



# ***Women Characters as a Mirror of Indian Society in Vyasa's Mahabharata***

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***Abstract : Sage Vyasa, author of many Hindu scriptures, is one of the most eminent literary figure of Indian literature. His literary works are undoubtedly most popular and widely read and his well known epic Mahabharata is performed like a drama. Mahabharata is the mirror of Indian society. Minus this literary work we can't think about the Indian literature. This epic talks about the age old socio-political and cultural scenario of Indian society. The Plot of this epic is still relevant in our day to day life. In this paper some women characters are taken for discussion and their role in that so called society. Through these characters we can see the female position in the society at that time and their social impact. During the age of Vyasa it is seen that women position is not same with man .But observing the women characters it comes to notice that the women characters of Mahabharata are remarkable and they have their own identity in their respective positions. To highlight the Indian society , the characters of Ganga, Satyabati , Kunti ,Madri, Gandhari, Draupadi , Hidimba , Amba , Ambika and Ambalika are discussed and how they related to the plot as well as with the time and society of Vyasa.***

***Key Words: Vyasa, Mahabharata, epic ,Indian society***

**Introduction:** It is said that Indian women were not given equal rights like man. In Mahabharata women are presented in such a way that they have their own contribution in the development of the plot. They play their roles as mother, wife, grand- mother , daughter- in -law, sister etc. It is a unique quality of the epic that women don't participate in the Kurushetra War directly. They are all relatives of two clans Pandava and Kaurava under one dynasty ,it is Bharata.

Some other characters are also there and have their own roles in the epic. Vyasa vividly portrays the women characters from which we get a picture of the world of ancient Indian women . Whenever situation arises they play their own roles for the betterment of their family as well as for the society.

The most interesting women character of this epic is Satyabati also known as *Matsyagandha* who smells like fish and also the mother of Vyasa. It is in the sense that for her Bhishma remains unmarried. Having abandoned by Ganga King Shantanu is not happy. For mental peace he goes to forest and meets Satyabati .He falls in love with her. But he is surprised to know that her father will take him as a son in law if he promises to make Satyabati's son king of Hastinapur. King Shantanu rejects this condition. This is the cause of his sadness. Whenever Bhishma knows he goes to Satyabatis' house and promises to her father that he will never marry in his life . Knowing his bow King Shantanu gives his son the power of will death. Later Satyabati gives two sons Vichitravirya and Chitrangada. They are not physically strong. After the death of her husband and her sons there is a challenge to the Hastinapur kingdom. On the one hand Bhishma the eldest son of Shantanu doesn't break his bow and on the other hand the throne is empty. In such a situation as a queen of Hastinapur she has to take a bold decision and asks his son sage Vyasa to beget sons through Ambika and Ambalika. Vyasa begets Dhritrashtra, Pandu and Vidura. As a mother and queen she is courageous and takes right decision at right moment to protect Hastinapura kingdom. Although she is the step mother of Bhishma she loves him and takes care like her sons. She goes to hermitage after Hastinapura gets a king. This is the responsibility of an Indian woman having finished her duty she retires to the forest. She is the symbol of Shakti.

Kunti, the mother of Pandavas, is one of the symbol of love , dedication , patient and Indian womanhood. Many challenges run over her life like a river flows to ocean but she remains constant. There is a fault in her life that she hides the birth of Karna as her son. For which Karna has to suffer identity crisis for his whole life. Moreover Karna has to take part with evil side of Duryodhana in Kurukshetra war. As a mother she repents this but as society is concerned it is illegal to establish the identity of Karna who is born during her adolescence using the divine spell of sage Durvasa. As a wife of Pandu and queen of Kuru she is dedicated to her husband. When Pandu is cursed by sage Kindama that he

never makes intimacy with her wives, Kunti using her spell, gives birth three sons Yudhishthira , Bhima and Arjuna the greatest warriors of that era. She also takes responsibility as a step mother of Nakul and Sahadeva. In this epic she is a woman of moral qualities. She tries to stop the war between Kaurava and Pandava. She is gently humiliated by the rule of Dhritarashtra but she is always calm and takes the situation under control. Still she respects Kaurava. This is the quality of an Indian woman who can accept the all challenges .These are her part and parcel of her life that she is unable to give the identity of Karna , loses her husband, Pandavas are given exile and has to go to forest with her sons. Still she stands by her sons to the last moment of war and constantly guides her sons. After the death of Karna she reveals to her sons that he is the eldest son of her. Doing this she finishes her duty to a son who passes his whole life with identity crisis.

Another wife of Pandu is Madri, the princess of Madra kingdom and sister of Shalya, is the symbol of sacrifice and a beloved one .Under the curse of sage Kindama Pandu dies when Pandu approaches Madri for sexual intercourse. She also dies herself with Pandu giving her sons Nakula and Sahadeva to Kunti.

The live of Gandhari in this epic is very interesting. She is an ideal woman standing by the side of dharma. She devotes all her life voluntarily covering cloth on her eyes showing her respect to blind husband and shares her husband's fate. She is not only the part of the body of Dhritarashtra but also the soul of his life after death .Dhritarashtra says to Vidura that Gandhari is for him everything. Knowing the result of the war many times she requests her husband and sons to stop the war . She possesses great wisdom and insight. She knows that this war will won by the dharma side where Krishna stands for. Being a virtuous and righteous woman she is not blind to the evil deeds of her sons .She always points out their wrong deeds and asks them to compromise with their brothers, Pandava .War is not the ultimate solution of any problem. She also requests lord Krishna to stop the war. Losing all near and dear ones, in emotion she curses lord Krishna that like the Kuru Dynasty His Yadu Dynasty also will be finished. She is so strong virtually who even does not hesitate the death of her hundreds sons for the sake of dharma. She realises that it is the result of their actions .She suffers immense grief still she is dutiful to Kunti. Whenever Kunti feels alone Gandhari gives companion to her.



Born out of fire Draupadi also known as Panchali plays a major role in the epic and is the symbol of the destroyer of evil. Being the wife of five husbands and sons and the queen she has to suffer lot in her life . We may also say it how Indian women suffer in various circumstances. She is the most beautiful and strong character in this epic . At the same time she is also constant and determined woman to take revenge against Kaurava and Karna. She is humiliated before the court of Hastinapur where the greatest warriors and king are present but no one can stop the order of Duryodhana to unrobe Draupadi. Had Lord Krishna not rescued she would have been naked. This incident is recognised as the cause of the greatest war of Kurukshetra. All may forget it but Draupadi never forgets it and she always tells her husband to take revenge. Honestly speaking she wants to take revenge only for that no one can do such like things in future. As a wife she does her duty accordingly . She feels sometimes angry with Arjuna because of the marriage of Ulupi and Subhadra. For the greater interest of the Pandava and to win the war and make friendship with other kingdoms she tries to tackle her own wavering mind. After winning the war she tries to calm her heart. She may be regarded as the first Feminist voice of Indian society. She raises the issues of the rights of women and never hesitate to say her rights before the court of Hastinapur and Angarajya when she is unrobed by Dushasana and humiliated by Kishak. She talks about the protection of a woman .Saying that if the kings and the warriors can't protect a woman they are not fit for ruling a kingdom, she establishes her feminist voice.

A savage woman, sister of a man eater, Hidimbi also depicted in this epic who is from North-Eastern part of India. She is a powerful demoness in the epic who can transform her body to many forms. Whatever presentation of her body in this epic ,her rule in the epic is very significant. When Pandava is in exile she encounters with Pandava and fascinated with the beauty of Bhima. They get married and their Son Ghatotkacha is born. This son plays a great role in the Kurukshetra war .To kill him Karna has to use his divine weapon. Although she is the sister of a demon she is in the path of righteousness and when the war is going on she sends her son to fight with Pandava. In other words, sending her son to the war she does her duty as a mother and as a wife of Bhima and member of Kuru dynasty she has the responsibility to protect . Although she does not get the royal position as other wives of Pandava she is loyal to her family. The greatest warriors Barbarik, Anjanaparva and Meghabarana are her grandsons who are also the symbol of righteousness.

The princess of Kasi Amba, Ambika and Ambalika were abducted by Bheesma to get married with Vichitravirya. But Amba does not marry with him because she has a love affair with king Salva. In this epic Amba is also a voice of feminism who openly expresses her love affairs with another king. Whenever she is rejected by Salva because of the abduction of Bhishma she makes up her mind to take revenge against Bhishma and bows that she will be the cause of Bhishma's death. After the death of Vichitravirya the heir of Hastinapur becomes again empty. Satyawati calls on Vyasa as a surrogate father and asks him to give birth with Ambika, Ambalika and a maid. Three sons Dhritarashtra, Pandu and Vidura take birth. Ambika, the mother of Dhritarashtra, is the representation of the qualities of courage and strength. Ambalika, the mother of Pandu, also has the quality of wisdom and devotion. Both Ambika and Ambalika are the loyal to their kingdom. To continue the lineage of Bharata clan they do their duty as assigned by queen Satyawati. After the death of Pandu they go to forest with mother Satyawati.

**Conclusion:** Discussing the female characters of Mahabharata, it is seen that all the characters are dependable on their husbands. At the same time they establish their identity whenever situations demand. During the era of Mahabharata they have no equal status with men. They cannot take final decisions like men but as wives, princess and queens they play their roles. They, in their own ways, give messages to mankind in different angles. To establish dharma all the female characters, with happy and sorrow, remain till the end of the story. The male characters also who are in the path of righteousness give respect to them in every moment. They are all ideal women loyal to their near and dear ones. This is the ideal world of ancient Indian women as discussed in Mahabharata.

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