feminist partnerships, these narratives play a pivotal role in advancing the feminist cause by underlining the significance of unity and support in combating patriarchal systems. Examining Mandodari in *Mandodari Queen of Lanka* by Manini J. Anandani and the princess of Lanka in *Lanka's Princess* by Kavitha Kane from a transnational feminist perspective uncovers numerous significant discoveries and perspectives. Both Mandodari and the princess of Lanka experience oppression in patriarchal societies, showcasing the commonality of gender based discrimination and violence. Their stories transcend cultural and national divides, demonstrating the shared struggles of women worldwide.

The characters form feminist alliances by building connections with other female characters. Mandodari shows solidarity with Surpanakha and Sita, while the Lanka princess forms bonds with Mandodari, Sita, and Urmila. These alliances go beyond cultural and national boundaries, highlighting the significance of working

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together and supporting each other to challenge patriarchal systems. Mandodari and the princess of Lanka exemplify strength and empowerment as they defy oppression. They defy patriarchal constraints, question societal norms, and assert their independence. Their stories serve as a source of inspiration for those seeking to resist patriarchal oppression and take control of their own destinies.

Both Mandodari and the Lanka princess are portrayed as intricate, multidimensional characters with their individual desires, imperfections, and challenges. Their stories defy stereotypes and common depictions of women in literature and culture, presenting detailed portrayals that showcase the range of women's experiences. The examination of Mandodari and the princess of Lanka through the lens of transnational feminism reveals the interconnected nature of gender, power, and agency in literary and cultural contexts. This highlights the significance of prioritizing women's perspectives and stories, and emphasizes the necessity of unity

and collaborative efforts in the battle for gender parity.

Examining Mandodari and the Lanka princess through the lens of transnational feminism provides important perspectives on the intricacies of gender, power, and agency in literature and culture. Their stories not only help to uncover and question patriarchal systems, but also underscore the endurance, fortitude, and unity of women in various cultural and national settings. The characters of Mandodari and Surpanakha are depicted with intricate depth, providing a unique perspective on feminist unity. Anandani's depiction of Mandodari showcases her as a complex character who skillfully manages the difficulties of her relationship with Ravana, all while showing compassion and comprehension towards Sita. Mandodari's interactions with Sita demonstrate the significance of women encouraging one another, even in the face of societal pressures and limitations.

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Kavita Kane examines Surpanakha's character in a new light, delving into the complexities beyond her demoness label. By illustrating the challenges she faced due to patriarchal norms and the courage needed to defy them, Surpanakha's tale emphasizes the significance of female unity in the fight against oppression and injustice. "And she had been the princess of the land: Lanka's princess" (Kane 295). Through delving into these stories, readers are prompted to contemplate how women can uplift and empower one another, even when faced with difficulties. The characters within these narratives act as role models for feminist unity, motivating readers to unite in the fight for equal rights and freedom.

The characters of Surpanakha in *Lanka's Princess* and Mandodari in *Mandodari Queen of Lanka* are likely to strike a chord with diverse feminist groups because of their complex characterizations and the powerful themes they represent. Both characters can connect with intersectional feminist groups by emphasizing how gender, race, and class intersect.

Surpanakha's experiences as a demoness and a woman of colour, alongside

Mandodari's challenges within a patriarchal society, reflect the unique obstacles faced by women who navigate various intersecting identities. Their narratives rise above cultural divides, connecting with feminist communities worldwide through the exploration of universal themes like empowerment, strength, and sisterhood among women. Surpanakha and Mandodari's stories resonate with readers from all walks of life, uniting them through shared experiences of both challenges and victories.

Both characters defy stereotypes and misunderstandings about women in non Western cultures. Surpanakha and Mandodari assert their own independence and combat conventional gender norms, providing narratives that empower women in their respective cultural settings. The narratives of Surpanakha and Mandodari offer

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valuable perspectives on how colonization and patriarchy impact the lives of women. By delving into the nuances of power dynamics and methods of resistance, their stories add to the dialogue on decolonization and liberation in feminist discourse. Although not directly focused on queer identities, the intricate portrayals of Surpanakha and Mandodari's characters can resonate with queer feminist groups. Their narratives defy conventional notions of femininity and emphasize the significance of accepting a wide range of gender and sexual identities. In general, the depictions of Surpanakha in *Lanka's Princess* and Mandodari in *Mandodari Queen of Lanka* are complex and nuanced, with the ability to motivate and empower feminist groups in different settings and circumstances.

The stories of Surpanakha have important implications for feminist activism and empowerment. Both Surpanakha and Mandodari find ways to reclaim their agency, even in the face of patriarchal constraints. Their narratives serve as powerful examples for feminist activism, urging women to assert their independence and resist oppressive societal conventions. The interactions of Surpanakha and Mandodari with other female characters, like Sita, demonstrate the crucial role of unity among women. Their stories underscore the strength of sisterhood in confronting and opposing patriarchal

oppression, promoting feelings of empowerment and united effort among feminists. ‘I was happy for Sita’. (Anandani 266). In a touching moment, Mandodari shows compassion and comprehension towards sita demonstrating her profound character and her capacity for empathy, even in difficult times.

Through the depiction of multifaceted female characters from various backgrounds, these stories advocate for intersectional feminism and inclusivity in feminist activism. They emphasize the importance of acknowledging the overlapping forms of oppression that women experience due to factors like race, class, and caste,

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urging activists to embrace more inclusive and intersectional methods of empowerment. Surpanakha and Mandodari disrupt the traditional stereotypes and archetypes assigned to women in mythology and literature. Their narratives challenge the conventional ideas of femininity and victimization, offering alternative role models for feminist activists to admire and follow.

The retelling of these characters' stories empowers women to reinterpret and reclaim narratives that have historically marginalized or misrepresented them. This narrative empowerment serves as a powerful form of activism, allowing women to assert their voices and reshape cultural narratives. To conclude, the tales of and Mandodari provide important perspectives and motivation for feminist advocacy and empowerment, highlighting ideas of autonomy, unity, diversity, and storytelling ownership. These stories encourage feminists to analyse traditional tales and beliefs, while also encouraging a feeling of empowerment and unity among women. ‘change is one thing acceptance is another’ (Roy 209).

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## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion**

Transnational feminism recognizes how different kinds of discrimination are

linked across countries and works to combat them through worldwide unity and action. It highlights the significance of recognizing how gender intersects with other factors like race, social class, sexual orientation, and nationality in shaping the lives of women globally. Transnational feminism is a feminist perspective that recognizes the connections between gender, race, class, and country on an international level. It challenges the prevalence of Western-focused feminist viewpoints and emphasizes the significance of specific contexts and knowledge. By examining how globalization, colonialism, and capitalism affect women and gender minorities variably around the world, transnational feminism promotes unified and cooperative actions to combat global gender disparities. It also underscores the significance of intersectionality, and considers the experiences of migrants, refugees, and diasporic groups in influencing gender relations.

The novels *Mandodari Queen of Lanka* by Manini J. Anandani and *Lanka's Princess* by Kavitha Kane both provide a deep examination of gender, power, and agency through a transnational feminist perspective. By retelling the tales of Mandodari and Surpanakha from the *Ramayana*, the authors explore the intricacies of ancient South Asian culture while also addressing issues that are relevant to modern feminist discussions. The characters of Mandodari and Surpanakha are portrayed as complex individuals who must confront the limitations imposed by patriarchal society while also asserting their independence in unique ways. The authors aim to challenge the common belief that these women were merely escorts to male characters by providing them with depth and nuance, showcasing their personal desires, challenges, and goals.

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The study of transnational feminism in English literature involves analysing how literature mirrors, questions, and interacts with the key concepts and issues of transnational feminist theory. This method explores how stories transcend cultural and national borders, how worldwide power structures impact women's experiences, and how various aspects of gender intersect with race, class, and other identities. Stories in

literature frequently depict themes such as migration, exploitation of global labour, human trafficking, and the effects of colonialism and globalization on women. These narratives shed light on the intricate aspects of women's lives across various regions of the globe.

Transnational feminist literature delves into the intersection of various aspects of identity, like race, class, and sexuality, in shaping women's lives. The authors emphasize the links between different forms of oppression, showcasing the interconnected nature of these issues. In this type of literature, voices and viewpoints from the Global South take centre stage, challenging existing Western narratives and showcasing the empowerment of women in these regions. Themes of solidarity across cultures and feminist advocacy are prevalent, with literature providing a platform for envisioning and expressing global feminist alliances and tactics for resistance.

Examples in English Literature Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* delves into the impact of the Nigerian Civil War on women's lives, touching on issues of race, class, and colonialism. Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* explores the intricacies of caste, gender, and colonial history in India. Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* depicts the experiences of a Bengali family in the United States, grappling with themes of migration, identity, and cultural displacement. Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* sheds light on the struggles women face in post-colonial Zimbabwe, addressing education, race, and gender issues.

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Within academic discussions, transnational feminist literary criticism involves dissecting such works to uncover their contributions to wider feminist dialogues and movements worldwide. Additionally, the novels provide detailed insights into the connections between gender, caste, and class, demonstrating how these factors influence women's experiences across various time periods. Through their depiction of power dynamics in the *Ramayana* story, the author encourage readers to analyse traditional ideas of heroism, villainy, and autonomy, prompting them to question how

these narratives support and sustain patriarchal beliefs. *Mandodari Queen of Lanka* and *Lanka's Princess* play an important role in transnational feminist discussions by highlighting the stories and perspectives of women who are frequently overlooked in traditional narratives.

Through a feminist perspective, the authors reimagine well known characters to prompt readers to consider the common challenges that women have faced throughout history and across different cultures. By emphasizing the need for unity and action against gender-based discrimination, these narratives encourage readers to reflect on the universal struggles of women and the importance of advocating for gender equality. When retelling stories that focus on Mandodari and Surpanakha, writers often delve into their agency and perspectives, challenging traditional patriarchal interpretations. These narratives examine how gender, caste, and class influence their lives. In some retellings, Mandodari is portrayed as a strong and independent queen, emphasizing her agency beyond her role as Ravana's wife.

Authors explore her struggles, aspirations, and the limitations imposed by patriarchal society. Similarly, Surpanakha's characterization goes beyond her usual depiction as a troublemaker. Authors delve into her background, desires, and the discrimination she faces as a demon woman. These narratives critique patriarchal

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norms and highlight how gender, caste, and class intersect to shape women's experiences, providing a more nuanced understanding of their lives. These narratives play a key role in transnational feminist dialogues by showcasing the common challenges women face regardless of geographic or cultural divides. By depicting Mandodari and Surpanakha as empowered individuals with agency, the stories resonate with women worldwide who confront patriarchal systems and bias.

They highlight the need to acknowledge the interconnectedness of women's experiences around the world, illustrating that even though circumstances may vary, the core obstacles remain the same. These novels highlight the strength and defiance



of Mandodari and Surpanakha in the face of oppressive systems, sparking unity and advocacy around the world. They emphasize that the battle for gender equality and women's rights is a universal cause that demands joint efforts. Authors promote the significance of empathy, comprehension, and solidarity among women of different cultures, nurturing a global sisterhood and empowerment.

Transnational feminist views are expressed not only in literature but also in advocacy and solidarity efforts that aim to combat gender-based oppression globally. *Mandodari Queen of Lanka* and *Lanka's Princess* provide valuable perspectives on the challenges and successes of women from diverse backgrounds, but it is crucial to turn this understanding into proactive steps. The portrayal of sisterhood in the novels *Mandodari Queen of Lanka* by Manini J. Anandani and *Lanka's Princess* by Kavita Kane plays a crucial role in shaping the storylines and developing the characters' relationships. The story *Mandodari Queen of Lanka* portrays sisterhood through Mandodari's interactions with her sisters and other women in the epic.

As the queen of Lanka and Ravana's wife, Mandodari faces intricate family and political challenges. Her relationships with her sisters are defined by loyalty,

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mutual respect, and the shared experience of belonging to a powerful and sometimes chaotic royal family. This sisterhood acts as a pillar of strength for Mandodari, giving her the support she needs to stay true to her values and remain resilient in the midst of her husband's aspirations and the eventual collapse of Lanka. The theme of sisterhood in *Lanka's Princess* is primarily explored through the character of Surpanakha, who is Ravana's sister. Her relationships with her brother and other family members play a central role in the story. Surpanakha's strong loyalty and thirst for revenge towards her brothers, especially Ravana, drive much of the plot. Despite her protective feelings towards her family, her sense of sisterhood is often clouded by her own ambitions and emotions. Kane's depiction of Surpanakha elucidates the complexities of sisterhood

within a royal family torn by power struggles and personal vendettas.

Both novels explore the theme of sisterhood to delve into the personal lives of their female protagonists, showcasing how these relationships impact their choices and behaviors. In *Mandodari Queen of Lanka*, sisterhood is depicted as a source of comfort and empowerment, aiding Mandodari in facing her challenges. On the other hand, *Lanka's Princess* illustrates sisterhood as a driving factor in Surpanakha's actions, occasionally causing harmful outcomes. To sum up, *Mandodari Queen of Lanka* highlights the positive and nurturing side of sisterhood, while *Lanka's Princess* delves into its complexities and challenges, showcasing the diverse nature of family connections in both stories.

The study sheds light on the perspectives of Mandodari and other princesses of Lanka in the *Ramayana* narrative, emphasizing their importance and significance. The stories illuminate their internal struggles, ambitions, and roles in the epic. Upon reflecting on these findings, we discover a diverse range of female experiences and perspectives that challenge conventional interpretations of the *Ramayana*. Mandodari

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is revealed as more than just a passive character; she is portrayed as a strong woman navigating complex power struggles and personal challenges. The impact of these insights on the field is significant, leading to a reassessment of gender dynamics and power structures in ancient epics.

By highlighting the voices of marginalized characters, we can better grasp the intricacies of storytelling and the human experience. Analysing how these reinterpretations are received in modern culture could provide valuable insights into changing attitudes towards gender and mythology. *Mandodari Queen of Lanka* and *Lanka's Princess* spark important discussions about representation, agency, and the timeless significance of ancient epics in influencing our perceptions of gender and power. 'She has the gift of accepting her life' (labiri 138). This phrase demonstrates feminist solidarity by recognizing a woman's agency and autonomy in embracing her

own life path, free from societal expectations or constraints .it celebrates her ability to define and accept her life on her own terms, fostering solidarity among women who value self -determination and individual empowerment.

Transnational feminism in literature expands feminist theory by exploring the connections between gender, globalization, and cultural identity. This perspective challenges the confines of Western feminism and shows how global economic, political, and social factors influence women's experiences in various ways. Through analysing literary works from this viewpoint, transnational feminism reveals the intricate power dynamics, effects of migration, and legacies of colonialism on women's lives. This approach promotes a more sophisticated understanding of feminism that encompasses diverse cultural stories and experiences.

Transnational feminism has become increasingly important in recent years as a way to understand the interconnectedness of women's experiences across cultures and

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borders. This approach challenges traditional feminist perspectives that focus primarily on Western experiences and instead calls for a more inclusive approach that recognizes the diverse realities of women globally.

This introduction sets the stage for an examination of transnational feminist themes in two key works of contemporary Indian literature: *Mandodari Queen of Lanka* by Manini J. Anandani and *Lanka's Princess* by Kavitha Kane. Transnational feminism emphasizes the global aspects of women's lives and struggles, recognizing that issues like gender inequality and violence are shaped by global forces.

*Mandodari Queen of Lanka* and *Lanka's Princess* offer new perspectives on female characters from the Ramayana, challenging traditional narratives and highlighting the relevance of transnational feminism. In *Mandodari Queen of Lanka*, Anandani portrays Mandodari as a complex character navigating a male-dominated world, while in *Lanka's Princess*, Kane offers a nuanced portrayal of Surpanakha, encouraging empathy and understanding for her character.

Both novels explore key transnational feminist themes such as war's impact on women and the struggle for autonomy. Overall, these works demonstrate the importance of a transnational perspective in understanding and addressing gender inequalities globally. By reimagining the stories of Mandodari and Surpanakha, Anandani and Kane contribute to a more inclusive and globally conscious feminist movement. Studying *Mandodari Queen of Lanka* by Manini J. Anandani and *Lanka Princesses* by Kavitha Kane has great importance in the progression of various academic fields such as literature, gender studies, and transnational feminist theory. These works provide valuable content for examination, exploring the experiences of female figures within the context of ancient Indian mythology.

Through a thorough analysis, this research enhances our insights into gender relations, cultural storytelling, and feminist discussions within a wide range of geographical and cultural settings. The study of novels like *Mandodari Queen of Lanka* and *Lanka Princess* offers valuable insights into how female perspectives are represented in mythological stories. These books provide detailed portrayals of women who are usually seen in secondary roles in traditional myths. By focusing on the stories and voices of these female characters, this research challenges established literary norms and broadens the scope of narratives that have often been overlooked. Additionally, analysing these texts contributes to our understanding of storytelling traditions and cultural heritage, illustrating the lasting impact of mythological themes on modern literature.

This investigation offers the valuable insights for gender studies through its intersectional analysis. By examining how gender intersects with race, class, and nationality, the research highlights the intricate nature of women's experiences and identities. Through the perspective of transnational feminism, the texts are analysed in connection to broader discussions on power, agency, and resistance. This type of analysis enhances our comprehension of how gender functions in various cultural

settings and emphasizes the significance of incorporating diverse viewpoints in feminist research. Furthermore, by delving into the portrayal of female agency and empowerment, this study adds to the ongoing discourse on women's rights and liberation.

Transnational feminist theory is advanced by exploring the texts *Mandodari Queen of Lanka* and *Lanka Princess* for insights into the relationship between gender, culture, and power dynamics.

This theory emphasizes the importance of solidarity and coalition-building across borders to promote gender equality. Through an analysis of how these

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narratives portray women's experiences in various cultural contexts, this research contributes to our understanding of global feminist movements and how women resist patriarchal systems. By challenging universal narratives about gender and power, this study encourages a more inclusive and intersectional approach to feminist theory that recognizes the diversity of women's experiences in different cultural and geographic settings.

To sum up, the examination of *Mandodari Queen of Lanka* and *Lanka Princess* provides valuable contributions to literature, gender studies, and transnational feminist theory. These analyses offer insights into the portrayal of women in mythological stories and delve into the connections between gender, culture, and power. By exploring these texts, this research addresses a significant void in current scholarly work, enhancing our comprehension of gender relations and feminist discussions across various cultural settings.

The project aims to contribute to a nuanced understanding of marginalized female characters in Indian mythology by addressing the following objectives: to emphasize narrative agency, explore how Mandodari and Surpanakha reclaim their stories and challenge traditional interpretations by navigating patriarchal structures

and asserting their voices and unravel how the stories of Mandodari and Surpanakha relate to wider feminist discussions and actions in various geographical and cultural settings.

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