

Ties That Don't Bind: Secure and Avoidant Attachments in Kavita Kane's *Sita's Sister*

Sobigaa YT¹, Dr. D.Anandhi²

¹*II M.A English, PSG College of Arts & Science, Coimbatore – 641014*

²*Assistant Professor, PSG College of Arts & Science, Coimbatore – 641014*

“A true hero isn't measured by the size of his strength, but by the strength of his heart”

-Hercules

Abstract- Myths are antique tales that have always shaped our beliefs, culture and creativity. *Sita's Sister's* novel by Kavita Kane is a retelling of the Ramayana as seen by Urmila who has been a neglected princess in the epic but has never gotten her fair share of the limelight. Her relationship with Lakshman is one of the most interesting parts of this retelling as the ideas of duty, sacrifice, and feelings repression are deeply ingrained into it. Although the Ramayana glorifies the devotion shown by Lakshman to Ram as a great virtue, Sita's Sister points out the silent emotional sufferings that Urmila suffers those fourteen years in exile as a result of their relationship. The paper critically analyzes the nature of their relationship as based on attachment theory. It stresses on the face-off between marital love and dharma and how the devotion of Lakshman towards his brother Ram results in deprivation of emotions in the course of his marriage, and the love of Urmila turns into loyalty, strength, and sacrifice which is unseen. This analysis will show how Urmila redefines marital strength in silence rather than rebellion and tends toward emotional maturity rather than bitterness while experiencing trauma and desertion. According to the current study, the development of their relationship is not a story of duty and marriage but rather of the emotional labour that patriarchal society expects of women in both mythology and daily life.

Keywords: *Sita's Sister*, Kavita Kane, Attachment Theory, Secure Attachment, Avoidant Attachment, Emotional Trauma, Feminist Revision, Mythology.

I. INTRODUCTION

Psychology provides well-defined models to understand humans and their relationship better. Among these, attachment theory is one of the most effective frameworks for analysing interpersonal

interactions. It was initially proposed by Bowlby in 1969, according to this theory, the early emotional attachments influence a person's attachment styles, sense of emotional stability and life management skills. Ainsworth's classification of secure, anxious, avoidant, and disordered attachments expanded the understanding of relationship behaviour in the subsequent era. Urmila undergoes one of the most severe emotional separations in mythical literature, where her husband leaves her for almost fourteen years to fulfil his moral and political duty, the attachment theory becomes highly relevant to the plot. Her perseverance, coping strategies, and emotional reactions might be interpreted as secure attachment patterns shaped by pain, love, and loyalty. In an elaborate psychological interpretation, the article demonstrates how the marital, family, and personal experiences of the characters are shaped by the tendencies of early emotional conditioning, bonding, and disrupted attachment. The extreme abandonment by Urmila, her coping skills, and her resilience to emotions are some illustrations of such complicated attachment behaviours that would hardly be the focus on the spotlight in mythological retellings. This paper examines how *Sita's Sister* reveals suppressed female emotional plight and provides a new dimension of attachment, loyalty and psychological survival in the patriarchal society.

II. AN OVERVIEW OF ATTACHMENT THEORY

British psychologist John Bowlby created attachment theory after writing a booklet on the orphaned and destitute children of World War II. In *The Nature of the Child's Tie to His Mother (1958)*, he made his first explicit declaration of attachment theory.

Bowlby asserts that a child's early emotional attachment to its primary caregivers shapes their

personality, psychological development, and future relationships. Babies develop their own internal mental models of how relationships function based on the actions of their caregivers, primarily mothers. A youngster feels secure when their caregiver is kind, accommodating, and emotionally available. However, the youngster withholds a contradicting message, such as “people will hurt or abandon me,” if the caregiver is careless, erratic, or rejecting. These mental models serve as the foundation for personality development, self-worth, emotional control, and the capacity to maintain positive connections in the future.

“The propensity to make strong emotional bonds to particular individuals is a basic component of human nature”(Bowlby 03) which defines that people have a biological need to be close to their caregivers, particularly when they are experiencing anxiety, distress, or uncertainty. This tendency towards protection and closeness is a useful evolutionary strategy that raises the likelihood of survival rather than an innate weakness. Therefore, attachment is a biological, behavioural, and psychological system that organises an individual’s responses throughout life rather than only being emotional.

Mary Ainsworth’s *Strange Situation Study* later divided attachment into three main categories: avoidant, anxious-ambivalent, and secure. Over time, scholars have added disorganised attachment.

- Secure attachment develops in the case of caregivers who are sensitive, consistent, and emotionally responsive. Such children will explore freely and approach others with little diffidence. As adults, they tend to form healthy romantic, familial, and social relationships.
- The so-called anxious attachment sets in, when the caregivers are not predictable (that is, sometimes they show love and sometimes are distant), causing children that are excessively dependent and ones that are always in need of reassurance. Being adults, these children are likely to be jealous, have fear of abandonment and they may over-emotionalize their relationships.
- Avoidant attachment occurs when the caregivers are unresponsive, rejective, or unavailable. Children are taught to repress emotions in order to defend oneself. The adults in avoidant patterns might appear self-sufficient but the inability to

cope with closeness, vulnerability and extended intimacy is a widespread problem.

- The most insecure type is disorganised attachment, which occurs when the caregivers are terrorising or even traumatised themselves. Children have contradictory behaviours, as they want to be close and at the same time afraid of it. Emotional deregulation, inner conflict, and lack of stable bonding are the effects in adults.
- According to attachment theory, unless they are consciously corrected, attachment patterns developed throughout childhood typically recur throughout life. Romantic partners frequently take on the role of attachment figures, evoking the same desires, fears, and behaviours that were developed during childhood. An avoidant partner withdraws when feelings of overwhelm emerge, whereas an anxiously attached individual may clutch to a spouse for comfort. This painful cycle repeats itself throughout their life. Therefore, attachment theory becomes an effective tool for clarifying issues related to marriage, love, trauma, abandonment, dependency and emotional resilience. It also has several uses in contemporary psychology as well, which includes literary interpretation, trauma studies, clinical therapy and parenting research. It clarifies how characters react to different emotions such as intimacy, separation, love and grief. To put it another way, the application of attachment theory on the literary or mythological narratives such as *Sita’s Sister*, Ramayana, or even contemporary literature, can explain how early emotional traumas impact their decisions, sacrifices, and relationships as adults. In the end, the idea proves that stable relationships are built on continuous care, emotional availability and the willingness to repair their mistakes within the relationship rather than perfection.

III. THE FORGOTTEN SISTER’S STORY

Kavita Kane’s feminist retelling of the epic Ramayana, *Sita’s Sister*, centres the story on Urmila, Sita’s younger sister and Lakshman’s wife, who is often forgotten. From Urmila’s childhood in Mithila until her marriage and the agonising moment when Lakshman departs for fourteen years of exile with Ram and Sita, the narrative chronicles her life. Unlike

Sita, Urmila remains in Ayodhya and works in the palace without letting anyone know that she is being emotionally abused, lonely, and separated. Kane depicts Urmila as an intelligent, emotionally sophisticated, and emotionally strong lady whose self-sacrifice is just like the one of people who enter into exile. The themes of responsibility, love, sisterhood, and female agency are highlighted in the plot amid an invisible emotional struggle of women and voicing those who are marginalised in. epic stories with the help of inner conflict, thoughts, and patience of Urmila.

IV.URMILA AS THE SILENTLY SECURE PARTNER

A person who develops a healthy and stable attachment style is said to be securely connected. This type of attachment style is usually created in childhood through constant care, emotional availability, and trust from caregivers.

Urmila is shown in *Sita's sister* as a woman who embodies a complexity of stable connection during difficult situations and whose emotional world is both rich and disciplined. From the first few chapters of the novel, it is clear that she has a deep psychological understanding and the capacity to control her emotions.

A key aspect of Urmila's attachment style is shown by Kane's description of her: "She had an effortless easy-giving manner that made her very agreeable" (Kane 07). This sentence highlights Urmila's ability to maintain her emotional breakdown, which is considered as a key characteristic of secure attachment, rather than expressing emotional coldness. People who are securely attached has the ability to strike a balance between expressing and controlling their emotions; they neither be silent completely nor over expressive about their inner experiences. Therefore, Urmila's control over her emotions is not a sign of repression but of responsibility; she protects her inner world because she understands the hardships and difficulties of others. From the perspective of attachment, this same strength turns becomes a weakness because her control over her emotions keeps her pain hidden.

A significant attachment rupture occurs when Lakshman leaves with Ram and Sita without her

concern, causing her a strong emotional breakdown. "But what about my future?". She wanted to let forth a furious scream. I don't have anyone but you! Oh! Lakshman, I need you?" (Kane, 145). This is the most hurtful line to Urmila as it is a kind of wound induced by the lack of closure, assurance, and reciprocation. Bowlby paradigm would classify this incidence as an acute attachment injury because she was a newly married woman who needs emotional concern, proximity, and confirmation by her partner. This unexpected separation breaks the secure attachment relationship that is characterised by intimacy and caring. The inability of Lakshman to even turnaround can be taken as a metaphor of emotional abandonment which is a non-verbal communication that adds invisibility to Urmila. The powerful psychological thinking frames that his transition brings about shape her emotional condition over the next fourteen years. The manner the separation takes place is just like the physical separation painful to the person who is securely attached as was the case with Urmila. The first reaction of Urmila to this disruption is silence. She prefers to remain silent in disbelief, depression, and survival instinct than to protest or challenge. Now quietness was her sole companion. This silence is caused by psychological protection (Kane140).The reason for this silence is psychological protection.

According to attachment theory, the attachment system is affected when a secure person is abruptly and unexpectedly abandoned. This sudden shift in Urmila can be seen by her incapability to speak; the crisis of unresolved loss causes her voice to break. Therefore, here silence is a self-protective reaction, it is an escape to stop or prevent from additional emotional harm, rather than passive acceptance. Throughout the story, this silence grows into a sustained emotional attitude that helps her to move forward without any recognition. Her emotional battle grew stronger day by day into a significant yet concealed the true fact of who she is. Urmila hides her own pain behind the layers of calm while continuing to love, care, and support her family. The fact that she is prepared to control her grief, run the home, and preserve the family's values without anybody seeing her sacrifice highlights a contradiction that frequently occurs in people who are securely attached: they serve as the emotional support system for others even if they may be internally crumbling. Emotionally, Urmila

reacts in excess, try to compensate the void created because of Lakshman's absence with an excess of strength, compassion, and selflessness. According to attachment theorists, people who are securely attached tend to create a safe emotional space for both themselves and their partners. It's exactly what Urmila does. Her stable nature, sympathetic nature, emotional maturity and deep ability to love made her suffer silently. The more she makes the more she disappears.

V.LAKSHMAN HAS THE AVOIDANT PATTERN OF ATTACHMENT

Avoidant attached people are individuals who control their relations by keeping the emotion at a distance, especially when it becomes unnecessary and uncomfortable. Lakshman traits As Kane has presented him in her novel, Lakshman traits proved to be an ideal case of avoidant attachment, which is based on emotional autonomy, problems with intimacy, and the need to follow obligation over intimacy. When an individual learns that emotional needs are not being rewarded in his early childhood, he or she becomes an avoidant attacher and develops to the point of extreme dependence on autonomy. Lakshman shows internalised behaviour of emotional detachment through his behaviour with Urmila in terms of his Attracting the marriage & abruptly getting away with his brother. Don't hate me what I have done he reiterated... Excuse me, could you forgive I know I have failed you" (Kane 143). It is one of the most typical instances of avoidant attachment pattern, where the duty surpasses emotional stability. He also puts his family commitments first before his love to his wife Urmila. This demonstrates that he is not comfortable or unwilling to maintain marital relationship. Lakshman is often attracted to jobs requiring self control, selflessness, and detachment as opposed to a love interest. His obedience to Ram becomes a psychological world where the purity of duty replaces his emotional depth. This is the very reason why Lakshman reacts immediately to the exile of Rama. Avoidants tend to seek a vacant room where they can forget emotional sensitivity. To be more exact, his affection towards Ram was substitutive attachment, a bond or relationship of a foreseeable order, which does not entail emotional reciprocity, but merely a mere family affection. The unpleasant state of affairs caused by the words of Urmila was

manifested in terms of withdrawal, immobility, and the unwillingness to fulfill her emotional requirements; this is one of the typical traits of avoidant attachment that is characterized by the fear of being dependent and intimate. More terrifying to him than the perils of the forest are the emotional obligations of marriage. In order to employ moral obligation as defence against relational accountability, he elevates dharma to an absolute. The avoidant frequently justifies his distance by redefining emotional disengagement as duty, morality, or practicality. Lakshman's narrative consistently exalts his emotional indifference and lack of presence in order to serve Ram. It enables him to maintain his psychological distance from Urmila without addressing the underlying idea that their emotional intimacy causes him to experience uncontrollable fear. If he can persuade that being emotionally close is a worthy sacrifice, he won't have to endure the discomfort. Suppressing one's own emotional needs is another aspect of avoidant attachment. Lakshman's stoicism is an internalised norm that emotions should never get in the way of duty rather than a sign of emotionlessness. As a result, he develops a pattern in which he rejects his own demands in addition to failing to satisfy Urmila's. He keeps emotional doors firmly closed since any moment of vulnerability would necessitate facing the suffering he inflicts. His years of not communicating or making any gestures during their separation are indicative of avoidant deactivation, a process in which a person disables their attachment system to avoid being vulnerable.

"She got the message – he would go to forest with or without the consent" (Kane 141) this line demonstrates the quiet and astonishment that characterise their emotional detachment and marital breakdown. Lack of explanation and emotional closure is a common avoidant attachment style: Lakshman is unable to deal with the emotional fallout from his departure. One of the worst conditions for a securely bonded relationship is ambiguity, which is what happens to Urmila. He doesn't give her the assurance and communication she needs. This is the silence which becomes the attachment injury that makes up their marriage. "Never! Mila never imagines that I cannot demonstrate my feelings towards you except that I do not condemn you can you feel how you fill my heart, my being, my very soul? More importantly, avoidance

behaviour by Lakshman is not one that is cruel. Kane describes him as someone who is not emotionally prepared but, on the contrary, has ill intentions. His affection to Urmila is subdued beneath the strata of denial, emotional and self-sufficiency. Due to his sheer lack of attachment to emotions, he fails to recognize the level of damage he inflicts. Due to this, his behaviour is hurtful as well as avoidant attachment; although he may not be intent on hurting her, he accomplishes this by being emotionally detached, silent and non-present.

VI. RELATIONAL DISTANCE: THE PURSUER-DISTANCER PATTERN

Another relational pattern, the pursuer-distancer cycle, where the seeking partner pursues emotional attachment and the other avoids their perceived intimacy demands, has been found through the attachment theory, which is a famous psychological theory. This becomes the difference-making aspect of the union between Urmila and Lakshman in the novel *Sita's Sister* by Kane. The attachment orientation exhibited by Urmila is secure but highly affective and is naturally drawn to mutual presence, connection, and tenderness. Lakshman, however, is characterized by some distancer characteristics: he does not want to show his vulnerability by throwing himself into duty, practicing self-control, and making self-sacrifices. This is the result of the differences between them and creates an undesirable and unavoidable imbalance in their relationship.

Though not noisy and not confrontational in her chase, Urmila assumes the role of the silent hunter. Its characteristic traits are silent endurance, patience and lust. Rather than showing him her love, she waits to receive it; rather than protest against his withdrawal, she does not. But when she is weak, she shows her desire in a straightforward way.

When Lakshman gets ready to go to the forest, her emotional appeal comes across as both tender and desperate: "Come back, dear warrior, as you would from a war." (Kane 158) This line expresses her desire for an emotional reunion as well as his physical return; she wants him to come back to her, not just Ayodhya or Ram. Instead of viewing their separation as a typical absence, she sees it as a metaphor of emotional

distance. Words she tries to come closer to him and to hold the connection not lose its grip on her world.

Lakshman, however, is the distancing part, who draws back since intimacy and relationship demands are not comfortable but not because he does not care. His leaving without emotional closure speaks of his avoidant style that lays emphasis on dharma in the face of emotional needs. Duty in such a case is a safe place where one is not required to handle emotions or confess the damage. The ethical superiority of loyalty to Ram is the position he maintains, leaving Urmila to the unanswered questions, unuttered love, and unexplained agony. The fact that he does not say anything during the time of parting adds to the emotional instability in a marriage. Later on in the years and with the added burden of emotion, Urmila starts to question the actions of Lakshman and the relationship obligation system that dictates the cross-cultural nature of their relationship.

Here she thinks about waking up to the imbalance she had to survive: we talk of dharma, dharma. But is there not dharma of a husband to his wife? (Kane 219). In pursuer-distancer pattern, the line is actually a threat to the liberty of the distancer. This brings out the way in which guys are habitually cleared of emotional accountability whereas wives are conditioned to comprehend, forgive and assist. Urmila does not deny the fact that dharma can not be one-sided without being oppressive; on the contrary, she portrays this as a great outcry of relational injustice. Their marriage becomes structured and gendered as well as being a psychological cycle in the form of the pursuer-distancer dynamic. Whereas Lakshman keeps pulling back with his responsibility, stoicism and avoidance, Urmila keeps making overtures with her hope, silence, devotion and emotional labour.

Their love is sad not because they are incompatible, but rather because they deviate in terms of relationship, communication, attachment expectations and emotional expression. Lakshman does not push Urmila purposefully rather; it simply happens because he has never been taught how to be emotionally present in a relationship, especially towards his partner. Furthermore, Lakshman's detachment style is a reflection of his inner lack to convert affection into intimacy rather than a lack of love. Bowlby describes this long-term separation without communication as a

part of attachment trauma. For fourteen years, Urmila's near-sleep state symbolised as a metaphor for psychological immobility, signifying emotional distance and extended longing in their relationship. "These fourteen years are going to be a test for each one of us... The pain is inevitable, but it will teach us much." (Kane 153). This is an adaptive survival strategy rather than surrender; her attachment system attempts to control her extreme separation distress. Lakshman continues his life as though nothing had occurred and Urmila does not get an opportunity to be valued and this intensifies emotional lapse in their relationship.

VII. CONCLUSION

Upon the analysis of the *Sita's Sister* in terms of attachment theory, the tale of Urmila is presented as a meaningful psychological fiction whose crafty feature is the ability to combine emotional truthfulness with mythological narration. Despite having the qualities of a securely attached individual, including empathy, resilience and ability to demonstrate strong emotional presence, in her marriage life, Urmila is the one where her qualities are put under constant checking and testing. Consequently, the signs of the consistent relational imbalance that dictates the direction of the relationship are the avoidance style of attachment and his inclination toward retreat, as well as his deed to duty and his lack of contentment with intimacy of Lakshman. More to the point, the pursuer-distancer cycle, which defines them, becomes solid structure instead of interpersonal, and is upheld by greater patriarchal expectations that place male responsibility over female perseverance.

The remote faith and love of dharma of Lakshman is a defense over his relational responsibility, which is a contrast to the traits of Urmila of desire, waiting, emotional tension and silent pursuits of her acknowledgement. Consequently, the novel puts emphasis on the emotional strain that is part of mythic ideals and shows how an incompatible connection, amplifies desire and causes breakage of feelings. Finally, Sita, my sister, introduces the reader to explore anew the epic characters as complexity psychological topics whose inner lives do not conform to the current rules of loyalty and duty. The novel by Kane turns out to be a powerful exploration of layers, depth, and critical evaluation of the emotional truths

that lie under the surface of the epic because it focuses on attachment traumas, marital imbalance, and the tenacity of the woman who is bargaining with abandonment. It also demonstrates that modern psychological systems can fit ancient books and dynamics as well.

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