

## Anecdote of Woman & Woman-hood in Mahabharata: A Critical Study

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### Abstract:

In this study three different types of stories were found which were not portrayed in such significant way but played a very interesting role in the story of Mahabharata. These stories are basically the tale or anecdote of woman and womanhood which are mainly projected to give lessons to the next generation. Three different roles are played by these three women- one is as a daughter named Madhabi, daughter of a great king Yayati, this story was told by sage Narada to Duryodhana, the second one is story of a wife, Oghavati, wife of King Sudarsan who beliefs in simple living and high thinking, this story was narrated by Bhishma to Yudhisthira and the third one is the story of a mother, Vidula, a very strong, virile-lady, this story was told by another noble mother Kunti to Lord Sri Krishna. This study tries to explore the original stories along with author's analysis from the modern perspective. The original texts and several books containing the stories individually are taken as references. In conclusion it tries to show that how these three women fought silently against their family as well as the society and its people but at the end how they would become successful and bound to downcast everybody in front of their womanhood.

**Keywords:** *Mahabharata, Story, Madhabi-Galava, Oghavati-Sudarsan, Mother Vidula, Desire, Failure, Achievement, Womanhood.*

### Introduction:

Keenness of listening stories is very common phenomena in human being. Keeping this in mind this study is primarily made on. This study stands on two pillars. One: the tales of Mahabharata. Two: different and interesting types of female characters who had played important and significant role in Mahabharata but their characters were portrayed in a different way. Whereas male characters in Mahabharata were mainly projected to give lessons to the next generation. In this study three woman characters has been chosen for discussion- i) story of Madhabi: said by great sage, Narada to Duryodhana ii) story of Oghavati: said by Bhishma to Yudhisthira and iii) story of mother Vidula: said by mother Kunti to Lord Sri Krishna.

### Aims & Objectives:

These three selected stories are the tale of three women and their suppressed woman-hood which had been portrayed very ordinarily by the composer of the great epic. They are treated as second class citizens in these stories. Their pain and disrespect was pictured by composer in this epic. But behind these pains he tried to narrate the story of the society and its people and how these slighted women were treated in those days by them. The scenarios of women in those days are not very much different in comparison with the present day. So these neglected and slighted women are chosen for this study because behind their story some another story is hidden which might be tried to be explored through this discussion. Through these stories their deprivation, sublimation, apostasy, politics for the game of throne could be found. All these are tried to be discussed here in concise.

### Methodology:

This study is primarily based on the original text of Mahabharata. The original text of Mahabharata with its explanatory notes is the prime resource for this article. The entire study is based on secondary sources. Eminent scholars' articles published in knowledge based journals and books are consulted and also taken as reference. This study is also highly influenced by the innovative writings of different writers. References are collected from different websites to make the study complete.

## Findings & Analysis:

### Story of Madhabi:

This story is found in Udyoga Parva of Mahabharata, narrated by sage Narada to Duryodhana. Narada advised Duryodhana to leave his pride and insistence unless his life will be ruined like Galava who had enough potentiality; but due to his obstinacy he couldn't achieve the summit of success.

Galava was the disciple of famous sage Visvamitra. After completing his education he wanted to give honorarium to his preceptor Vivsamitra. Vivsamitra was not agreed at first to take anything from Galava but Galava repeatedly expressed his desire to give something to his preceptor. Due to Galava's engagingness, Visvamitra got irritated and showed desire to get eight hundred white horses with one black eared as his honorarium. This precious honorarium was not possible for Galava to collect or to give as gift to his preceptor. But he was determined to give these to his preceptor. So he started penance of Lord Visnu. Lord Visnu was satisfied with him and sent his carriage (*Vahana*) Garura to him. Garura visited different places with Galava to collect such horses. But they failed in their mission.

Lastly they came to the King Yayati, who was very famous for his offerings to the Brahmins. King Yayati shows his inability to fulfil Galava's desire. But he gave his daughter Madhabi to Galava, who had all good qualities for being a woman and stated that through her he may collect or fulfil his desire. When Madhabi was given by her father, Yayati, she was not even asked that whether she was agreed to go with Galava or not, she was just given, given like a property.

Getting Madhabi from her father, Galava went to the King of Ayodhya, Harsashva. Seeing the beauty of Madhabi the king got very pleased and stated to Galava that he will provide him with two hundred white horses with one black eared in lieu of Madhabi and promised him that after one year and getting a son from Madhabi he will fulfil his promise. He further stated to Galava that after completion of one year Galava may come and take away Madhabi because he will not marry her due to his other queens. Galava agreed with this condition of the king, Harsashva. Madhabi spent one year in the palace of Ayodhya with the king Harsashva and begot a son named Vasumana. The king Harsashva kept his promise as he returned Madhabi to Galava along with two hundred horses. Galava got tensed as he needed eight hundred of such horses and now he could not use Madhabi anymore to fulfil his desire because she had already been used and had a son. Then Madhabi informed Galava that she had a boon that after giving birth of a baby she will regain her virginity every time. After knowing this Galava came to the king of Kasi with Madhabi.

In this way by using Madhabi, Galava collected six hundred horses and Madhabi lived and slept with the king of Kasi, Divodasa and king of Bhoja, Usinara respectively. They were also begot with two sons named Pratardana and Sivi from Madhabi. Madhabi's three sons were brought up by their respective father. Still Galava was far from his desire, as still he needs two hundred more such horses. Then he came to know that there is no hope to get more such horses as all available such horses were stolen. After knowing this fact Lord Visnu's friend Garura advised Galava that to give these six hundred horses to Visvamitra and told the story that how it has been collected by using Madhabi. Galava did this and after listening the story of Madhabi, Vivsamitra told that he knew that Galava couldn't be able to collect such horses but due to Galava's obstinacy he wanted these horses. He also added that why he should not come first to him with Madhabi then he will become the father of four sons, so he advised Galava to keep Madhabi to him and after one year Galava will take her away as usual. After spending one year with Vivsamitra, the sage begets a son named Astaka. Visvamitra was very pleased with Madhabi and accepted the honorarium of Galava. Thus with the help of Madhabi, Galava was able to fulfil his preceptor's wish and leaving Astaka at the hermitage of Visvamitra, Galava took Madhabi with him with a pleasing mind and decided to return her to her father, Yayati.

Madhabi still had a deep affection for Galava after begetting four sons from different kings and a sage. She always thought for the best for Galava, that's why she never felt hesitate to sleep or to live with three kings and lastly with father-figure sage, Visvamitra. She never got anxious to go with Galava because from the very first day when she saw Galava she liked him and seeing the worried face of the young sage she felt sorry for him.

But when she came to know that Galava wanted to return her to her father then she unfolds herself. She appraises her love for Galava and wanted to marry him and expressed her desire to live a conjugal life with him. But Galava was not ready for this. He refused Madhabi and decided to return her to her father. Madhabi then requested Lord Visnu's friend Garura to motivate Galava but Galava was not ready to pay attention to anybody regarding Madhabi. Madhabi was compelled to return to her father with broken heart and Galava went into the dense forest for deep penance.

After that Yayati arranged a Svayamvara for selecting a groom for Madhabi. Here at first Madhabi was ready to marry but could not find any suitable match for her in that particular day, thus she entered into the hermitage and started deep penance.

In this way many years passed by. Madhabi's sons became young and were very much obedient to their mother. One day Madhabi was doing Vajapeya Yajna with her four sons and saw her father Yayati was falling down from the heaven. Due to extreme pride Yayati was expelled from heaven and now he wanted someone's piety to get back into the heaven. Again her daughter, Madhabi came to his help. She gave her piety to him so that Yayati could get back to heaven. Then there entered an old monk with extreme grief, he was none other than Galava. Galava admitted his fault and realised that he had done injustice with Madhabi. He then got ready to accept Madhabi as his wife and gave his piety to his father-in-law Yayati. Getting piety from Madhabi and Galava, Yayati returned back to the heaven. In brief this is the story of Madhabi & Galava.

### Analysis:

Now there is a question. Whose story is this? Is this a story of Madhabi or Galava? The composer of Mahabharata, Vyasadeva told this story after sage Narada narrated this story which belongs to the insistence of Galava for that he could not reach the summit of success. But why should not we consider this as a story of Madhabi? Galava's obstinacy did not only ruin his life but destroyed the maidenhood of Madhabi. Galava's engagingness irritated his preceptor and that's why he wanted such a precious honorarium from him but Galava did not fulfil his preceptor's desire. It was fulfilled by Madhabi by using her womb. She was given to Galava by her own father as Sulka (offerings). Poor Madhabi still loved Galava and wanted to marry him but got dumped. Instead of Madhabi's sacrifice Galava blessed her sons but not her. Madhabi did everything for Galava and his father but Galava uttered that Madhabi's sacrifice made her sons' generous, righteous, knowledgeable and valiant. She rescued her father and as well as Galava and helped them to fulfil their promise and lastly after being expelled from heaven Yayati again begged to her daughter to give him her piety for that he could return back to the heaven. Madhabi again bequeathed her piety without any hesitation to her father. According to our Sastras a daughter should be kept under the guidance of her father in her maidenhood, after marriage by her husband and at her old age under the supervision of her sons. But Madhabi was an exceptional. Her own father gave up her as Sulka (offerings) to an unknown saint who was suffering to keep his inaccessible promise to his preceptor. So it was quite obvious that the unknown sage will not at all be capable to look after her daughter. Actually Galava by using Madhabi's womb had fulfilled his desire, his prayer to give honorarium to his preceptor. Is that our polity literature actually said about the duty for being a father or a husband of a daughter?

However Madhabi fulfilled every requirement of blokes in her life. She helped her father to keep his promise, she satisfied physical needs of three kings along with father-figure saint Visvamitra and begot birth of four sons and above all she helped Galava for fulfilling his preceptor's wish. Basically Madhabi served her father as daughter, three kings along with father-figure saint Visvamitra as mistress, Galava as a woman to fulfil his desire and her sons as mother. She performed all her duties being a woman but the society and the composer of Mahabharata could not give her any justice. This story was not of her; this was the story of the insistence of Galava. Narada the great sage could not portray Madhabi as a statuette of womanhood rather he tried to highlight the unjustified insistence of Galava.

From the modern perspective Madhabi can be cited as a complete statuette of womanhood, who proved wrong to the composer of polity literature. She was not protected properly either by her father, her husband or her sons. At the end of her life after giving piety to her father Yayati, she sublimated herself from a common woman to goddess. It's a shameful story of a king and a saint. A king with beggarly attitude and a saint didn't

have potentiality to keep his promise by his own ability. Both of them proved their inability to protect a woman one being her father and another being a saint or Brahmin or a lover.

### Story of Oghavati:

This story was found in the Anusasana Parva of Mahabharata. This was narrated by Bhishma to Yudhisthira. Yudhisthira asked Bhishma how could be a man achieves his death. In reply to his question Bhishma narrated this story. This is a story of a King Sudarsan and his wife, queen Oghavati. Though they were king and queen of Ikshvaku dynasty but still they lived a simple life like an ordinary people. Sudarsan was the son of God Agni and Sudarsana. Sudarsana was the daughter of a righteous King Duryodhana of Ikshvaku dynasty and her mother was goddess-river Narmada. Sudarsan the son of Agni and Sudarsana, got married with Oghavati, daughter of King Oghavan. Sudarsan and Oghavati lived at the city of Mahismati of Ikshvaku dynasty. Sudarsan left every luxury from his life because he believed in simple living and high thinking. He was righteous, honest and bequeath-person who always wanted to overcome death so he once told his wife Oghavati that he wanted to spend his life by serving guests. It's not possible for them to move around to serve people so they had decided who ever will be their guest they will serve them up to their best and for that if anybody will want Oghavati without any hesitation she might give herself for the sake of righteousness. Oghavati agreed to all of her husband's desires and accepted very gladly the life of an ordinary woman. Though she was a queen but still she did everything by her own and lived happily with her husband. They had no maids and servants therefore they had to perform their regular duties by their own hands along with serving the guests.

One day Dharmaraja, the God of Righteous came to their hermitage in the costume of a Brahmin. At that time Sudarsan was not in their house as he went to the forest to collect wood sticks. Oghavati did everything to satisfy her guest but Dharmaraja was not satisfied with the foods she served to him and the offerings in the form of their cattle's and all their wealth which has been presented to him because his main need was to fulfil his sexual desire from Oghavati. After lots of hesitation to satisfy their guest without finding any solution Oghavati agreed to sleep with Dharmaraja. She did everything at bed but still the guest was not satisfied. At that time Sudarsan came back from the forest and want a glass of water from Oghavati. He called her by name but Oghavati sleeping with an outsider suddenly felt ashamed to answer her husband. She kept quite. Then Dharmaraja replied that his wife is sleeping with him in bed so she will not be able to serve him at present. Listening to this Sudarsan replied with folded hands that it was his pleasure that Oghavati is serving their guests in this way. Until the guest got satisfied he would wait. After listening to this Dharmaraja was very pleased; he left Oghavati and blessed both of them. Dharmaraja told that he was actually taking their test that whether they really wants to serve their guest by giving themselves unconditionally or not. They are passed in their test now but if Sudarsan ever did adverse to his nature of serving his guests like he did now then he will be murdered by the soldiers of Dharmaraja.

The God of Righteous blessed Sudarsan that he might live at heaven with his wife. But Oghavati wanted to be a river and served people from their thirst, tiredness and hunger. So the God said that half portion of Oghavati will be tributary or a branch of piety-watered river Narmada and half of her portion will live with her husband at heaven. In brief this is the story of Oghavati & Sudarsan.

### Analysis:

In the story of Oghavati and Sudarsan two dimensions has been found. One is Sudarsan as God in disguise of human being another Sudarsan as human being, as a husband or as a king. If we go through the character of Sudarsan from the very first perspective we found Sudarsan as an honest, dutiful, generous and righteous and bequeath-person who has sacrificed his entire life by serving his guests. Being a king he left all the luxuries and palace and did all house hold works by his own hands. He believed in the lines of Upanisada that Brahma is the ultimate and entire world lies in the shadow of it (*Brahma satya jaganmithya*) so he had devoted his life for emancipation (*moksha*). He wanted to overcome death or in other way it can be expressed that he didn't want rebirth. His gesture was unquestionable. His simple living and high thinking attitude was admirable. But on the other side of his character it has been found as a coward and recreant human being. A person who could not save his wife's esteem how could be he protects his people being a king. Being a king, being a husband he never asked Oghavati that what her desire was. Did she accept his desires from the core of her heart? Sudarsan's desires were noble but he didn't ask Oghavati what was her opinion is in this regard. Oghavati

accepted her husband's craving like her own yearning, that's why she gave herself to her guest, the God of Righteous, Dharmaraja. Isn't an irony? A Dharmaraja was doing the most virulence (adharma) work in the name of testing Sudarsan? But Oghavati served her guest for the sake of her husband's word. But she had a wish in deep of her mind. She wished to be a river to serve thirsty, hungry people as she had done being a woman for her husband and Dharmaraja too. But when Dharmaraja blessed her, he didn't fulfil her wish. He blessed her by saying this that half of her portion will go to heaven with her husband and other half will be a river but not a full river as she will glide with the zeal-watered river Narmada. Ogha means cloud so during monsoon this river will become over-flowed with its own water. According to the modern perspective a husband will be more appreciable if he will give up his life for the sake of his wife to protect or to save her womanhood. But here Sudarsan preferred to become immortal than to become a good husband. He also failed to protect her wife from insult. Herein the composers of polity literatures or law-makers stand in front of a big question. From this story it may be concluded by saying that this immortality or self-desires are sometime becomes more important than to protect a woman or a wife's respect or womanhood. Is this story the message or lesson was given by the law makers regarding the safety or protection of a woman? Or this was the lesson of Bhishma to Yudhisthira?

### **Story of mother Vidula:**

This story was narrated by Queen-mother of Hastinapur, Kunti to Lord Sri Krishna at Udyoga Parva in Mahabharata. Yudhisthira sent messengers to Duryodhana for making truce-proposal repeatedly but Duryodhana refused his resolution all the time. Agitated Kunti not getting Yudhisthira in person narrated Lord Sri Krishna the story of mother Vidula.

Vidula was born in the royal family of Sasvata and got married with the king of Souvir. Her son was Sanjay but after the early death of the king of Souvir, the king of Sindhu conquers the state of Souvir and Sanjay along with his family became their captives. Though the king of Sindhu takes care of Sanjay and her mother Vidula but Vidula couldn't digest it. She was not agreed to see her son in this way. But she never found any enthusiasm or effort in her son to get back his previous glory. Seeing her spiritless son one day Vidula called Sanjay and gave her a speech and after hearing the speech Sanjay started crying.

Vidula told him that he may not be his son because he does not possess any manly warmth or manly anger, he is like an imbecile. She doesn't understand that how he can find that his glory has been turned down but still he is alive. His power, achievements are not discussed by the people and he is not at all a man or a woman; he actually counted just as a number in a mass or in a group of people who is not famous for his bequest or bequest, penance, souvenir, virile, education and wealth; he could not be Vidula's son, he might be her excrement. She added that don't think about the result of the war, it may be possible that you will be defeated in the war but if you will die in the war I will not cry because then I could be called as a mother of a virile son. She stated that she was born in a royal family and after marriage she came to Souvir-royal family. She was the sole monarch of this empire and was loved very much by her husband. But still if Sanjay wants to see his mother and wife in this way like captives, then what is the value of his life? Where woman are insulted in a state in this way, there she couldn't want to live.

After listening to such a speech Sanjay was dumbstruck. He then asked his mother how he could regain the strength. Then mother Vidula suggested him to find the enemies of the king Sindhu and get friendship with them. In this way Vidula motivated his spiritless son Sanjay and ultimately Sanjay vanquish his state, Souvir. After winning the battle Vidula said to her son Sanjay that she told her so ruthlessly because she wants to see him as a King not as a captive. In brief this was the story of mother Vidula.

### **Analysis:**

This story was told by Kunti in Mahabharata. In Mahabharata the same story was found in case of Yudhisthira where Yudhisthira's all efforts will go in vain for establishing peace at Hastinapur, he failed every time. Duryodhana never accepted any proposal from Yudhisthira. Yudhisthira didn't want to fight against his brothers but mother Kunti was not ready to see Yudhisthira and her other four sons in this way, so she tries to motivate his son Yudhisthira for war. That's why she told this story to Lord Sri Krishna as she knew that Krishna's words were always acceptable and unavoidable by her sons so she chose Lord Sri Krishna as a

messenger. Similarly mother Vidula told that she wanted to see her son as a King not as a captive. Here arises a question. Is that so? Isn't it's true that Vidula actually wanted her past glorious life back? She admitted that she in her old days was the sole monarch of this dynasty. Now she lost all her glorious days. That's why she encouraged her son in this way because she wanted to be a Queen-mother. In her early days she was the queen and enjoyed all kinds of power and wealth. If she will be the Queen-mother she will regain the same power and wealth. Mother Vidula was a power monger woman. She always enjoyed power; now being a captive she couldn't be able to use such power in her day to day life. So she became buoyant to his son for retrieval of her lost strength and wealth. The same motto was seen in case of Kunti. Kunti also wanted to become the Queen-mother of Hastinapur Empire. If Duryodhana will be the king then his mother Gandhari will be the Queen-mother and she had have all the power and positions which was enjoyed by Kunti in her early days being the Queen when Pandu, her husband was alive. Kunti and Vidula, both the mother wanted to become powerful that's why they are ready to accept any kind of adversity for their sons; even their son's death.

### Conclusion:

In these three stories three typical types of women are found. One is daughter, another wife, and the last one mother. A cycle of a complete woman may be traced by performing three roles in her life i.e. daughter, wife, and mother. In this epic, these three women established themselves as distinguished character along with their womanhood. Three of them had different types of wishes in their life. Mother Vidula wanted to be queen-mother, that's why she used ruthless words to her son for the sake of victory in the battle-field and at the end of the story she succeeded. Oghavati who dedicated herself to fulfil her husband's desire but wished to become a river and the God of Righteous blessed her for that. The last one is Madhabi who wanted a love-life from the disciple of Visvamita, Galava for whom she used her womb four times to fulfil his desire to give honorarium to his preceptor Visvamitra. Madhabi was also used by her father Yayati as his property, but still to save the honour of his father she gave her piety to his father so that he could be able to return back to the heaven. At the end of this story Galava accepted Madhabi but it was too late then. In the epic the composer tried to show that the desires of every woman were fulfilled with the help of the men. But that's not true. These three women did everything they can do for the sake of their desires. To get love-life from Galava, Madhabi slept with three different kings and one father-figure Brahmin. Oghavati in spite of her chastity served the God of Righteous and in return of that service God blessed her in a way that half of her portion will go with her husband at heaven and other half will serve people of earth as a branch of river Narmada. Her desire was not completely but partially fulfilled. Mother Vidula wanted to be the queen-mother of Souvir dynasty. For that she inspired her son to conquer the state from his enemy. Her son fulfilled her desire and made her an honourable Queen-mother.

In conclusion it can be said that though our ancient law makers and the composer of the epic tried to explore that every desire of a woman should be fulfilled by the men. And women should be protected by the men; in the maidenhood she should be under the supervision of her father, after marriage by her husband and at old age by her sons. The above three stories of three different women are of opposite features. Here Madhabi bolstered her father to keep his promise for an unknown person who ruined her life but she also helped him to keep his promise to give honorarium to his preceptor. In case of Oghavati, Sudarsan never ever had been able to go to heaven without the help of the chastity of Oghavati. For mother Vidula if she didn't spoke ruthlessly and suggested her son Sanjay that how he should attack his enemy, then his spiritless son will live lifelong with his family as captive. Here all the characters show their dignity with tremendous mental strength and established their womanhood without the help of men. These characters prove their identity by their own deeds and also prove wrong to those who thought that without the help of a man woman couldn't stand alone.

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- ❖ All the stories narrated here are taken from the original text of Mahabharata; edited by Haridas Siddhantavagisha.

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