

Learnings and Managerial Implications from Comparative Analysis of Eminent Women in Mahabharata

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Abstract: The paper focuses on literature review on the various books available in Mahabharata. It then explores the strengths and weaknesses of Gandhari, Kunti and Draupadi. It further puts forth the learnings and managerial implications from comparative analysis of the above mentioned eminent women in Mahabharata.

Introduction:

Gandhari was the daughter of King Subal of the Gandhar region. She worshipped Lord Rudra in her childhood and was blessed with a hundred sons. In those days, the number of members of Kuruvansh was less in Hastinapur. That is why on Bhima's request King Subal got Gandhari married to Dhritrashtra. Dhritrashtra was blind from birth. So Gandhari also covered her eyes for life time with a band to be able to empathize with the situation of her husband.

According to Rudra's boon, she got pregnant. At the same time she got the news that Pandu's wife Kunti has given birth to Yudhishthir. Even she should have a son very soon, with this intention, she took her foetus out. It was a dead body. Then Vyasji showed mercy towards Gandhari and he cut that body into hundred pieces and put them into many pots filled with ghee and other medicines. Duryodhan, Dushashan etc. hundred Kauravas and a girl named Dushala were formed. This way Gandhari got hundred and one children.

After the war of Mahabharata, Gandhari was living with the Pandavas. Later, she had a feeling of renunciation so she went to jungles with Dhritrashtra and Kunti. There, Dhritrashtra, Kunti and Gandhari died due to conflagration, in the forest.

She sacrificed her vision because she said that she wanted to be able to feel the same way as her husband. She did not want the Kauravas and Pandavas to fight amongst themselves but the attachment to her sons and husband might have held her back from taking a strong stand to prevent the Great War.

Strengths and weakness- Analysis of Gandhari:

- 1) Gandhari was mother of hundred sons. This was her strength as she was supported by all of them.
- 2) She covered her eyes for life time with a band. This shows that she was mentally strong and determined.
- 3) She was deeply attached to her sons and her husband. This was her weakness in a way.
- 4) She insulted Kunti in the temple episode. (But according to some books, Gandhari was close to Kunti). This shows her weakness in a way.
- 5) She also cursed Krishna after the war. This shows her weakness of not being able to withstand the emotional trauma which she was undergoing inspite of knowing her son's flaws.
- 6) Gandhari was also devout; in particular an ardent worshipper of Lord Shiva. This highlights her religious strength.
- 7) She repeatedly exhorted her sons to follow dharma and make peace with the Pandavas. This shows her strength of character again.

Kunti:

Kunti was the mother of the eldest three of the Pandava brothers. Her story is also told within the Bhagavata Purana, wherein she speaks on the philosophy of devotion of Krishna, known as Bhakti yoga. Kunti is thus held as a figure of great importance within many Hindu traditions and especially with worshippers of Krishna (Vaishnavas). Her father was Shoorsen of the Yadav clan, and she was named Pritha. She was thus the sister of Vasudeva, father of Krishna. She was given in adoption to the childless King Kuntibhoja, after which

she became known as Kunti. After her arrival, King Kuntibhoja was blessed with children. He considered her his lucky charm and took care of her until her marriage.

When she was young, the rishi Durvasa told her a mantra with which Kunti could summon any deva and have a child by him. When Kunti asked why he gave her this mantra, he told her that it would be useful to her later in life.

Kunti could not believe the mantra, so she tried to use it. The god Surya, appeared. She asked him to go back, but Surya said he was compelled to fulfill the mantra before returning. After birth of the child, Kunti abandoned the child in a basket in a river. This child was later found and adopted by a chariot driver and his wife, and was named Karna. He went on to become a central character in the Mahabharata. The ambiguous emotions Karna felt about his birth mother play an important role in the Mahabharata.

Later on, Kunti married Prince Pandu of Hastinapura. He took a second wife Madri, but was unable to father children due to a Rishi's curse. Once, when Pandu was on a hunting excursion, he shot an arrow at a deer-couple, which to his misfortune turned out to be sage Kindama and his wife. The dying sage cursed Pandu that as he had killed them in their moment of union, the moment he *unites* with a woman will be his last. Grief-stricken, he decided to abandon palace life for doing penance and proceeds to the forest with his wives, to live in self-imposed exile. Then, when the erstwhile king expresses concerns about dying childless, Kunti revealed her secret mantra. She used it three times, first receiving a son, Yudishtira, from the god Dharma, then Bhima from the god Vayu, and thirdly Arjuna, from the god Indra. Kunti revealed the mantra to Madri, who bore twin sons, Nakula and Sahadeva, from the twin gods the Asvins. The five together are known as the Pandavas.

After the death of Pandu and Madri, Kunti was left to tend for all five sons. After the great battle of Kurukshetra and in her old age, she goes in exile to the forest, with her brothers-in-law Dhritarashtra and Vidura, and Dhritarashtra's wife Gandhari where they die together in a forest fire.

Kunti's character within the Mahabharata is accorded much respect within the Hindu tradition. Her activities were that of a very pious and loyal wife and of a person with a great deal of self-control. Kunti was given a special boon which enabled her to bear the sons of great celestial devas as many times as she wished. However Kunti did not misuse her boon, limiting herself to three sons only. In spite of Pandu's pleas for more sons, Kunti held onto the Shastras which state that one should not have more than 3 children when the children are not conceived in the usual manner.

Strengths and Weakness- Analysis of Kunti:

Strengths:

- 1) Kunti's activities were that of a very pious and loyal wife and of a person with a great deal of self-control.
- 2) . Kunti was given a special boon which enabled her to bear the sons of great celestial devas as many times as she wished
- 3) Kunti did not misuse her boon, limiting herself to three sons only.
- 4) Even though she had lesser number of sons compared to Gandhari - they were enough to win in the battle against Kauravas.
- 5) In the temple episode her sons lived upto her expectations and got 100 golden flowers before the Kauravas and stood by their mother so that she could visit the temple with grace.

Weakness:

- 1) Kunti could not believe the mantra told by Lord Surya, and tried to use it. This shows her distrusting nature.
- 2) Hence, after birth of the child, Kunti abandoned the child in a basket in a river. This shows that she was scared of norms put forth by society and social stigma of being an unwed mother. Her priority was not her baby.
- 3) When the erstwhile king expressed concerns about dying childless, Kunti revealed her secret mantra. She used it three times, first receiving a son, Yudishtira, from the god Dharma, then Bhima from the god Vayu, and thirdly Arjuna, from the god Indra. Kunti revealed the mantra to Madri, who bore twin sons, Nakula and Sahadeva, from the twin gods the Asvins. This shows her weakness. The same act was justified in her psyche just because she was married now.

Draupadi:

King Drupada of Panchala had been defeated by the Pandava prince Arjuna on behalf of Drona, who subsequently took half his kingdom to humiliate him. To gain revenge on Drona, he performed a fire-sacrifice to

obtain a means of besting him. Draupadi emerged, as a beautiful dark skinned young woman, together with her siblings Dhrishtadyumna and Shikhandi from the sacrificial fire. She is better known as *draupadi*, daughter of Drupada. she was very brave woman.

As per The Garuda Purana Draupadi is the incarnation of Bharati-Devi, The Consort of Lord Vayu. As per Narada and Vayu Puranas, Draupadi is the composite Avatar of Goddesses Shyamala (wife of Dharma), Bharati (Wife of Vayu), Sachi (wife of Indra), Usha (wife of Ashwins), and Parvati (wife of Shiva), and hence married their earthly counterparts in the form of the five Pandavas. Enraged at a jest by Parvati, Shyamala, Sachi and Usha, Brahma cursed them to human birth. Parvati thought of the solution wherein they will be born as one woman, Draupadi and hence share the earthly body for a smaller period of time. They requested Bharati to be with them in their human birth. Draupadi's characteristic fight against injustice reflects Parvati or her Shakti, Kali, inhabiting Draupadi's mortal flesh at times. At other times, Draupadi was docile and even waited to be rescued (as in case of Jayadratha and Jatasura) showing the qualities of other goddesses like Sachi and Usha. Other times, she showed astuteness in hiding their true identity and asking Vayu's son Bhima to kill the evil Keechaka, like Goddess Bharati would. Draupadi was also avatar of Goddess Shree, who was joint wife to five Indras, who incarnated as the Five Pandavas.

She was to be born several times for imprisoning the Indras. The first time was as Vedavati who cursed Ravana (who is another goddess Avatar Swaha, wife to Agni). She then came again as Sita, especially to take revenge from Ravana while Agni hid the real Sita. Her third incarnation was partial: either Damayanti (whose husband, Nala, was equivalent to Dharma, Vayu, and Indra, just like the Pandavas) or her daughter Nalayani. She married Sage Mudgala. The fifth avatar was Draupadi herself. So, we find in Draupadi, a composite avatar of Kali, Parvati, Sachi, Shyamamala, Usha, Bharati, Shree, and Swaha, the eight goddesses.

Draupadi was a multifaceted personality: she could be fiery and angry when the situation called for it, but she still had a compassionate nature. She knew all the servants in the palace by name and they affectionately called her "bahu rani." She encouraged people to face life with the same inner strength that she did. For example, after Abhimanyu's death, she consoled his grieving widow, Uttara, by reminding her of the cause for which Abhimanyu gave his life. She encouraged Uttara to gather her strength for the sake of her and Abhimanyu's child, whom she was carrying at the time. After the war, Draupadi looked after Gandhari with respect and affection, even though Gandhari's sons had wronged her in so many ways.

Because of her virtuous nature, Draupadi is considered one of the panchakanya, a group of five women who are especially venerated in the Hindu tradition.

Drupada intended that Arjuna alone win the hand of his daughter. Upon hearing of the Pandavas' supposed death at Varanavata he set up a swayamvara for Draupadi intending to bring Arjuna out into the open. The princes vying for Draupadi's hand had to shoot five arrows at a revolving target, while looking only at its reflection in a bowl. Drupada was confident that Arjuna alone could accomplish this task. Arriving with his brothers disguised as Brahmins (priests), Arjuna successfully tackled the target, which other kings and prince were unable to accomplish.

While in exile, Kunti, mother of the Pandavas often advised her sons that they share everything they have (or obtain through Bhiksha i.e. alms) equally amongst themselves. Kunti, unmindful of what Arjuna was referring to, unassumingly asked her son to share whatever it is with his brothers. Thus, in order to obey their mother's order all five accepted Draupadi as their wife, without taking her consent.

When Krishna visits the family, he explains to Draupadi that her unique position as the wife of five brothers results from a certain incident in her previous birth. She had in that lifetime prayed to Shiva to grant her a husband with five desired qualities. Shiva, pleased with her devotion, tells her that it is very difficult to get a husband with all five qualities that she desired. But she sticks to her ground and asks for the same. Then Lord Shiva grants her wish saying that she would get the same in her next birth. Hence she gets married to five brothers each who represents a given quality: The just Yudhisthira for his wisdom of Dharma; The powerful Bhima for his strength that exceeded that of a thousand elephants combined; The valiant Arjuna for his courage and knowledge of the battlefield; the exceedingly handsome Nakula and Sahadeva, for their love that put even Kama, the God of Love, to shame.

None of Draupadi's children survive the end of the epic. Parikshita, grandson of Subhadra and Arjuna, is the sole Pandava descendent who survives, at the end of Mahabharata.

Indraprastha was built at the site of the Khandava forest. The pride of buildings was the Palace of Illusions and this was where Draupadi took Duryodhana and his entourage. Duryodhana felt extremely insulted that Draupadi and her maids saw his embarrassing predicament. This was the most embarrassing moment in

Duryodhana's life. Time and again his cousins had got the better of him. This was the last straw. He swore revenge and such a revenge that Draupadi would fall at his feet begging for mercy.

This key incident is often considered to mark a definitive moment in the story of Mahabharata. It is the one of the driving reasons that ultimately led to the Mahabharata war, though it cannot be considered the central or the most important one.

After the dice game is over, in an emotional appeal to the elders present in the forum, Draupadi repeatedly questions the legality of the right of Yudhishtira to place her at stake when he himself had lost his freedom and as a consequence did not possess any property in the first place. Everybody remains dumbfounded. Bhishma, the patriarch of the Kaurava family and a formidable warrior, has only this explanation to offer to Draupadi - "The course of morality is subtle and even the illustrious wise in this world fail to always understand it."

During the *Vastra haran* episode- Kauravas demand Stripping of Draupadi who refuses. Then to the horror of everybody present, Dushasana tries to strip Draupadi of her sari. Seeing her husbands unable or unwilling to help her, Draupadi prays to Krishna to protect her. A miracle occurs henceforward, which is popularly attributed to Krishna but in Vyasa's Mahabharata, Draupadi's saviour is named as Dharma (who could be just morality, the god Dharma, Krishna as the Lord of Dharma, or even Vidura or Yudhishtira, or even a logical paradox of Draupadi's question - did Yudhishtira have the right to stake her when he had already lost himself). As Dushasana unwraps layers and layers of her sari, her sari keeps getting extended.

While the Pandavas were in the Kamyaka forest, they often went hunting, leaving Draupadi in the care of Dhaumya, their priest. At this time Jayadratha, the son of Vriddhakshatra, the husband of Duryodhana's sister Dussala, passed through Kamyaka forest on the way to Salwa Desa. There he saw the stunningly beautiful Draupadi. Jayadratha then started beseeching her to go away with him and desert her husbands who had fallen upon bad times. Draupadi pointed out that it was wrong to desert one's spouses when they were in difficulty and then gave him a rather long and deliberately delaying speech on exactly the sort of bad time her husbands would give him on their return.

While the pandavas were leading their normal life in their own disguised form, one day Kichaka, the brother of Sudeshana, and the commander of Virata's forces, happened to see the draupadi. He was filled with lust at her beautiful form. He asked her to marry him. But Draupadi refuses him saying that she is already married to 'Gandharvas'. She warns Kichaka that her husbands are very strong and he would not be able to escape death at their hands. Later he forces his sister, queen Sudeshna to help him win Draupadi. Sudeshna orders Draupadi to fetch wine from Kichak's house. Draupadi tries to dissuade the queen from sending her to Kichaka's house but fails. When Draupadi goes to get wine, Kichaka tries to molest her. Draupadi escapes and runs into the court of Virata. Kichaka kicks her in front of all the courtiers including Yudhishtira who was also present in the court at that time. Draupadi curses Kichaka in the court that her husbands 'Gandharvas' will surely kill him. King Virata asks Kichaka to leave to preserve the honour of the court. Later that night, Pandavas together hatch a plan to kill Kichaka. Kichaka meets her later again and tells her that he is the strongest in that country and she has no way other than to accept him. Draupadi, as per the plan, agrees with him but on condition that none of his friends or brothers should know about their relationship. Kichaka accepts her condition and promises her that he will not let anyone know. Draupadi asks Kichaka to come to the dancing hall at night. Bhima (in the guise of Draupadi) that night in the dancing hall, fights with Kichaka and kills him. (Book 4: Virata Parva, Kichaka-badha Parva)

Perhaps Draupadi's most exceptional quality was that Shri Krishna considered her his *sakhi* (friend) and sister. One day when Krishna cut his finger, Draupadi immediately tore off a piece of her sari and bandaged his cut. Krishna said that with this loving act, she wrapped him in debt and he would repay each "thread" when the time comes. Indeed, when Draupadi needed Krishna's protection and fervently prayed for his help, he came to the rescue and gave her unlimited cloth. This is one of the stories of the origin of the Raksha Bandhan festival.

Once, while the Pandavas were in exile, Durvasa Muni, who was known for his quick anger, suddenly decided to drop in along with his many thousands of disciples. He would naturally want something to eat for himself and his followers, but the Pandavas had just eaten and there was no more food left. Fearful of Durvasa's anger, Draupadi prayed to Krishna. When he appeared, Draupadi took the last grain of rice in the pot and asked Krishna to eat half for himself and half for the whole world. When Durvasa and his disciples arrived, they were all so full that they did not want anything to eat, and thus left peacefully.

Draupadi is an exemplification of bhakti, and she experienced God's divine presence constantly in her life.

Strengths and Weakness: Analysis of Draupati:

Strengths:

- 1) Draupadi was a person of erudition. She had learnt politics during her childhood.
- 2) She equally loved her husbands and did a lot for their wives too.
- 3) She was Multi-faceted personality.
- 4) She was a brave woman.
- 5) Her strength was Bhima always who was ready to do anything for her and honour.
- 6) She was good in managing several things and always respected Kunti.
- 7) She was very attractive and beautiful.

Weakness:

- 1) She was outspoken.
- 2) She had no control over her anger.
- 3) She was the main reason for the war which took place between Kauravas and pandavas.
- 4) She always wanted the revenge to be taken by her husbands in case of any episode where disrespect was shown towards her by anyone.

Comparative Analysis of Gandhari, Kunti and Draupadi:

- 1) Draupadi knew "Management" - She managed all the men in her life tactfully like Krishna and her husbands. They always did anything for her and fought for her honour. Kunti knew how to manage her sons well - so she was good only at the domestic front. Gandhari's blindness was metaphorical - she shut her eyes all her life to avoid seeing the misdeeds done by her sons. She neither could manage her sons nor could do anything to prevent the war.
- 2) Draupadi was quite outspoken as compared to Kunti and Gandhari.
- 3) She was more well read in "Politics" as compared to them.
- 4) She was the driving force for the war which took place whereas Gandhari and Kunti could not do anything to prevent the war in spite of being mothers.
- 5) Kunti was stronger than Gandhari even though she had only five sons as "Quality" always overpowers "Quantity".
- 6) Kunti's sons were more obedient than Gandhari's sons which again shows Kunti as a stronger woman.
- 7) In order of qualities and strength, Draupadi is the strongest and Gandhari is the weakest of the three women which is justified by the sequence of events in Mahabharata.

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