



03

DESIRE AS A PSYCHOLOGICAL FORCE IN KAVITA KANE'S *KARNA'S WIFE: THE OUTCAST'S QUEEN*: A HUMANISTIC ANALYSIS THROUGH PETER BROOKS

Poovarasi. D¹

*Research Scholar, Department of English, Auxilium College (Autonomous), Vellore, Affiliated to
Thiruvalluvar University, Serkadu, Vellore, TN, India*

&

Dr. Kalaiselvi R. H²

*Assistant Professor, Department of English, Auxilium College (Autonomous), Vellore, Affiliated to
Thiruvalluvar University, Serkadu, Vellore, TN, India*

Abstract

*This article examines desire purely as a psychological force in Kavita Kane's *Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen* (2013), drawing exclusively from Peter Brooks' conceptualization in *Reading for the Plot* where desire propels emotional existence forward. Looking at the inner world of Uruvi, it approaches desire as the emotional force that gives life a sense of direction, its repression leading to inner conflict and self-blame, dependence on emotions as a way to become vulnerable or develop, self-blame and self-reproach of others through projection of inner conflict, and the clash between instinct and ethics that makes one reflect on oneself. The psyche of Uruvi exposes the desire that defines identity by seeking completion, open confrontation that allows growth and resolution that brings peace or epiphany. This humanistic prism emphasizes the transformative effect of desire within patrilineal restraint, and it provides new psychological understanding of epic retellings without any externalities. The conversation emphasizes the path from suppressed desires to anxiety, yet also points to the potential for emotional honesty through genuine interaction, positioning Uruvi's journey as a representation of human psychological complexity.*

Keywords

Psychological Desire, Emotional Power, Uruvi Psyche, Peter Brooks, Humanistic Psychology, Internal Conflict, etc.

Full Article

Introduction:

In *Karna's Wife: The Outcast Queen* (2013), Kavita Kane boldly re-centers the vast Mahabharata on Uruvi, an imaginary but convincingly imagined Kshatriya princess who takes a bold step to marry the outcast warrior Karna, plunging her into unknown psychological depths. Breaking all the strict caste structures and family traditions, this union plunges Uruvi into a whirlwind of passionate love bordering on obsession, unswerving loyalty through ethical ambiguity, and great agony regarding moral betrayals that strip her for her identity. Her interior world turns into a warring field where uncivilized emotional energies collide against each other, showing how much or how little the human psyche is vulnerable to strain. In his classic work *Reading for the Plot* (1984), Peter Brooks, thinks of desire not as a plot device, but as the engine of all human experience, the underlying psychological engine. To Brooks, desire is more vital and propulsive than structural plot mechanics, the imposture that takes people into elusive fulfillment, that generates inevitable conflict, and that ultimately propels people toward some sort of resolution, whether catharsis or haunting. Brooks' Theory of Aesthetic Development presents a purely



humanistic psychological critique by carefully eliminating all remnants of fictional structure and utilizing methodical procedures to extract the many developments of desire within us as the most powerful emotional force possessing us in our lives to impose direction upon an otherwise aimless life; the continuous search for completion that follows the constant discomfort created within us by the deprivation we experience due to a lack of emotional, moral, or spiritual support; the brutal suppression of self through societal values or ethical beliefs which creates a cycle of ever-increasing guilt and debilitating anxiety emotional dependence creating either great disintegration or the development of one's self-disturbingly the inherent ambivalence created by interweaving love/ fear, passion/guilt the projection of our voids/ insecurities onto others in relationships; emotional commitment created by a raw and realistic confrontation with one's desires the ability to resolve by either achieving complete satisfaction or through simply accepting or realizing they are no longer necessary; the development of a personal identify to build one's own values, make decisions and establish boundaries; and the constant tension between instinct (the primal) and ethics (the regulation), producing self-assessment and finally transformation.

The ideal exemplar of these Brooksonian dynamics turns out to be Uruvi, whose dramatic breaking of caste rules to take Karna as the naked symbol of the raw power of desire breaking the iron bars of societal order. Her decision at the beginning of the story sets her in motion in a chain of inner struggles that reveal the dual psychological burden and the triumph of desire, the devastating guilt in the wake of the Draupadi swayamvara debacle, in which the complicity of Karna compels Uruvi to balance her devotion with moral disgust the torturous, agonizing struggle between the flat-out loyalty of Karna to the unhealth. All these episodes serve to enlighten the reader about the price of desire, which is heavy in the psychological sense, expressed in anxiety, self-doubt, emotional turmoil, but they also lead to growth, strength, and self-discovery. This paper fills the gaping void in psychological critique of Kane that current scholarship has tended to fill with either a feminist or subaltern reconsideration of the work, but not with an examination of the propulsive mechanics of desire in the sense that Brooks puts it forth. Demonstrating that desire is the central element of humanistic identity, defining the values, decisions, and emotional space of Uruvi within the limits of patriarchal control, this paper is the first to offer a psychologically rigorous approach to the retelling by Kane, and it has wider ramifications regarding the role of desire in epic fiction as well as human existence.

Theoretical Framework:

According to Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot* (1984), desire serves to encourage human thought and experience to a larger thing, love, belonging, or validation. This may also be understood humanistically as: a force of emotion in the form of existence bigger than romance the need to complete emotional/moral deficiencies the production of guilt and anxiety through the production of emotional dependencies the risk of disintegration and growth in the face of emotional dependencies the ambivalence that adds texture to love, fear and guilt projection of emotional needs in light of unmet needs emotional growth through an open confrontation with ones This will be to examine the psyche of Uruvi through Brooks alone to explore her internal drive.

Literature Review:

The literature about feminist reclamation of Kavita Kane, and Uruvi analyses of agency vs. patriarchy. S. Srinivas (2022), is able to follow the socio-psychological torment of Uruvi, her defiance of marriage being the cause of alienation but disregards the psychology of desire as propulsion. In a 2022 Academia.edu humanistic analysis, Karna Wife is criticized as a novel lacking character authenticity, with credit given to Uruvi who is strong with no Brooksonian insight into emotional motivation. Critiques such as that of Sanjeev Kotnala (2015) hail the emotional



development of Uruvi who started as an envious person and then turned into a solidar with Vrushali, feeling of dependence, but disregarding the idea of ambivalence-projection. The choices of Uruvi are regarded through the prism of a feminist reading (Newman College, 2023), although no psychological aspect of the matter is deeply examined. In Indian versions of Peter Brooks *Reading for the Plot* is lightly treated his wish-as-forward-thrust is here psychologically, rather than narratively, in nature. In Kane, no work brings together the tenet of the emotional complexity of desire presented by Brooks purely on humanistic ground, and the psyche of Uruvi, and the feeling of guilt-ridden devotion, projected insecurities, ethical tensions remain unexplored.

Research Gap:

Although the *Karna Wife: The Outcast Queen* discusses mythic retelling and character control, it does not address the Brooksonian psychological aspect of desire in the Uruvi arc. Structuralist interpretations follow the epic lines psychoanalytic texts reach Oedipal faithfulness, yet disregard emotional drive, repression-ambivalence, and instinct-ethics conflict. No work implements the Brooksonian tenets desire humanistically, Uruvi projected Draupadi-guilt, Karna-dependence evolution, repressed moral desires, which makes her psyche transformative mechanics to be uncharted, and the theme of this paper focuses on it.

Research Methodology:

This qualitative analysis is a close reading of *Karna Wife: The Outcast Queen* in which thematic coding of Uruvi-centered excerpts was conducted based on the framework set by Brooks: emotive force (urgency), lack of freedom (indicators of guilt), dependence (individual growth or disintegration), etc., and unique psychological insights were noted. Cross-referencing secondary sources was done to generate contextual support.

Desire as Emotional Power and Pursuit of Completion:

The seismic decision that Uruvi makes in the swayamvara is painful with the raw psychological charge of desire, a Brooksonian burst of desire that destroys rational calculation as she throws the golden prince Arjuna aside to win the stigmatized Karna. This is a dislocation of primal emotional energy into a desperate desire belong to the real life and to be appreciated, transcending caste hierarchies which declare her choice social suicide. Peter Brooks sheds light on this scene as the propulsive force of desire filling existential empty spaces-Uruvi defiant proclamation of “I choose outcast over the chosen” (Kane, 45) turns her gilded princess life of empty innuendo into laser-directed directionality. The gap between what she now owns, in the form of wealth, status, security, and her inner warrior-needs of moral fulfilment by means of a union with the war-trodden nobility of Karna is bridged by her psyche, desire being the inevitable psychological motor which propels her towards emotional fulfilment. This emotional push is expressed physically in the post-marriage stage where Uruvi joins Karna in a course of archery, and her love causes the isolation to be transformed into a strong wedded bond. Where she previously wasted away in the luxury of the palace with no purpose, now every arrow she gives Karna is a ceremony of mutual aspiration, where her desire creates a bond against the foreignness. The idea of forward emotional thrust described by Brooks has been fully realized here, the psychological investment of Uruvi does not only keep her decision alive but actively drives both of the partners to each other, her emotional work sewing their divided identities into mutually carrying wholeness in opposition to the fragmentation of society.

Accordingly, the desire as emotional power of Uruvi essentially restructures her life of stagnant privilege to mobility purpose, which is the principle of Brooks that psychological propulsion generates meaning out of nothingness. This arrow of swayamvara follows the full course of the desire first rush breaking traditions, long-term investment creating marriage, and



mutual fulfilment going against social death penalty. Quite to the contrary, the desire of Uruvi is not an act of fatuous passion, but the desire as humanistic salvation, as the power to convert the existential alienation into the ultimate purpose-driven integrity of the man over the monumental disintegration.

Repression of Desire and Inner Strife:

Her passions are brutally repressed with caste punishment and male contempt, bludgeoning Uruvi to ruins after her swayamvara humiliation, in which Karna is the facilitator of Duryodhana. The mental trauma becomes embedded in the form of burning guilt. “How could I fall in love with a man who has taken away the dignity of another woman?” (Kane, 156) births breed poisonous anxiety that develops to a full psychological distress. These emotions are squashed in suppression to torturous pressure that eventually leads to Uruvi temporarily fleeing Karna, with her psyche shattering under the pressure of loving what is morally wrong. The lens of Brooks shows the corrosion of emotional balance by a stifled desire what was a successful decision turns into self-destructive struggle; her re-entry is not an accomplishment but an affirmation of the irrepressible force of gravity of suppressed desire. This repression is further exacerbated by family pressures, in that Vrushali-rivalry first of all mutters the solidarity-desire of Uruvi to the first wife of Karna. The subordinate roles of wives are prescribed by culture, yet the repressed desire of sisterhood that Uruvi endures struggles to compete with each other and gives rise to the spiralling guilt that is enough to trigger a complete breakdown of her psyche. Every repressed desire, to reach out to Vrushali, to protect her in the world, spreads further, proving the maxim of Brooks that frustrated desire does not disappear but only spreads like cancer to chronic emotional conflict, which must finally be expressed or destroyed. This sadistic oppression-desire circle is the ultimate embodiment of what Brooks cautions about, where, when the energy of the psyche is suppressed, it does not divert and burns instead, turning the original victory of the agency of Uruvi into a ghostly life where each loving look at Karna revives moral torture. The discontinuous re-entry and Vrushali torment makes clear the dual bind of desire the irresistible pull of gravity against the threat of societal destruction which puts the psyche of devotion in the midst of the blade of the morality. In this interiorized war, Uruvi, with her humanistic tragedy of emotional propulsion subdued, yet still alive, desiring yet bound by guilt, her future sisterhood-emerging is a prefiguration of the seminal, although blood-streaked, reclaiming of desire.

Emotional Dependence and Ambivalence:

The fact that Uruvi is emotionally so dependent on the approval of Karna is the weakest fault line of her psyche, his emotional indifference being the paradox of her craving that also endangers to break her up. This Brooksonian dependency is compulsive devotion in the form of reading his non-answering as rejection, his few smiles as salvation, where her self-esteem is on the line, and her existence is at stake. But it is this same dependency that causes growth the relentless pursuit of his emotional availability causes Uruvi to grow stronger, transforming weakness into mental strength. Ambivalence is the most desirable psychological texture of desire, as the love of Uruvi to Karna collides with fear of his Duryodhana loyalties, love to his nobility collides with the guilt of his tormented Draupadi: “Half my heart breaks to the man he might be, half fears the monster he serves” (Kane, 210). The duality theory by Brooks helps to understand that these contraries do not cancel but enhance emotional multidimensionality, the psyche of Uruvi becomes complicated by constant contradiction, and her inner civil war of devotion and doubt turns out to be the source of self-awareness. Such a palimpsest of emotions is not pathological, but it is the process of the maturation of desire. This dependence-ambivalence crucible enables Uruvi to attain Brooksonian psychological integration, as the need to be validated shifts into consciousness, becoming instead



of a desperate need. The fact that she is capable of bearing the contradictions of love without collapsing is the victory of desire over fragmentation, Karna is her emotional heart, but she stands on her own, independent of his eyes. This coming-of-age changes crude dependency into mutually supporting strength and ambivalence is not seen as a vice but as the smithy that shapes her humanistic personality in opposition to the titanic anarchy.

Projection and Identity Formation:

Uruvi brilliantly transfers her worst insecurities to the characters of Draupadi and Vrushali and makes these women serve as psychological reflections of her unmet validation needs and fear of inadequacy. The natural charm of Draupadi is projection screen to the terror of emotional substitution of Uruvi, who thinks of her the queenly ideal I have not, and of Vrushali as the real wife who's maternity Uruvi is jealous of. This Brooksian projection mechanism is the revelation of the architecture of her psyche the desire never left unmet does not live in the abstract, but requires a tangible implementation in the dynamics of relations. However, it is this projection that drives identity to form as facing these reflected insecurities compels Uruvi to mark out strong values and lines. Her most distinguishing statement, that "I am more than wife; I am his anchor, his conscience, his equal" (Kane, 278) is the crystallization of desire-oriented individuality, as it turns projected fears into intentional decisions such as protecting the sons of Karna against court intrigue. Brooks discloses how desires do not simply express identity but rather make it, Uruvi wasn't who she was despite her complicated desires but because of these desires, she was forced to define herself radically in response to erasure by the patriarchy. The projection-created identity of Uruvi frees her finally of patriarchal scripting, since Brooksian desire is transformed into reflected insecurities into self-autonomy. What starts out as a shred of self-doubt, which is dispersed throughout Draupadi, Vrushali, Karna, etc., transforms into intentional action to protect his sons, to question his allegiances, to assert moral equality. It is an alchemical process that unveils the greatest psychological role of desire not simply revelation but creation in which intricate yen will be the very building block of strong individuality that overcomes epic determinism and cultural annihilation.

Tension, Growth, and Resolution:

The brutal conflict between animal instinct and moral responsibility forms the main arena of the psyche of Uruvi, which is most destructive when she is opposed to the Duryodhana-blindness of Karna "You owe him gratitude, and your heart is too blind to see his poison!" (Kane, 320). Such tension of instinct-ethics does not paralyze but electrifies Brooksian reflection by compelling Uruvi to question the point of love and complicity. It is the friction of the mind that is produced to create intolerable heat, but it is fruitful it is the conflict between desire and conscience that gives her moral clarity. Clash is the crucible of growth telling the truth about Karna, without in any way destroying love, cleanses it, the realization of psychological courage that is the milestone of Brooks in the developmental sense of the word. The solution is not total satisfaction but war-eve peace, and Uruvi comes to terms with the incomplete love in its bitter ending I cannot save him, but I see him all. This bitter-earned discovery brings emotional completeness, not fantasy consummation, but deep psychological unification in which desire turns not from torture but to enlightenment, and Uruvi goes through with his humanistic change. The arc of tension-growth-resolution that Uruvi uses to fulfil Brooks humanistic vision of desire as a kind of psychological salvation in which the battle of instinct-ethics brings not devastation but transfiguration. And in contrast to tragic heroes whose conflict is unresolved, her war-eve calm is the final triumph of desire, the primal propulsion turned to wisdom, ethical enlightenment, and disintegrated identity combined into unity. It is this radical closure that asserts desire as the smith of humanistic identity



the medium that drives Uruvi out of caste-defiant decision to guilt-ridden repression to the ethically-based self-realization, her journey is the epitome of Brooks truth that mental agency in finality makes meaning out of meaninglessness.

Discussion:

The arc of Uruvi confirms the Brooks wish as humanistic essence: emotional force is the guiding force, oppression destroys, ambivalence enriches, projection unfolds, and tension develops. Whereas Julien Sorel's self-destructive breakdown is caused by repressed ambition, Karna-dependence in Uruvi leads to healthy development; her moral struggles bring peace, unlike her blindly dharma-mediated suffering, Draupadi. The desire humanizes Uruvi which is a psychic power in the patriarchal epos beyond myth to generalize internal conflict-resolution. This Brooks-exclusive reading is the first to bring out the psychological profundity in the study of Kane, and it explains the desire-infused nature of identity.

Conclusion:

Desire, as the life-giving psychological power of Uruvi in Kavita Kane, *KarnaWife: The Outcast in Queen* the reading with the incisive tool of Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot* is the uncurved in its rawness, the tormented in its suppression, yet immensely transformative desire that drives her through her caste def What starts as emotional energy shattering the social ties turns into oppression to the inner struggle and ambivalence, but ends up with generating development by bravely facing instinct-ethics conflicts, projecting fears, and relying on dependence. The inexplicable nature of desire in the formation of emotional individuality is depicted here, through the prism of patriarchal restraint, where repressed urges give rise to anxiety, and open-minded reckoning to calm, not ecstasy, but suffering, anxiously acquired wholeness. This purely humanist critique that has been stripped of narrative machinery adds value to literary psychology by tracing the ten modes of desire as the driving force of Uruvi inner development as the transition between epic myth and universal human complexity. The retelling by Kane therefore goes beyond mythic ret conning and becomes a deep humanistic exploration of psychological propulsion how desire makes the outcast queen human, creating autonomous identity out of anarchy. In shedding light on the tenets of Brooks, which is the power of emotion guiding life, oppression spreading to torture, ambivalence carving out the depth, tension giving rise to wisdom, this paper brings Karna Wife as the exemplar of how desire can transform suffering into selfhood and generalize it to Kane and to the epic fiction.

References

- Brooks, Peter. *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative*. Harvard UP, 1984.
- Kane, Kavita. *Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen*. Rupa Publications India, 2013.
- Kotnala, Sanjeev. "Karna's Wife – The Outcast Queen: Mahabharata from Uruvi's Eyes." *SanjeevKotnala*, 24 Nov. 2015, sanjeevkotnala.com/karnaswife/.
- "A Critical Analysis of Kavita Kane's *Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen* – A Humanistic Approach." *Academia.edu*, 2022, www.academia.edu/82917838/A_Critical_Analysis_of_Kavita_Kanes_Karnas_Wife_the_Outcasts_Queen_A_Humanistic_Approach. Accessed 5 Apr. 2026.
- Srinivas, S. "Socio-Psychological Problems of the Protagonist in Kavita Kane's *Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen*." *Revista de Estudios Sociales*, vol. 82, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.7440/res82.2022.13>.



- "Uruvi: Retrieval of the Unsung Conqueror in Kavita Kane's *Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen*." *MTWU Journal*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2023, mtwujournal.com/wp-content/uploads/v2n1-005.pdf

Article Received:23/07/2026

Article Accepted:04/08/2026

Published Online:30/09/2026

To Cite the Article:D., Poovarasi and R. H. Kalaiselvi. "Desire as a Psychological Force in Kavita Kane's *Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen: A Humanistic Analysis through Peter Brooks*." *Literary Cognizance: An International Refereed/Peer Reviewed e-Journal of English Language, Literature and Criticism*, Vol.-VII, Issue-2, September, 2026, 17-23. www.literarycognizance.com

This is an Open Access e-Journal Published under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License

