

Revisiting Surpanakha: Reclaiming Narrative Space, Agency, and the Female Body

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ABSTRACT

In the dominant versions of the *Ramayana*, Surpanakha is represented as an ugly, monstrous, potbellied demoness and positioned as the antithesis of the obedient and passive Sita. Her transgressive behaviour renders her a villain and invites severe punishment. This stereotyping is reinforced through popular media, which visualizes her with grotesque features, an ugly face, a monstrous body with long nails, sharp teeth, and horns. She is depicted as a temptress. This one-dimensional representation denies her agency, complexity, and humanity. In contrast, contemporary writers such as Kavita Kane, Volga, Sara Joseph, Anand Neelakantan, and others have reimagined her character with feminist, Aryan-Dravidian, and subaltern framework. These writers reinterpret her not as an adulteress but as an assertive and confident woman who resists the subjugation of women and Aryan supremacist ideology. These alternative perspectives on Surpanakha subvert the mainstream narratives and reimagine her as a figure of resistance who challenges patriarchal, gendered, and racial subjugation. This study examines a revisionist theatrical representation of Surpanakha in *Surpanakha: A Search* (2025), a solo performance by theatre artist Parshathy J Nath. Parshathy undertakes an inquiry into one of the marginalised characters of the *Ramayana* and reimagines Surpanakha's mutilation as the result of a chauvinistic attitude towards female sexuality. By foregrounding questions of agency, bodily autonomy, space, and choice, *Surpanakha: A Search* connects the epic past with contemporary realities. The performance highlights how the constraints

imposed on Surpanakha continue to shape the lived experiences of women today, thereby reclaiming her as a symbol of resistance against patriarchal, racial, and cultural domination.

Keywords: Body, Space, Gap, Feminist perspective, Aryan-dravidian, Racial conflicts.
