Going Beyond The Marginalized - A Study With A Specific Reference To Indian Women In Epic Context.

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ABSTRACT:

This paper examines the changing role of Indian Women in the Global context keeping in view women in the epic context with due emphasis given to the image of women, in social and literary context, her struggle to break out of the marginalized identity. The paper also concentrates on the perspective of women in the patriarchal context and breaking away from the docile, feminine image thrust by the patriarchal order. Her defeat and affronts her triumph and success, her endeavors and failures form the thrust area of the paper. A cursory reference will be given to the works of Indian women novelists who form the marginalized group depiction of women in Indian art, Indian visual art, Indian folk lores, Indian sculpture fighting against the commodification and domestic servitude from feministic perspective concentrating on the relevance of the great poet of India Veda Vyasa who fought valiantly against the hegemonic stereotypes laying a road map for Indian women to establish their identities in the Global context.

Sources and references for the paper are drawn from texts, edited books, research papers and journals which speak for the so called marginalized.

Key Words: *Marginalized, Identity, Women, Epic, Mahabharata.*

MARGINALISATION:

Marginalization refers to the overt or covert trends within societies whereby those perceived

as lacking desirable traits or deviating from the group norms tend to be excluded by wider

society as undesirables. Wing Leung in his paper on 'conservatism and marginalization' describes a marginal person as "one who does not belong to the marginal man (dwells) at the margin of two cultures and two societies (and possesses) a marginal mentality with unresolved identity crisis". Louis Wirth speaking of minority groups says that "A group of people who, because of their physical or culture characteristics are singled out from others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collaborative discrimination." The essence of marginalization would mean that a distinctive social group with its own characteristic features singles out or victimizes the more numerically dominant members of the society, hence subsequent unequal treatment leading to discrimination social ostracism etc., in the epic context we are reminded of the Kauravas who were a hundred in number, trying to single out the Pandavas who were only five and numerically marginalized.

The author of the great work Vyasa himself was a dusky colour born to a fisherwoman in the early part of life with a disagreeable smell of fish who was awed by the fame and authority of the great sage Parashara, Vyasa was born out of an unlikely union. Satyavati of a lower social level became the queen of Shantanu. These indicate the first fragments of absence of marginalization in Mahabharata. In the developed world, social or ethnic minority groups stand out as being sick, the disabled, the obese, the teenage mothers, homosexuals and lesbians. They suffer from social exclusion. Much of the progressive reforms of the last century have been driven by the need for societies to mitigate damaging internal unrest, by a deliberate reversing of previous trends that endangered political and social marginalization of social and political minorities and the women.

It may be observed that a unique character of Mahabharata is the intellectual and spiritual presence of women. On many great conversations exploring the reality of life women are present as teachers. They are portrayed with utmost respect as teachers of mankind and in that there is not self – consciousness and condescending concession. Women were capable of challenging kings as they argue with scholars and a capable of correcting the arrogance of power as well as arrogance of learning. We are reminded of Savithri Upakhyana where she converses with the lord of death which is endearing, scholarly and brilliant.

In the modern political scenario people no longer accept the necessity to have different station in life, just as people are overtly conscious of how different or strong others could be and how fragile they themselves are. The absence of unity may be seen in how the world market has destroyed the ideas of a shared life which could give life a better meaning and stability. In Mahabharata we find that there was absolute ethical discipline of dharma which laid the foundation for social progress and social wealth. There as a Samanya – dharma which was common to all social functions. The ideal of a shared life where each individual is emotionally dependent on the other is seen in the epic.

Within the developed world, social, or ethical marginalized social groups stand out. They suffer from social marginalization due to racial or political minorities. Marginalization would be the core of general human social conflict issues mostly related to racism, ethnism etc., Eugenics is the name given to the science based idea which advocate marginalization of people on the criteria of their race or their colour. Speaking about this context the epic Mahabharata discounts racism and identifies a human being for his attributes. The Varna system in the words of sage Brighu as recorded in the Santi Parva was based mostly on the colour of a human being. However the attitude of treating a human being on the basis of his complexion i.e., Varna which meant colour which would be Shukla – Varna or the fair skin and Krishna – Varna the dark skin may not at all determine the position of the human being in the social hierarchy according to Mahabharata. Through Sage Bharadwaja Vyasa questions as to how a human being can be considered for his colour when all human bleed, defecate, sweat and has phlegm and life.

The secular and anti – racist outlook of Vyasa is further supported by the fact that Vyasa himself was dark – skinned individual who was famously called Krishna – Dwaipayana. The Hindu – Pantheon Krishna who plays a pivotal role in the Mahabharata was of dark complexion. Draupadi who was dark was endowed with beauty which was eternal and beyond the scope of description.

Therefore it may be observed that the theory of origin based on colour was discounted by Mahabharatha. The politics of the marginalized in India has posed new challenges for the

Women's movement in India. This has led to the Dalits and Women's activism in India. The assertion of Dalit interests has posed new challenges for the Women's movement in India. It has been criticized for it totally delineates itself from the interests of the Dalit women. Women's activists have challenged and are responding to this critique. There is an argument that the caste determines the place of women. Using their caste identity to further their interests beyond the realm of women's activism they are trying to celebrate their personal experiences as political. In the epic society it is observed that women were given a place of honour and given considerable amount of freedom. They had freedom of expression. The highest place given to the so called marginalized class of women is seen in the Upakhyanas pertaining to Shakuntala, Savithri, Vidura, Tapati, Damayanti etc. They were highly qualified and scholarly and rose beyond the realm of caste, creed and religion. Most of these women were totally liberalized and they chose their own husbands as in the Upakhyana of Savithri in Vanaparva. These women participated freely in the Swayamwara and chose their life – partners. They argued with men in powerful yet convincing manner and sometimes assumed the roles of preceptors who preached the path of righteousness. The Vidula episode in Adiparva or the Shakuntalopakhyana all bears testimony to this. Satyavati herself dominated through her utilitarian ethics which gave her the right to enforce the view which was most suitable for her domain. She was eager to place on the throne an heir apparent. She insisted on her own progeny to be the surrogate father of her daughters – in – laws offspring. She believed that there was one solution to do the right thing. It may be observed that the women of Mahabharata were never a political minority and there was no question of marginalization in terms of gender. Mahabharata it may be observed never was concerned about the colour of the skin or the gender of a person but valued a human being for his pure thoughts and action. Varna – Sankara or the mixing up of races was common in Mahabharata though it was forbidden in theory. While the Dharma – Sastra segregated people on the basis of various artificial so called attributes the Mahabharata rejected all these and brought together the people for their human attributes. Varna was reduced to a function and not to a person and every human attributes was the result of conduct and not birth. The marriage bond has made a woman carry out certain daily routines.. Nevertheless women of today do not succumb to domestic slavery and this is increasingly been replaced by purchase and sale of house work. However more often than not we find that the burden of the housework still falls on a woman.

It may be observed that in Mahabharata the position of women in domestic life was more liberalized and she was given a better place in family life. She was not treated as a commodity meant for mere household work. 'Protection' is often misunderstood as the vocabulary of power – relationship. But we find in Mahabharata that even at the surface level it was self – control which was the foundation of the relationship and not power. Women were made happy within the family life. Mahabharata was concerned with the quality of relationships at personal level and oppression of women was not seen. The anthropology, sociology, political, ideology have all brought together the family a place of pride for women and it may also be observed that equality in domestic life was the order of the epic. Women enjoyed high level of participation in the execution of power. However in the present days though they enjoy a high level of participation in the work force the entire burden of domestic labor falls on a woman. Mahabharata states at every turn that the family and the context of law and polity surrounding the family are above all. According to Mahabharata life within a family, according highest status to women should be advocated by dharma. However with the commodification of women and their labor, the traditional basis for family life is absent in today's world. It may be very difficult to attain the ideal of a loving family. The twentieth century has seen that the transformation in personal relations is a transformation of ethics. The concept of universality has risen to universal significance. Ethical politics can be advocated only when there is cooperation. The three stages of the development of cooperation may be discussed here to examine how ethical politics got introduced in the epic. The first stage is the hierarchy, traditional or the bureaucratic relationship. The power vests with one individual and he knows what is best for another person and how he should utilize it. In Adiparva the daughters – in – law of Satyavati Ambika and Ambalika are widowed without an heir apparent to the throne. The process of levirate is performed by Vyasya on the request of Satyavathi. The power to execute this function vested with Satyavathi and she knew what is best for her to invite Vyasa for the process of procreation. It could be her contention that Vyasa being her own progeny and a virtuous sage his off springs would also have the same qualities and scholarship. The second relationship is a conflict between equal individuals with their own ends. Each of them uses the other for their own end. In the epic Mahabharata Duryodhana and Karna retained the relationship of a retailer and a provider. Politically Duryodhana wanted to befriend Karna, for he knew that his

charisma equaled that of Arjuna. On the other hand Karna though was a Kshatriya retained the tag of a Suta. Therefore to be recognized with a status in the society, he had to befriend Duryodhana. The third relationship is found in a Utopian society. It is a collaborative and team work where every individual treats the other as an end in himself and not merely a means. Identity Politics is political action to advance the interests of members of a group who perceive them to be oppressed by virtue of a shared and marginalized identity such as race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation and the like. Writer L.A Kauffman traced its origin to the civil rights movement in the early and mid-1960 s. Barbara Smith defined it as Politics that grew out of our objective material experiences as black Women. The best known aim of identity politics is to empower the oppressed to articulate their oppression in terms of their own experience which is a process of consciousness. Identity politics is completely varied from conception of politics driven by self-interest. In Mahabharata there is no discrimination or marginalization due to the operation of the principle of identity politics. The epic is not concerned about the colour of the skin but about the human colors like fear, greed, anger, sorrow, hunger etc., Varna was more of a social order rather than a person. Positions of men and women were relatively held by human conduct. The oppressed class fights valiantly against the autocrats who try to marginalize them. Separation is only a means to an end. It may be organizational or even territorial. In Mahabharata in Udyoga Parva we find Draupadi rising against the Kauravas in her speech with Krishna. Her level of consciousness rises beyond oppression and she is abusive in her course of conversation she requests Krishna to arrange for war and not strike a peace treaty. She is consoled by Krishna that very soon he would look into the destruction of Kauravas. This is an example to show that no practice which is beyond the realm of dharma can sustain for a long period of time. Identity politics is a phenomenon which recognizes majoritarian national identity as nationalists. Nationalist here would not refer to a racial or a tribal phenomenon. It should be a stable, continuing community, a common language with a distinct common territory. Positive political form can be that of rise of capitalism and struggles of the rising bourgeois under feudalism. The author of Mahabharata Vyasa believed that there was no question of excluding anybody. In his opinion any operation did not have a center or a periphery. Everybody was equally important and he had to be treated for his human worth and attributes. The so called marginalized have got back their

spaces in the epic. In his opinion all the actions of a human being is based on Dharma. The bringing together or holding alltogether is possible through Dharma. Whatever has the characteristics of negating dharma and disintegrating human unity has to be called as Adharma. The Mahabharata king is advised in Santi Parva that he cannot take for granted the weak and the helpless. If a person who is weak is left harassed and oppressed by the so called elite of the present days in the opinion of Vyasa there is a power above all of us who will take care of the weak. The ordering progress and prosperity of a welfare society depends on the lokayatra or lokasangraha of a king who follows Svadharma. We are reminded of Draupadi in the epic. When her own people for whatever reason be, cannot come to her rescue it is Lord Krishna, the highest power who creates opportunity for ending of marginalization. It may not be out of context to state that Vyasa fought against the hegemonic stereotypes to give back the space to the marginalized. Some of the western critics argue that homogeneity of mainstream culture makes it impossible to accept the marginalized. Social justice movements should aim at not integration but rather multicultural pluralism. Progressive politics in the epic was made possible by powerful characters with deep sense of duty and morality likes Satyavati, Draupadi, Kunti, Gandhari and the like who voted for economic freedom, political discussion and freedom of expression. Proper voice, opinion, wisdom and deeper meaning which are reasons for progress were made possible through reconciliation of the mainstream with the marginalized. With manifest realism the epic traces many inter related aspects which have to be understood with the context of self and the others in their individual and collective meaning. Women character of the epic were highly educated and liberal and create a space for themselves and laid a road map to show the global world how space can be created through cultural interactions among different individuals within a society. This shows that the dynamic tendency of culture has resulted in defining, redefining and rediscovering cultural patterns of the society. The creation or rejection of the space definitely has a bearing on the progress of the society. There is good reason to believe that if the mainstream merges with the margin and if the progressive people can orient themselves in this new terrain, then the radical social transformation to which so many aspire to seek an identity can be achieved. Despite the cultural and political fragmentation, the widespread prejudice as to the equal moral worth of all humans constitutes the embryo of a new universal consciousness. There is a good reason to

believe that Mahabharata has addressed the women issue in a very progressive manner. It may be observed that not a single woman turns a home into wilderness. More often we see the wife protecting the husband from his wholly mistaken notions of one thing or the other concerning the family. The literary perspectives with discussion of ethics, politics and international affairs have moved conveniently from margins to main stream. Mahashwetha Debi the great writer of Bengal has discussed how main stream reformers had to struggle to pass the margins into the mainstream with a specific reference to Draupadi the Black Woman.

CONCLUSION:

The Mahabharata state was a social state which shifted the emphasis from material gains to human togetherness. It networked human bonds and social foundations of human solidarity. It protected against the main devastating competition of "war of all against all" The Lokahita concept of Mahabharata shows that the 'order of equality' lifted the members of the society to the status of citizens. This concept helps in the recycling of the society for common good, as a wife or a mother is highly extolled in Mahabharata. Hence the women who are so called marginalized get into the mainstream.

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