

## **An analysis of some lesser known women characters in the Mahabharata**

Dr. Supriya Banik Pal  
Reader in Sanskrit  
S. C. College  
Dhaniakhali, Hooghly  
West Bengal, 712302, India.

It is the aim of this paper to bring into limelight the status of the women (except the prominent figures like Draupadi, Gandhari and Kunti) of Mahabharata with their special features and an attempt has been made to furnish the introductory notes on them.

The paper starts with a brief discussion on some lesser known women characters of the epic Mahabharata and tries to give a critical account of their position in the society. The trio, Draupadi-Gandhari-Kunti is portrayed as leading women characters of Mahabharata. Apart from these role-models, there are more ladies who have been kept in the cool shade of neglected identity and treated with contempt by the scholarly world. More or less one hundred seven ladies are mentioned in the epic Mahabharata. Most of these women characters are enriched with excellence and erudition. Like the male counterpart of the society these ladies also possess deep insight in to the matter of decision making, have excellent understanding of practical life and are treasured with high ethical values and morality. Mahabharata pays its highest tribute to some of these ladies as 'Dirghadarshini', 'Pandita', 'Brahmavadini' etc. The names of these ladies are Ganga, Satyawati, Uttara, Amba-Ambika-Ambalika, Subhadra, Arundhati, Ulupi, Pativrata Sandili, Sulabha, Pingala, Vidula, Sudeshna, Prabhasabharya, Damayanti, Madhavi, Sakuntala etc. I have classified these ladies into three categories:

- i) women belonging to the royal families,
- ii) women from ascetic background,
- iii) women of common descendants.

Among these maidens Arundhati, Pativrata Sandili and one Brahmajna Gautami have been mentioned as 'Pandita' and 'Brahmavadini'. Truth-seekers, sages and ancestors have come to listen and learn the secrets of the religion from Arundhati while Siddha Siva and Pativrata Sandili are honoured by Bhishma as Sarvajna and Sarvatattvajna. In the discussion between Gautami and Arjunaka, the Fowler with 'Mrityu' and 'Kala' we find the sound affinity with practical life and philosophical contemplations of the different Shastras of Gautami, who has achieved the deepest truths of the *all pervasive*. Bhiksuni Sulabha has meticulous discussions on different shastras and philosophy of emancipation with the king Janaka. An essence of strong personality and profound command over political ideas can be found in the conversation of Vidula, especially in those where Vidula tries to remove the fear psychosis of her son Sanjaya against war and encourages him to fight back to come out and win over the war. She is also called 'Dirghadarshini' by Kunti. A refined and emphatic political prudence and responsible duties towards home-front find a remarkable place in the character of Queen mother Satyawati. Profundity of logical expression with vehement opposition against Duryodhana's refusal comes into light through the speech of Sakuntala.

In this paper it is proposed to examine the relevant characters in order to unveil the less known neglected identity of some of these glorious ladies and to give due focus on a complete exploration of their contributions to the society of the great age of Mahabharata.