

Desire, Sufferings and Wisdom: A Critical Study of Satyavati's Character from *TheMahabharata*

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Abstract: In India, perhaps every child grows up with the mesmerizing tales of *TheRamayana* and *TheMahabharata*. It has become our tradition to tell these tales with great interest. These epics have fascinating women characters like Sita, Kunti and Draupadi. Among these characters, Mahabharata's Satyavati emerges as a captivating character to the reader. *TheMahabharata* is not only a tale of war but it also exposes human strength and weaknesses. Satyavati is also an embodiment of positive and negative traits. This paper attempts to explore Satyavati's strength and weaknesses of her personality. She takes some decisions of her life under the effect of her desires and she suffered a lot in her life but she tackled every situation with her wisdom.

KeyWords: Desire, Sufferings, Wisdom, Strength

Introduction: Satyavati was adopted daughter of the head of the fisherman chief, Dashraaj. The story of her birth is very interesting. Once, Indra had given to Vasu, the king of Chedi, a heavenly crystal vehicle studded with jewels. With the help of that vehicle, the king used to move about in the sky that's why he came to be known as 'uparichara'. By his capital, flowed a river called 'Suktimati'. This river was once attacked by an animated mountain, 'Kolahalla', maddened by lust. Vasu struck that mountain with his foot and the river came out of the embraces of 'Kolahalla'. The river had begotten from the mountain a son and a daughter. The river 'suktimati' gave her twins to Vasu. The king made that son the general of his army and married the beautiful girl 'Girika'.

Once Girika at her proper time for childbearing waits for her husband but the king is sent away for hunting by his ancestors, to kill a beast. Spring season and attractive scenery of the forest makes the king lovesick, so his semen comes out. He gives it to a falcon and requests the falcon to take it to his wife Girika. The falcon is attacked by a Hawk and the semen falls into river Yamuna. An *Apsara* named Adrika, who had become a fish by a curse of Brahma, consumes it. After ten months, that fish is caught by a fisherman. Later when he cut it, he is surprised to see a boy and a girl in the belly of the fish. The girl that is born from this fish has the odour of the fish. The fisherman takes these children to the king. King gives the girl to the fisherman's

chief named Dashraaj to adopt her as his daughter. She comes to be known as *Matsyagandhadue* to her stinking smell of fish. Once, the sage Parasara sees Girika with all her extraordinary beauty. He expresses his desire to unite with her but Satyavati denies by saying that other 'Rishis' standing on both the banks are looking at them. Then, Parasara creates a fog around the boat and unites with Satyavati. He gives her the boon of virginity and blesses her with excellent perfume that will emit from her body, "...having obtained her boon, she became highly pleased, and her season immediately came. And she accepted the embraces of that *Rishi* of wonderful deeds. And she thenceforth became known among men by the name of Gandhavati (the sweet-scented one). And men could perceive her scent from the distance of a *yojana*. And for this she was known by another name which was *Yojanagandha* (one who scatters her scent for a *yojana* all around) "(Ganguli. *AdiParva*. 163. 127). She becomes *Yojnangandha* as her fragrance spreads up into *yojana* (a distance of eight miles). Due to the special powers of Parasara, she delivers a son on the spot. He grows up immediately and promises his mother that he would be present whenever she calls him. After making this promise, he retires to the forest for penance. This son came to be known as Vyasa.

Shantanu of the Puru dynasty was the king of Hastinapura. He had a son from Ganga who had left him taking the child with her. When that child attained his youth, Ganga handed over to the king his son. She made his son well trained in all faculties. The king appointed his son Devavrata as his heir apparent and started to live happily with him. After spending four years, one day Shantanu went to the forest. "And in course of his ramble, he beheld a black-eyed maiden of celestial beauty, the daughter of a fisherman"(Ganguli *AdiParva* 100.126).

Her arrival changes the situation. Devavrata, son of Shantanu, is the legal heir of throne but he has to leave his right and he comes to be known as Bhishma because of his oath to remain unmarried for his whole life. All this happens because of Satyavati's marriage with Shantanu. He takes this severe oath because Satyavati's father agrees to marry Satyavati with king Shantanu only on one condition that, "O king, what I ask of thee is this: the son born of this maiden shall be installed by thee on thy throne and none else shall thou make thy successor" (Ganguli *Adi Parva*.100.216). When Devavrata comes to know about the condition, he takes the vow of celibacy so that he could never be an aspirant to the throne. This effect laid down by Satyavati's character on the Kuru's dynasty twists the situations. King Shantanu begets two sons from her: Chitrangad, a valiant hero; and Vichitravirya, a great archer. After Shantanu's death, Bhishma installs Chitrangad on the throne with the approval of Satyavati. Chitrangad is very arrogant and insults even Gods and Asuras. So a war is fought between Chitrangad and Gandharva, also named Chitrangad. In that battle, Gandharva kills Chitrangad. , "... after Chitrangada was slain, his successor Vichitravirya being a minor, Bhishma ruled the kingdom, placing himself under the command of Satyavati"(Ganguli *AdiParva*. 102.219). when Vichitravirya attained his youth, then, Bhishma coronates Vichitravirya and settled his marriage with the king of Kashi's two daughters, Ambika and Ambalika. He is very weak, so after some years, he dies due to consumption, without

having any child. Satyavati becomes distressed due to her son's death, "The unfortunate Satyavati then became plunged in grief on account of her son. And after performing with her daughters-in-law the funeral rites of the deceased, consoled, as best she could, her weeping daughters-in-law and Bhishma, that foremost of all wielders of weapons" (GanguliAdiParva 103.222). Now, she becomes worried about the lineage of the forefathers, so she says to Bhishma

The funeral cake, the achievements, and the perpetuation of the line of the virtuous and celebrated Santanu of Kuru's race, all now depend on thee. As the attainment of heaven is inseparable from good deeds, as long life is inseparable from truth and faith, so is virtue inseparable from thee. O virtuous one, thou art well-acquainted, in detail and in the abstract, with the dictates of virtue, with various *Srutis*, and with all the branches of the Vedas; know very well that thou art equal unto Sukra and Angiras as regards firmness in virtue, knowledge of the particular customs of families, and readiness of inventions under difficulties. Therefore, O foremost of virtuous men, relying on thee greatly, I shall appoint thee in a certain matter. Hearing me, it behoveth thee to do my bidding. O bull among men, my son and thy brother, endued with energy and dear unto thee, hath gone childless to heaven while still a boy. These wives of thy brother, the amiable daughters of the ruler of Kasi, possessing beauty and youth, have become desirous of children. Therefore, O thou of mighty arms, at my command, raise offspring on them for the perpetuation of our line. It behoveth thee to guard virtue against loss. Install thyself on the throne and rule the kingdom of the Bharatas. Wed thou duly a wife. Plunge not thy ancestors into hell. (GanguliAdiParva 103.222)

Then Bhishma replies, "The earth may renounce its scent, water may renounce its moisture, light may renounce its attribute of exhibiting forms, air may renounce its attribute of touch, the sun may renounce his glory, fire, its heat, the moon, his cooling rays, space, its capacity of generating sound, the slayer of Vritra, his prowess, the god of justice, his impartiality; but I cannot renounce truth" (1.103.223).

Hearing these words, Satyavati discloses the secret of his son Vyasa to Bhishma. He agrees on the name of Vyasa for the benefits of his family. Then Satyavati goes to her daughters-in-law, Ambika and Ambalika. She speaks to them righteous and beneficial words in secret.

O princess of Kosala, listen to what I say. It is consistent with virtue. The dynasty of the Bharatas hath become extinct from my misfortune. Beholding my affliction and the extinction of his paternal line, the wise Bhishma, impelled also by the desire of perpetuating our race, hath made me a suggestion, which suggestion, however, for its accomplishment is dependent on thee. Accomplish it, O daughter, and restore the lost line of the Bharatas. (1.105.229)

She uses her wit and wisdom to secure the Hastinapur throne. She never turns her face from her duties besides so many problems and difficulties. She convinces both her daughters-in-law and persuades them for *Niyoga*. Thus Pandu, Dhritarashtra, and Vidura are sons of Vyasa by three different women. Though Dhritarashtra is the eldest, he cannot be the king of Hastinapur due to his blindness. In his place, Pandu becomes the king. But Pandu dies because of a curse, given by a *Rishi*. After the funeral rites are over, Vyasa speaks to his mother,

Mother, our days of happiness have gone by and days of calamity have succeeded. Sin beginneth to increase day by day. The world hath got old. The empire of the Kauravas will no longer endure because of wrong and oppression. Go thou then into the forest, and devote thyself to contemplation through *Yoga*. (GanguliAdiParva128.266)

Acquiescing in the words of Vyasa, Satyawati enters the inner apartments and addresses her daughter-in-law, saying,

O Ambika, I hear that in consequence of the deeds of your grandsons, this Bharata dynasty and its subjects will perish. If thou permit, I would go to the forest with Kausalya so grieved at the loss of her son. (GanguliAdiParva128.267)

After taking the permission of Bhishma, she departs for the forest along with her daughters-in-law. In the forest, she deeply submits herself in severe contemplation. In due course, she leaves her body and ascends to heaven.

Conclusion: Satyawati though does not appear in the epic for long but her role is very important. Her story is full of hope, ambition, and determination. “Satyawati was brought up by a fisherman and was doing a menial job. But after becoming a Queen she proved her wisdom and ability. Bhishma respected her and consulted her on administrative and family matters. She was keen about the welfare of the kingdom, and setting aside her grief, took initiative in the continuation of her vanishing race” (Bhawalkar 399). She is strong enough to achieve her aspirations and she grabs every chance to change her fate. Unlike Kunti, she never hesitates in accepting her son from a premarital encounter with Rishi Parasara. Satyawati not only manipulates the people around her but also controls the situations to accomplish her motives. Her liberated behaviour reminds us of the modern feminist culture. She only demands from sage Parasara what she needs at that time, no further demands or commitment like the live-in-relationships of our modern culture. Satyawati transcends her status from a low-caste woman to a queen of the kingdom. She secures not only her position but also of her descendants.

Satyavati suffered a lot in her life due to her desire of becoming a queen but she earned a respected position in the heart of all due to her wisdom.

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