



Gender Discrimination: A Study on the *Mahabharata*

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The Art of Re-Reading epics with a modernized ideas and ideas of enlightenment like humanity and subjectivity has produced its impact in Indian literature. Recent works based on the ancient epics of India has given new perspectives and new dimensions on understanding the epics in depth. Analyzing these epics of India on the stands of feminism resulted in cementing a clear image of women in the ancient times.

The Mahabharata, the world's most famous epic is half history, half myth and wholly magical. The epic deals about the rivalry in Kaurava dynasty- the Paandavas and the Kauravas. The struggle between the cousins resulted in the bloody battle of Kurukshetra . Apart from Krishna, beloved and inscrutable, an incarnation of Vishnu and mentor to the Paandavas; Bheeshma; Drona, Drupad and Karna, definitely the epic also has powerful, complex women characters that effected the action in major ways. For instance, the widowed Kunti, mother of Paandavas, Gandhari, wife of the sightless Kaurava king, and most of all, Paanchaali also known as Draupadi. But in some way, they remained shadowy figures, their thoughts and motives mysterious, their emotions portrayed only when they affected the lives of the male heroes, their role ultimately subservient to those of their fathers or husbands, brothers or sons. The current paper is to shed light on some of the unrecognized women in the Mahabharata.

The Mahabharata gives an insight into the values and ethos of the society. The epical attitude on women is not the thing of the past but the similar attitude continues to persist even today. There are some important women characters in the Mahabharata who are forgotten or not considered often. This paper is to bring out the importance of the women who lost significance in the epic with special reference to Hidimba and Ulipi.

The Mahabharata earlier known as the Jaya consists of nearly one lakh verses. This epic stands as a record of the history of the ancient India especially on the Aryan and Non-Aryan race. The Non-Aryan could be termed as in the racial and cultural linguistic sense in the

Mahabharata. In the same way handling of the women characters is also questionable when the Mahabharata is analyzed in the feministic perspective.

Hidimba is a Rakshasi princess who marries Bhima. The life of Hidimba is not clearly portrayed or has not been interpolated to the readers. The Paandavas with their mother were travelling through the forest which belonged to the Rakshasas. Hidimba's brother is the king of the rakshasas. They were man eaters and were waiting for any human to cross their boundary. The smell of Paandavas attracted the rakshasas. They wanted to trap the Paandavas and make them their feast. In order to divert them Hidimba was sent who disguises herself into a beautiful women. Her plans were devastated with the very first meeting of Bhima. She immediately falls in love with him. Bhima's manliness attracted her that she wanted to seduce him.

This person is worthy of being my husband, I shall not obey the cruel mandate of my brother. A women's love for her husband is stronger than her affection for her brother. If I slay him, my brother's gratification as well mine will only be momentary. But if I slay him not, I can enjoy with him forever and ever. (Adi Parva Section CLIV)

She didn't want Bhima to become a prey for their clan. But when the Paandavas identified the original identity of her they wanted to leave her move away from the forest. Hidimba who was totally in love Bhima insisted them to fight her brother which bhima accepts as he was attracted by her beauty.

O though of fair hips, fear not anything . . . O beautiful one, thou shalt today behold my prowess like unto that of Indra. O though of fair hips, hate me not thinking that I am a man. (Adi Parva, section CLV)

Bhima won the duel with Hidimba's brother and was crowned the king of that magical forest. Hidimba pleaded Kunti to let her marry Bhima.

O, be gracious unto me and make Bhima accept me. . . Though knowest the pangs that women are made to feel at the hands of deity of love. . . these pangs, of which Bhimsena hath been the cause, are torturing me . . . unite me with this thy son. (Adi Parva Section CLVII)

Kunti finally accepted as they wanted a hideout from the kauravas. After the marriage, Hidimba delivers a son who was named Ghatotkacha. As promised by Hidimba she lets Bhima and his brothers and mother to leave the forest and move further.

Even after gaining the part of Kaurava's dynasty Kunti was reluctant to call Hidimba to Indraprastha as she cannot accept his first daughter-in-law to be a rakshashi. She was deprived of her right as she belongs to the non-Aryan race. When Ghatotkacha was cursed by Draupadi of death at a very young age where she in turn cursed Draupadi that she would have five children and all of them would die at their childhood.

Hidimba's confession of love that she had towards Bhima is interpreted in a different manner as it is not a woman who chooses their men but the men are to choose their women. She has been projected as a seducer and a villain who tries to steal him of his virtue. When a woman expresses her inner most feeling for a man it turns into lust and not love.

Ulipi, the Naga princess is one of the wives of Arjuna. While Arjuna was on exile for twelve years which he accepted for entering the room of Draupadi, he met Ulipi who was in love with him. Ulipi lives under the Ganges and meets him when he comes to take bath in the Ganges.

. . . the mighty armed hero was dragged into the bottom of the water by Ulipi, the daughter of the Nagas, urged by the god of desire. (Adi Parava, Section CCXVI)

She wanted to marry Arjuna and tells him of the desire she had for Arjuna. Though Arjuna was attracted by Ulipi's beauty was reluctant to satisfy her desires. But Ulipi insisted him and thus Arjuna stays there for a day and satisfies her lust. After the death of Chitrangadha she helped Arjuna to raise his son Brahubhuvan.

The Exile... is only for the sake of Draupathi. Thy virtue cannot sustain any diminution. . . it is a duty to relieve the distressed. . . I woo thee, being filled with desire. Therefore, do what is agreeable to me. It behoveth thee to gratify my wish by yielding thy self up to me. (Adi Parava, Section CCXVI)

The character of Ulipi is misinterpreted as a lustful women and a seducer of the virtuous Arjuna. But the actual intension of Ulipi was not brought out by the interpolators. She was a virtuous woman and lived a life of chastity and was ready to help Arjuna of his needs. She was even ready to take care of the son of Chitrangadha, Arjuna's another wife.

Hidimba and Ulipi were basically the women of virtues who were to be celebrated. But there greatness is been over shadowed by a masculine interpretations. The society has taught that a woman must not openly declare her feelings and desires. In case of exposing their will they may be turned as a lustful and seductress woman.

There has been confusion in handling the sexuality of women. Since men have been traditionally dominating the games are always in favour of man. If a woman is trying to possess a man then it hurts the ego of them. It is also evident that traditional discrimination towards the women with dusky complexion. This epical attitude is not a thing of past but the same attitude on women prevails even today.

Reference

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