



**ETHNOCENTRISM AND EXOGAMY: A SOCIOLOGICAL
STANDPOINT IN KAVITA KANE'S KARNA'S WIFE: THE OUTCAST'S
QUEEN**

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ABSTRACT

The research article explores the concepts of Ethnocentrism and Exogamy practices among the people from the mythological period till present time in Indian Writing in English. The article also explores the changes that these practices had undergone over the years and substantiate the effects of this practices that is still prevalent in a brand new forms among the people in the present society. The effect of these two concepts in the mythological period can better explain through two theories namely Social Dominance theory and Social Identity theory. The main objectives of this article are to explore the transformation of the practice of Ethnocentrism and Exogamy from the mythological till the modern era, to portray the struggles and sufferings of men and women because of these practices, to understand the mindset of people affected by this kind of evil practices and finally to aware younger generation about the immediate need for the eradication of this practices in the contemporary society. This article also emphasizes the practices like Ethnocentrism and Exogamy had its effect on the younger generation which in turn corrupts their true mind. It also creates awareness that it's high time for the people to eradicate all these practices for the harmony of people living in society.

Key Words: Ethnocentrism, Exogamy, Outcast Marriage, Kshatriya and Sutas.

ETHNOCENTRISM AND EXOGAMY: A SOCIOLOGICAL STANDPOINT IN KAVITA KANE'S *KARNA'S WIFE: THE OUTCAST'S QUEEN*

Ethnocentrism and Exogamy was two important concepts in the field of sociology than literature. The research article's main aim is to trace these two practices that are followed in the mythological period and its importance among the people in the mythological period. The article also discovers the sufferings of people due to the prevalence of these practices in that mythological period through Kavita Kane's novel *Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen*. The research article on the whole tries to aware people about the damages this kind of practices can bring to mankind as it was prevalent even in the present society but with a different identity.

The concept of Ethnocentrism can be generally defined as thinking one's own group's ways are superior to others or judging other groups as inferior to one's own. The term "ethnocentrism" is used in the situations where ethnicity, inter- ethnic relations, and similar inter-group issues are taken into considerations. The word "ethnic" refers to the cultural heritage and the word "centrism" refers to the central starting point thus on whole it means judging other groups from one's own cultural point of view. In a simpler way, Ethnocentrism can also be defined as "making false assumptions about others ways based on one's own limited experience" (Barger). So, the assumptions an individual make on others can be mostly a negative judgments which reflects ethnocentrism. There are some extreme forms of ethnocentrism they are racism, colonialism and ethnic cleansing. Ethnocentrism concept was often used as a tool to promote the power of a particular group.

On the other hand, the concept of Exogamy is the social norm of marrying outside one's social group. Exogamy is also called as outcaste/out marriage, that's marrying outside

one's own group. Exogamy is usually associated with kinship and at time it's also associated with ethnicity, religion, caste and class. This concept was mostly common among the social groups known as clans or moieties (groups). There are two types of Exogamy they are Genetic Exogamy and Cultural exogamy. Genetic Exogamy is the practice of marrying outside of one's kin or blood relatives. Cultural Exogamy is the practice of marrying outside of one's cultural group. Cultural Exogamy can lead to some conflicts among the groups if the two cultures are too distinct. Thus, in this article both the concepts of Ethnocentrism and Exogamy can be seen interwoven in the unsung hero of the Mahabharata Karna's life that transforms his whole life's goal which can be studied through Kane's novel *Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen*.

Kavita Kane is a well known Indian woman Mythological novelist who is known for her voiceless mythological women characters as protagonists in her novels. Kane was born in Mumbai and she was a senior Journalist over two decades as well as the Assistant Editor of Times of India who later quit her job to become a full time writer. Kane was known for her gynocentric writings and feministic points of view in her novels. Kavita Kane authored seven novels and all her novels were translated into other languages like Hindi and Marathi. Kane's first novel which formed the base of her career as novelist was *Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen* (2014) which discloses the life of Karna in the vision of Uruvi the wife of Karna as well as the princess of Pukeya, Karna who was the outcast but by birth he was the elder Pandava Prince, a Kshatriya warrior.

The research article explores the portrayal of the ethnocentrism based on the differentiations in the classes prevailed in mythological time and it also depicts the criticisms that the people in that period had over the exogamy/out marriage through the marriage or Swayamvar of Princess Uruvi to Karna, the outcast through Kane's novel. This article also unearths the pain and sufferings of particular person/persons who were treated as low class

due to the superior ethnic culture prevailed in that period. It also describes the challenges and difficulties faced by the pair in the society whose marriage was exogamous in nature. At last, the article covers the themes of ethnocentrism and exogamy which was clearly elucidated through two important theories called social dominance theory and social identity theory.

Social Dominance Theory is a multi-level theory which concerns about the societies maintaining group based dominance. This theory was put forth by two researchers, Jim Sidanius and Felicia Pratto in 1999 that explained why the social structures supported the social hierarchies based on various traits. This kind of hierarchies was based on gender, race, age, economic status and other characteristics. All the societies must have social hierarchies in which there must be one superior social group that can be a religious, ethnic, national or racial one that had all privileges as it holds power in the society. Thus, the societies recognize the rights of dominants as virtuous and those norms were generalized in the whole society while the subordinates have little social recognition and they're always stigmatized. Social Dominance theory states that the inequalities among the groups are maintained in part through the use of disproportionate force against the subordinate groups.

In the novel, Karna's life was always filled with so many struggles and sufferings due to the prevalence of social hierarchy during the mythological time. During the mythological period, the society was divided into four divisions they are the Brahmanas, the Kshatriyas, the Vaishyas and the Shudras. In the epic Mahabharata, the Kshatriya was dominant social group than others as they were ruling Kings and Queens of the land. As Karna was a son of Adhiratha, king's charioteer his talents are not taken into consideration by the royals/kshatriyas of Hastinapur. Even his right for education was also denied due to his low caste and other situations happened in his life can be explained in detail in this article.

The childhood and the teenage of Karna were unpleasant as he was denied of many basic rights in the society because of his low caste/ethnicity as he was a sutaputra/

charioteer's son and not a Kshatriya warrior. Karna was not accepted by any Gurus/teachers in the Gurukul for learning archery, Vedas and Puranas as he was a sutaputra a low class boy, his basic right for education was refused by everyone even though he had talents of his own. "... the young Radheya, the son of Radha as he was also called, approached the best teacher of martial arts in Hastinapur- Guru Dhronacharya - the guru of the Kauravas and Pandavas, but the guru refused to teach him because he was not a kshatriya" (Kane, p.13). During his teenage he showcased his talents in an archery contest held at Hastinapur for the princes of Hastinapur, in the beginning everyone wondered about him as well as his talents but when his caste was revealed he was ridiculed by everyone in the public. "At the Hastinapur archery contest he outdid Arjuna, the rising star of the Kuru dynasty and the kingdom's most accomplished archer. But his moment of fame and credit crumbled when he was questioned about his birth and lineage. Once again, he was turned down for being a sutaputra..." (Kane, p.13). Karna's life journey was not only bed of roses as he faced many thorns on his path one such incident was Draupadi's rejection of Karna on her swayamvar stating that even though he was throned as the King of Anga he was not from Kshatriya clan. Draupadi's direct rejection without even letting him showcase his talents was a huge humiliation for Karna in front of many Princes and Kings,

'Wait!' she ordered. 'You may be a king now, O King of Anga, but you are not of royal birth. I am a king's daughter and will not wed a base- born man. As Draupadi, the yajnaseni, the one born out of fire, I insist on being declared a veeryashulka, a bride to be won by the worthiest and the very best. I will not allow a low- born sutaputra to participate in the challenge. Please do not proceed' (Kane, p.31).

Karna during his lifetime, offered alms to the people after completing his prayers to the Sun God. His only wish was to offer food to the poor people but no one was ready to receive food from him as he was a low cast sutaputra even after throned as the king of Anga

by Duryodhana. Thus, during his death Karna requested to Lord Krishna to fulfill this wish of him after his death that was later fulfilled. "The second boon Karna asked of me was to fulfill a wish of his that he had not been able to carry out himself- that of annadhanam- his wish to distribute food to others... That was one wish he regretted he could never carry out, as people avoided eating in the house of a low- born man" (Kane, p.290-91). .

As depicted in the theory of social dominance, which explains that a community/clan were treated as inferior to the culture /norms of other superior classes/communities in the society in the same way all through his life Karna was not accepted whole heartedly by the people in the society as he did not belong to the superior Kshatriya or Brahmin clan instead he was a sutaputra. Even after his death he was recognized and accepted by everyone because his true identity was revealed not for his talents and good qualities he has possessed all through his lifetime. Karna faced this issue of ethnocentrism in each step throughout his life as sutas were considered as inferior clan to the royals or kshatriya clan and he had overcome many difficulties while facing this problem of ethnocentrism even at the time of his birth which was clearly explained with the aid of social dominance theory.

The novel *Karna's wife: The Outcast's Queen*, also portrays the sufferings and difficulties undergone by both Princess Uruvi and Karna, as Uruvi was adamant in marrying him which was not acceptable in their society. Uruvi was the princess of Pukeya who fell in love with Karna when she saw him for the first time at the Hastinapur Archery contest. From that time she was dreaming about him and decided to marry him but it was not easy as he was low born sutaputra while she was the Kshatriya princess as the practice of Exogamy or as Manusmriti says the practice of Pratiloma was not accepted in the mythological period.

Uruvi was confused in the beginning about how to inform her parents about her love for Karna as they were ready to conduct the Swayamvar for her marriage and her love was one sided because Karna doesn't know about her. Uruvi's father was King Vahusha and her

mother Queen Shubra decided to ask Uruvi about her marriage before the swayamvar as they wanted to know her wish in the wedding. Thus, Uruvi's father King Vahusha decided to have a conversation with his daughter about her marriage and entered her room where he found out that something was not right, he inquired his daughter whether she was tensed about her swayamvar as she was already in love with someone. Uruvi was surprised at how well her father had known her and she finally confessed that she was in love with Karna which shocked her father to the core. King Vahusha was very mad at his daughter's decision and tried to make her understand that her decision was extremely wrong in the vision of the people in the society. But Uruvi was very adamant and argued with her father that she would marry Karna or else she would remain unmarried in her father's home. Uruvi's father was perturbed about his daughter's future due to her firm decision. "Society will not permit me to keep you unmarried, nor will it allow you to marry a charioteer's son. You can't marry a half-caste. You wouldn't be as crazy as that. You are a kshatriya girl- you cannot marry a sutaputra!" (Kane, p.18).

Uruvi was firm in her decision which was known to her father and finally he agreed half-heartedly worrying about her daughter remained as a unmarried woman it's better to be married to a sutaputra. King Vahusha shared his conversation with his daughter as well as her decision to his wife as well as Uruvi's mother Queen Shubra who in turn tried to pacify her daughter to change her decision by locking her in her room, days passed but nothing changed. Finally, both her parents accepted her choice reluctantly and sent invitations for her swayamvar or wedding ceremony. On the altar of her wedding ceremony, Uruvi at first was nervous about garlanding Karna by crossing others then she used her love for Karna as her strength to move forward. After her wedding with Karna there was many conflicts among the Kings and Princes who were invited as they considered her act as insults for their position and status. "The assembly broke into pandemonium. 'A swayamvara means choosing a

bridegroom from her same social class- a kshatriya bride cannot marry beneath her!' the princes raged. ... 'The princess cannot marry a man of a lower caste!' barked another incensed king..." (Kane, p.34). There were high chances of huge conflict in that swayamvar hall but the interruption of Lord Krishna stopped the madness and fury of the invited Kings and Princes.

After Uruvi's marriage with Karna, the couple went to Karna's home where his first wife Vrushali welcomed her warmly without any possessiveness or jealous feelings in her. But others in his family didn't accept her immediately; especially Karna's younger brother Shona hated her presence as she belonged to the Kshatriya community not their clan and according to him she was an outsider. The person to react most furiously to the news was Shona, Karna's younger brother. 'I am not against Karna bringing another bride home, but she's a Kshatriya princess, a stranger, an outsider who will never be able to mingle with us. She is sure to disrupt the peace of this house. Worse, she may take him away from us,' he warned, voicing aloud his parents' rising trepidation (Kane, p.45).

After few days of her marriage with Karna Uruvi noticed the changes among the people she had known and their behaviour towards her was completely changed. Many people who were her friends and relatives had spoke ill about her at her back due to her marriage with Karna who was an outcast thus she was also treated as a pariah's wife not as a princess of Pukeya as before times. When Uruvi attended lunch which was hosted by her mother many relatives didn't attended the feast and few who are present were rudely neglecting her that was actually a huge embarrassment for her parents which saddened her. "Uruvi rushed home quickly, promising herself she would never make her mother suffer ...But she could not run away from the humiliation of such a life, ...how people would treat her after her marriage to Karna" (Kane, p.59).

Karna and Uruvi's exogamous marriage was not accepted by everyone in the society that had its effect not only on Princess Uruvi as she married a sutaputra. The impact of their marriage was also reflected on Uruvi's parents who also dealt with few embarrassments and humiliations as they had given her daughter's hands to an outcast. Karna's marriage with Uruvi was approved by only some people who were dear to both of them as both their cultures and status was very different that was not approved by the people in the society.

These concepts of exogamy as well as ethnocentric views on his life shaped Karna as an individual in the society, the changes in his attitude, mixed emotions like anger, hurt, ego and sorrow reflected in him throughout his life. Karna was affected by the refusal of people to regard him with recognition as well as his wish to transform the social identity of him from "pariah" to the "brave warrior" which can be approached with the Social Identity theory. Social Identity theory was formulated by the social psychologists Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the year 1970's. Social Identity theory describes the conditions under which social identity becomes more important than one's own identity as an individual. This theory also specifically explains the ways in which social identity can have an influence on inter group behaviour. This theory was built under three concepts they are social categorization, social identification and social comparison. In the article "Understanding Social Identity Theory and Its Impact on Behavior" Cynthia Vinney states that, Social identity theory arose from the work of Henry Tajfel that examined the way perpetual processes resulted in social stereotypes and prejudice.

Kane's novel *Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen* in which Karna's life can be categorized into the three components that was his life events can be grouped into social categorization, social identification and social comparison as stated in the social identification theory, which resulted in the turn of events that transformed his life in a different path. Karna was born for Kunti and the Sun God before her marriage thus she left his son in the river that

was found by the couple Adhiratha and Radha who brought up the child as their own son even Karna was fondly called as Radheya the son of Radha. So, even though born as a Kshatriya he was known as the son of the charioteer a sutaputra who was categorized as the low caste according to the social hierarchy while the ruling classes or the kshatriyas were the dominant in the hierarchy. Thus, Karna was socially categorized as an outcast/ Pariah because he was the son of charioteer or sutaputra as he was a mixed caste. "Karna is a sutaputra – the son of a suta – one who is born of a Brahmin woman and a kshatriya father. The sutas traditionally served the kings and functioned as their rathakars, their charioteers... but none of them have been treated as friends of the king or their equals" (Kane, p.19).

Karna was socially identified as an outcast and the son of the king's charioteer Adhiratha, the thing Karna wanted to change was his social identity. He don't want to be a charioteer like his father instead his wish was to be identified as a brave warrior in the city of Hastinapur. Karna's wish was to become a great archer and he proved his talents in the archery contest at Hastinapur but he was not allowed to compete with the prince Arjuna as he was not a Kshatriya warrior, he was considered as an outcast compared to the superior Kshatriya clan in the social hierarchy. As princess Uruvi married Karna she was also categorized as a pariah's wife not as a Kshatriya princess and she faced many humiliations as well as embarrassing moments at many events.

At the present Indian society, there's the prevalence of the ethnocentrism or in other words the superiority of one particular caste/community which suppress the other caste/community. The suppressed classes were called as Dalits or Untouchables in the Indian Writing in English. Dalits are considered even lower than the Shudras who are at the lowest bottom. The concept of Untouchability was abolished legally in 1950, when India became a republic but in reality it remains rooted in the minds of Indian people. Dalits are still facing violence and hatred in the present Indian society at various fields. In the article "In India,

Dalits still feel bottom of the caste ladder” states that, the National Crime Records Bureau in its crime report in the year 2018, which lists out 42,793 cases “a Dalit was a target of crime, on average, every 15 minutes. The number of cases has increased 66 percent over last decade” (Subramanyam). In the same article there was a collected information about the Dalits in which a recent survey taken among the Dalits in the USA claims that 25 percent of the people stated that they were facing verbal and physical assaults as well as 60 percent of them were experiencing caste based harmful jokes/abuses. These dalits have to come across many difficulties in their work places where a case study states that there has been a case charged on large IT companies accused of caste discrimination against Dalit employees by the other caste higher officer. Thus, even in the modern society there was the concept of ethnocentrism where one caste was considered as lowest to other superior castes.

The concept of Exogamy was now known in the new form called inter caste / inter religious marriages at the modern society. India is a country where caste and religion still forms the base for arranged marriages, political affiliations, and social hierarchy, academic and professional networks. Thus, in the Indian society violating these norms and marrying outside their community/caste would have to face severe consequences. The couples are criticized for marrying outside their community; the Indian society makes the living difficult for those people. Some people even went to the level of killing them in the name of honour of the family and this practice was prevalent even in the current time. This issue of ‘honour’ not only includes dominant caste families but also other caste families. There were no laws inculcated for honour killings in the Indian society. The issues on inter- caste couples was under rated as well as there were no cases registered based on this issues. Thus, the concept of exogamy was more severe and punishments were more aggressive in the present Indian society.

The research article "Ethnocentrism and Exogamy: A Sociological Standpoint in Kavita Kane's *Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen*" put forth's an argument that the people in the present society still practicing the old practices that results in the corruption of the younger minds in the present generation without their knowledge. The article also questions that the age old practices and the people in the society was more important/ significant than the happiness of the young children and teenagers to their parents as well as for their family members. The article states that these practices can be eradicated only when the people held their own children's happiness as superior to other issues. Finally, this article creates awareness about the need for the transformation of the few old practices which doesn't hold any meaning in the current generation.

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