

Gender Inclusivity vs. Non-Inclusivity in Kavita Kane's Select Novels

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ABSTRACT

Indian writing in English has dealt with many themes and concepts which relates to the current issues prevailing in the society. Inclusivity is one of the major concerns in interdisciplinary as well as transdisciplinary fields of literature in the contemporary period. Inclusivity in literature means the act of not excluding the people or members in the basis of gender, race, class, sexuality, disability etc. The research article central focus is on the concept of Gender Inclusivity, the difficulties in acquiring gender inclusion in the patriarchal Indian society is explained with the aid of the Indian mythology *The Ramayana*. Gender Inclusivity means the neutrality on gender concerns that's no bias or discrimination based on the masculine or feminine gender. At the present scenario, the attainment of Gender inclusivity in almost all fields is a big question mark due to the prevailing gender differences especially for women in the patriarchal Indian society. This article portrays the two different mind-sets of people in the society towards gender discrimination and gender neutrality in the Indian society. The main objectives of this research article are to explore the gender non-inclusive or male dominated Indian society, to understand the pain and sufferings of suppressed women in the contemporary society, to compare and contrast the society which is gender inclusive and gender non-inclusive society and to explicate the need for gender inclusive society in near future in order to maintain peace and harmony.

Keywords: Gender Inclusivity, Non-Inclusivity, discrimination, Woman sufferings and equality/neutrality.

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Indian writing in English deals with the concept of gender discrimination or gender non-inclusivity which acts as the significant part of study in this research article. Gender Inequality is the major concerning issues in the patriarchal contemporary Indian society. This article depicts the various opinions of people in the patriarchal diverse Indian society about gender issues especially sufferings of women. Some of the reasons for the prevailing gender inequality are lack of education for three fourth of women population in India, unequal treatment of women employees regarding wages and promotion in jobs, racism, societal mind-sets of people etc. Inclusivity is the recent developing theme in the literary field. Inclusivity is the concept that ensures equal opportunities to everyone in the society in spite of variations among people due to race, class, gender, physical and mental disabilities. Inclusivity is the results of the battle of social injustice against oppressed, women, marginalized and discriminated people in the society.

The article's central focus is on the Gender Inclusivity and bringing this gender inclusivity concept into practice is extremely difficult job in this patriarchal Indian society. Gender Inclusivity is the concept that surpasses equality in the society. It ensures that all opportunities, services and establishments to everyone

regardless of their gender as well as the male and female stereotypes don't define the societal roles. The article explores the gender inclusive and gender non- inclusive mind-sets of people prevailing in the same Indian society through Kavita Kane's two select novels *Karna's wife: The Outcast's Queen* and *Sita's Sister*. The research article portrays the sufferings of oppressed women through gender differences prevailing in the city of Ayodhya; simultaneously it also exhibits the gender inclusive concept through the people in the city of Mithila. The comparison of Gender Inclusivity and Gender Non- Inclusivity is explained with the help of the conflict theory.

Kavita Kane's first novel is *Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen* in which she has portrayed the life journey of the unsung hero of the Mahabharata Karna. In this novel, Kane showcases the struggle faced by Karna from his childhood because of him being an outcast was depicted in the vision of his kshatriyas wife Uruvi. The novel describes the independent lifestyle of princess Uruvi of Pukeya from her childhood till her swayamvar as well as the change in her living style after her marriage with Karna who was an outcast. This novel represents the gender inclusive mindset of few people as well as the gender non- inclusive mindset of people through the experience of Uruvi as a kshatriyas princess as well as a wife of an Outcast before and after her marriage in her life.

The novel *Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen* began with princess Uruvi reminiscing about the young archer Karna whom she had a glance at the archery contest conducted by Bhism Pitamaha and other ministers to validate the strength of the princes of Hastinapur. Uruvi was brought up by her father with all the freedom to study and go around places according to her wishes, "Uruvi's father allowed her to break free of norms..." (Kane, *Karna's Wife*, p. 15). Uruvi also had grown up with the mindset that why only girls have norms in the society and she hated the certain rules for the tag of a girl from a good family by the society. "The daughter detested the unsaid decree which demanded that a girl of a good family should be hidden away till it was time for her to get married. She played with her friends in Hastinapur, sang and danced with her cousins, rode horses with the Pandavas and the Kauravas, and climbed trees with Bhima and Vikarna, the Kaurava prince" (Kane, p.15).

King Vahusha of Pukeya was a great intellect and he decided to bring up his daughter as a person with knowledge against all odds in the patriarchal society. "For the Princess of Pukeya, her father was her world. Though a kshatriya, King Vahusha was an eminent scholar as well..." (20). During her young age, Princess Uruvi was stressed because she was not good at subjects like mathematics and astronomy in which her father was good, thus her father King Vahusha motivated her to find out her interest in other fields in which she may be good. Uruvi's father thus helped her to find her talents and she was interested in science based on plants, medicines etc. Uruvi was also talented in horse riding, with the help of her father she already had broken the norms that girls should be groomed up as princess instead she was trained as a horse rider. "While girls of her age were groomed to become dainty princesses, Princess Uruvi saddled her horse each morning to ride to the gurukul where she spent the day immersed in the world of medicinal herbs and other remedies" (20). So, from these incidents it's proved that few people are not differentiating people with gender. There are a gender inclusive people in the patriarchal society of Pukeya and Hastinapur.

Kavita Kane's another novel *Sita's Sister* describes the life journey of Urmila along with her sisters. The novel showcases the life of Urmila and her sisters from their childhood in Mithila and the change in their lives after marriage at the city of Ayodhya. The novel portrays the two different faces of society that is gender inclusive society and gender non- inclusive society through the people at the city of Mithila and Ayodhya. The differences between Inclusivity and Non- Inclusivity can be depicted in the novel through

the ruling of two kings that is King Dasarath as well as King Janak in Ayodhya and Mithila. Urmila was allowed to study Vedic verses from the young age by her father King Janak without considering her feminine gender. She could be able to read difficult words and sentences at a young age, she remembered all this when she was searching Sita as they're playing hide and seek. "King Seeradhvaj Janak, her father- the pronunciation of which name was easy for Urmila as she was used to reciting Vedic verses everyday – might be one of the most prosperous kings and a respected scholar,..." (Kane, *Sita's Sister*, p.8).

When the sisters were gossiping about the arrival of two princes at the time of Sita's Swayamvar, Urmila questioned whether it's for the scholars meeting that was conducted by King Janak every year at the city of Mithila. "And anyway, what's so unusual about guests coming over? Don't forget, the philosophy conference which father hosts each year at Mithila is on" (Kane, p.14). Urmila, Sita, Mandavi and Srutakirti all sisters were well versed in Vedas and other literature. Urmila even accompanied their father King Janak to all the conferences held across the country. "They were largely that, although they were well versed in Vedas and Upanishads, politics, music, art and literature... However, they had accompanied their father to all the conference and religious seminars across the country, experiencing a world that no princess had been allowed to visit" (14). From this incident, it's clear that King Janak brought up her daughters with all the knowledge against the societal rules. King Janak was not just the King and scholar but also renowned rishi himself. "Janak was no ordinary king; he was a renowned rishi as well, the favourite pupil of the famous rishi Yajnavalkya ... and sage Ashtavakra, from whom he learnt about soul and the true nature of the self" (28). Urmila had the quenching thirst for more knowledge because of her visits to all the conferences with her father, thus this quest for knowledge rather than any material things was instilled within her by her father 's knowledge and activities. "But Urmila yearned for more; she wanted to see more places, places she heard about through her growing years... But she knew that she, too, would be married off after Sita's swayamvar. Marriage did not hold much interest for Urmila but it was a social discipline she would have to conform to. She would rather seek knowledge instead of a suitor" (14).

Urmila's quenching thirst for knowledge made her a learned Scholar during the exile period of Ram, Sita and Lakshman. Urmila instead of wasting her time for her loneliness she utilized that time by learning many Vedas, political ideas, administrative tactics from the sage Vashista and other gurus of the Ayodhya's royal court. She got an invitation from her father and renowned scholar King Janak for attending the philosophical conference conducted every year at Mithila. Urmila was invited as a learned scholar not as daughter of King Janak but as a scholar. "Urmila got an unexpected invitation. It was from her father for the forthcoming philosophical conference – the prestigious *brahmanyagna*- which he hosted every year... He was requesting her to attend the annual symposium in her own right as an acclaimed scholar" (202). Urmila had got a chance to directly debate her ideas and views with referred sages, scholars and philosophers. This holds huge significance in Urmila's life as she attended the conference her father King Janak was really proud of her growth and achievement even during her low or bad times. He stated that Urmila's achievements credits had to be given to Lakshman because she was also in exile that's detached from everything that pain and separation polished her in intellectual and spiritual way as she became a learned scholar or pandit. "The exile made you understand the meaning of tapasya and thus made you a tapasvi. And as this great tapasvi who has gained spiritual understanding and intellectual attainment, I greet you today as a scholar" (207).

Gender Non- Inclusivity is the opposite of gender inclusivity. Gender Non- Inclusivity means people won't follow the gender neutral or gender equal society. Gender non- inclusive society must have differences in

gender among the people due to the patriarchy. At one side King Janak of Mithila ruled the city with no differences in gender, caste, race etc. as he acknowledged everyone with knowledge and wisdom. He even brought up her daughters with the knowledge of verses and other literature. The four sisters after their marriage at Ayodhya faced many difficulties as the common people of Ayodhya as well as the royal people in the court reflected the gender differences or inequality. When for sisters were welcomed at Ayodhya by the Queen Mother Kaikeyi she ignored Sita completely as she was an adopted daughter of King Janak which portrays a form of inequality or non-inclusivity. One day Manthara the chief maid and mother figure for Queen Kaikeyi visited Urmila in her palace in the name of giving sweets made by her sister Sita. Manthara asked Urmila to try cooking as painting would not satisfy her husband when he's hungry. This again proves that as wife woman must know the skill of cooking which reflects inequality.

When Ram, Sita and Lakshman decided to spend their lives in forest for next fourteen years nobody thought of the safety and well being of Sita instead Queen Kausalya was happy that Sita was fulfilling her duties as wife by accompanying her husband and she would look after Ram during the exile. "She looked at the two Queens, hoping they would stop Sita. But, instead, Kausalya looked pleased with her decision. 'Just as a good wife should be!' she said proudly. 'I give you my blessings, dear. Help him in his endeavour'" (111). When Bharat and others met Ram in the forest to return back to the kingdom, Ram refused to return Bharat decided to wait for Ram at Nandi gram living the life of an ascetic. At that time Urmila questioned Bharat as well as others that four brothers followed the dharma of son, brother and king but they're not following the dharma of husband when their wives are expected to follow the pathway way of their husbands without any demands. "So be it, Bharat, like your brothers Ram and Lakshman, you too shall live a life of an ascetic, free from the bond of worldly love and care. Who cares whatever happens to your wife and your family?' ... But is there no dharma of the husband for his wife? No dharma of the son for his mother? Is it always about fathers, sons, and brothers?" (169).

Gender Non-Inclusivity or Gender Inequality can be better explained with the aid of Conflict Theory. According to Open Education Sociology Dictionary, Conflict theory can be commonly defined as a theory that emphasizes the role of coercion, conflict, and power in society and that social inequality will inevitably occur because of differing interests and values between groups. Conflict theory defines society where there's a struggle for dominance among social groups. In the gender context, Conflict theory argues that gender is best understood as men attempting to maintain power and privilege to detriment of women. So, according to this gender perspective men are seen as dominant group and women are their subordinates. The conflict theorists argue that existence of this inequality or non-inclusivity is because of the dominant group or patriarchal society trying to maintain its power among people in the society.

The concept of Gender Non-Inclusivity or inequality in the two novels *Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen*, *Sita's Sister* as well as in the present society can be explicated through the aid of Conflict theory. In the novel, during Sita's swayamvar when Ravan the king of Lanka and Asura clan unable to lift the Shiv Dhanush he insulted the daughters of King Janak to balance his power and dominance before others. "...I cannot move it, none present in this room can. So, King Janak, do you wish your daughter to remain unmarried? Because no one in this room will be able to string the bow—it is impossible to even shift it. What sort of a suicidal condition have you laid for your daughter? Do you want her to remain a spinster?" (31).

When Bharat as well as other ministers failed to convince Ram to return to the palace after his father's death, they found out the solution that Bharat would rule the land until the real king Ram return from his exile and thus Bharat decided to rule the land from Nandigram while leading a life of an ascetic sacrificing

all worldly pleasures till Ram's return. Urmila argued that the four brothers and other ministers didn't thought of the women in the house before finalizing their decisions. She questioned Bharat and other brothers that they completely forgot the women in the family and how their decisions would affect their lives. Guru Kashyap of Ayodhya's royal court condemned Urmila of her accusations and she was not permitted to speak or question the decision of the future king and ministers. At this incident, once again the patriarchal mindset of men was reflected that tried to stop the questions of Urmila even though it's right. "Princess, how dare you speak such outrageous words?" interrupted Guru Kashyap furiously. 'Do you think this is your father, King Janak's court that encourages free thinking women like that philosopher Gargi to debate and argue shamelessly? This is not so! This is the assembly of the greatest minds of Ayodhya!'" (Kane, pp.169-170).

The research article clearly emphasize the presence of Gender inclusive as well as Gender Non- Inclusive society that's different mind-sets of people in the same area or region at patriarchal Indian society. The people at Ayodhya have the dominant or patriarchal mindset that was reflected in decisions taken by the King as well as the court ministers during the time of Ram's exile from the land. On the other hand, people and King Janak of Mithila followed the gender equal/ neutral society where everyone was given chances to share their opinions inspite of their gender. King Janak himself was a revered scholar and he got her daughters the princesses of Mithila as well learned who would accompany him to all the conferences. King Janak's royal court has female sage and scholar Gargi whose opinions as well as his daughter's opinions were also considered before finalizing any political decisions.

In the contemporary society, men and women are differentiated in almost all fields. At the work places, gender inequality was expressed through paying low wages for women employees than male employees even though the amount of work is equal for all. Even at the present time, in many villages education was provided only for male children not for female children. Gender Inclusive society is a must in order to bring peace and harmony in the society but putting it into practice is not an easy task. Many people in the present society are not ready to treat men and women as equals in all fields without looking at their gender differences. The mind-sets of people are completely drenched in the rules and regulations of patriarchy which was prevailing in India before ages. So, it is not easy to convince the men and women in India to change their mindset/ beliefs that is followed from the very ancient mythological period. This article concludes by stating that even though the present society is very advanced due the modern technological inventions still gender inequality exists due to the mind-sets of the people and there is a need for gender inclusive society where everyone are treated equal without any gender variations.

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