



Patterns and Equations of Relationship in Kavita Kane's *Tara's Truce*

Dr. Sreekala.B

Assistant Professor in English, NSS College, Pandalam, Kerala, India

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Abstract— Kavita Kane's writings are from the perspective of mythological women characters, and she placed them as the protagonists of her fictionalized retellings. Their resourcefulness, diplomatic skills, intellectual capabilities, oratory skills as well as their longings, despair and helplessness are revealed through her narration. In Kane's *Tara's Truce*, the heroine is the Vanara woman Tara, who was the wife of the mighty Vanara king Vali. Her sense of astuteness, her fair and righteous dealings with people, her high sense of intelligence, her sense of handling situations in the most appropriate manner, her sincere and efficient oratorical skills while dealing with turbulent situations -all these contribute to create a woman infinitely worthy and strong. A significant element in the fictionalized retelling is the equations of the relationships of almost all characters portrayed in the work. Social exchange theory is a concept based on the notion that a relationship between two people is created through a process of cost-benefit analysis. Social penetration theory also defines the types of relationship, and it was developed to explain how information exchange functions in the development and dissolution of interpersonal relationships. In the retelling, the truce that Tara entered is solely by counting the benefits, though she claimed her deeds as belonging to the highest form of self-sacrifice. The relationship equations in *Tara's Truce* could not be gauged completely by the theories of relationships. Even the protagonist Tara and almost all the major characters insisted on their selflessness in their relationships and their unconditional love for each other. But as we trace these relationships and observe them through the veil of the theories, we can't obliterate the relevance of the models of the Social Penetration Theory and Social Exchange Theory in *Tara's Truce*.



Keywords— *Mythology, Feminism, Relationships, Selflessness, Theories*

I. INTRODUCTION

Indian mythological retellings are a flourishing and fertile field in the present scenario of Indian Writing in English. Anand Neelakantan, Kavita Kane, Amish Tripathi, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni - all made use of the potential of this immeasurably vast, abundant and rich repertoire of tales, plots, subplots and all kinds of characters. Kavita Kane always writes from the perspective of mythological women characters, and she placed them as the protagonists of her fictionalized retellings. Some of these women characters are mythological heroines while some are women who have no special significance in mythology. There are also purely fictional characters whose names have not appeared in the

narratives of mythology as in the case of Uruvi, who is portrayed as the wife of Karna by the author.

Whether it is *Lanka's Princess*, *Sita's Sister* or *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty*, Kane took her heroines into confidence and narrated the retelling from their point of view. The writer traverses through the inner self of these women and gives voice to their otherwise silenced existence in a typical androcentric society. Their resourcefulness, diplomatic skills, intellectual capabilities, oratory skills as well as their longings, despair and helplessness are revealed through her narration. Whether it is considered as a sort of fictionalization or as an alternate representation, these retellings provide the readers with a possibility to direct

their thoughts and imagination to variegated channels of life.

II. DISCUSSION

In *Tara's Truce*, Kane's 2022 novel, the heroine is the Vanara woman Tara, who was the wife of the mighty Vanara king Vali, who defeated even the invincible Ravana of Lanka. Her sense of astuteness, her fair and righteous dealings with people, her high sense of intelligence, her sense of handling situations in the most appropriate manner, her sincere and efficient oratorical skills while dealing with turbulent situations -all these contribute to create a woman infinitely worthy and strong. The other characters paled into insignificance in the work as Tara was portrayed by Kane providing her with such impeccable qualities. She even went to the extent of establishing that Vali became the king of Kishkinda only because of the qualities of his wife.

Despite all these unique gifts and talents of Tara, a significant element that strikes the readers in the fictionalized retelling is the equations of the relationships of almost all characters portrayed in the work. Tara's character, though impeccable and in every respect praiseworthy, creates a certain pattern when analysed in the light of the theories of relationships.

Social exchange theory is a concept based on the notion that a relationship between two people is created through a process of cost-benefit analysis. In other words, it is a metric designed to determine how much effort someone invests in a one-on-one relationship. The measurement of the pluses and minuses of a relationship may produce data that can determine whether someone is putting too much effort into a relationship. Social exchange theory's core assumptions establish a fundamental foundation of malleability: One size does not fit all. A person's expectations, as set by comparison levels, allow the theory to be viewed on a sliding scale, one that adjusts on an individual basis. This is perhaps the theory's most known commodity, as it establishes a "give and take" metric that can be analyzed to determine how much effort one person may be putting into the relationship. The social exchange theory was put forward by American sociologist George C. Homans in 1958 when he published an article titled "Social Behavior as Exchange." Homans devised the framework and in the years that followed, other studies expanded the parameters of Homans' fundamental concepts.

Social penetration theory also defines the types of relationship, and it was developed to explain how information exchange functions in the development and dissolution of interpersonal relationships. Social penetration describes the process of bonding that moves a relationship from superficial to more intimate levels. The

onion model is a useful metaphor for describing how social penetration theory operates, elaborating on social penetration as a process through which people "peel back" others' layers of personal information through interpersonal interaction to reach the core. It takes time to reach another's "core self," the most intimate details about another person. The public image is the outer layer of a person that is visible to many others. The private self is the innermost layer of a person that is revealed to others only over time through disclosure. Social penetration theory describes several layers including superficial layers, middle layers, inner layers, and core personality. The core personality is the most private information about a person.

In the retelling, the truce that Tara entered is solely by counting the benefits, though she claimed her deeds as belonging to the highest echelons of sacrifice. Though it is not in a completely material point of view, she was always conscious of the power she wielded and fiercely guarded it in every possible manner. Her namesake, the goddess Tara advised her,

Tara, you and I embraced our passions. We are the quintessence of sacrifice and love, of duty and desire. As price, we have to force our pain and humiliation aside, pledge away our broken promises so that others can have a life of harmony in a violent world. Tara, making this truce is our purpose (*Tara's Truce*, Prologue xiii).

Tara made the truce, but in her own terms, with the complete awareness of herself making a sacrifice for the sake of the harmonious existence of her family and her kingdom. But through the truce she safeguarded the interests of herself and the future possibilities of her son.

When they were young and independent, Vali realized that it was only with Tara that he found life a pleasing affair rather than a serious business. He weighed the pros and cons of making her a part of his life, even though he knows very well that her father will never endorse such a union since he is a person who has only dreams as his credentials. But later when his dreams became a reality as he defeated Ravana and emerged as the ruler of Kishkindha, it changed the equations of his relationships. In the assessment of the pros and cons of his union with Tara, she is more rewarded by marrying him. But to Vali his union with her is beneficial from a different standpoint. Her father Sushen readily agreed to the union the moment he came to know the mind of his daughter. The initial response of Vriksharaj in treating her as an object of discord between the brothers has changed with the change of situations. Thus, it is established that the demands in relationships also determine the comparative benefits or losses in the

relations, which underline the tenets of social exchange theory.

Even though Tara was in love with Vali, her reply to him when he became serious with their marriage shows that even her love to him is not unconditional. Social exchange theory has its impact in analysing her responses towards him at that time. Elements of costs and benefits are evident as she clearly states her reluctance to marry a man with no sense of responsibility. She mocked that he nurtured empty dreams, and their love had blunted his determination, and he lost focus. She beseeched him to seek more to be eligible for her. Though Tara tried to convince it as an attempt on her part to spur him to action and to drive him to fulfil his already blunted purpose of becoming a king, the relationship theory establishes it as an attempt on the part of a woman to maximize the benefits of a relationship in which she has a clear upper hand. Even her father Sushen noticed his daughter's absolute power over Vali. "Vali is like a wild horse. You, Tara, are the only one who can rein him in, not Sugriv or Vriksharaj. He listens only to you", (89) He revealed to Tara in a candid manner.

On the other hand, Tara's relationship with Sugriv even in its very beginnings is marked with a certain amount of vagueness. He is not satisfied with the share of attention he receives from her. "They were friends, but he wanted more. They chatted endlessly, but he could not get himself to voice his feelings for her" (52). Only when she became close with Vali that he realized that it is too late, and he had lost her forever. That sense of loss pervaded throughout in his relationship with her and he could neither obliterate nor overcome his loss. "Tara was his friend first.... Vali had got to know her much later.... Yet, it was Vali she had fallen in love with...He felt crushed under the weight of heavy hopelessness." (59) He was not able to hide the feeling of resentment which stems from jealousy and disappointment. Tara was able to decipher the strange behavior displayed by Sugriv and she suspected him and at the same time she wanted to disprove what was on his mind. She tried to behave as if nothing had happened and their relationship was just the same as it usually was, but she failed at times due to his response.

The pattern of relationship with Vali and Ravan is also based on this cost benefit aspect of the social exchange theory. Ravan, who was invincible, realized that he is no longer indomitable, as he is defeated and held as a prisoner by Vali. Hence, he controlled his anger in his dealings with Vali. He realized that he has much to lose if his relationship with Vali is inimical. He feels that he is not completely secure even by the boon from Brahma. He realized that his life, his power and even his kingship are based on Vali's decisions. Hence, he accepted Vali's elaborate gesture of a

request for friendship though he was at first reluctant to accept Vali as an equal partner by giving the part of his kingdom -Kishkindha- to Vali. He expressed his initial hesitation through the words "Don't be a fool, Vali.....You're only heading for trouble. You can't keep me here. My army will attack you before you can blink. I'll see you, right. You know what I mean." (109). But when he realized the gravity of the situation Ravan relented and he conceded to Vali's conditions to liberate him from his state of imprisonment. He even offered to build a magnificent palace for Vali.

Vali, who is completely immersed in his love for Tara, gave the credit of his defeat of Ravan to her, as the person who spurred him to action by challenging him to take risks. Vali's method of dealing with relationships is in a much more straightforward manner. When he heard that Sugriv eloped with Ruma with the assistance of his friend Hanuman Vali expressed his disapproval that how can their relationship be termed as friendship as Hanuman is Sugriv's minister and hence his subordinate. At the same time, he was very much conscious of the fact that Tara loves him because of his credentials and by no means is it a blind love."I know that you would have never married me if I was a failure, a loser."(137) But he was content of the fact that she loved him and allow him to love in return.

But the relationship between the two brothers had a different texture. Vali held his younger brother in low esteem and the younger brother in turn nurtured great antipathy towards Vali which he hides himself in a very skillful manner. He is pleased that his elder brother is not aware of his true feelings towards him. He thinks that Vali is a fool who blindly believes that everyone admires him. Since he knows the innermost layers of his nature he can estimate the true nature of his brother. The Social Penetration Theory is ascertained in his understanding towards his elder brother. The theory operates in Tara's understanding of Vali also, as is evident in her observations about him. She observed how he could be insecure about his authority. He watched his court and ministers suspiciously and if he felt any disapproval towards them, he would make them quit their own by making their life unendurable. Knowing the true nature of the two brothers and their mutual relationship she was sure that nothing could bring them close again. After the disappearance of Vali and the rumours about his death Sugriv's words on Vali throws light on the feelings he nurtured towards his elder brother. "Vali was no better than Ravan.... He was as ruthless and murderous. You well know it! His death is because of his ego and ambition. Not because of me!" (199). He was also so eager to marry the widow of his brother by holding on to custom as the backbone for the fulfillment of his desire. The crux of this

theory has its influence on Ruma's relationship with Sugriv also. When she came to know the innermost layers of his nature, she was confused about Sugriv's true feelings towards her and hence suspected whether he ever loved her at all.

Only when Tara felt that her imploring towards Vali had fallen in deaf ears that she remoulded the idol in her mind which she created on her own. She now recognized him as a ruthless egomaniac who cared only for himself- his power, ego and ambition." She saw him more accurately now, and he was a fiend. But most unbearable of all was the humiliation she now had to go through-to be the wife of such a monster". (162) When he appeared before her after his fight with the monster Dundufi, she recognized the changes in him and found a barbarian standing before her. She came to the conclusion that the other people who discerned the changes in him were correct in their judgement; he was morphing into an uncontrollable tyrant. But she could not overthrow the tyrannical love that enamoured her completely. His love was unlike hers; she felt that he possibly loved himself more than he loved her.

Sugriv's confession towards her after the disappearance of Vali reveals a different order of love. He explains himself as he tries to convince her,

I never expected you to love me; I didn't see any reason that you should. I was content being near you, as a friend, even as your brother-in-law. I was thankful to be allowed to love you, and I was satisfied when you were pleased with me or when you treated me with good humoured affection" (183)

He is of the opinion that in the give and take policy of relationship Vali received more than he had given. That is to say, he is more benefitted by the relationship. According to Sugriv "He and I worked together. He was smart. Do you know why? He had you! I wasn't so smart, that's why I am the king's minister. My brother's servant. His guard. His sentry- "(198)

Vali, after his reappearance suspected his younger brother of duplicity and hence kept him away though it costs him dearly. After Sugriv's exile Tara felt that the general opinion about Vali is based on a lack of understanding of the real situations as she is the one who penetrated into the intricacies of the events and relationships. Hence, she was embittered by listening to others. To those people who lacked awareness, Sugriv was the victim and Vali, the villain. But as a true observer of the situation, she was able to understand the sense of betrayal he was trying to grapple with. She knows that he has low cunning and high valour. But simultaneously she didn't fail to notice the people and

the relationships he estranged by his egoistical and vengeful actions.

According to Vali's view the once inseparable brothers have now irreconcilable differences, and they are thirsting for each other's blood as they lost trust in each other. Vali lost his trust in Sugriv the moment he realized that his younger brother is ambitious for his position and everything he had. Sugriv made use of the first opportunity he had in order to possess all that he longed for. Their relationship came to stagnation from that moment when Sugiv tries to raise himself from the position of a subordinate.

III. CONCLUSION

The relationship equations in *Tara's Truce* could not be gauged completely by the theories of relationships. Even the protagonist Tara and almost all the major characters insisted on their selflessness in their relationships and their unconditional love for each other. But as we trace these relationships and observe them through the veil of the theories, we can't obliterate the relevance of the models of the Social Penetration Theory and Social Exchange Theory in *Tara's Truce*. Though the writer's focus is on the feministic perspective of Tara as the protagonist and her relationship with her lover turned husband Vali the intricacies and the differentiated models of relationships in the fictionalized retelling did not fail to command the attention of the readers.

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