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The Portrayal of Women in Mahabharata

Linguistic

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ABSTRACT

The root cause for the origin of Mahabharata is the conflict between ancient and modern dharmas. The source text of Mahabharata of vyasa depicted deeply the socio-economic,political, religious and economic conditions in the last phase of Vedic culture. There after all the Mahabharatas which came outembedded in them the conditions of the places and times of their emergence and they stood as a part of great inheritance of India Mahabharata stands as a challenge for those who study the Indian culture . As Eliot remarked 'The presentness of the past and pastness of the present' also embedded in it the cultural changes which apply to every developing era..

`Parva'which reconstructed the society of Mahabharata separating the myth and reality and searched the answers for innumerable problems in Mahaabharata is the basis for this paper.Parva is the modern novel form of Mahabharata. Prof. Gangisetty Lakshminarayana, former vice chancellor of Dravidian university translated Parva' into Telugu which was written by the famous kannada writer and philosopher Prof.S.L Bhairappa. Parva presents the ancient society in its exact form before our eyes '.Parva focused on the concept of chaste city and its consolidation and complexity in concrete terms. This ideological conflict is the basis for my paper.Chasticity, virginity and their role in the life of women have been analysed in my paper .

I. **Introduction:-**

The source for writing Mahabharatha is the conflict between ancient and modern Dharmaas. Vyasa Bharatha deals with Final stage vedic period reflecting economic, political, ethical, social and other aspects in detail. Ever since Mahabaharathaas that have come out from time to time in all regions, discussed the conditions prevailed during the period. Though Mahabharatha belongs to a remote past, but embedded it's relevance even to the present in a creative manner as Eliot says "presantness of the past and pastness of the present"

The basis for my article is the famous novel 'Parva' written by S.L. Bhyrappa, who focuses on solutions for several problems with rational thinking and clearly shows the dichotomy between myth and reality in a creative sensibility. The Kannada version is translated into Telugu by Gangisetty Lakshmi Narayana.

The novel 'Parva' mirrors the structure and nature of the society in the Mahabharatha from the very layers of History. The conflict, and complexity between the ancient and modern feelings relating to Chastity of women and its transformation dealt in the Mahabharatha. This very root of my paper.

The aim of my presentation is to expose how chastity and virginity influenced the life of women during that period.

II. Main Theme:-

VIRGINITY:- During Mahabharatha period, it is natural to have children even before marriage. They are called ' Kaaneena Children'. Krishna Dwaipayana is such child, born to Parasara and Sathyavathi before their marriage. Even the child born to Krishna Dwaipayana and Gandharva woman, called 'Suka' is also such child. They have received respect in that society. They have become Masters of Vedic studies. The kaaneena children have been adopted at the time of marriage of their mothers. For instance, Rukmaratha, son of Salya in Madhra Desa is ready to fight with the enemies for the sake of his Kaaneena child. In Arya family, mother is considered great if she begets male child. Later the mother, who has a kaaneena child, is looked down upon by the society. For marriage, virginity is most important. It is also a symbol of civilization. For that Kunthi's life is an example. Karna is kaaneena child of Kunthi. But it is kept secret. It is felt that Seers are ancient and Kshatriyaas are modern. That is why Kshatriya woman should be a virgin.

Even Rukmaratha has restricted his daughter Hiranyavathi to be a virgin, because if a Kaaneena child born to her, High class Kshatriyaas may not come forward to marry her. That is why he prefers 'Swayamvara' to his daughter by setting aside 'Oli' system. The change in Society is strikingly visible as women are prohibited to have chastity, even before marriage.

CHASTITY:- Virginity before marriage, Chastity after marriage have become compulsory for women. Gandhari stands as an example for chastity. As soon as she comes to learn that Dhrutharashtra's blindness, she herself decides blind-folded. Then all call her a chaste woman. Chastity has reached such an extent that the generation is put to criticism for leading to Niyoga-method. The order of the day is that, any one deprived of children, are allowed to have children in Niyoga practice and acceptable according to Sasthra. If husband is impotent, by Niyoga method , women can beget children. For that practice, a patronized priest is eligible. But the women should have desire for children, but not lust. After that, the priest is treated as equal to a father.

Chitrangadha and vichitraveerya are begotten children of fisherwoman Sathyavathi. Chitragadha is killed by Gandharvas. Vichitraveerya being ill healthy, dies at an early age. As Bheeshma has declined to marry, the Kuru Vamsha turns to be a danger of disappearance. Bheesema decides to have progeny through Niyoga method.

For that, he feels that Vyasa is a right person carry on the method. To honor his mother's word, Vyasa accepted Niyoga method. As a Niyoga method is the practice of Kshatriyas, and they desire to have their empire permanently as long as they continue to survive. Dhrutharashtra and Pandu are born to Ambica and Ambalika, and vidura is born to a servant maid.

By birth Dhruthrashtra is blind, Pandu is unfit to family life, and vidura is a son of a servantmaid. In a way, three are underserved for administration. As a result, the problem has cropped up once again. Pandu leaves for forest and follows Niyoga method to have children for his wives. Thus Dharmaraja, Bheema and Arjuna are born to Kunthi; Nakula and Sahadeva to maadri by Aswini. This way Niyoga method becomes a root for Kuru Vamsha family. After the birth of Chastity, Niyoga method has become source for the fall of Kuru Vamsha which has led to Kurukshetra war.

The differences between the children of brothers have arisen not only for the share of Kingdom, but also conflicts of rights among the cousins. Duryodhana's plea is that he is born direct to Dhrutharashtra, where as the children of Pandu are born through Niyoga method. Hence he claims that he has every privilege to rule the empire. This has questioned the very existence of Pandavas. Dharmaraja expresses that Dhrutharashtra is also born to Niyoga method, so also he is eligible to become the king of Hasthina. This main conflict ultimately leads to the battle of Kurukshetra. In ancient

times, much importance is given to field, rather than the seed, where as in modern times this concept has been reversed.

Field is considered mother, father is seed. At first during transition from matriarchal to patriarchal equality has prevailed. In course of time, importance to mother has faded and prominence to further has increased. This is due to illusion of Chastity. Dhuryodhana pleeded strongly basing on the concept of chastity by convincing that he is born to Gandhari, a chaste women.

The feeling of Chastity has pointed out Niyoga method and has questioned Polyandry. Consequently, Draupadhi has to face insult in the very haram of Kauravas, because of having five husbands. Duryodhana after observing mother's chastity, find fault with Pandavas' mothers Kunthi and Maadri, as well as Draupadhi. And becomes instrumental for Kurukshetra war. Earlier adherence to husband in Chastity, later not-having sex with others, is chastity. This chastity has laid conditions to the women to be obedient though the husband is blind, handicapped, or inefficient. After the war of Kurkshetra, Gandhari has lamented before Krishna about her chastity, which has brought her blindness and helplessness and expresses her agony for loosing her freedom.

III. Results and Discussion:

VIRGINITY:- Satyavathi, Kunthi, Hiranyavathi have become symbols for the changes that have taken place earlier to their marriages. Even though Satyavathi has begotten child by Niyoga method, but has led a happy life with Santhana, as Queen. The people of that Kingdom have given very good reception to her. But for Kunthi, such kind of prominence is not given, and the possession of a son before her marriage is kept secret. Yet her father has never objected her freedom. But Hiranyavathi, the third generation is deprived of such freedom and her womb has been kept intact and confined to privacy. Little by little, the women has lost right over her body and freedom leading to captive in the very institution of marriage. Thus the change has been noticed in the status of women in the Mahabharatha.

CHASTITY:- It has become compulsory to be a virgin before marriage and after, a chaste woman. A change has taken place in due course relating to the definition of chastity. In primitive times, chastity means obeying the husband in 'letter and spirit ' However Kunthi and Maadri have begot children through Niyoga method. But the honour that has been received by Ambica and Ambalika, Kunthi and Maadri cannot command such respect. That in due to transformation that has kept in course of time. After that, the Niyoga Method has been abolished. Chastity means not having any contract with other man except, following the footsteps of her husband. Gandhari is known to be a symbol of chastity, though she has not served her husband. She has felt life only with her husband. Keeping women in myth, has started from Gandhari. Gandhari has expressed her felt feelings about her blind folding for marrying blind person Dhruthrastra in protest, but told her grief for not removing blindfold for those who worship her as a chaste women. She has uttered these words in Shanthi Parva in the Mahabharatha. At last, the myth of chastity has reached a peak point, after the war of Kurukshetra, then wives of Kauravas have sacrificed their lives for the sake of their dead husbands.

Ganga, Satyavathi, Ambika, Ambalika, Kunthi, Maadri, Gandhari, Draupadhi, wives of Kauravaas, all have become examples for the changing conditions in respect of women status in the Mahabharatha.

Ganga does not bare the male domination she strongly holds her Privilege over her children as in Matriarchal society. Satyavathi has laid some conditions and saved her status. These two belong to tribal community and Anarya in race. The remaining all the Ambika, Ambalika, Kunthi, Maadri, Draupadi Aryans. They have lost their freedom over their bodies. They have conducted themselves not on their own will, but according to their husband's directions. But the women of first generation have not lost their freedom absolutely. Ambika and Ambalika silently have protested not to share their body with hermit. As a result, genuine progeny is not born. Kunthi and Draupadi have questioned the authority on them. Gandhari though marries a blind man, but succumbed to myth of chastity. But later generation of women have lost not only their freedom from over their body, but also their individuality. Thus the lives of women have been occupied by the Institution of Marriage. Character has become only resort of her. Changes such as becoming captive in the wheel of marriage, loosing their own identity, deprived of their consciousness in respect of status of women can be discerned in the Mahabharatha.

IV. Conclusion:- The Mahabharatha has presented the conflicts and complexities of virginity and chastity and the changes that have taken place in the status of women. The very conflicts have tantamounted to the out break of the war Kurukshetra.

The women have lost their freedom during the puranic periods of the Ramayana and the Mahabharatha. She has had no sexual freedom and reproductivity. Even to beget a child, or when, and with whom is decided by her husband. The very right is exercised by father when she is virgin, and husband, after her marriage. Thus the Mahabharatha evaluates the changes in respect of status of women time to time in a crystal clear manner.

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