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Shurpanakha Speaks: Reclaiming the Silenced

Women of the *Ramayana*

Abstract: *This paper re-examines the Ramayana through the silenced voice of Shurpanakha, a character historically demonised as grotesque, lustful, and dangerous. By situating her mutilation and rejection alongside the stories of other marginalised women—Ahalya, Renuka, and Urmila—the study reveals how the epic encodes patriarchal anxieties, punishes female desire, and perpetuates cultural othering. Drawing on Valmiki’s Ramayana, Kampan’s Iramavataram, and modern feminist reinterpretations by writers such as Volga, Kavita Kane, and Anand Neelakantan, the article highlights the ways in which women who resist or transgress social norms are silenced through physical violence, moral condemnation, and erasure. Employing feminist, psychoanalytic, and postcolonial frameworks, the study positions Shurpanakha not as a monstrous outsider but as a symbolic figure of protest against systemic injustice. By reclaiming her narrative, the paper challenges the binaries of idealised and vilified womanhood, urging a re-reading of the Ramayana as a text that must be interrogated for its enduring role in shaping gendered hierarchies.*

Keywords: Shurpanakha, Feminist reinterpretation, Ramayana, gendered violence, patriarchy.

Shurpanakha Speaks: Reclaiming the Silenced Women of the *Ramayana*

Saswati Ghosh¹

Introduction

The *Ramayana*, one of the most revered epics of Indian civilisation, has traditionally been read through the lens of dharma, ideal kingship, and the virtuous womanhood embodied by Sita. Yet, nestled within its grand narrative lies another tale, less told, more silenced—that of Shurpanakha. Often caricatured as grotesque, lustful, and dangerous, Shurpanakha has historically served as the epic’s cautionary figure: the antithesis to the ideal woman. However, what if the war of the *Ramayana*—commonly seen as a divine conflict over Sita’s abduction—was also rooted in the humiliation and mutilation of Shurpanakha? This paper argues that Shurpanakha's rejection, ridicule, and physical disfigurement reveal a deeper pattern of gendered violence, moral double standards, and cultural othering in the epic.

Revisiting Shurpanakha’s portrayal across classical and modern retellings—from Valmiki’s *Ramayana* to Kampan’s *Iramavataram*, and from contemporary feminist literature to devotional adaptations—this article reclaims her narrative as symbolic of women silenced for desiring, protesting, or simply existing outside patriarchal norms. Alongside Shurpanakha, other sidelined figures such as Ahalya, Renuka, and Urmila are examined as victims of moral systems that valorise obedience and silence in women. By foregrounding these "unsung" women, this essay invites a critical rethinking of justice, power, and voice in the *Ramayana* tradition.

Literature Review

The marginalisation of female voices in the *Ramayana* has received increasing scholarly attention in recent years, with particular focus on characters like Shurpanakha, who have traditionally been demonised and silenced within dominant patriarchal frameworks. A range of contemporary feminist and psychoanalytic studies seeks to revisit and reconstruct these neglected perspectives, bringing forward subversive and empathetic reinterpretations.

Aditi Dirghangi and Seemita Mohanty’s seminal paper, “*De-mythifying the Ramayana: A Study of the ‘Devoiced’ Surpanakha*” (2019), critiques the androcentric canon of Valmiki’s epic by reclaiming Shurpanakha’s voice through Kavita Kane’s *Lanka’s Princess*. The authors argue that Shurpanakha, long portrayed as grotesque and immoral, represents a figure of female sexual agency, punished precisely for transgressing gender norms. In contrast to Sita, whose idealised chastity renders her

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culturally acceptable, Shurpanakha's assertive desire destabilises the patriarchal binaries of virtue and vice. Their study positions her not merely as Ravana's sister or a narrative device, but as an emblem of "devoiced" womanhood struggling to assert individuality within a male-dominated moral order.

Pavithra P. and Dr. G. Dinesh Kumar expand on this feminist-humanist approach by applying a psychoanalytic framework to Kane's novel. In their 2024 study published in *IJCRT*, they explore the roots of Shurpanakha's emotional transformation from Meenakshi to Surpanakha, attributing her rage and vengefulness to early familial trauma, gender discrimination, and emotional neglect. They highlight how Kane reimagines her not as a rakshasi but as a psychologically damaged woman whose pain and rebellion mirror the effects of systemic misogyny. The portrayal is significant in that it reframes "monstrosity" as a product of emotional deprivation rather than innate evil, turning Shurpanakha into a complex subject with interiority and history.

Dr. Vibha Tiwari's article "*Revisiting the Ramayana with a Feminist Perspective*" (2022) complements these readings by emphasising the pattern of female subjugation across characters like Sita, Kaikeyi, Urmila, and Ahalya. In particular, her critique of Shurpanakha underscores how female sexuality—when articulated openly—is portrayed as dangerous and deserving of brutal punishment. Tiwari argues that the mutilation of Shurpanakha is emblematic of patriarchal discomfort with women who deviate from the passive, submissive mould. This reading situates Shurpanakha within a broader framework of literary and cultural violence that extends across the epic's female figures.

The special issue on *Peripheral Identities in Middle Flight* (2017), particularly the essay by Soumya Sundar Mukherjee, also emphasises Shurpanakha's location at the intersection of gender and cultural periphery. As a rakshasi, she is doubly marginalised—not only as a woman but also as a representative of a non-Aryan, forest-dwelling community. Her rejection and mutilation by the 'civilised' Aryan princes are read as symbolic acts of silencing the other—geographically, socially, and sexually. Mukherjee's analysis aligns with the broader postcolonial critique of epics that mask exclusionary ideologies within the guise of divine order.

These reinterpretations collectively dismantle the simplistic good-versus-evil dichotomy of the *Ramayana*, revealing instead a complex network of gendered power relations. Modern retellings like those by Volga, Kavita Kane, and Anand Neelakantan play a pivotal role in this reframing, offering counter-narratives where characters like Shurpanakha, Urmila, and Ahalya become bearers of trauma, resistance, and political consciousness. Such works challenge the epic structure's moral authority and propose alternate ways of remembering and reimagining justice for the silenced women of mythology.

Methodology

The primary objective of this study is to interrogate the portrayal of Shurpanakha and other marginalised female figures in the *Ramayana* tradition, tracing how their representations have evolved across classical, devotional, and contemporary literary sources.

The analysis begins with close readings of the Valmiki *Ramayana* and Kampan's *Iramavataram*, focusing on the Panchavati episode and the treatment of Shurpanakha's character. Particular attention is paid to the language, symbolism, and moral judgments embedded in these texts that contribute to the demonisation and silencing of female desire. These foundational epics are contrasted with modern literary reinterpretations such as Kavita Kane's *Lanka's Princess*, Volga's *The Liberation of Sita*, and Anand Neelakantan's retellings, which reimagine Shurpanakha, Ahalya, Renuka, and Urmila through a feminist lens.

Additionally, the paper draws from secondary academic literature—including feminist, psychoanalytic, and postcolonial critiques—to contextualise the figures within broader debates around gender, voice, and justice in mythological narratives. Key works by scholars such as Aditi Dirghangi, Seemita Mohanty, Vibha Tiwari, and Pavithra P. provide critical frameworks for understanding how female transgression is punished and how patriarchal morality is upheld through selective narration.

The study also incorporates cultural parallels and contemporary social analogies, such as the phenomenon of acid attacks and the dichotomy of Lakshmi/Alakshmi imagery, to emphasise the continuing legacy of symbolic and real violence against women. The article thus navigates between textual analysis, cultural criticism, and contemporary feminist discourse to reclaim the humanity and agency of women historically cast as “other” or “monstrous.” Through this multi-layered approach, the article not only re-evaluates epic narratives but also challenges the enduring socio-cultural ideologies that justify the marginalisation of female voices, both in literature and in lived experience.

Panchavati: Rama-Lakshmana-Sita and Shurpanakha

When Shurpanakha proposes her love for Rama in Valmiki's *Ramayana*, Valmiki describes her as ugly, pot-bellied, copper-haired, harsh-voiced, and an old Rakshasi (*The Valmiki Ramayana*, 3. 17.9-11). This Rakshasi, however, does not conceal her identity, stating that she is a *Kamarupini Rakshasi* (one who can change her form at will). In her eyes, Sita is ugly, unchaste, terrifying, and emaciated, and utterly unworthy of Rama, who possesses royal features and the beauty of Kamadeva. Shurpanakha believes she herself is suitable for Rama, and therefore, Rama should abandon Sita, or Shurpanakha will eat Sita and Lakshmana, and then she will roam happily and peacefully with Rama throughout Dandakaranya, because this Panchavati, this forest, is full of Rakshasas, but with Shurpanakha by his side, Rama will be safe and undisturbed. If Valmiki knew that Shurpanakha was a *Kamarupini Rakshasi*, then why would she appear in such an objectionable form instead of taking the shape of a beautiful woman

preferred by humans? *Kamarupini* means she can change her appearance at will. Did Valmiki assume that a Rakshasi is unintelligent, only capable of achieving things through brute force? Or is she shameless, and thus deserving punishment? Or, from the very beginning, did Valmiki consider a woman expressing her affection or love so openly for another man should be so objectionable to the readers and devotees, that only an ugly Shurpanakha can dare such a thing? Yet, in the famous South Indian Ramayana, Kampan's 'Iramavataram', written in the twelfth century, where the very title expresses the poet's devotion to Rama as an avatar of Vishnu, Shurpanakha is an extremely beautiful woman. There, the disfigurement is even more horrific: nose, ears, hands, and breasts (*Iramavataram* 69-84, 119.2947, 33.2860, 33.2861). But Shurpanakha's two-day love proposal is very poetic. While Valmiki's Ramayana expands the entire story over 51 shlokas, Kampan's version has 143 verses detailing it. Even if Rama is described as a protector of all, the disfigurement or killing of women is common in the Ramayana; in Valmiki's Ramayana, in the Balakanda, Lakshmana had cut off the hands, nose, and ears of the Rakshasi Taraka before killing her. And the wife of Bhrigu was also beheaded.

In Valmiki's Ramayana, Rama then calls Sita, his beloved wife and, stating that it is difficult to live with a co-wife, directs Shurpanakha towards Lakshmana: "He is of good character, handsome, unmarried, and equal to you in beauty" (*The Valmiki Ramayana* 3. 18.2-3). And the proposal: "O wide-eyed one, you should worship him" (*The Valmiki Ramayana* 3. 18.5). Now, the two brothers begin to mock the love-struck Shurpanakha, as mockery was scarce in their forest life. When Shurpanakha makes the same proposal to Lakshmana, the reply is that he is his elder brother's servant, so why should she be a servant-wife? Instead, if she becomes Rama's younger wife, Rama will abandon his ugly, unchaste, terrifying, old wife and stay with Shurpanakha. This mockery continues, and when the impatient Shurpanakha, considering Sita her rival, chases her, Rama seems to realise, saying that it is not right to mock this love-struck forest-dwelling raksasi, as she is not skilled in accepting refusal, disfigures this 'mad', 'unchaste' woman, as described by Valmiki (*The Valmiki Ramayana* 3. 18.20). Thereafter, Lakshmana cuts off Shurpanakha's nose and ears. So the Purushottom Rama and Lakshmana, supposedly representing a civilised species, made a joke with an 'uncivilised' forest-dweller, and punished Rakshasi Shurpanakha for expressing love! (*The Valmiki Ramayana* 3. 18.21). In Valmiki's Ramayana, ideal women are obedient, modest, and do not express independent desires, and certainly not if they are love-struck. Therefore, the Rakshasi Shurpanakha, who roams freely, dares to be alone, and can invite a man like Rama or Lakshmana to be her companion—that woman, even if not human, is punishable in human society. By punishing Shurpanakha, a message can be sent to women in every home that Sita is the ideal, not Shurpanakha! Because the forest-dwelling, solitary Rakshasi Shurpanakha is a source of danger as the 'other' to Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana. Or, anticipating her as a source of danger, she was made the 'other'; because she is not suitable for human society, the shastrakaras (scriptural authorities) approve of her physical disfigurement. Moreover, she is a widow;

such an open and courageous expression of desire by a widow is an even greater danger to society. There is no room for the idea that there can be cultural differences between humans and rakshasas regarding gender roles. In the eyes of human culture and judgment, the rakshasa is the "Other." That "Other" has been given a fitting punishment, a punishment that will leave a permanent mark on their body and mind.

Thereafter, the bleeding Surpanakha first went to Khara for redress, but Khara, Dushana, and their fourteen thousand rakshasa army were successively killed in battle with Rama. After this, first their attendant Akampana, and then Surpanakha herself, with her bleeding and disfigured face, went to Ravana's court in Lanka with this news, seeking redress. What redress? That Ravana should abduct Sita, Rama's wife, because Sita is worthy of Ravana, and it was while trying to bring her to Ravana that poor Surpanakha ended up in this state. Valmiki, however, made Surpanakha tell a slight lie, that she had gone to Rama and Lakshmana—she doesn't say that, as if a rakshasi is synonymous with a basket of lies. When we see the portrayal of "good girl" versus "bad girl" in Hindi cinema today, don't we see this same picture? In some parts of Bengal, during Lakshmi Puja (especially the Lakshmi Puja that happens during Diwali), an idol of Alakshmi is made as the opposite of Lakshmi, and her nose and ears are cut off before immersion. Is this not the same tradition of punishment? And can't any so-called ugly woman desire any so-called handsome man? The opposite happens all the time. Who decides the standard of beauty? And if someone disfigures a woman, as happens with acid attacks today, Surpanakha teaches us, don't hide your face in a corner of the house. Let the whole world know who disfigured you; speaking out loudly can protect oneself. And if we cannot protect ourselves today, we can at least make ourselves memorable in the pages of history and epics; future generations might give us justice. Thus, the abduction of Sita and the war of the Ramayana become inevitable.

Surpanakha's History and Geography

Surpanakha was born of mixed blood. However, this origin is also found in the Uttarakanda of Valmiki's Ramayana. As Uttarakanda has been described as a later extrapolation into the epic, one is open to accepting or rejecting it. Surpanakha is the daughter of Rishi Vishrava, son of Maharsi Pulastya. Her mother was Kaikesi, daughter of the rakshasa Sumali and the gandharva maiden Ketumati. According to Valmiki's description, her brothers were Dashagriva Ravana, the mighty Kumbhakarna, and the righteous Vibhishana. But Surpanakha was disfigured. Elsewhere, such as in Kampan's Iramavataram, Surpanakha is exceedingly beautiful, named Minakshi, meaning her eyes are elongated like fish. Elsewhere, she is not Surpanakha, but Suparnika, because she loved plants and animals. Not the civic beauty of Lanka, but the free forest of Dandakaranya was her open, free-roaming space. She earned the epithet Surpanakha by using her nails for self-defence.

Valmiki writes that Surpanakha was married to the demon Vidyutjihva. But when Ravana set out to conquer the three worlds, Vidyutjihva was killed in a battle with the Kalakeya demons in Ashmanagara. When the weeping Surpanakha, with a choked voice, rebuked Ravana for killing his brother-in-law, Ravana consoled her, saying he would appease her with honour, gifts, and favours, and that he did not recognise Vidyutjihva during the battle when arrows were being shot. Or, he suggested, let his dear sister stay with her maternal cousin Khara and his general Dushana in Dandakaranya; Khara and Dushana have fourteen thousand rakshasas under them who will always be ready to obey Surpanakha's commands. Surpanakha does not desire civic comforts or the wealth of Lanka. She wants to live a free, independent, solitary life like herself. She is comfortable in the forest. So, not Lanka, but Dandakaranya is what she voluntarily chooses for her solitary life.

Elsewhere, we find that marrying Vidyutjihva was also an expression of Surpanakha's independent thinking. Because he was a demon, a different clan other than the rakshasas, the rakshasa king Ravana did not accept this relationship at all. Mandodari mediated and persuaded Ravana to agree. After the marriage, when she was still Minakshi, not yet Surpanakha, she was living happily with Vidyutjihva. The Kalakeya demon king Vidyutjihva was planning to defeat the rakshasa king Dashanana Ravan and seize Lankapuri. During such a period of doubt, while conquering the netherworld, *Patala*, Ravana attacked Ashmanagar. After Vidyutjihva's death and Ravana's return to Lanka, proud Shurpanakha, abandoning the comforts of Lankapuri, became a solitary forest dweller.

Valmiki did not write anything about Shurpanakha's fate. It can be assumed that after Ravana's death, when Vibhishana became king, Shurpanakha continued to live in Lankapuri. It is said that a few years later, Shurpanakha and her step-sister Kumbhini drowned in the sea. However, just as devotional scriptures say that Ravana abducted Sita so that he would die at Rama's hands, because this was his 'worship in the form of an enemy', similar claims are made about Shurpanakha. It is said that Shurpanakha went to Pushkar and performed penance to Brahma so that she would get Rama as her husband in her next life, and thus, in her next life, in the Treta Yuga, she was born as Kubja, one of Krishna's many wives. Devotionalism softens Shurpanakha's loud desires, protests, and pain by immersing them in the rasa of devotion.

Shurpanakha in Contemporary Literature

There have been several writings about Shurpanakha across India, all of which are sympathetic towards her. Although there have been many sympathetic writings towards Sita in Bengal, I have not found examples of mainstream sympathetic writings towards Shurpanakha in Bengali literature. Here, three such writings are discussed. In 2018, Anand Neelakantan wrote 'Ravana's Sister Meenakshi' (Westland Publications, New Delhi). Elderly Meenakshi, having come to Ayodhya, reminisces to a Chandali woman, an outcast in so-called human society, about the day Sita was to be abandoned. Then Sita and

Meenakshi meet face to face. They exchange experiences about the horrors they both have gone through and are still going through. In Meenakshi's memory, her physical mutilation is accompanied by the destruction of her homeland, Lankapuri. This exchange helps to reduce the horror of their experiences. There, in the context of Sita and Ayodhya, Meenakshi becomes the individual 'other' and Lankapuri becomes the collective 'other'.

On the other hand, in the novel 'Lanka's Princess' by journalist and mythological writer Kavita Kane, Meenakshi is a carefree forest maiden. She stays in Dandakaranya because there is no display of wealth like one finds in Lanka. All creatures are bound by the forest's discipline -- be they human or demon, stationary or mobile, everyone respects and fears each other. Everyone will live in the forest, but the forest will not accept anyone's servitude. Trees, plants, and animals are at the centre of her love. After the murder of her husband Vidyutjihva, Meenakshi sheds her carefree nature-loving self and becomes the terrifying Shurpanakha, her sole aim being revenge on her brother Dashanana Ravan, for which she is prepared to go to any length. Nevertheless, after the destruction of Lanka, when Vibhishana gains the kingdom, she discusses the relevance of the war, the destruction, and the deaths with Mandodari in despair. Her next targets are Rama and Lakshmana. For this, she takes a job in Mandavi's, Shatrughna's wife's house, disguised as a maid named Chandra. Chandra herself draws Ravana's picture, but public suspicion sends Sita to the forest. Now it's Urmila's and Lakshmana's sons' turn. She can't do it anymore, because in Lakshmana's son, she finds the young Indrajit and her own son Shambhri. Urmila gently tells her that she doesn't actually enjoy destroying anyone; in everything, she is actually searching for her lost world.

Volga's book, "Liberation of Sita," is the English translation which received the Sahitya Akademi Award in Telugu. In this book, after Sita goes into exile, she meets four female characters one by one, all of whom, according to our ideas, were all wronged in some way or other: Shurpanakha, Ahalya, Renuka, and Urmila. In exile, Sita finds a beautiful forest, which Shurpanakha has created. Shurpanakha says that she has been able to overcome her inner anger and feeling of revenge in the creation of this beauty, the serenity, in the beautification of this forest. A human, a demoness, one from Ayodhya, one from Lanka -- they forget all the injustice they faced, their abandonment. Their love for Rama has ruined both their lives. So, before Sita leaves, she says that life has taught her not to ruin her life for any man. And Rama, he is not free either; the pride of a Kshatriya, the pride of a king who pleases his subjects, the pride of being an heir to the Ikshvaku dynasty has forced him to perform many duties throughout his life. How much has Rama himself been able to do what he preferred throughout his life?

What was Ahalya's fault?

Rama liberated the stone-like Ahalya. But how much was her responsibility in turning a stone? When Brahma was creating beings, he created a woman, Ahalya, with all beauty and virtues, without any adversity or 'flaw'. He handed this woman over to the great sage Gautama. Greedy Indra had intercourse with her in the guise of Gautama. The responsibility is entirely Indra's. The punishment should be Indra's. What kind of justice is it where Ahalya's beauty is destroyed? And if the judgment is not just, then why should Rama be the saviour by "liberating" Ahalya? Brahma created Ahalya uniquely, and Indra coveted her. Gautama cursed Ahalya, saying, "May your beauty be destroyed. You, who were beautiful and youthful, have strayed from the righteous path; Indra was confused by seeing only you as beautiful, and after this, many more will be beautiful like you" (*The Valmiki Ramayana* 7 30.37-38). This judgment echoes our contemporary times. Is it not typical victim-shaming? If you are raped or a victim of sexual harassment, that is entirely your responsibility!

Renuka's Decapitation

The killing of women did not happen in Satya, Treta, or Dwapara Yugas; this is another narrative we have inherited. In the Balakanda of the Ramayana, will the killing of the demoness Taraka not be considered a killing of a woman because she was a demoness? Then what about Renuka? The wife of Rishi Jamadagni and a mother of his five children had such immense virtue that she would bring water from the river every day in a new sand pot for her husband's yajna, and by the power of her virtue, that water pot would arrive intact at the ashram every day. One day, the water was late. Jamadagni, through his yogic power, learned that his wife had faltered. There are multiple stories mentioned for this faltering; on one hand, it is said that Renuka was afflicted by lust after seeing the Gandharva Chitraratha having intercourse with other Gandharva maidens in the river; in another, it is said that Renuka saw the shadow of a Gandharva couple's lovemaking in the water while they were moving in the sky; on the other hand, she herself also became involved. So the sand pot could not hold water. Upon returning to the ashram without water, Jamadagni, as punishment, told his sons to decapitate Renuka. Four sons refused, but the youngest, Parashurama, on his father's command, severed the heads of his mother and four brothers with an axe. The message that there is no leniency for even a mother if she is "unchaste" is still seen today. As a reward for this act, he did get everyone's lives back, but that does not make the incident of decapitation forgivable. It is noteworthy that in the Ramayana, Dasharathi Rama takes away the prowess of Parashurama.

Silent Urmila

Even though Bharata and Shatrughna practised extreme austerity to rule the kingdom in Rama's name, Mandavi or Shrutakirti, their wives did not have to endure fourteen years of separation from their

husbands. Although there is no special mention of them either. Even when Rama and Lakshmana return to Ayodhya, we do not find any mention of Urmila. Although there is a mention of Kaushalya's grief after Lakshmana's demise, Valmiki makes no mention of Urmila. There are some stories about this silent Urmila in the minds of modern people.

Embodied Women and Human Rama

If the women of the Ramayana are human, even if they are divine beings, they do not express any desires or passions. That is reserved for the inhuman demoneses. Good girls will be, like Sita, having no existence of their own without their husbands, no desires of their own. Otherwise, their fate is dismemberment or decapitation. And whether Rama is an avatar or not, in his time, he was a human and a good ruler -- accepting this does not lead to any political, social, or cultural difficulties. Sita's fire ordeal, her subsequent banishment to the forest, Shurpanakha's nose and ears being cut off -- questions about these things could certainly arise in later times, and it was difficult to accept them even then. Today, questioning Rama's virtue leads to severe difficulties. Not only now, but sixty-five years ago, when Arvind Kumar wrote a poem titled 'Ram Ka Antardwand' in the July 1957 issue of Sarita magazine, he witnessed the poem being banned, the magazine being burned, an attack on the magazine office in Delhi, firing, and deaths. Later, when he wrote 'A Study in the Ethics of Banishment of Sita' as a document for his case against him, which later came out as a book, he still could not include the poem in it.

Conclusion: Reclaiming the “Other” Woman

The figure of Shurpanakha, long dismissed as grotesque, lustful, and laughable, emerges in this study not only as a victim of physical and symbolic violence but as a mirror reflecting the deep anxieties of a patriarchal moral order. Her desire is criminalised, her autonomy punished, and her voice muted—yet, her presence continues to haunt the epic, urging us to listen again, more attentively and more justly. In reclaiming Shurpanakha's story, we are not merely re-evaluating a character; we are confronting the structures that differentiate between the “ideal woman” and the “dangerous woman,” between Sita and Shurpanakha, Ahalya and Renuka, Urmila and Mandodari. These binaries continue to shape contemporary cultural narratives—where women are judged for desire, punished for protest, and silenced for speaking out. By re-reading these characters through feminist and cultural hermeneutics, we challenge the mythic and moral sanctity of the epics and begin the process of ethical reparation. The Ramayana, like all great literature, must remain open to re-examination, especially when it perpetuates social hierarchies under divine authority. If epics are to remain relevant, they must not only be revered but also interrogated.

Let Shurpanakha speak—not in whispers, but in echoes that reshape the canon.

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