

## ASSERTIVE YET ACQUIESCENT WOMEN OF THE MAHABHARATA

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### Abstract

Indian mythology encompasses characters featuring philosophical/spiritual power and reflects the human traits of love, courage, valor, and righteousness also hatred, revenge, and violence. Our epics and myths have an important means of determining the paradigms of our culture. Even women and children are left unspared of the agony of the war. While wives and mothers of foot soldiers suffer a lot after the death of their menfolk, women of high ranks also suffer the distressing consequences. While we get an intense analysis of the time, space, cast and place, the epic intricately focused on the heroes and cowards, villains and good men, fools and wise men in the course of its narrative. Almost contrast to Ramayana, the poem in praise of an ideal man, adored as a hero, the Mahabharata is a record of human beings with usual human flaws. Kunti, at Pandu's suggestion to be impregnated by a Brahmin for progeny, refuses it steadfast, calling it an act killing the conscientious of a lady. She does it eventually giving birth to Yudhishtra, Bhima and Arjun. Even then she keeps her firstborn a secret. This secret brought a feeling of being left adrift, unloved and rankled deep within her. However, both of them are stubborn and impulsive and made certain decisions during the critical moment of their lives.

Keywords: Indian mythology, paradigms, culture, unloved,.etc

Indian mythology encompasses characters featuring philosophical/spiritual power and reflects the human traits of love, courage, valor, and righteousness also hatred, revenge, and violence. Our epics and myths have an important means of determining the paradigms of our culture. Five women from the epics – Ramayana and Mahabharata – have played crucial roles in our tradition. They have in fact shaped the psychological outlook of Indian women then and now equally. Psychologically imbibe a sense of undeterred perseverance in the lives of women who face deterioration in their personal lives.

In this article, we attempt to study two characters from the epic Mahabharata: Draupati, the wife of Pandava brothers and Kunti, Pandava's mother. The epic describes the dynastic struggle for the crown and throne of the kingdom of Hastinapur between the Pandavas and Kauravas. The 18 days war between two groups of a family has led to massive destruction. Guru dynasty, known for its pomp and show has buried many unknown faces and emotions in the course of history. The dynasty to have witnessed the greatest war of the era has succumbed innumerable lives of common man.

Even women and children are left unspared of the agony of the war. While wives and mothers of foot soldiers suffer a lot after the death of their menfolk, women of high ranks also suffer the distressing consequences. Mahasweta Devi's *After Kurukshetra* has beautifully registered the turmoil of the women as the socially deprived class of the era. Indian tradition, however, distinguishes between the two by calling the Mahabharata a history and the Ramayana a poem. (Karve, 79)

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The epic treasures many unheard stories of both common and princely men. Kunti and Draupadi, queen of Pandu and Pandavas respectively, the women of unparalleled beauty and richness has suffered an identity crisis. Despite being in the state of royalty and richness, many times they are treated as a mere commodity.

Pritha, the firstborn of Devameedha Surasena of Madhura had a rather unusual childhood. Right after her birth, Kunti was adopted by her father's friend Kuntibhoja of Kunti kingdom. Kunti is a blessed child to enjoy all the richness and royalty of her father's house yet yearned for a mother's love. She finds none to confide her longing, hopes, and wishes. These piled up emotions left deep-rooted in her for long years. Kuntibhoja placed her daughter at the service of an eccentric sage Durvasa and warned her not to neglect any service to him. He cautioned her against displeasing the sage for the fear

of bringing disgrace to her and their clan. This fear in her is one of the irreparable disgraces she and the epic face later on. When asked between her first born and the pride of her clan, she took the most crucial decision by abandoning her first born.

She loses her name (her identity), Pritha and accepts herself as Kunti, the daughter of Kuntibhoja. She remains silent as she has no voice against the partiality levied upon her in the patriarchal society. Women of her age are either under the protection of her brother or her father throughout their life. She is a man's possession. Once a woman gets married she comes under the control of her husband's family. She never turns back at her maternal relations even during her dire need.

Draupati, the woman born out of the sacrificial fire is named after her father King Drupad. Though born to change the course of history, these two women have taken their names after their fathers. This stands a clear trace of patriarchal influence in the lives of women of the epic age.

Like Kunti, Draupadi not being the biological daughter of King Drupad longed for a mother's love before her marriage. The princess has a wide knowledge of governance, archery, and internal affairs but abstained from motherly affection to which she wishes to confide her love, fear, and doubts.

When Kunti and Draupadi reach their marriageable age, their parents arrange for a swamyavara, where the bride can choose the groom of her choice. Kunti enjoys the liberty to choose Pandu, the King of Hastinapur. She leaves her homeland to her husband's palace with dreams, aspirations, and anticipation. But the fate has yet another scene to be witnessed by her. To the utter shock of Kunti, Pandu chooses Madri as his second wife. She has to witness multiple shocks thereafter. Pandu's inability to father a child, his second marriage with Madri, his idea to leave the rule of Hastinapur to her sons, the death of Pandu and Madri. All these mishaps happen to her continuously in her life that she has no time or power to change the course of events. And throughout this period, Kunti stands out for her patience and perseverance and single-mindedly brought up and stands by the side of her sons in a manner befitting a strong wilful lady.

Kunti, at Pandu's suggestion to be impregnated by a Brahmin for progeny, refuses it steadfast, calling it an act killing the conscientious of a lady. She does it eventually giving birth to Yudhishtra, Bhima and Arjun. Even then she keeps her firstborn a secret. This secret brought a feeling of being left adrift, unloved and rankled deep within her.

Pandu is the fourth man in her life to add misery to her already turbulent life: her two fathers, her first son Karna and now her husband. After the death of her husband Pandu and Madri, hardly had she heaved a sigh of relief after bringing her sons to Hastinapur,

fresh troubles arose among the cousins for the rights of the throne. Dhritarashtra planned to remove the Pandavas from the public eye by sending them to Varanavata in the pretext of going on a pilgrimage just to pave way for his sons to rule the nation.

After the marriage of her sons, she looks forward to a peaceful life thereafter. But as usual, her hope is in vain. The resultant of the dice game forces her sons and Draupati to go into exile. Owing to her old age, Kunti has to remain in Vidura's house. This dependence is harder for her than all the mishaps in her life.

Draupadi's swayamvar is a plan in disguise to bring Pandavas out of incognito. Like her birth, Draupadi's swayamvar was decided by her father and brother. She has no control over anything happening to her or around her. Though Draupati chose Arjun in swayamvar, she is made to marry all five Pandavas. Saints, scholars and all learned men seem to go deaf and dumb to the agitation of Draupati who is to accept 5 men like her husband. To her, morality, justice, and righteousness deviate for the convenience of men. In certain ways, Arjun degraded Draupati by claiming her as a prize and his elder brother, Yudhistira further insults her by carrying out their mother's wish by treating her as if she is an object won in a contest. All her sentiments and emotions need a great amount of adjustment to adopt the new lifestyle of living with five husbands.

Both Kunti and Draupadi bravely accept the challenge, shoulders the responsibility and bring it to a fruitful conclusion. They are the victim of circumstances and had no control over the situation yet strive hard to emerge victoriously.

Amreeta Syam in her poem Kurukshetra rightly points out the state of queens and princess of the era as,

“The Pandavas have given  
 Draupati... No joy, no sense of  
 victory  
 No honor as wife  
 No respect as a mother-  
 Only the status of a Queen...”

Kunti who is tattered by the fate cannot bring solace to Draupati and her misfortune in life. Neither Draupati nor Kunti could stop the misfortune when Kauravas summoned Pandavas for the dice game. Along with the whole world, Kunti remains a silent spectator when Draupadi was disrobed in the hall of dice. This injustice is never meted out in her life. Though being in a state of emotional imbalance, neither Kunti nor Draupati go to their parents' house. They are left to fight against their barriers single-handed, in spite of having a strong paternal homeland to help them. During the 12yrs exile period, Draupati prefers to go to the forest along with her husband instead of her father's house.

A princess in Drupada kingdom later the queen of Hastinapur is homeless due to the plot knitted against them. When Pandavas stay in the forest, Kunti lives with Vidura praying for the good and the victory of her sons. Throughout her life, we get glimpses of disappointment and suffering. Even during her end, she showed her unbending will. After the gruesome war, she preferred to be with Gandhari and Dhritarashtra and spend the remainder of their lives in the forest. She endures all her pain and suffering from silence. " Then Bhima said,'How can you go away without enjoying the kingdom your sons have won for you?'"(Karve, 61)

She along with the two old companions sat in a yoga pose, calmly awaiting the forest fire to engulf them. According to the words of Irawati Karve, Kunti died as she lived, unbending. Kunti and Draupadi set many examples of righteousness, whether it was following the instruction of their fathers, siding the destiny of their husbands, showing the right path to their husbands (Draupati) and children (Kunti). When Draupadi undergoes humiliation in the public by Kaurava brothers, she longs for revenge and ends in the gruesome battle of Kurukshetra. Her mother-in-law had the burning fire of revenge and later she ensured her sons avenged her insult.

Both Kunti and Draupadi, in their own way, are women of substance. They are willing to undergo pain, sacrifice comfort and happiness, and stand up for what they felt is right.

However, both of them are stubborn and impulsive and made certain decisions during the critical moment of their lives.

The two women are aware of the right from wrong and always endeavored to follow the path of dharma even at the most challenging time. However, they are humans trapped in their life situations and have no choice but to live their destinies, thus displaying grace, dignity and unusual strength of character.

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