CHAPTER V

Women Education in Mahābhārata

5.1. Educated Women

In the Vedic age, the refulgent golden age of women's all round progress, they (women) occupied the exalted position in society. Roma Choudhari is of the view that India reached its zenith of education at the very dawn i.e. Vedic age of human civilization:

"Thus the zenith of education and learning, reached by India at the very dawn of human civilization - which, however, by no means marks the dawn of her culture, but rather the meridian - has been maintained in some form or other, all through the ages."\(^1\)

Atharvaveda declares-

"Doth win a maiden a youthful husband through Barahmacharya or Vedic studentship."

The significance of this reference is that it gives direct indication to the right of women to the studentship and education.

The Mahābhārata, which occupies a unique place in Indian literature, does not lag behind in giving descriptions regarding the marvellous success, which women achieved in the

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2. Atharvaveda, 11/7(5)/18.
sphere of education. The memorable epic of India is resplendent with acts and achievements of a large number of women scholars of repute.

Although Mahābhārata lacks in providing direct testimony about women's right to education and learning, yet the instances of many scholarly women, who kept the torch of learning burning, are ample proofs that women were provided opportunities for quenching their thirst for knowledge during the Mahābhārata age.

Women had the right to naiṣṭhika brahmacharya or a life of celibate asceticism in the Mahābhārata age, so there is a galaxy of some prominent women ascetics in the Mahābhārata such as Sulbhā etc.

Besides those women whose choice voluntarily fell upon a life of celibacy, there were some women, who inspite of embracing the family life, were endowed with the knowledge of Infinite Brahman. Kathopanisad glorifies Imperishable Brahman in these words:

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\text{"Realizing through self-contemplation that Primaeval Lord (Brahman) who is difficult to be seen, being deeply hidden, placed in the cave (of the heart) and dwelling in the abyss, a wise man gives up joy and grief."}
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Women also had the full right to enter the

1. Kathopaniṣad commentary by Shastri, Surendera Deva, Chowkhambha Vidya Bhawan, Varanasi, 2/2/12.

2. Ram, Sadhu, Essays on Sanskrit literature, p.66.
Vanaprastha āsrama in order to lead a life of austerity and meditation during this age. Satyavatī and her two daughter-in-laws did so.

Some women were conversant with the highest philosophy of life as well as with different branches of knowledge. Many women of royal-blood were well-versed in the knowledge of politics and were also religious minded. Gandhari, Kunti etc. were such women.

Sulabhā

Sulabhā, who was an adept in yoga, entered the intellect of the king through her own intellect, and controlling the rays of light issuing from his eyes by those emanating from hers, bound up the king with yogic bonds with a view to ascertaining the truth.

A highly virtuous mendicant lady named Sulabhā was the contemporary of Janaka, the king of Mithilā. Her father was king Pradhāna and lack of a suitable husband compelled her to lead unmarried life. She, therefore, preferred to live as a celibate ascetic and wandered hither and thither alone in search of the Ultimate Truth. She adopted the doctrines of Yoga and acquired the stage of supreme realization i.e. the stage of oneness of the individual soul with the infinite universal soul. She assumed the form of attractive young lady by the power of Yoga for testing the level of Janaka's

2. Great Women of India, p.199.
spiritualism as well as also for benefitting herself from his superior experiences. She reached the court of king Janaka. The king welcomed her and entered into a philosophical discussion with her. Even Janaka, a renowned scholar, was impressed by her spiritual superiority.

Sulabhā's proficiency in various subjects becomes evident from her speech which breathes a depth of thoughts and meaning. Again her speech is full of illusions to the philosophical doctrines of the different schools. For instance, she has mastered the science of Yoga as is not hidden from her aforesaid description. There are abundant references to the Sāmkhya philosophy in her speech. The doctrine of Sāmkhya that Prakṛti (Nature) creates all creatures finds a mention in the following verse:

"Whether the Unmanifest or the Manifest be their cause, or whether the two be considered as their cause or whether the four together be the cause, they that are conversant with spiritual science behold nature as the cause of all creatures."

Śvetāsvatara Upaniṣad also describes all the creation as the projected form of Prakṛti (Nature):

2. Ibid. translated by Dutt, M.N., p.504.
There is a description in the epic of Šāndilya who became an ascetic. She had attained the highest perfection in asceticism.²

Daughter of Šāndilya

Mahābhārata also mentions the daughter of Šāndilya who as a celibate ascetic throughout life and succeeded in attaining the highest place among the ascetics.³

Gautamī

Gautamī had the knowledge of that ultimate reality called Brahman. When her only son breathed his last as a consequence of snake-bite, she was capable of delivering a scholarly lecture on the state after death owing to this very supreme knowledge.⁴

Ansuya

A woman scholar named Ansuya, wife of Attri has been portrayed as a brahmavādinī (or an expounder of Brahman) in the great epic.⁵


3. Ibid., 9/53/6 to 8.5/111/1 to 18.

4. Ibid., 13/1/10, 14 to 16, 19, 20, 22, 24.

5. Ibid., 13/14/65.
Women also had the right to enter the Vānaprastha āsarma or go to the forest in order to lead a life of austerity and meditation. For instance, Satyāvatī and her two daughters-in-law went to the forest to practise austerities after the demise of king Pāndu and breathed their last there. Satyābhāma and other queens also repaired to the forest when Kṛṣṇa was no more and performed severe penances there.

Thus says Roma Chāudhari, "From the above, it is clear that during the age of the Mahābhārata also, women were entitled to brahmavidyā or the philosophy of Brahman, and as such to upanayana or initiation and brahma-charya or Vedic studentship."

Gāndhārī

Such are the virtues of Gāndhārī, the wife of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, that Tripurari Chakravarti is perforce drawn towards her:

"Undoubtedly, the noblest and best of the women characters in the Mahābhārata is Gāndhārī. She, more than any other person, in the Epic kept her faith in the moral order undimmed, and in the hours of supreme crisis in her life. She always unhesitatingly sacrificed narrow, personal, selfish interests, and embraced the cause of virtue and righteousness. This she did even at the peril of herself and the fortunes of her family. She kept aloft the standard of dharma

1. Mahā., 1/119/11, 12.
2. Ibid., 16/3/72.
and asked others to act in the same manner. After the terrible disaster of the Kurukṣetra War, in which she lost all her hundred sons and other near relations, Gāndhārī stood firm and maintained her unflinching faith in the triumph of the moral law, and she could boldly express her feelings to that effect.¹

The king of Gāndhāra named Subala was the father of Gāndhārī.² Bhīṣma, being the uncle and guardian of the Kuru prince Dhrūtarāṣṭra, was looking for a suitable bride for him. He came to know about Gāndhārī, who was abundantly religious-minded girl from Brahmins. He rushed messengers from Hastināpur to Gāndhāra with the proposal of the marriage. Subala was reluctant in accepting the proposal at first due to blindness of Dhrūtarāṣṭra but the nobility, greatness and fame of the Kuru family led to the acceptance of the proposal by him. When Gāndhārī was informed about the decision, she decided to lead the life of a blind person and wrapped her eyes with many-folded bandage.³ Such was her devotion towards her husband. Gāndhārī, is, therefore, the embodiment of the ideals of Indian womanhood.

Gāndhārī became the mother of one hundred sons⁴ but unfortunately these sons could not come to the expectations of their holy mother. She could not agree to the wicked ways

¹ Great Women of India, p.170.
² Mahā., 1/103/9.
³ Ibid., 1/103/9 to 13.
⁴ Ibid., 1/107/34, 37.
of her sons with regard to their bias attitude towards the sons of Pāṇḍu. When Yudhiṣṭhīra lost his everything including his wife, kingdom and brothers at the game of dice in the court of Hastināpura, everyone was jubilant in the Dhṛtarāṣṭra camp except Gāndhārī who was terribly shaken by the mean and immoral conduct of her sons. She was overwhelmed with grief when she heard of the sufferings of the sons of Pāṇḍu. She not only criticized the misconduct of Duryodhana who was destined to be the death knell of the entire Kuru clan but went even to the extent of suggesting that his sons should obey him who had cast a slur on the fair name of their reputed Kuru family. How touching is this appeal of Gāndhārī that is couched in words that go direct to the heart:

रत्नोऽनुष्ठानोऽध्ययनोऽवतारसः प्रत्येकः प्रदानादिइ।

She even asked her husband to disapprove the misdeeds of their wicked sons.

Exclaims Swami Nihshreyasananda:

"As a mother Gāndhārī never allowed her love and affection for her sons to get the better of her judgement and wisdom. Her voice throughout the Mahābhārata is the voice of warning to her sons, who were treading the path of error and injustice." 

2. Ibid., 2/66/34.
Gāndhārī constantly exhorted her son Duryodhana to avoid the path of war and settle the family dispute amicably with Pāṇḍavas. When he disapproved the peace-proposals forwarded by Śrī Kṛṣṇa on the eve of the great war of Kurukṣetra, Gāndhārī expressed her resentment strongly in the royal court of Hastināpura. She rebuked Duryodhana and emphatically advised him to desist from war:

न युद्धे तात कल्याणे न ध्यार्थ्यो कुलत: सुखम् ।
न वापि विजयो नित्ये मा युद्धे चेत आदिधा: ।।

"Doth not lie, My dear son, welfare in war, not to talk of Dharma (virtue) and Artha (worldly benefit). From whence happiness will come? Even victory is not ever-lasting, set not, therefore, your mind on war."

Thus Gāndhārī is depicted indulged in a very intelligent political discussion with Duryodhana in the open royal court in the Mahābhārata which exhibits her keen interest in politics.

Duryodhana never cared to pay heed to Gāndhārī's intelligent suggestion, consequently the inevitable Kurukṣetra war broke out. Duryodhana tried his utmost daily to seek the blessings of his mother for emerging victorious but she the jewel among women, always uttered rather declared prophetically:

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2. Ibid., 5/127/19 to 53.
Commenting upon Gāndhārī's words Roma Choudhari writes:

"Her immortal saying, "Yat dharmastato jayah" (Victory pertains only to the side of right), when she refused to wish success even to her own son, Duryodhana, has passed into a classic."^2

The terrible and disastrous Kurukṣetra war which swallowed all her hundred sons could not succeed in deterring Gāndhārī from the path of righteousness, that is why she could gather the endless strength to express her feelings so strongly.3

Gāndhārī, however, cursed Śrī Kṛṣṇa and the Yādava dynasty to meet their fearful end owing to the failure of Śrī Kṛṣṇa to avert the ruinous war.4 After spending some years under the affectionate protection of Yudhiṣṭhira, Gāndhārī with her husband and Kuntī etc. left for her final journey5 and fell prey to death when a conflagration engulfed the

1. Mahā., 11/17/5, 6.
2. Great Women of India, p.105.
3. Mahā., 11/14/17 to 19; 11/15/16 to 20.
4. Ibid., 11/25/40 to 42.
5. Ibid., 15/21/9.
Swami Nihshreyasananda showers praise upon Gāndhārī in the following words:

"She (Gāndhārī) exemplifies the best ideals of Indian Womanhood through the ages from the days of the Mahābhārata, and remains immortal in the minds of millions of Indians, who derive their inspiration from the great Epic." \(^2\)

And mark the qualities of Gāndhārī as described by the sage Vyāsa:

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\text{सा व इतिहासी देवी कालपर्यायवेदिनी।}
\text{गान्धारी सर्वसत्त्वा।}
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"And Gāndhārī who knew what Time brings in its due course, who was well-versed with all the Dharmas (virtues/duties) and endowed with intelligence----"

Gāndhārī has, thus, carved a niche for herself in the hearts of millions by way of her virtues even today.

Kunti

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\text{रुपसत्त्वोपेतता धम्मरामा महावर।}
\text{इश्वरी कुन्तिमोहस्य।}
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"Endowed with sattva, beauty and every accomplishment, devoted to Dharma (virtue) and observer of rigid vows, the daughter of Kuntibhoja."

Kunti is the personification of the matchless

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1. Mahā., 15/45/19 to 31.
4. Ibid., 1/105/1.
strength of character, versatility and learning of the women of yore.

Daughter of king Kuntibhoja Kunti (Prthä) entered into a wedlock with king Pāṇḍu of Hastināpura in a swayamvara (marriage-assembly). She resided with her husband on Satasrnga mountain in a hermitage for a couple of days. She became the proud mother of three sons named Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma and Arjuna from different deities called Dharma, Vāyu and Indra respectively as a result of a boon (in the form of a mantra) conferred upon her by the sage Durvāsa.

After the demise of Pāṇḍu, who used to practise asceticism in the forest, Kunti returned to Hastināpura with her three sons and twin step-sons Nakula and Sahadeva. She became, indeed, the symbol of patience when she lived under the protection of king Dhṛtarāstra. Those days proved a real testing time for Kunti's courage but even then she did not lose heart. She escaped along with her five sons at Vāraṇavata where a house was erected with the help of inflammable materials which was a part of a conspiracy hatched by Duryodhana and his father to burn the sons of Pāṇḍu and his wife Kunti alive. Kunti with Pāṇḍavas roamed here and there

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1. Masīha, 1/105/1, 2.
2. Ibid., 1/110/45; 1/111/1 to 4.
3. Ibid., 1/114/1 to 27.
4. Ibid., 1/113/34, 35.
5. Ibid., 1/117/4.
6. Ibid., 1/136/15.
in the forests till Arjuna, whose skill in archery was par excellence, won Draupadi, the princess of the king of Pāṇchāla, as his wife in a swayamvara arranged by the king Drupada. When Dhṛtarāṣṭra came to know about the alliance of Pāṇḍavas with Pāṇchālas, Vidura was sent by him to the king Drupada in order to bring Kuntī and her sons back to Hastināpurā where they were welcomed and half of the kingdom of Kurus was bestowed upon Yudhiṣṭhira. And ah! Kuntī became the queen-mother, but alas! the days of her joy were numbered because her son Yudhiṣṭhira lost everything in a game of dice which was nothing but a plan of Duryodhana and Šakuni to dethrone the son of Pāṇdu. Consequently Pāṇḍavas had to go to the forest to live in exile. Kuntī was wonderstruck. It was like a bolt from the blue for her but even then Kuntī encouraged her daughter-in-law Draupadi who was also to accompany the Pāṇḍavas:

"O Child! Don’t be aggrieved that this great calamity has befallen you. Well-acquainted you are with the duties of the fair sex. Praiseworthy are your character and conduct."

Commenting upon the condition of Kuntī Swami Nihshreyasananda remarks:

2. Ibid., 1/190/7.
3. Ibid., 1/195/25.
4. Ibid., 2/70/4.
"Kuntī was not prepared for this unexpected reverse of fortune. She was terribly aggrieved, but remained firm as a rock and uttered words of encouragement and advice to Draupadī as she was accompanying the Pāṇḍavas to the forest."¹

The stay of grief-stricken Kuntī at the house of Vidura was a long wait of her sons who had to spend thirteen years in exile and out of these last one in incognito. On the expiry of their exile, the sons of Pāṇdu wanted their kingdom back but the vicious Duryodhana did not accede to their request. As a consequence the dreadful Kurukṣetra war took place. In a last bid to prevent this ruinous war, Svē Kṛṣṇa wanted to Hastināpura with the peace-proposal where he met Kuntī also. She couldn't hold her tears back on seeing him. The insults which were heaped especially upon Draupadī were unbearable in her view.² The cup of Kuntī's sorrow was full to the brim on remembering that except Vidura nobody dared to protest against the inhuman dragging of Draupadī by Duḥśāsana. Thus according to Kuntī only Vidura deserved respect in the entire Kaurava assembly. She, therefore, declared:

"३१५ यदि भक्तांगी न धनेन न विदग्या।"

². Mahā. 5/88/49, 50; 5/88/85, 86.
³. Ibid., 5/88/52.
"Doth attain a man reverence only by his good conduct, neither by his pelf nor knowledge."

This indirectly throws light upon Kunti's knowledge of moral education which had been imparted to her. Referring to this Swami Nihshreyasananda exclaimed:

"She undoubtedly laid down a very important maximum necessary for the moral evolution of mankind when she said that a man attained moral elevation by his character and conduct, and not by his fortune or learning."

Kunti stressed the need of war with the Kauravas in her message to her sons through Sri Kṛṣṇa. She tried to remind Yudhīṣṭhira the futility of dharma which was cured due to his inability to perform his duties. Her message to Arjuna and Bhīma was:

यदृ धनेष्यो वाय्यो नित्योद्धस्ते बृहदोऽरुप 
यदर्भ्रत्रिया ततः तत्स्य कलाशयक्तम्: ||२

"Tell Arjuna and Bhīma who always remain prepared for war that the time has come for fulfilling the purpose for which a Kṣatriya woman gives birth to a son."

She exhorted Nakula and Sahadeva that their choice should fall only upon those comforts and luxuries which were attainable by a display of prowess rather than even life itself. In her view the way to bring back their lost glory was nothing else but war.

Kunti narrated the old tale of queen-mother Vidulā

who exhorted her son Sanjaya to fight because he had been vanquished by the king of Sindhu. She was of the opinion that her only son should prefer to breathe his last while fighting against enemies than to lead a life of poverty. She asked him not to smoke away but to blaze up. Vidulā roared:

"Blaze over the heads of enemies for a moment or even for a smallbit of time.

Like Vidulā Kuntī's advice to Pāṇḍavas through Śrī Kṛṣṇa was not to choose the life bereft of honour and full of poverty and humiliation. She advised them to strive to restore their lost glory at every cost. Her message to Yudhiṣṭhira was:

"Be indulge in war according to Rājadharma. Don't cast a slur on (the fair name of your) grandfathers. Doth not meet an end devoid of punyas alongwith your younger brothers owing to the loss of your virtuous deeds."

Kuntī also played the role of a mediator. When Kuntī

2. Ibid., 5/132/22.
3. Ibid., 5/131/13.
4. Ibid., 5/131/29.
5. Ibid. edited by Dutt, M.N., p.184.
6. Ibid. edited by Satvālekar, Damodar, 5/130/32.
came to know that war was inevitable, she went to her deserted son Karṇa and allured him to be on the side of Pāṇḍavas after telling him that he was none other than her eldest son.¹ Swami Nihshrayananda writes:

"Her firm conviction was that Duryodhana, being deserted by Karṇa, would come down to reach an agreement with her sons. Thus the impending catastrophe would be averted, and the two branches of the same family would be able to live together in peace and with mutual understanding."²

The mother in Kuntī said to Karṇa:

कार्तिकीः पि भवतां यथा रामजनार्दनः ।
असतां न किं तौऽके स्वाध्वर्याः सहिततत्त्वाः: II 3

"The unity of Karṇa and Arjuna is like that of Rāma and Janārdana. There is nothing which can't be performed if there is union of your souls."

Although Kuntī was suffering from intolerable mental agony and her heart was sinking at the very thought of the terrible fight which was going to take place between Karṇa and Arjuna yet she couldn't succeed in her peace-mission because Karṇa stood firm like a rock in his decision to be loyal to Duryodhana.⁴

A couple of years after Kurukṣetra war when Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Gāndhārī expressed their desire to lead a

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¹. Mahā., 5/143/3.
². Great Women of India, p.176.
⁴. Mahā., 5/170/1.
life of asceticism, Kunti also made up her mind to accompany them. Even Yudhishthira and Bhima failed to dissuade her from her superb decision. She proclaimed that she had enjoyed life in its fullness, so she should enter Vānaprastha āśrama. Meaning thereby that she might have been given education regarding four stages of human life. She uttered the following last words of blessings for her sons:

"May the choice of your understanding be righteousness and heart be generous."

Following the path adopted by Gandharī and Dhṛtraṭra in their final journey to the Himalayas, she was destined to be their follower even in death when a fire broke out in that very part of the forest where they were living.

Kunti’s intimate knowledge of politics as well as that of religion is, thus, evident at every step. There seems to be no end to her knowledge of these. She declared at one place:

राजा घरति वेदु धर्म देवत्याघद कल्पने ।
स देवयानि घरति नरकालय गच्छति ॥

1. Mahā., 15/22/7 to 32; 15/23/1 to 21; 15/24/1 to 15.
2. Ibid., 15/23/17.
3. Ibid., 15/23/20.
5. Ibid., 1/45/19 to 31.
6. Ibid., 5/130/12.
"If a king doth practise dharma (virtue), doth he attain Godliness and if he doth practise vice, doth he go to hell."

The character of Kuntī is a veritable mine endowed with varied tales like the story of the spirited mother Vidulā, the blunt force of whose language is amazing. The story of Kuntī sheds ample light on the fact that she was imparted moral education and possessed the knowledge of Vāmaśrama dharma. This learned and talented lady Kuntī, who was the embodiment of patience and unfailing courage in the face of heavy odds, still wins the admiration and reverence from all corners and leaves an indelible impression upon the minds of people.

Draupādi

Tripurari Chakravarti considers Draupādi the central figure of the great Epic and remarks thus:

"Draupādi, throughout the Mahābhārata, is the embodiment of courage, fortitude, sense and sensibility, and even pride and prejudice. In a sense, she is the central figure of the great Epic, and her character has been depicted with wonderful skill by that master artist, Maharshi Krishna Dwaipayana. The very circumstances of her birth made it abundantly clear that she had come to this world to fulfil a great destiny. She arose from a sacrificial fire lit by her father, Drupada, King of Pāñchāla, and at once a voice from above announced that Draupādi would in course of time perform duties pleasing to the gods, and that the Kuru family would meet with disaster on her account. Her beauty was indescribable, and her body emitted the

1. Mahā., 1/175/7,8.
fragrance of a blue lotus. In short, she was a veritable goddess in human form."

Born from a sacrificial fire Draupadī became the daughter of king Drupada and the would be destroyer of the Kṣatriya race. Her beauty was superb. A swayamvara was arranged in order to enable Draupadī to select the husband of her own choice where she found, to her surprise, Arjuna, the bravest amongst all, as her husband. She became the ideal wife of the Pāṇḍavas. When a great sacrifice named Rajasūya was performed by Yudhiṣṭhira, Duryodhana became pale and was afflicted with jealousy on seeing the splendour of Pāṇḍavas' prosperity. The enormous wealth acquired by the sons of Pāṇḍu was the cause of his anguish but he didn't forget to mention that Yajnasenī (Draupadī) deprived herself of food till everybody including the dwarfs and the deformed had enjoyed their share. Thus it seemed that mercy and compassion for the lowest of the low was in her blood.

Draupadī, undoubtedly, was the embodiment of courage. This virtue of hers came to fore when Yudhiṣṭhira lost her in

1. Great Women of India, pp. 176, 177.
2. Māla, i/155/41.
3. Ibid., i/155/44.
4. Ibid., i/155/43.
5. Ibid., i/175/5.
6. Ibid., 2/43/15, 21.
7. Ibid., 1/149/41.

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a foul game of dice at Hastinapura and Duḥṣāsana didn’t lag behind in heaping all sorts of insults on her. Finding everybody including Bhīṣma as a mute spectator to all this Draupadī was furious with rage and said:

"O Fie! when all the Kurus in this assembly look silently on this act which transgresses the shore of the Kuru morality; the morality of the Bharatas have certainly been destroyed and the usage of those conversant with the Kṣatriya practices have surely disappeared."²

Draupadī’s hair were dishevelled and her attire was half-loosened owing to the cruel dragging³ by Duḥṣāsana, she held him guilty of performing this savage act.⁴ Bhīṣma feigned his ignorance in understanding the intricacies of dharma⁵ on the passionate appeal of Draupadī to save her honour. Only Vikraṇa protested⁶ while Vidura appealed to every one to express his resentment against the inhuman conduct of Duḥṣāsana towards Draupadī.⁷ Bhīma, there and then vowed to take revenge of Draupadī’s insult and send

1. Mahā., 2/60/33.
3. Ibid., edited by Satavalekar Damador, 2/60/20.
4. Ibid., 2/60/30.
5. Ibid., 2/60/40 to 42.
6. Ibid., 2/61/11 to 24.
7. Ibid., 2/61/52 to 80.

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Duryodhana, and his supporters to the abode of Yama.\(^1\) As a last resort Draupadī remembered Sri Kṛṣṇa\(^2\) who rescued her from this calamity.

When Pāṇḍavas went to the forest to live in exile for a long period stretching over thirteen years, Draupadī, unhesitatingly, followed them as an ideal wife but there was one thing which perpetually continued haunting her and that was the humiliation which was meted out to her by the wicked sons of Kuru family. Draupadī narrated that horrible episode of her life to Sri Kṛṣṇa who had come to inquire about their well being and wept bitterly and uncontrollably.\(^3\) She was of the view that the strength of Bhīma, Arjuna etc. was futile.\(^4\) Draupadī was consoled only when Sri Kṛṣṇa told her that the wives of the Kauravas would have to weep like her in future.\(^5\)

Draupadī has been depicted as a learned woman and also well-versed in religious practices in the great Epic. She discussed the attributes of dharma with Yudhiṣṭhira and aggrieved as she was, Draupadī didn’t hesitate in criticizing even God. She said in her grief:

\[ \text{न मातृपितुवदं राजन् धर्मा भूलल वतीं} \]
\[ \text{रोषादिव प्रृत्तोदयं यथायमितरो जन:} \]\(^6\)

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1. Mahā, 2/63/14.
2. Ibid., 5/80/26.
3. Ibid., 5/80/1 to 42.
5. Ibid., 5/80/44.
"O King! (Not affectionate) is the behaviour of God like parents towards all the human beings. Doth he behave indignantly like other people, it appears."

She, however, couldn't succeed in defeating Yudhishthira who said conclusively that dharma was eternal\(^1\) and ever-pervading phenomenon, her doubts regarding dharma, therefore, should be vanished like mist.\(^2\) She found ample solace in his words and also felt strengthened.

When Lord Kṛṣṇa alongwith his consort Satyabhāma came in order to see the Pāṇḍavas in the forest, Satyabhāma out of curiosity asked Draupadī how she was able to win the hearts as well as the reverence of the Pāṇḍavas who were warriors of repute.\(^3\) The lecture delivered by Draupadī which expounds the duties and responsibilities of a wife is worth-remembering\(^4\) and also proves that she might had been imparted such education.

When the sons of Pāṇḍu had to reside in incognito during the last year of their exile, they chose different types of jobs not worthy of them. Yudhishthira was full of anxiety for Draupadī. Said he:

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2. Ibid., 3/32/38.
3. Ibid., 3/222/4 to 5.
4. Ibid., 3/222/18 to 59; Chapter 225.
"Beloved wife is this (Draupadî) of ours and dearer than our lives. Doth deserve she of being maintained like a mother and respected like an elder sister."

She, voluntarily, chose to be a Sairandhri (a maid servant skilled in hair-dressing etc.) and lo! the worries of the eldest Pându son disappeared in no time. This damsel of bewitching charms didn't fail in her duties, alongwith the Pândavas without disclosing their identity in the palace of the king Virâta. This time was the real ordeal for Draupadî. Kîchaka, the commander-in-chief of the king of Virâta took a fancy to her. Her beauty had an irresistible fascination for him. He approached Draupadî with the marriage proposal which she rejected. Once he even dared to humiliate Draupadî by kicking her in the presence of the king Virâta where she had gone to seek his protection. The king of Virâta had to meet with the stern rebuk from Draupadî, there and then, on his failure to do justice to her. She said angrily:

"Doth not differ thy dharma to that of dacoits which is unworthy of the court."

2. Ibid., 4/3/16,17.
3. Ibid. edited by Satavalekar, Damodar, 4/13/6,7.
4. Ibid., 4/13/12 to 21.
5. Ibid., 4/15/17.
She proclaimed that neither the king nor his courtiers were devoted to dharma\(^1\) for the simple reason that they served such a king. She, thus, indirectly exhorted them to revolt against him. When the things became unbearable for Draupadī, she narrated her tale of woe to Bhīma with tears rolling down her cheeks.\(^2\) She also showed him her soft hands which had developed corns due to the hard work done by her.\(^3\) Bhīma hatched a conspiracy with Draupadī to kill Kīchaka and thus Bhīma showed him the way to the abode of Yama.\(^4\)

After the expiry of the exile of the sons of Pāṇḍu, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, Drupada, Draupadī and the Pāṇḍavas etc. discussed their further plans. Everybody including Bhīma was in favour of a policy of peace.\(^5\) This really annoyed Draupadī. She could never imagine of forgiving Duḥśāsana etc. Her feelings were deeply hurt.\(^6\) Being adamant in order to take the revenge of the insults inflicted upon her by the Kauravas, her only counsel was war.\(^7\) Taking a tuft of hair in her left hand and weeping bitterly\(^8\) Draupadī said to Śrī Kṛṣṇa—

2. Ibid., 4/16/8 to 16; 4/17 to 20 chapters.
3. Ibid., 4/19/23.
4. Ibid. edited by Sukthankar, Vishnu S., 4/21/1 to 87.
5. Ibid. edited by Satavalekar, Damodar, 5/74/18.
6. Ibid., 5/80/3.
8. Ibid., 5/80/33 to 35.
"O Krishna! Feel so down-hearted if Bhima and Arjuna as to advocate a policy of peace, aged father of mine along with (his) sons, the great ear-warriors, will wage a war (against the Kauravas)."

She was of the view that valiant Abhimanyu and her five brave sons would also do the same. Draupadi declared that she would suffer from the loss of peace of mind until she was able to see the dark-complexioned hand of Duḥśāsana, severed and licking the dust. Uttered she the following words with anguish:

"My heart, O Bhima, is rent asunder, pierced by darts of sharp words, as it were at the thought that the long-armed one (Bhima) has an eye on dharma."

Justifying her outburst comments Tripurari Chakravarti:

"Her spirited outburst was in every way worthy of her position and dignity; it was her sworn revenge for outraged..."
womanhood. She could be satisfied with nothing less than the utter extinction of her oppressors."\(^1\)

Srī Kṛṣṇa, who was virtually moved by the agony of Draupādi, vowed for the annihilation of the Kaurva dynasty and asked her to stop weeping.

The prophecy of Srī Kṛṣṇa became true. On the end of the war and before his coronation the righteous Yudhishthira suffered from the boots of depression and was filled in remorse on account of the slaying of his kinsmen, sons, grandsons and friends and was bent upon following the path of renunciation. Arjuna, Nakula etc. tried their utmost to dissuade him but in vain. Draupādi, whose knowledge of dharma\(^2\) was scintillating, asked the eldest Pāṇḍu son not to lead a life of asceticism. She exhorted him to rule over the kingdom acquired by prowess alone.\(^3\) She said:

असल्कः प्रतिकृष्ण सत्त्रां व परिपालनम्।
कङ्क राजां परो दर्षः समरे वापायनम्।\(^4\)

"Suppression of the wicked, protection of the good ones and never fleeing from the battle (field) - is the supreme duty of the kings."

The exhortation of Yudhishthira by Draupādi to cast off his grief and rule the kingdom is unworthy of being ignored.

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3. Ibid., 12/14/19 to 20.
4. Ibid., 12/14/6.
Draupadi became an unquestioned empress when Yudhiṣṭhira became the paramount suzerain of the entire earth. After enjoying the royal luxuries for a couple of years Yudhiṣṭhira along-with his brothers left for their final journey, Draupadi also followed suit. By encountering a fall she went to the celestial region.

Draupadi seems to be conversant with politics as well as religion from her above-mentioned description. The cultural education of her manifests itself in serving the Pāṇḍavas and following them in their every action. It appears that following words of Kālidāsa were meant only for Draupadi:

"A (lovable) consort, adviser (full of wisdom), (beloved) companion and a favourite pupil inn cultivating the fine arts."

Strength of character, versatility and learning of women of ancient India are exhibited in none other than Draupadi. Tripurari Chakravarti writes about her:

1. Mahā., 17/1/21, 30.
2. Ibid., 17/2/3.
"She was the very embodiment of Sri or good fortune in the house of the Pāṇḍavas. She was occasionally subject to moods of indignation, no doubt, but the loftiness of her soul, her unfailing courage in the face of disasters, her spirit of self-sacrifice, and, above all, her moral earnestness and spiritual integrity have shed a lustre on the ideals of womanhood of an ancient India."

Vidulā

Tripurari Chakravarti says:

"The story of queen mother Vidulā is remarkable as presenting the true spirit of a Kṣatriya—never to acknowledge defeat, but to fight on. We do not know if she ever lived, but the unconquerable spirit of this farsighted, gifted queen, as depicted in the Mahābhārata, still wins our admiration and reverence. A mother she was, but her love was not that of a common mother: it was the love of a queen for her princely son born to rule a kingdom."

Vidulā was the widowed queen of king Sauvīra. Her country was annexed by the neighbourer king of Sindhu. He gained victory over her only son Sanjaya who fled away from the battle-field and was dismayed and discouraged. Vidulā had no soft corner for such a coward person who might be her

son. She reproached him in very stern words. She went even to the extent of saying that she had not given birth to such a coward person and he was unknown to her.¹ Vidulā exhorted her son to defeat the enemies and not to be the enhancer of their joy.² She asked him not to be content with a little³ but urged him to act.⁴ She gave preference to embrace death while plucking the teeth (fangs) of enemies who were like snakes.⁵ Her following words of exhortation have become immortal:

"Better is a momentary flaring up than go on smoking for a long time."

Vidulā exhorted her son to blaze up even for a moment like a piece of Tinduka.⁷ In other words, she asked him to show his valour even for a moment. In Vidhulā's opinion Sanjaya should always strive for numero uno position and never think of being ranked second or third.⁸ She said that her son should always try to find out the weak-points of his enemy like a

¹. Mahā., 5/131/5.
². Ibid., 5/131/7.
³. Ibid., 5/131/8.
⁴. Ibid., 5/131/6, 7, 11, 12.
⁵. Ibid., 5/131/9.
⁶. Ibid., 5/131/10.
⁷. Ibid., 5/131/11.
⁸. Ibid., 5/131/12.
hawk roaming about in the sky. This dignified queen inspired her beloved son by saying that one should always hold one’s enemy by his thigh even when one is falling down and one should not be aggrieved if doing so one is cut off from one’s roots. She tried to make Sanjaya, the would-be king, to be brave.

On being thus exhorted by the spirited queen Vidula, her son retorted her saying that the whole earth, the jewellery and all comforts would be of no use for her if he was no more, but his words failed to melt her. Commenting upon this Tripurari Chakravarti writes:

"But Vidur(1) was not to be hoodwinked. Rather, like a skilled physician, she was determined to hurt her son a little so as to cure him of a sickness that endangered his very life." 

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2. Ibid., 5/131/18.
3. Ibid., 5/131/22.
5. Ibid., edited by Salviakar, Damodar, 5/131/36.

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Vidulā told her son:

"O Sanjaya, the life of that man is indeed worth-living on whom all depend for their maintenance, as birds go to a tree laden with ripe fruits."

In her opinion only that man, like Indra who showers mirth upon gods due to his prowess, lives life to its fullness on whose valour depends the prosperity of his near and dear ones. Vidulā inspired her son by saying that only that son of Manu, who leads an excellent life because of the strength of his arms, is able to attain fame in this world and has access to heaven hereafter. She suggested Sanjaya to lead a life of prosperity and nurse hatred for the existence of a pauper. Thinking him unworthy of his name 'Sanjaya' Vidulā exclaimed:

"Thou are Sanjaya (the conquerer) by name merely but behold I no sign of that (quality) in you. O my son! Be worthy of thy name and don't make it meaningless."

2. Great Women of India, p.203.
4. Ibid., 5/1/31/42.
5. Ibid., 5/1/32/28.
6. Ibid., 5/1/32/7.
The bold queen-mother reminded her son that a highly learned Brāhmaṇa foretold in his childhood that after being face to face with a misfortune Sanjaya would retain his lost glory. Remembering the words of that man possessing great foresight Vidula had not lost hope of seeing her son to be a conqueror one day and, therefore, all that exhortation for fighting again to win was taking place from her side. She tried to remind her son about the prosperity she enjoyed when her husband was alive. She remembered herself of being born in a noble family and having come from one lake to another. Vidula asked Sanjaya not to see the wretched condition of her as well as that of his consort. With a ray of hope she asked her son to be like a ship in order to help them in crossing the unfathomable ocean of difficulties and make the impossible possible. In her view Sanjaya was endowed with the capacity to revive them who were as good as dead.

2. Ibid., 5/132/9
5. Ibid., 5/132/16.
Vidulā had a deep insight into human psychology. She made her son realize that he had taken birth in royal family and told him to consider a kingdom either like the gate of heaven or like nectar. In her view the only way to attain kingdom was war. She, therefore, advised Sanjaya to fall like a burning piece of wood upon the enemies.1 Her advice was:

अहि शुद्धुरे राजन् स्वर्गस्वरूपः पालय।
मा त्वाः पर्येत् गुरुपर्ण शुद्धः स्वर्गमन्त्रादाय।।

"Slay thy enemies in battle.
O King! perform thy duty (dharma). May not anyone behold thee pauper and thine enemy prospering."

Touching the weakest spot of his heart Vidulā asked Sanjaya to rejoice in the company of the daughters of Sauvīra as he used to do in the past but she forebade him to be ruled by the daughters of the king of Sindhu.3 The queen-mother said that she would have no peace of mind if she saw her son following others because she couldn’t remember that there had ever been such a person in their race who ever submissively walked behind others.4 Her advice for the Kṣatriyas was never to bow down before anybody.5

Despite of all this coaxing by his undaunted mother,

2. Ibid., 5/132/30.
3. Ibid., 5/132/32.
4. Ibid., 5/132/34.
5. Ibid., 5/132/35.
Sanjaya was unable to gather enough courage to fight again, he complained of step-motherly behaviour on her part and alleged her of being cruel. In his view she was stone-hearted. In order to soften the heart of his mother Sanjaya again pointed out the futility of all luxuries if he breathed his last. Queen Vidulā was adamant. In her opinion need of the hour was action and to show his valour. She said that Sanjaya would have to face the wrath of people; if he failed to do so. She, therefore, thought it her duty to motivate Sanjaya to fight again. Vidulā proclaimed that a man vanquished by the enemy and, thereby, burning with rage should dwell on the hope of taking revenge. In her view such a person should either finish himself or kill the enemy. She told that there couldn't be peace except following this path.

For Sanjaya the harsh words uttered by his mother were too stern to bear, he, therefore, said that he deserved the compassion of his mother and not that rude rebuke. Ignoring her son's pleadings Vidulā stood firm like a rock and her stand was that she would extend a rousing welcome for him only when he would come back after slaying his enemies.

1. Mahā., 5/133/1, 2.
2. Ibid., 5/133/3.
3. Ibid., 5/133/5.
4. Ibid., 5/133/4.
5. Ibid., 5/133/13, 14.
6. Ibid., 5/133/17.
and emerge victorious, but the reply of her son was that lack of pelf and allies were great impediments in his way of victory. Sanjaya told his mother that after thinking over his position from every angle, he had lost all hopes of regaining his kingdom, but he was ever ready to surrender to the wishes of his wise mother if she had some idea to help him in overcoming his difficulties.

And lo! Vidulā was already prepared to stand by the side of her son during that hour of his dire need. The motivational speech of Vidulā that follows bears testimony to her sound knowledge of politics. Vidulā told Sanjaya that there were many persons amongst his foes whose confidence could be won by way of courtesy, respect and friendship. In her words many fortune-seekers could join his side when bribed and some who felt jealous with his enemies holding high ranks, such persons would deceive their master for improving their position and taking revenge. Thus, in short, persons who were annoyed with his enemies, greedy, weakened and eclipsed by his foes could be of great help for him. In this way, Vidulā told him, he would be able to make his army stronger and that of his enemy weaker. Thus, in her view, Sanjaya could do wonders by dividing his enemies-

1. Mahā., 5/133/19.
2. Ibid., 5/133/20.
3. Ibid., 5/133/20.
4. Ibid., 5/133/21.
5. Ibid., 5/133/30, 32.
"like a tempest of great force scattering the clouds."\(^2\)

According to this heroic mother Vidulā there were many persons who were discontented with the king of Sindhu and, therefore, waiting for suitable opportunity. Such persons and the enemies of the Sindhurāj, told Vidulā, would join the camp of Sanjaya.\(^3\) Thus she suggested her son to follow the policies of sāma, dāna, danda and bheda. In her opinion Sanjaya shouldn’t be despondent at the very thought of lack of sincere friends because there were his well-wishers who would stand by him in weal or woe.\(^4\) Sanjaya was taken aback when his mother unfolded the secret that she also possessed a vast treasury unknown to anybody.\(^5\)

At last all the admonitions and reproaches of Queen mother Vidulā for the cowardice and inaction of her son bore fruit. Thus incited by his mother in a fiery speech Sanjaya like a horse of good breed rising to the occasion followed her instructions.\(^6\)

Commenting upon the role played by Vidulā in

2. Ibid., edited by Dutt, M.N., p.188.
5. Ibid., 5/134/9.
motivating her defeated son to strive and conquer the enemy

Tripurari Chakravarti could not help writing:

"One might wonder why this great queen did not take the reins of the state into her own hands instead of wasting her time on her worthless son. But Vidurā(1) the queen had died with her husband, the late king of Sauvīra. She lived only as a mother, and her thoughts concerned only her son and his welfare."

The talent and qualities, of this great queen named Vidulā, worthy of winning applause, have been rightly described by Kuntī in the following verses:

यशोरिणी मन्युपरी कुले बाता विभावरी ||
क्षण्वतरा प्रत्या विदुरा दीप्यदर्शनी ||
विधुताराजसेतायु धुतायाय बुद्धाय ता ||

"Renowned, wrathful, born in a noble-family, attached to the duties of Kṣatriya, having senses under control and endowed with far-sightedness. Vidulā was known to all kings, conversant with all śāstras and (famous for) hearing speeches( of eminent persons)."

Damyanti

न ज माधवसिंम विमिच्छ दियेष फिफ्फरा मताय ||
अधोऽर्द्धश्च च सशु सत्यमेतात ब्रजीविमि ते ||

"In all sorts of miseries there is no other medicine like that of a consort, view is this of physicians- I speak the truth to you."

2. Mahā. edited by Satavalekar, Damodar. 5/15/2,3.
3. ibid., 5/58/27.
Such are the utterings of Damyantī who was endowed with flawless beauty\(^1\) and the daughter of Bhīma, the king of Vidarbha.\(^2\) Nala, the son of Viśrṣena,\(^3\) was peerless in all worlds.\(^4\) Both of them fell in love with each other after hearing repeatedly the words of praise showered upon them by royal heralds without having a look at each other.\(^5\) This damsels of incomparable beauty who was the envy of gods was also bestowed with a noble and exalted mind. When, Nala, sent by gods-Indra, Varuna, Agni and Yama,\(^6\) asked Damyantī to choose one of them as her husband,\(^7\) Damyantī, in order to show the way to Nala who was in a fix, told him to attend the svayamvara arranged by her father along with gods where she would choose him as her consort.\(^8\)

The intelligence of Damyantī was put to a severe test because when the name of Nala was announced in svayamvara sābhā, she beheld to her utter embarrassment, five persons (Nalas) all alike in form.\(^9\) At first, she tried to remember

\(^{1}\) MAHA., 3/50/13.
\(^{2}\) Ibid., 3/50/8.
\(^{3}\) Ibid., 3/50/1.
\(^{4}\) Ibid., 3/50/14.
\(^{5}\) Ibid., 3/50/15, 16.
\(^{6}\) Ibid., 3/52/3 to 5.
\(^{7}\) Ibid., 3/52/72.
\(^{8}\) Ibid., 3/53/10, 11.
\(^{9}\) Ibid., 3/54/10.
the marks pertaining to the gods about which she had heard from old men, but she found no such mark in anyone of them.¹ When her intelligence and reasoning failed her, then, this religious-minded lady saluted the celestials² and prayed them to reveal Nala to her³ because listening about Nala from the swan she had accepted the king Nala as her consort.⁴ Being impressed by the purity of her heart and mind and her passion for Nala, the four gods endowed her with the capacity to recognize them by their peculiar marks:

\[ \text{मनोकृष्णि बुद्धि व मर्क्ति राग व मारतः} \]
\[ \text{यथोक्ति प्रज्ञे देवः सामाध्यं लिङ्गं रिणे} \]²⁵

That intelligent and deeply religious damsél then saw that four gods were neither perspiring nor touching the earth. Their gaze was fixed ⁶ and Nala was ultimately found by her showing opposite characteristics.⁷ Damyantī, then, put a garland around his neck.⁸

Bhīma celebrated the marriage-ceremony of Damyantī.

¹. Vīrāṇa., 3/54/14.
². Ibid., 3/54/16.
³. Ibid., 3/54/16.
⁴. Ibid., 3/54/17.
⁵. Ibid., 3/54/22.
⁶. Ibid., 3/54/23.
⁷. Ibid., 3/54/24.
⁸. Ibid., 3/54/26.
and Nala. Damyantī became the proud mother of one son and one daughter named Indersen and Indersenā respectively, but her matrimonial joy was shortlived. Nala's wicked brother Puśkara induced Nala who was under the influence of Kali to play at dice. He started losing and losing. The noble-minded Damyantī desirous of doing good to her husband and afraid of the calamity that was going to befall him told her nurse named Brḥadsena to summon the ministers in the name of king and inform them about the loss suffered by him. When Damyantī told Nala that his subjects had come to see the king for the second time, Nala ignored her again. When Damyantī failed to distract the king through her intelligence, she again ordered her nurse to call Vāṛṣṇeya, the charioteer by the order of Nala. This lady who was possessing the knowledge about the importance of time and place asked Vāṛṣṇeya to take her children to her paternal house. He did as ordered after consulting the ministers. Nala gambled

4. Ibid.. 3/57/2,3.
8. Ibid.. 3/57/11.

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away his wealth as well as kingdom. He woke up from his slumber when he was asked by Puṣkara to hold Damyanti as his stake. After taking off all the ornaments and wearing only a single piece of cloth Nala left his palace followed by Damyanti whose dress was also merely a piece of cloth. Both of them stayed for three nights outside the precincts of the town, but people ignored them out of fear of Puṣkara. Smitten by pangs of hunger, Nala was robbed of his only cloth by the rangers of sky (birds) the colour of whose plumage bore resemblance to that of gold. Nala had thrown that cloth in order to catch the birds which were none other than dice.

Nala who was only in his birthday suit asked Damyanti again and again to go to her parents' kingdom, but such was the cultural education of that time that she refused to leave.

2. Ibid., 3/58/3.
3. Ibid., 3/58/5.
4. Ibid., 3/58/6.
5. Ibid., 3/58/7.
6. Ibid., 3/58/7.
7. Ibid., 3/58/9, 10.
9. Ibid., 3/58/11.
10. Ibid., 3/58/13.
11. Ibid., 3/58/15.
12. Ibid., 3/58/22.
her consort who had met with a great catastrophe. She said in a choked voice:

"How can I depart leaving thee in this lonely forest, deprived of thy kingdom, despoiled of thy wealth, thyself not covered even with a single piece of cloth and afflicted with hunger?"

Her sincere advice to Nala was that there was no physic equal to a consort in time of distress. According to Damyantī she would soothe the weariness of Nala who would get fatigued and smitten by hunger in the midst of that dreary wilderness. Consoled by Nala that his intention was not to leave her, she suggested that both of them should go to her paternal home where they would be welcomed, but shorn of his prosperity he couldn't even think of going there. Nala was clad merely in one half of the cloth offered by Damyantī when he deserted her while she was fast asleep.

After being forsaken by Nala, Damyantī was filled

2. Ibid. edited by Dutt, M.N., p.89.
5. Ibid., 3/58/29.
6. Ibid., 3/58/33,34.
7. Ibid., 3/59/1.
8. Ibid., 3/59/17.

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with grief and anxiety. Weeping bitterly and roaming hither and thither like an insane woman, her only worry was that Nala would find it difficult to live without her.\textsuperscript{1} Being swallowed up by a serpent she was saved by a hunter who became inflamed with lust and had to lose his life soon by the curse of the chaste Damyanti.\textsuperscript{2} Wandering in the forest she came face to face with some ascetics sitting in a hermitage who consoled her by saying that she would be reunited with Nala and he would regain his lost glory. After uttering these soothing words, the ascetics along with their hermitage disappeared.\textsuperscript{3} Later on, Damyanti joined a caravan of traders with the permission of its leader, but soon that caravan was attacked by a herd of elephants resulting in heavy loss of life and wealth. Damyanti was blamed for the calamity that had befallen them by the survivors but before they could do any harm to her, Damyanti moved forward.\textsuperscript{4} At last she entered Chedi where the compassionate queen appointed her Sairandhari for her daughter Sunandã after acceding to some conditions laid down by her.\textsuperscript{5} Nala, in the meantime, was deprived of even his beauty\textsuperscript{6} which proved to be a blessing in disguise for him and he joined the service of king Rûparûna.

\textsuperscript{1} Mahã., 3/60/1 to 18.
\textsuperscript{2} Ibid., 3/60/17 to 38.
\textsuperscript{3} Ibid., 3/61/1 to 91.
\textsuperscript{4} Ibid., 3/61/107 to 125; 3/62/1 to 17.
\textsuperscript{5} Ibid., 3/62/18 to 43.
\textsuperscript{6} Ibid., 3/63/11.
of Ayodhyā.¹

However, Brāhmaṇas were sent by the father of Damyantī in order to find out Nala and Damyantī promising handsome rewards in return.² One such Brāhmaṇa named Sudeva recognized her in Chedi where she was unknowingly being protected by none other than her aunt.³ Damyantī was sent back by the sister of her mother, the queen mother of Chedi because Damyantī was longing for a reunion with her parents as well as children.⁴ The joy of her near and dear ones knew no bounds on her arrival.⁵ When this lady with a religious fervour of mind saw that all of her relatives, children, parents and companions were in the best of their health,⁶ then:

"O King, resembling a goddess that glorious lady Damyantī did the worship of gods as well as that of Brāhmaṇas in the best way."

Despite of her reunion with her beloved ones Damyantī

¹ Mehā., 3/65/13 to 24; 3/64/1 to 8.
² Ibid., 3/65/1 to 4.
³ Ibid., 3/65/6 to 37; 3/66/1 to 13.
⁴ Ibid., 3/66/16 to 21.
⁵ Ibid., 3/66/22.
⁶ Ibid., 3/66/23.
⁷ Ibid., 3/66/24.
was sad at heart. She poured out her heart to her mother that they should leave no stone unturned for searching Nala again without whom her life was meaningless. On the advice of Damyantī's mother king Bhīma asked the Brāhmaṇas to do so. Before their departure the messengers went to see Damyantī. That lady of unsurpassed beauty also possessed superb intelligence and adopted a unique way to find out Nala. She told them that she had composed some verses and asked to recite those couplets wherever they went. Some of the verses are as under:

वा न तर्क किंतु दिनित्या दस्तार्यं त्रस्तिंति मया ।
उत्तम दिपिने कुपलामुरवता भ्राया क्रियाम् ।।

"O dear gambler, where did you flee away deserting me — thy devoted and darling consort-asleep in the forest and tearing off half of my cloth?"

तत्त कर्या तमाकिता तत्त्र तत्त्वस्ती भ्रायिणी ।
दक्ष्यमाना मृष्ण बाला वत्त्रायंतामित्तृता ।।

"Wretched girl, she is ever expecting thee in that very place as thou ordered"
her when you left—extremely burning (with grief) and clad in half a piece of cloth."

"O foremost of persons, O the most excellent among bow-men be kind to me for it is from thee that I have listened that compassion is the highest virtue."

Her warning to the messengers was that the identity of the author of these verses should be kept as a top-guarded secret and at the same time she asked them to inform her about the response, if any. She also ordered them to know the whereabouts of that person. Thus ordered by her, the messengers departed to find out Nala.

After sometime a Brāhmaṇa whose name was Parnāda came back from Ayodhya and narrated the whole story to Damyantī that when he was returning after reciting the couplets composed by her in the court of Ṛtuparna where nobody was able to give any response, the charioteer of the king named Bāhuka came to him and shedding tears incessantly gave the answer. He also told her that although Bāhuka was not good-looking and possessed short arms yet he was skilled in driving horses very fast and the food cooked by him tasted

2. Ibid., 3/67/17, 18.
very sweet. That intelligent lady was, at once, convinced that Bāhuka was none other than Nala. She consulted her mother and persuaded her to make her plan, for bringing Nala back to Kundinpurā, a success. The first step towards turning her plan into action was to send Sudeva to Ayodhyā with the message that Damyantī was again going to hold a swayamvara the next day to which the kings and princes were rushing from all quarters. On hearing this Ṛtuparṇa couldn't think of anything else but made up his mind to attend the same and intimated Bāhuka about his intense desire to reach the country of Vidarbha at any cost. Although Nala in the disguise of Bāhuka was shocked for a moment yet he, who knew that Damyantī was endowed with a sharp brain, thought:

அர்மத்யே மேற்கு வாயுக்யக்கிநின்றோ மத்தான்

"Or perhaps hath (she) adopted this policy for my sake."

Nala did as ordered by Ṛtuparṇa. Nala's proficiency in driving the chariot gave Ṛtuparṇa such a pleasant surprise that he disclosed Nala the secret that he was well-conversant

1. Mahā., 3/68/1 to 12.
2. Ibid., 3/68/13 to 16, 20 to 22.
3. Ibid., 3/69/1, 2.
5. Ibid., 3/69/22, 33, 34.
with the play of dice.\(^1\) He imparted the same to Nala nay Bāhuka in exchange of being trained regarding the knowledge of horses by Nala.\(^2\)

The chariot of Ṛtuparṇa driven by Nala entered the city of Kundin with its rattling sound which resembled the sound of deeply rumbling clouds of rainy season.\(^3\) Damyantī as well as the horses of Nala who were in that city recognized that sound within no time.\(^4\) Ṛtuparṇa beheld to his utter surprise, no sign of swayamvara there\(^5\) while Damyantī was not able to find Nala who was in the guise of Bāhuka.\(^6\) Without losing heart she sent her female messenger named Keśinī to enquire about the particulars of Bāhuka who was in her opinion Nala. She also asked her to narrate the story of Pranāda to him and observe his reaction.\(^7\) Being asked by Keśinī about the purpose of Ṛtuparṇa's visit to Kundinpur, Bāhuka replied that they had come there to attend the swayamvara of Damyantī. He told her that he, as a charioteer of the king, covered the long and tedious journey in very short span of time.\(^8\) When Keśinī inquired whether

2. Ibid., 3/70/25.
3. Ibid., 3/71/2.
4. Ibid., 3/71/3 to 5.
5. Ibid., 3/71/22.
6. Ibid., 3/71/31 to 33.
7. Ibid., 3/72/1 to 4.
8. Ibid., 3/72/6 to 9.
Vārsṇeya knew something about the whereabouts of Nala. Bāhuka replied in the negative adding that Nala was roving in the world and would not disclose his identity to anybody. Then Keśinī recited the verses composed by Damyantī and asked Bāhuka to repeat the answer given by him Pranāda because Damyantī desired so. In a voice choked with tears he uttered the same words as he had said before but while repeating his answer he was unable to check the flow of his tears and wept bitterly. Keśinī told Damyantī each and everything in detail. Nala disguised as Bāhuka didn’t reveal himself.

Damyantī once again became convinced that Bāhuka was Nala, she, therefore, ordered Keśinī to observe the actions of Bāhuka silently. She asked her not to give Nala either fire or water immediately, if he demanded so. She wanted to test Nala in this way. Her order to Keśinī was to notice any human or super-human quality in Bāhuka and inform her. Keśinī did as was ordered. She told Damyantī that she was struck with wonder to find that Bāhuka did not catch fire, even if he touched the same. The empty vessels were filled with water whenever he looked at them. He pressed flowers but they didn’t lose their fragrance and remained ever fresh.

1. Māhā., 3/72/13 to 16.
2. Ibid., 3/72/17 to 22.
3. Ibid., 3/72/23 to 30.
4. Ibid., 3/73/1 to 5.
5. Ibid., 3/73/7.
Damayanti through Kesinī also found that whatever Bāhuka cooked tasted very sweet. She noticed to her amazement that Bāhuka behaved like Nala and now there was no place left for any doubt about the identity of Nala. When finally Damayanti sent her son and daughter along with Kesinī, he embraced them very fondly saying that they were like his own children.

After examining Nala Damayanti had doubt about his appearance only, she, therefore, sought the permission of her parents to see Bāhuka face to face and ask some questions. Both of them were overwhelmed with woe on unexpectedly beholding the wretched condition of each other. Showering volley of questions Damayanti asked Bāhuka:

"O Bāhuka, did thou ever see any man, who was cognisant of virtue, had left his consort asleep in the woods?"

"Who except Nala of good fame could go abandoning his beloved and unoffending wife in the solitary forest when she was overtaken by fatigue?"

2. Ibid., 3/73/18 to 25.
3. Ibid., 3/74/3, 4.
4. Ibid., 3/74/7, 15.
5. Ibid., 3/74/9 to 13.
6. Ibid., 3/74/9, 10.
Nala explained that he behaved like a maniac under the influence of Kali and did so. He said that he was stunned to hear the news of her second swayamvara. The chaste lady named Damyantī trembling with fear told him that it was only part of a plan devised by her to attract him:

अपायोष्यं भयं तृणं नवाभायनेन तव ॥

She told him that there was none else except him in this world who had the capacity to cover the distance of a hundred yojana in a single day. She asked him not to suspect any kind of infidelity on her part. Vāyudeva also told him that Damyantī had never committed a sin and he himself bore testimony to this. He remarked:

अपायो विविधानायं त्वदर्धमोऽलोकनयां ॥

"For thy sake, it is unrivalled project was devised by her."

When the clouds of doubt were removed, Nala wore the magic garment offered to him by the king of serpents Karkotaka and

1. Mahā., 3/74/16, 22, 23.
2. Ibid., 3/75/4.
3. Ibid., 3/75/5.
4. Ibid., 3/75/6.
5. Ibid., 3/75/7, 11.
assumed his former physique and handsomeness. Thus by not losing heart this noble lady used her mind and was reunited with her husband. Nala, who had by then acquired proficiency in the play at dice, challenged Puṣkara either to game at dice or wage a war of weapons against him. Ultimately each throw by Nala vanquished Puṣkara and made Nala victorious. He regained everything (including his kingdom) he had lost. Instead of inflicting the cruelest punishment on Puṣkara, Nala of undaunted courage forgave him. Damyantī was now an unquestioned empress.

Sage Vyāsa praises Damyantī in the following words:

दम्यंतीं तु रुपेण रोजता युता प्रियः
तौभाष्येत्र यया कप पुष्ममा ॥

"But Damyantī of slender waist, obtained celebrity all over the world in beauty and brightness, and in good name, luck and glory."

Besides these qualities Damyantī possessed the cream of intellectual acumen and presence of mind. There is predominance of wit and intellect in her character whether it be cleverly choosing her consort in swayamvara or sending the messengers in search of Nala with the verses composed by her

2. Ibid., 77/4,8.
3. Ibid., 3/77/18.
4. Ibid., 3/77/22.
5. Ibid., 3/50/10.

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and in chalking out a plan for compelling Nala, who was disguised as Bāhuka, to disclose his identity. Thus a rare combination of brain and beauty is found in Damyantī. With the fineness of her intellectual acumen Damyantī stands out among the educated women during the period of Mahābhārata.

Sāvitrī

"Seeing that slender-waisted damsel of robust hips, and looking like a golden image, people thought we have got a goddess".

The princess of Mālva city and the consort of Aśvapati gave birth to Sāvitrī who was the consequence of the hard penances observed by her father. He attained her as a boon from the goddess Sāvitrī whom he offered oblations every day, she was, therefore, named after the goddess. Sāvitrī was the embodiment of Śrī (Lakṣmī) and possessed lotus-like eyes. The suitors were unable to court her because she appeared as if blazing in splendour.

2. Ibid. edited by Dutt, M.N., p.419.
4. Ibid., 3/277/6 to 23.
5. Ibid., 3/277/24.
7. Ibid., 3/277/27.
beauteous damsel was religious-minded also:

"Then on a Parva day, Sāvitri, observing fast, bathing her head and approaching the family deity caused the Brāhmaṇas to offer oblations to the sacrificial fire in accordance with due rites. Then taking the flowers (and garlands with which she worshipped the deity)——"  

When nobody came to woo young and charming Sāvitri, her father became worried and asked her to choose the husband of her liking. She set out in search of a suitable groom surrounded by the old counsellors of her father. She paid visits to the hermitages of royal seers and gave away money in Tīrthas. Once Aśvapati was seated with the celestial sage Nārada, Sāvitri came back and after being asked by her father, she told that she had selected Satyavān, the son of the blind king Dyumatsena of Śālva country ousted by his foes and residing in a forest practising austerities. Nārada was not in favour of the decision taken by Sāvitri and forbade her to do so. Being compelled to tell the reason, the view of the celestial sage was that although Satyavān was as wise as Bṛhaspati and brave like Indra, yet merely one defect

2. Ibid., edited by Dutt, M.N., p.419.
3. Ibid., edited by Satvalekar, Damodar, 3/277/32 to 41.
4. Ibid., 3/278/1 to 10.
eclipsed all his virtues that he had a very short span of life in store for him and he would breathe his last within one year from that very day. Her father, then and there, opposed her marriage with Satyavān and asked her to choose another person as her life partner but Sāvitrī stood firm like a rock. Suniti Bala comments:

"Those words of her father made Sāvitrī realize that it was the supreme moment of her life. She must decide between what was pleasant and what was good, and assert her will in favour of what she considered most precious. Gone was her shyness as well as her habitual dependence on her parents in cases of doubt. Awakened to a full sense of its dignity, true womanhood cast its lot in favour of pure love, chastity and self-effacement."

Sāvitrī replied:

सूक्ष्मो निपतति सूक्ष्मु हन्या प्रदीप्यते ।
सूक्ष्मु ददानीति त्रिप्वेतात्ति सूक्ष्मु सूक्ष्मु ॥
दीर्घो राहवाल्पायु: सूक्ष्मो निंश्चंक्रिया वा ।
सूक्ष्मु दृढः मया मर्त्य न द्वितीयेक्ष्मायमु ॥

"Doth the die fall but once, the daughter can once be given away. 'I bestow'—(such) words are spoken but once (and) it is only once that these three things occur. Whether hath he a short span of life or long; whether he be endowed with virtues or devoid of them, I have, for once, choosen him as my consort and will not select any other person second time."

2. Ibid., 3/2/8/23, 24.
On hearing this, Nārada spoke:

रिमहर बुद्धिनिर्प्रेक्षा तावाण्या दुक्कस्ताव ।
केवला परात्युं होक्या ध्यायितस्मात् कर्यत ॥

"O best of men, firm is thy daughter Sāvitrī in her resolve. Impossible it is to wean her away from dharma (virtue)."

Seeing her thus determined Nārada’s suggestion was that Āsvapati should give away Sāvitrī to Satyavān and the king did so.²

Such was the cultural education imparted to Sāvitrī as:

गैते पितारि स्नानं संन्यासमन्ना कर्यत ॥
जूहे वल्क्लान्यं दस्त्रं कारायणमेव व ॥

"Her father having departed, cast off she all of her jewellery and put on a dress of barks and cloth dyed red."

Sāvitrī became the apple of every one’s eyes owing to her virtues, self-control and affectionate behaviour. She pleased her mother-in-law by bestowing upon her the gifts of all kinds of robes as well as by attending to her physical needs. She also won the heart of her father-in-law by worshiping him like a god and by the control of her words. She, nevertheless, delighted her husband by her sweet disposition, but even then the ominous words of Nārada continued haunting her day and

2. Ibid., 3/278/29.
3. Ibid., 3/279/18.
When Sāvitrī ascertained that the demise of Satyavān would take place on the fourth day, that observant of the Trivārtasāvitrī started fasting although her father-in-law raised admonishing objection. She remained standing like a wooden statue. On the fateful day Sāvitrī offered oblation to the blazing fire. When she bowed before her inlaws and the ascetics, she received the benediction that she would never be a widow. Suniti Bala writes:

"How avidly her soul drank those words of assurance uttered by truthful lips! Rays of hope entered her mind, and a strength which knows no defeat filled her soul."

Her father-in-law asked her to eat but her reply was that she was determined to take her meals when the sun would set. Sāvitrī asked her in-laws to permit her to accompany Satyavān who was going to the woods for gathering fruits etc. She expressed her intense desire to pay a visit to the forest covered with flowers. Although she had become very very pale because of fasting, yet her maiden request was granted. Thus a smiling Sāvitrī with a heavy heart followed her husband.

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1. Mahā., J/277/19 to 23.
2. Ibid., J/280/7 to 5.
4. Ibid., J/280/10 to 12.
5. Great Women of India, p.218.
7. Ibid., J/280/18 to 29.
Along with Sāvitrī satyavān collected fruits. He complained of a severe headache when he was felling the branches of a tree. He told Sāvitrī that a great sleepiness was overcoming him. Then Satyavān laid his head in the lap of his consort, Sāvitrī, who had not forgotten the words of Nārada even for a moment, started calculating the moment, the hour, the time and the day. That horrified lady beheld, within a moment, a crowned person attired in a red garment and having the splendour of the sun with a noose in his hands. When Sāvitrī saw him standing beside Satyavān and gazing at him, she with a throbbing and trembling heart requested that superhuman to disclose his identity. He told her that he was none other than Yama and had come with the intention of carrying her husband. Describing the purpose of his coming personally, the god of death further told her that his emissaries were not deemed fit by him for taking away such a person endowed with various qualities, he, then and there, drew out the soul from the body of Satyavān and it became destitute of lustre and bereft of motion.

1. Mahā., 3/281/1 to 5.
2. Ibid., 3/281/6, 7.
3. Ibid., 3/281/8, 9.
4. Ibid., 3/281/9 to 11.
5. Ibid., 3/281/12, 13.
7. Ibid., 5/281/16, 17.
Binding the soul of Satyavān with a noose, Yama started proceeding towards the south followed by Sāvitrī.\textsuperscript{1} Yama asked her to return in order to perform his last rites,\textsuperscript{2} but a determined Sāvitrī replied that it was her eternal duty to follow her consort to wherever he was being carried or going of his own accord.\textsuperscript{3} That bold Sāvitrī said:

\begin{quote}
There shall be no obstacle to my course on account of my asceticism, my devotion to superiors, my affection for my husband, my observance of vows, and your grace.\textsuperscript{5}
\end{quote}

Yama was pleased to listen words of wisdom from her and, therefore, told her to ask for a boon except the life of her husband.\textsuperscript{6} The intelligent lady asked him to restore the eyesight of her father-in-law and prayed that he should be endowed with prowess like sun or fire.\textsuperscript{7} Granting her this boon Yama again asked her not to proceed further because she was fatigued and had traversed a long way.\textsuperscript{8}

2. Ibid., 3/281/19.
5. [\textit{Rigveda} edited by Dutt, M.M., p.424.]
8. Ibid., 3/281/27.
Sāvitrī had not lost the sharpness of mind even during that critical situation, she told the god of death that she was not exhausted because she was with her husband. She further said that she was treading the same path to which her husband was being taken. She asked Yama to lend a ear to the wise saying uttered by her:

सताल ततुणंगामिन सतपुर्वक तत्
परं तत्: परं चिन्त्यानि पुरुषाते।
न यापनं ततपुरुषे संगतं
तत्: ततां संनिश्चेषं समानमेऽ।।

"Highly commendable is even a single meeting with the righteous. Still more so is the friendship with them. Doth bear fruit, for ever the communion with the virtuous. One should, therefore, always accompany the virtuous."

Even Yama relented to listen to the words of Sāvitrī which were full of wisdom. Charmed with her utterings, he said:

मनोहुस्यां हुस्यद्विविद्धनं रक्षा यदुक्तं कर्मं गृहानासनयः।

"The words spoken by you are pregnant with great import. They augment the wisdom of even the learned and are delightful to the mind.

2. Ibid., 3/281/29.
3. Ibid., 3/281/30.
So he wanted to bless Sāvitrī with one more boon, save the life of Satyavān. She prayed to Yama that the lost kingdom of her father-in-law be regained by him. The same was granted. Although she was again asked to return, yet she followed Yama.

Following the god of death, Sāvitrī won his heart and pleased him. Her view was that Yama had proved the worth of his name by exercising control over all creatures by his ordinances and carrying them away according to regulations.

She poured sweet words full of wisdom into the ears of Yama:

उपदेतः स्वभृतेऽव्यम्भो बलसा गिरा।
अनुग्रहच दाने व सत्यथ धर्म: सतातन:।

"Benevolence towards all creatures in thought, word and action, compassion and charity— is the eternal dharma (duty) of the virtuous."

She impressed Yama by saying that people of the world are blessed with a very short span of life and they are devoid of energy, this is but an open secret. According to her, the virtuous show mercy even upon the foes who come to seek shelter from them. In the opinion of Yama the words spoken

2. Ibid., 3/281/31.
3. Ibid., 3/281/35.
4. Ibid., 3/281/34.
5. Ibid., 3/281/35.
by Sāvitrī were pleasing him in the same way as the water is in the case of a thirsty man. He, therefore, told Sāvitrī to ask for one more boon except the life of her husband.¹ She requested Yama to bless her father Aśvapati with one hundred sons in order to perpetuate his race.² Her wish was fulfilled and she was once more asked to go back,³ but to no avail. That bold and fearless lady continued following the god of death, undeterred.

Sāvitrī told Yama that the fatigue had not the capacity to even touch her for the simple reason that she was beside her husband.⁴ She praised him by saying that because of judging people without any discrimination, he is, rightly, styled as the lord of justice.⁵ She spoke sweetly to Yama that people don’t have so much faith even in themselves as in the righteousman. Everyone, therefore, has a longing to be intimate with them.⁶ She further said:

लौकिकदातं सर्वभूतानां विवासो नाम जायते ।
तत्स्मातृ ततो विशेषं विवासं कुरूते जनः ॥⁷

¹. Mahā., 3/281/36.
². Ibid., 3/281/37.
³. Ibid., 3/281/38.
⁴. Ibid., 3/281/39.
⁵. Ibid., 3/281/40.
⁶. Ibid., 3/281/41.
⁷. Ibid., 3/281/42.
"And friendship alone generates the confidence among all creatures. It is, therefore, that people repose confidence specially in the virtuous."¹

Being spell-bound on hearing such words Yama wanted to bestow another boon upon her except the life of her husband.² That moment was the real test of her presence of mind in which she did not fail. By using her superb wit and intellect she asked to be blessed with one hundred sons endowed with prowess through Satyavan in order to perpetuate their line.³

And lo! her supreme wish also not remained ungranted but she was asked to retrace her steps.⁴ Instead of going back Savitri continued saying that pious people always find themselves inclined towards religion. The union of the pious with the righteous always results in something unique:

वत्ता सदिभन्तिल: संगमोऽरितिः⁵

In her opinion the pious are always devoted to the acts of self-sacrifice for others and they don’t expect anything from anyone.⁶ The truthfulness of the virtuous makes the sun move

³. Ibid., 3/281/44.
⁴. Ibid., 3/281/45.
⁵. Ibid., 3/281/46.
and the earth is supported by their asceticism. Such was the magic of words uttered by Sāvitrī that Yama expressed his strong desire to bless her with some incomparable boon. As if Sāvitrī was waiting for this very moment. She immediately pointed out the futility of the last boon granted by the god of death and, therefore, prayed that Satyavān be restored to life without whom she was like a corpse. She said:

न कामे मरृतिनायुता हूँबे
न कामे मरृतिनायुता दिव्यः
न कामे मरृतिनायुता श्रीयः
न मरृतीन व्यवस्थि बोधिलयः

"Deprived of (my) consort I don't long for happiness, without (my) husband I don't crave even for heaven, without (my) lord I don't want prosperity and bereft of him life is unbearable for me."

She requested Yama to restore Satyavān to life in order to prove his own words true.

The divine dispenser of judgement Yama readily admitted defeat at the hands of such a pure soul, he not only brought Satyavān back to life but also blessed him to enjoy a long life and be a renowned king. Thus Sāvitrī proved to be

2. Ibid., 3/281/50.
3. Ibid., 3/281/51.
4. Ibid., 3/281/52.
5. Ibid., 3/281/53.
6. Ibid., 3/281/55 to 56.
a saviour of the line of her parents as well as that of her
in-laws' line.¹

Religious-minded Sāvitrī is impressive, primarily,
due to her intellectual character. She was victorious over
destiny and death by the sheer power of her wisdom, love and
loyalty. Her contribution is rightly described by sages:

निचयणनां व्यस्तगीर्मितुद्व
कुन्न नरेन्द्रस्य तंगोपये छटे ।
त्वथा बृहस्पती गृहद्वमयीयवान
समुदयत साधित पुनः कूलिनय ॥²

"O chaste girl, you are of gentle
disposition, observant of vows, possessed
of virtue and have sprung from a noble
line. And it is by you that the line of
this best of kings, overwhelmed with
calamities and drowned in a deep gulf (of
obscurity) has (at last) been rescued."³

According to Winternitz Sāvitrī reminds one of
Draupādi, Kuntī and Vidulā:

"For the independent department of
princess Sāvitrī who goes out in search
of a husband for herself and insists upon
her own choice although the holyman and
her father raise an admonishing
objection; the independence with which
she practises penance, performs sacrifice
and takes vows; and above all her bold
pleadings for the life of her husband as
well as her knowledge of wise sayings, by
which she impresses even the god of death

¹ Maha., 7/281/57, 58.
² Ibid., 3/282/43.
all this reminds one rather of the women of the heroic poetry like Draupadi, Kunti and Vidula than of the Brahmanic ideal of a woman.¹

Sukanyā

King Srayāti was blessed with only one child whose name was Sukanyā.² According to Suniti Bala Gupta:

"She was endowed with youth, beauty, perfect health, gracefulness and a great cultural heritage."³

Once Sukanyā, accompanied by her father as well as companions, reached the sage Chyavana.⁴ Adorned with various kinds of ornaments, she approached the place where the great soul communing with the self-effulgent Brāhmaṇa was sitting covered all over with ants and appearing like a heap of earth.⁵

रूपैण वधला पैव मद्दन मदन घ।
बर्मेज वन्यक्षारां शाब्स: परम्बुक्लितः।⁶

"Endowed with beauty, youthfulness (Sukanyā) who was amorous and frolicsome started breaking the branches of trees laden with blossoms."

³. Great Women of India, p.182.
⁵. Ibid., 3/122/3, 4, 7.
Rsi Chyavana, endued with the ascetic prowess, was pleased to look at the grace of the feminine figure with amazement. He addressed her but Sukanyā could not hear his words. Her eyes at once, fell upon something looking like a pair of gems shining through the holes of the ant hill. Out of curiosity she pierced the eyes of the sage with a thorn, thereby, making him blind. Chyavana became furious with sage and stopped the calls of nature of the troops of Sryāti. The king strived to find out the reason but in vain. Seeing her father aggrieved and moved by the plight of the soldiers, she told each and every thing. The ruler of the earth, there and then, prayed to Chyavana that his daughter be forgiven but the sage did not pay heed to his words. Chayavana asked the king to give him the hand of his daughter and Sryāti did so.

Such was the magic of the cultural education imparted to Sukanyā that she accepted old Chavana as her consort without any grudge and became his devoted wife. The above mentioned statement can not be accused of exaggeration because:

2. Ibid., 3/122/12, 13.
3. Ibid., 3/122/17.
4. Ibid., 3/122/14 to 19.
5. Ibid., 3/122/20 to 24.

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"The faultless Sukanyā also, having obtained that ascetic for her husband, began to wait upon him by practising asceticism and observing the ordinances."

"The beautiful featured one, that guileless lady, worshipped Chyavana and waited upon his guests and ministered to the sacred fire."

Once the celestial twins Āświni Kumāras behold Sukanyā while she was taking bath. Endowed with flawless beauty, she, unknowingly, raised ineffable desire in their mind and questioning her whereabouts, they praised her:

"O timid one, thou shine like a flashing lightning in this woodland. O fair one, we have never come across anyone like thee even in the celestial world."

2. Ibid., edited by Dutt, M.N., p.183.
5. Ibid., edited by Sañvälekar, Damodar, 3/127/1.
The divine twins were shocked to hear from her that she was the devoted wife of Chyavana. They asked her not to cling to that old Chyavana who was on the verge of death and wanted her to accept one of them as her husband. The faithful wife of the sage, Sukanyā rebuked them by saying that the celestials shouldn’t have any doubt about her fidelity.

When Aświnis failed to lure Sukanyā, they offered to restore the youthfulness and handsomeness of her husband, because both of them were the celestial physicians. They laid one condition only for doing so, that she would have to select one from amongst the three as her husband. With the consent of Chyavana, she brought him there. The aged and blind sage was asked by the twin gods to have a dip into the water of the lake, Chyavana did so. Aświnis also entered into the lake. When the sage was rejuvenated, all the three came out of the lake assuming the same appearance pleasing to the eyes and asked her to choose one of them as her husband. After pondering for a moment she ascertained who was her husband and selected him who was a true replica of the resplendent heavenly twins:

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Sukanyā is, therefore, a living embodiment of the characteristic Indian concept of exclusive devotion of the wife to her husband. She, in fact, committed an unpardonable sin by blinding Chyavana but she compensated that by her single-minded devotion to her lord. As a consequence of her devotion, affection and faithfulness to her consort and by her intellect that cultured lady succeeded in restoring the youthfulness of her husband. She, thus, occupies a very high place in the galaxy of women of the Mahābhārata age.

Lopāmudrā

"O King, endowed with beauty par excellence she (Lopāmudrā) started growing quickly bearing resemblance with a lotus in water or the sacred flame of fire."

Such a vision of youth and loveliness was created by none other than the sage Agastya by assembling together the prettiest parts of creatures when he could not find a
suitable maiden to perpetuate his race. He handed her over to the king of Vidarbha. That exalted girl looked as effulgent as the lighting in his palace. She was named Lopāmudrā. Agastya was compelled to create her because he had to save his ancestors who were hanging in a pit with their heads downwards for the want of an offspring from Agastya who had taken a vow of celibacy. Lopāmudrā was brought up amid luxuries. She shone like the brilliant Rohini (the name of a star) in the sky surrounded by her maid-servants. She excelled even an Apsarā in her looks. Although she was endued with good and excellent manners yet no prince ever dared approach her for the fear of Agastya. She pleased her parents as well as near and dear ones by her sweet disposition.

When the parents of Lopāmudrā were anxious to find a suitable match for her, Agastya came and asked for her hand. Her parents were stunned and did not know what to do.

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2. Ibid., 3/94/10, 19.
3. Ibid., 3/94/11 to 15.
4. Ibid., 3/94/23.
5. Ibid., 3/94/24.
9. Ibid., 3/95/1, 2.
10. Ibid., 3/95/3.
Beholding her parents afflicted with grief, Lopāmudrā requested her father to marry her to Agastya and the king bestowed her on the illustrious sage. After having Lopāmudrā as his consort, he asked her to take off her costly robes as well as jewellery. As a consequence of the wonderful cultural education received by her, she did not hesitate in discarding her precious dress and ornaments. Vyāsa writes:

तबधेराणि अग्रव वल्कल्याजिनांि य
समान्यतवध्य व बम्बायलोपना ।

"The lady with large eyes, then, accepted rags, bark and deer-skin (as her dress) and became the observant of vows and acts like her consort."

Lopāmudrā felt a rare pleasure while serving her lord. She, at last, won the heart of Agastya with her devotion, service, purity, self-control, grace and beauty. One day her lord saw her blazing in ascetic splendour when she came after taking a bath in her season; he, at once, understood that the proper time had come to accomplish the desire of his

1. Mahā., 3/95/5 to 7.
2. Ibid., 3/95/8.
3. Ibid., 3/95/9.
4. Ibid., 3/95/10.
5. Ibid., 3/95/12.
ancestors and have an off-spring.\textsuperscript{1} He made Lopāmudrā aware of his intense yearning to beget a child.\textsuperscript{2} She, with a request, desired to have the same nuptial bed as comfortable as she used to have in her father's palace.\textsuperscript{3} She wanted to be adorned with celestial ornaments. In her view he should be garlanded with flowers.\textsuperscript{4} She refused to approach her consort in the dress of an ascetic and pollute the same at any cost.\textsuperscript{5} When Agastya expressed his inability to provide the luxuries she enjoyed in her parental home for the paucity of money,\textsuperscript{6} she asked him to do so with his ascetic prowess\textsuperscript{7} to which he did not agree because he was not prepared to misuse his spiritual power for his selfish ends.\textsuperscript{8} Lopāmudrā, whose doubts about his spiritual superiority were cleared, asked him to do whatever he liked without causing any harm to his dharma.\textsuperscript{9} Agastya went to three kings namely Srutarvā, Vradhnaśwa and Trasadasyu in order to get the desired wealth but did not succeed in his mission as he found that their

\begin{enumerate}
\item Mahā, 3/95/13.
\item Ibid., 3/95/14.
\item Ibid., 3/95/17.
\item Ibid., 3/95/18.
\item Ibid., 3/95/22.
\item Ibid., 3/95/19.
\item Ibid., 3/95/20.
\item Ibid., 3/95/21.
\item Ibid., 3/95/23.
\end{enumerate}

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income and expenditure were equal.\(^1\) Agastya thought it improper to take anything from those kings because if he did so, other creatures would have to suffer.\(^2\) He, then, approached the king of demons Illvala possessing enormous wealth who obliged the sage.\(^3\)

When the desire of Lopāmudrā was accomplished by Agastya who kept his dharma intact in doing so she, gracefully, yielded to his wish.\(^4\) Agastya raised a question in order to test his wife. He asked her if she would like to have one thousand sons each equal to ten or only ten sons each of whom be equal to a hundred or just one who could conquer one thousand.\(^5\) The reply of Lopāmudrā, sprinkling sparks of brilliance hither and thither, proved that Agastya needed Lopāmudrā only because they were made for each other:

\[
\text{सहस्रलिंगि: पुत्रं: एको पैदा तपोधन ।}
\text{एको हि बहुमिः कृपायूँ विद्वान् साधुरताभिः:।।}^6
\]

"O great ascetic, bless me with merely one son equal to a thousand. One learned and gentle son is far superior to many wicked sons."

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1. Mahā., 3.96/1 to 16.
2. Ibid., 3.96/6, 11, 16.
3. Ibid., 3.97/20 to 3.97/1 to 14.
4. Ibid., 3.97/16, 17.
5. Ibid., 3.97/19.
The union of such pure souls bore fruit in the form of their only son Drdhadasyu.¹

Highly cultured Lopāmudrā, with a religious fervour of mind, is the master-piece created by the Grand Old Sire, Brahmn. Agastya by assembling the elite of every best thing in the universe. She is, thus, a rare example of beauty and brilliance combined together.

Śakuntalā

नाम व तुड़वा वराहोतः स्रीमतीं वरहालिनीया्।
विभाजामाना वृष्णा तपस्वा व दौड़न व।
रूपोलीवस्मलनायु्।।

“And beholding that (damsel) of perfect symmetry of shape and exquisite beauty, who was adorned with sweet smiles, whose loveliness and youth was in full bloom and who was effulgent with (her faultless) limbs (body), hard asceticism and self-control.”

Although Śakuntalā was Śrī (the goddess of fortune) incarnate yet was in the dress of an ascetic² whom the ruler Dusyanta found when he happened to visit the hermitage of Kanwa.³

¹ Mohā., 3/97/23.
² Ibid., 1/65/10, i.i.
³ Ibid., 1/65/3.
⁴ Ibid., 1/65/1.
The exceedingly beautiful Šakuntalā was highly cultured because in the absence of her father she not only welcomed the Guest of Honour but also worshipped him in due form. She paid him due regards by offering him a seat, pādyā and arghya. Honouring him in this way the maiden enquired about his health. After introducing himself Duṣyanta told her about the purpose of his visit and also made enquiries regarding the whereabouts of Kaṇwa. Šakuntalā informed the king that her illustrious father had gone to collect fruit and asked him to wait for a moment.

Being spell-bound and captivated by the bewitching beauty of Šakuntalā, Duṣyanta enquired about her parents. She told him that she is considered to be the daughter of the virtuous and illustrious sage Kaṇwa. Duṣyanta could not believe his ears that such an observant of rigid vows the sage Kaṇwa, who led a life of celibacy, could ever fall from the path of righteousness, he, therefore, asked her to

2. Ibid., 1/65/5.
3. Ibid., 1/65/5.
4. Ibid., 1/65/8.
5. Ibid., 1/65/7.
6. Ibid., 1/65/13.
7. Ibid., 1/65/12.
8. Ibid., 1/65/15.
9. Ibid., 1/65/16.
dispel from his mind doubts regarding her paternity.\(^1\) She disclosed the secret that she was born of a celestial nymph Menaka and the royal sage Viśvamitra but was discarded immediately after her birth.\(^2\) She was found by Kanwa\(^3\) and got her name Sakuntalā because she was being protected by the Sakuntas (birds) in the solitude of the forest.\(^4\) Although Kanwa was an ascetic yet he lavished all the deep affection of a father on his adopted daughter. She was so cultured that she served her foster father like his own daughter. Suniti Bala Gupta writes:

"Could a daughter of one's own flesh and blood speak more affectionately for her father? Knowing fully well that Kanwa was but a foster father, she yet served him like a true daughter and made his hermitage a real home.\(^5\)"

The youth of Sakuntalā was like a swollen surging river, so being smitten by her outward charms, the love of Duṣyanta towards her was carnal. Therefore, when he came to know about her royal origin, he, at once, proposed her to be his consort. He inveigled her into marrying him in the gandharvā form of marriage which is considered to be the

\(^{1}\) Mahā., 1/65/17.
\(^{2}\) Ibid., 1/66/8, 9.
\(^{3}\) Ibid., 1/66/12.
\(^{4}\) Ibid., 1/66/14.
\(^{5}\) Great Women of India, p.190.
best but Sakuntalā asked him to wait for her father who would bestow her upon Duṣyanta. The king enticed her by saying that it was not improper for them to enter into wedlock following the gandharva rite and moreover they had fallen in love with each other. Sakuntalā, who had in her very blood the ingredients of passion inherited from her mother, could no more display the feminine restraint and modesty which are normally expected of the daughter of a sage. She offered but poor resistance. Sakuntalā was inexperienced and fell headlong into love with the impetuosity of her youth. The dawning of love in the virgin heart of the unsophisticated Sakuntalā is, indeed, a unique portrayal. Even being overpowered by the sentiment of love and reason bidding farewell Sakuntalā of Vyāsa was unbashed, argumentative and bargaining maiden. She, therefore, dared reply that in case what Duṣyanta said was sanctioned by the scriptures and she was really her own disposer, even then her condition was that the son born out of that wedlock should be his heir-apparent to the thorne. She was prepared to marry him only when Duṣyanta acceded to the condition laid down by her. The king agreed to fulfill her wish without giving a second thought. He even promised to take her to his capital

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4. Ibid., 1/67/15 to 17.
in a royal style. By convincing her that she deserved to be a queen, he wedded that divine-like damsel according to due rites. Šakuntalā contracted her pre-nuptial love without the permission of her foster father and against the rules of the hermitage. Her love, therefore, brought suffering in its wake. Duṣyanta came back to his capital after giving assurance to her that he would keep his promise. He even told her that she would be escorted by his troops to the palace. While heading towards his destination the thought of Kaṅwa kept haunting him. His only worry was the sage. He was at a loss to understand what course of action Kaṅwa would take on hearing this.

Kaṅwa came back to his hermitage as soon as Duṣyanta left but Šakuntalā did not gather enough courage to greet him. The great seer who was endowed with spiritual prowess could not remain unaware of what had happened in his absence. He lovingly supported her saying that the act done by her secretly without seeking his permission but having the sanction of scriptures could not be the cause of shame for

2. Ibid., 1/67/19.
5. Ibid., 1/67/21, 22.
her. He further told that the might of her would be son being par excellence he would have sway over whole of the earth which is surrounded by the ocean. His army would be irresistible to his foes. On hearing this Śakuntalā came forward and after taking down the load of fruit from him asked the illustrious Kanwa to be gracious to her consort as well as to his ministers. Being pleased with what she had done, Kanwa wanted to bless her with a boon. She asked that her husband and his descendents might be virtuous and never be deprived of their throne.

Śakuntalā attained the bliss of motherhood by giving birth to a son possessing incomparable strength. He grew up as a child endued with beauty, magnanimity and all accomplishments. When he was of six years, he could tame wild animals like tigers, elephants, bears etc. Because of his quality of subjugating all beasts, he rightly got his name Sarvaḍamana. On seeing Śakuntalā's son of unusual strength Kanwa ordered his effulgent disciples to escort

2. Ibid., 1/67/28. 29.
4. Ibid., 1/67/32.
5. Ibid., 1/67/33.
6. Ibid., 1/68/1.
7. Ibid., 1/68/2.
8. Ibid., 1/68/5.
9. Ibid., 1/68/7, 8.
Sakuntalā along with her son to her husband's home without further delay because in his view women of married status bring a bad name to their parents by residing in their homes for a long time. The disciples obeyed the order of their teacher Kanwa. On entering the resplendent court of Hastināpura, they returned after introducing Sakuntalā. She told the king that his celestial-like son named Sarvaḍamana be installed as the crown prince and also asked him to recall the agreement he had entered into before marrying her. The king who remembered each and everything vividly feigned ignorance being conscious of his own reputation. He rebuked her saying that she was a wicked woman in the garb of an ascetic and even refused to recognize her. He asked her to decide herself whether she should reside there or go.

Crest-fallen Sakuntalā appeared to have lost her consciousness and stood like a wooden-statue. She was filled with shame. Repudiated by the king in this way, her pride was hurt and she flared up with rage and indignation. Although she tried utmost to hide her rising anger and blazing fire of asceticism, yet she fearlessly held the king responsible for treachery. Sakuntalā told the king that he had recognized her but he was intentionally insulting her like an ordinary

1. Mahā., 1/68/9 to 11.  
2. Ibid., 1/68/12 to 14.  
3. Ibid., 1/68/15 to 17.  
4. Ibid., 1/68/18, 19.  
5. Ibid., 1/68/20 to 22.
low-born person. According to her his heart was witness to the truth.1

Śakuntalā was well-versed in religious scriptures, that is why her rebuke contains moralizing sentences. Winternitz has acknowledged this fact:

"Also in the dialogue between Śakuntalā representing her son’s and her own claims and the king not willing to recognize them, we find many old and original verses preserved... and in Śakuntalā’s speech moralising sentences may have occurred."2

Śakuntalā tried her utmost to awaken Duṣyanta from the slumber of forgetfulness and reminded him:

स्फोटमार्मको शरीरं तवं तस्माद न हृदयं दर्शितम् पुराणम् ।
यो यदिति कर्मण: पापकार्य प्रस्तावितके त्वव वृत्तिः करोऽर्थाम् ॥ ३॥

"And (if) thou think "I am alone", (then thou) not know that doth the great Omniscient One dwell in thy heart who is aware of every evil deed (and) in whose presence thou commit sin."

She further tried to make Duṣyanta realize that while sinning a man thinks that none is beholding him but is seen by the

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ever watchful celestials like sun, moon, yama, dharma etc.\(^1\) According to her a sinner gets severe punishment from yama for his wicked deeds.\(^2\) In her view such a person who degrades himself remains unblessed by the celestials as well as he doesn’t receive blessings even from his own soul.\(^3\)

Sakuntalā further stressed the joy that a son showers upon his father. In her opinion a son, being the saviour of his forefathers from a particular hell called put, is named by the creator himself as putra.\(^4\) She further said:

\begin{quote}
भायरीर जनिते पुत्रादेवै त्वमिवानाम् ।
हृदाद्वते जविता पूज्यं रत्नं पुर्णं पुर्णवृत् ॥\(^5\)

"Beholding the face of a son born of (his own) consort, doth a person see his own face as he doth in a mirror (and he) doth feel so exalted as a virtuous man who hath attained heaven."
\end{quote}

She added that the feeling of happiness, that a father experiences when he gets fondled by his son whose body is covered with dust, is unique.\(^6\) She opined that the touch of a son is far more pleasing than that of women, water and delicate clothes.\(^7\)

\begin{enumerate}
\item Māhā., 1/68/28, 29.
\item Ibid., 1/68/30.
\item Ibid., 1/68/32.
\item Ibid., 1/68/37.
\item Ibid., 1/68/48.
\item Ibid., 1/68/52.
\item Ibid., 1/68/55.
\end{enumerate}
Sakuntalā quoted the learned and wise men well-versed in scriptures according to whom the husband himself enters into the womb of his consort and then comes out in the form of a son. The wife is, therefore, rightly called jāyā by them.¹ She emphasized the importance of man's better half (woman) in the following verses which are considered as the most splendid specimens of Indian epigrammatic poetry by none other than Winternitz.²

अर्थार्थरूपयुक्त भाष्य विशेष, विषय सभावतः अर्थार्थरूपयुक्त: सबा ||
भाष्य भूलु विवर्णनात्मक भाष्य चिन्तन परिच्छेदः ||
विद्यार्थी पुत्रविवर्णनात्मक भवन्तेता: प्रियंदशत: ||
पितरो धर्मार्पिनीय मन्त्रयात्मात् माताः ||
देहमणावा यतोद्धेष्व विद्यातिलिङ्गवामुः नरतः: ||
हिंदुद्वे स्वेते दारिद्र धर्मार्पिनी: तलिलेखितव ||³

"The consort is a man's half, the wife is the best friend, the wife is the root of three created values viz. Dharma, Artha and Kāma, the wife is friend of a man who is on death-bed (source of salvation)."

"They, the gently-speaking women are friends in loneliness, fathers while performing sacred acts, mothers for the unhappy ones."

"Tortured by pains of sorrow and pestered by illness, men are revived by their wives as those who are tortured revived by fresh water."

1. Mahā., 1/62/76.
5. Ibid., p.363
Thus striving to move that stone in the guise of Duṣyanta Śakuntalā reminded him that she, who was his devoted wife, did not deserve to be insulted but respected. She asked him not to be indifferent to his son who was wistfully casting his glances towards him because in her view even ants instead of destroying their eggs support those—

\[अण्डानि विकुङ्ति स्वानि न व भिन्दन्ति पिपोऽल्का: \]

She asked Duṣyanta to behold his son who was born from his own body as his second self as he saw his own image in the crystal-clear lake. She tried to remind him that he had married her in the hermitage of Kanva. She told the king that she was cast away by her mother Menakā who was foremost among apsarās in her infancy and now was being repudiated by none other but by her husband. Śakuntalā said that in case she was cast away by the king, she would go back to the hermitage but requested him not to forsake his own child.

1. Mahā, 1/68/33.
2. Ibid., 1/68/53.
3. Ibid., 1/68/54.
4. Ibid., 1/68/64.
5. Ibid., 1/68/66.
6. Ibid., 1/68/67, 70.
7. Ibid., 1/68/71.
Suniti Bala Gupta comments on the reply of Šakuntalā:

"The spirited reply of this sinless woman, brought up in the forest, still seems to echo through the endless space of time. She pleaded not for herself, but for son but the heart of Dushśānta was proof against all noble sentiments."¹

Duṣyanta pretended not to know Šakuntalā and told her that he had nothing to do with the son. In his view her words did deserve no credence.² He went even to the extent of calling Menakā a cruel-hearted woman and her father Viśwamitra a profligate person.³ He further said that if according to her Viśwamitra and Menakā were foremost amongst rṣis and apsarās respectively, then she should feel ashamed of proclaiming herself as their progeny.⁴ According to him Šakuntalā was a lady of loose character and asked her to go anywhere she liked.⁵

The curt reply of the king Duṣyanta, who disowned Šakuntalā in the open court, was like a bolt from the blue. His answer not only dashed her hopes to the ground but also crushed her reputation. Although the daughter of a nymph, yet she was also the daughter of a great hermit Kanwā.

¹ Great Women of India, p.194.
² Mahā., 1/69/72.
³ Ibid., 1/68/73, 74.
⁴ Ibid., 1/68/75.
⁵ Ibid., 1/68/79, 80.
Humiliation heaped upon that coy maiden turned her into an angry woman but, exercising supreme control over herself, Šakuntalā told the king that he saw the smallest mustard seed like faults of others but he dared not look at his own faults which were as big as the Bilwa fruit. She maintained that her mother Menakā was, virtually, considered to be the best of celestials. Her birth was, therefore, undoubtedly nobler than that of his. She told Duṣyanta that even atheists get annoyed with those who deviate from the path of truth. Such persons are like the snakes of virulent poison whom people dread. She tried to remind him that a man, who casts away his son who is his own image, is unable to attain the higher worlds. The pelf as well as fortune of such a man are destroyed by the celestials. She quoted Manu according to whom the sons are of five kinds. She further told that only a son (irrespective of his type) is the saviour of his forefathers from hell. IN her view a son is preferred even to the celebration of sacrifices. She further told the king that truth surpasses even one hundred horse-sacrifices.

1. Mahābhārata, 1/69/1.
2. Ibid., 1/69/2.
3. Ibid., 1/69/15.
4. Ibid., 1/69/16.
5. Ibid., 1/69/13.
6. Ibid., 1/69/19.
8. Ibid., 1/67/22.
her and asked Duśyanta to accept his own son and adorn him with the name 'Bharata.' The king readily agreeing to do so told the people who were present in his court that although he knew that Sarvaḍamana was his son, yet he hesitated to acknowledge the truth out of the fear that people might have doubts regarding the paternity of his son, if he had directly yielded to the words of Śakuntalā. Duśyanta then welcomed Śakuntalā before that august assembly and made his son the heir-apparent bestowing upon him the name 'Bharata' who afterwards had a sway over all the kings of the world.

Thus it becomes evident that Śakuntalā was a highly cultured lady and was well-versed in religious-scriptures. Winternitz writes in this context:

"Yet it is not probable that all the beautiful texts which Śakuntalā is made to say-texts which deal with happiness and marriage and the duties of the husband, with the duties of the father and truthfulness- belong to the ancient heroic poem. Some verses referring to the law of marriage and succession which are taken from the law books indicate rather that Brahmanical scholars have used the speeches of Śakuntalā to include as many texts on morals and law as was possible."

1. Mahā., 1/69/28 to 33.
2. Ibid., 1/69/34 to 56.
3. Ibid., 1/69/43, 44, 46.
Sakuntalā of the great epic, Mahābhārata possessing the glamour of celestial beauty and endowed with a religious bent of mind has been transformed by Kālidāsa into:

"the finest and the most striking specimen of romantic love".1

writes Sivaprasad Bhattacharya. He further writes about her:

"She errs, suffers, corrects herself and is elevated and transported into the galaxy of great women."2

In the view of Kālidāsa Sakuntalā is beauty incarnate whose bewitching looks captivate him. He has immortalised this vision of loveliness in the following words:

अथ: किल्लयराग: कोमलविटपानुलिरिणी बाहु ।
कुसमिव लोभनीय योवनमिजु सन्नद्यु । ॥

"Her lips are as red as the fresh leaf, her arms as slender as the twigs, and her charming bloom of youth as intoxicating as sweet-smelling blossoms."

Jaratkaru

कोपे वा उम्मिलस्य धर्मोपोद्धव बुन: ।
धर्मोपो गरीयानुै यभादैत्यकरोन्मन: ॥

1. Great Women of India, p.245.
2. Ibid., p.245.
4. Mahārāja, 1/43/16.
"Whether the indignation or the loss of dharma of such an observant of religious practices (be preferred)? Jeopardization of spiritual welfare is certainly greater this was (her) opinion in this matter."

Such a rare woman who sacrificed her own happiness at the alter of the spiritual welfare of her spouse was named Jāratkāru. Vāsuki, the king of serpents, married his sister princess Jāratkāru to a sage bearing the same name. Her husband Jāratkāru was a strict observer of celibacy and practised hard penance. He had to enter into wedlock in order to save his ancestors from falling into hell. The renowned sage yielded to the wish of his forefathers to perpetuate his line on one condition that he would marry the maiden of the same name who would bestow herself upon him as alms of her own accord. Moreover, he would not maintain his consort. Vāsuki agreed to that undignified proposal of the sage because he was, at first informed by one of the snakes named Elāpatra and then by the Grand Sire (Brahmā) that a great saint named Jāratkāru would marry the princess of that very name and their progeny Astīka would be the saviour of the snakes by putting an end to the snake sacrifice of

1. Mahā., 1/13/36.
2. Ibid., 1/13/23; 1/42/4,5.
3. Ibid., 1/13/24 to 27; 1/42/6,7.
Janamejaya. He was bent upon taking revenge of his father king Parikṣit who breathed his last because of a snake-bite due to a curse of an ascetic Śṛngī for insulting his father named Samīka.

Such wonderful was the influence of the cultural education of the Mahābhārata age that Jaratkāru accepted her fate without any demur in order to fulfil the wishes of her brother as well as that of her consort who had laid one more condition before his wife that if Jaratkāru did anything or uttered any word which would displease him, he would, then and there, leave their house. Although there was no limit of her grief when she heard those words, yet she agreed to do as ordered. She, like a devoted wife, tried utmost to serve and please her husband. The sage Vyāsa throw light on how Jaratkāru used to serve him:

"The illustrious girl, moved by the desire of doing good to her relatives, served her husband of hard life with the means of Śvatakākīya (i.e. with the wakefulness of the dog, the timidity of the deer and the sharp instinct of crows to understand signs)."

1. Mahā, 1/34/1 to 14; 1/35/8 to 11; 1/42/17, 18; 1/46/10; 1/47/3, 9.
2. Ibid., 1/37/9 to 14.
3. Ibid., 1/43/7, 8.
4. Ibid., 1/43/9.
5. Ibid., 1/43/10.
6. Ibid., edited by Dutt, M.N., p. 66.
Soon the illustrious princess was bearing the progeny of Jaratkāru. The embryo was effulgent and resplendent like fire and started growing like the white fortnight moon. One day looking very much fatigued the sage fell asleep while placing his head in the lap of his wife. As soon as Jaratkāru slept, the sun was also going to bid farewell to the day. The princess was in a dilemma and did not know what to do. As the day was fading away, Jaratkāru was lost in thoughts out of the fear of the loss of dharma of her husband. She was in a fix whether she should wake her consort from the slumber or not. She knew very well that her husband was devoted to rigid asceticism, she, therefore, was trying to find out a way by which she should disturb his sleep without offending him. She thought:

उत्त्यापपिल्ले येनेन धृष्ट दीक्षिते करियोऽति ।
धन्यवादोऽयोऽध्विन्य सत्यकारिकम् गुम्यः ॥ ६ ॥

"If(I) wake him up, (he) will certainly be furious with rage. (If) doth the time for prayer pass away, there will, surely, be loss of his dharma (virtue)."

1. Mahā. edited by Satavalekar, Damodar, 1/43/12.
2. Ibid., 1/43/13.
3. Ibid., 1/43/14.
4. Ibid., 1/43/14.
5. Ibid., 1/43/15.
6. Ibid., 1/43/17.
At last, once again sacrificing her own happiness, she decided not to jeopardize the spiritual welfare of her ascetic husband.\(^1\) Therefore, without giving a second thought Jaratkāru prayed him in a very sweet voice to arise in order to perform Sandhya (prayer) because the sun was about to set. She reminded him that it was the time for Agnihotra. According to her the scenario of that particular moment was very lovely.\(^2\) At this the lips of the sage Jaratkāru started quivering with indignation and feeling humiliated he, at once, decided to leave that place. In his view the sun was not blessed with that kind of prowess to set when he was sleeping.\(^3\) She told him that she did not wake him up with the intention of insulting him, but she did so because the time for his evening prayer was passing away.\(^4\) The roving mendicant turning a deaf ear to all her pleadings told her that he had never uttered a false word, he, therefore, would have to go.\(^5\) Reminding her about the condition, laid by him, of never earning his displeasure by any means, he asked his wife to inform her brother Vāsuki about his departure and told her not to be overwhelmed with grief.\(^6\)

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1. Mahā., 1/43/16.
2. Ibid., 1/43/18 to 20.
3. Ibid., 1/43/21 to 23.
4. Ibid., 1/43/26.
5. Ibid., 1/43/28.
6. Ibid., 1/43/28 to 29.

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Having heard the words of her consort Jarat-kāru, endowed with flawless beauty, was overpowered with woe. Tears were rolling down her cheeks and her voice was choked, yet mustering enough courage she asked him with folded hands not to forsake her in that manner because she hadn’t committed any fault. She further told him that if he was ever busy in religious pursuits, she also not lagged behind in performing her ‘dharma’ (duties towards her husband) and was always engaged in doing good to him:

Moreover, in her view the purpose of their marriage was not yet accomplished. Her worry was not her personal happiness but she was mad with grief at the thought that the son who would be the saviour of the Nāga (snake) race was yet to be born. She told her husband that she was finding herself unable to face her brother Vāsuki because the welfare of her relatives depended on the son begotten by him. She prayed:

1. Mahā., 1/43/30 to 31.
2. Ibid., 1/43/32.
3. Ibid., 1/43/33 to 36.
4. Ibid., 1/43/35, 36.
"O twice-born, this alliance of mine with thee should not go futile. O lord, moved by the desire of the welfare of my race, (I pray) thee to be pleased."

She added that she was not yet sure about her conception.  

The sage then informed her that she was carrying his child who would be a great seer possessing the knowledge of the Vedas and Vedāngas. With these words Jaratkāru left the palace in order to practise severest asceticism again.  

Such was the impact and prowess of the cultural and religious education imparted to Jaratkāru that Suniti Bala Gupta was compelled to write:

"...... this noble princess, who, for the welfare of her husband as well as of her kith and kin, had renounced all the pleasures of the world and served him day and night like menial."  

Jaratkāru, thus, becomes an unparalleled example of self-sacrifice.

5.2 Curriculum for Women Education

Although no separate institutions for educating the women existed during the Mahābhārata age, yet the description of women makes it evident that education regarding different subjects was imparted to them. The curriculum of women education included: Veda, Purāṇa, Smṛti, Śāstras, religious, moral, cultural, political and vocational education,

1. Mahā., 1/43/34.  
2. Ibid., 1/43/38, 39.  

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education regarding different arts, education regarding Brahman etc.

**Veda**

Vedic education formed an integral part of women education during the Mahābhārata age. Śakuntalā recited the Vedic mantra before the king Dusyanta which the Brāhmaṇas utter on the birthday ceremony of a son:

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आदि-गादि-गात्रस्मृतिः हत्यादभिवायसि ।
तत्र त्यस्य तु गुरुज्ञानं जीव शरदः शतम् ॥
यो मौनकाचन्द्रदीपरो मैं संतानसपिच्छ वाक्यम् ।
तत्सात्यमेव जीव मे पुत्र दुधुष्ट्वा शरदाः शतम् ॥
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"(You) have sprung from the parts of (my) body; you) are born of (my) heart. (You) are myself in the form of my son; may he live for one hundred years."

"My life as well as the continuation of my race depend upon you. May you live for one hundred years with happiness."

Kuntī, the mother of the Pāṇḍavas, acquired the knowledge of the mantras of Atharvaveda from a Brāhmaṇa.²

**Purāṇa**

Women were imparted Pauranic education during the age of Mahābhārata. Kuntī narrated the story of king Vyusitāśwa and his wife Bhadrā to Pāṇḍu which was based on Purāṇas.³ Draupadī was well-conversant with the characters of great sages like Kaśyapa etc.⁴

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2. Ibid., 3/289/20.
3. Ibid., 1/112/7 to 53.
4. Ibid., 3/30/44.

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Smṛti

Women were imparted education regarding Smṛtis during this age. For example Śakuntalā, quoting Manu described five types of sons to the king Duṣyanta.¹

Śāstras

Women were also given education of different Śāstras during the Mahābhārata age. Kuntī described Vidulā as conversant with all Śāstras.² The saying of Śakuntalā that even atheists get annoyed with those who deviate from the path of truth is a sufficient proof that she had been taught the philosophy of atheists. Śakuntalā says:


“The deviation from truth and virtue horrifies even atheists as all persons are in fear of the annoyed snake of virulent poison.”

During Sulabhā’s philosophical discussion with Janaka, the king of Mithilā, she made a mention to the doctrine of Sāmkhyā philosophy that Prakṛti (Nature) was the cause of all

¹ Mahā., 1/69/18.
² Ibid., 5/131/3.
³ Ibid., 1/69/15.
creatures. Sulabhā, a celibate ascetic, entered the intellect of the king Janaka through her own intellect. She controlled the rays of light issuing from his eyes by those emanating from hers and bound up the king Janaka with yogic bonds with a view to ascertain the truth. This proves that she had mastered the science of Yoga. Kuntī was familiar with the fact that sons could be begotten by the power of Yoga.

Religious Education

Religious education was one type amongst different types of education which was imparted to women. For example-when Duryodhana desired to seek the blessings of his mother Gāndhārī to be victorious in the Kurukṣetra war she refused to do so and declared prophetically that victory always accompanies dharma (यति धर्मांतरं अयः) The last words of blessings spoken by Kuntī to her sons that the choice of their intellect should befall on dharma prove Kuntī's knowledge of religion. Draupadī discussed the characteristics of virtue with Yudhiṣṭhira. Sāvitrī observed fast, offered

2. ibid., 12/308/16, 17.
3. ibid., 1/112/34.
4. ibid., 11/17/5, 6.
5. ibid., 15/23/21.
6. ibid., 3/31, 33 chapters.

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oblations to the sacrificial fire according to due rites—this description proves that she had been imparted religious education. Benevolence towards all creatures in thought, word and action, compassion and charity is the eternal dharma (duty) of the virtuous—this as well as other utterings of Sāvitrī prove that she might have been given such education. Sukanyā started to serve her husband Chyavana by practising asceticism and observing the ordinances and also served the sacred fire—this description proves that she was given such education. When Duṣyanta refused to recognize Śakuntalā, she said:

"And if thou think 'I am alone,' then thou not know that doth the great Omniscient One dwell in thy heart who is aware of every evil deed and in whose presence thou commit sin"—

This as well as other utterings of Śakuntalā on this occasion prove that she was well-versed in religious scriptures and might have been given such education. One day the sage Jaratkāru fell asleep and when the time of his Sandhyā (evening prayer), his wife the princess Jaratkāru was

2. Ibid., 3/281/34.
3. Ibid., 3/281/23, 24, 46 to 49.
4. Ibid., 3/122/26, 77.
5. Ibid., 1/68/27.
6. Ibid., 1/68/28, 29, 30, 32, 36, 40, 42, 48, 49.

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in a dilemma whether to wake up her husband or not. On thinking that if the time of his evening prayer passed away, there would be the loss of the virtue of her husband, Jaratkāru decided to wake him up sacrificing her own happiness. It proves that Jaratkāru was given religious education. The sayings of Gautamī that those people, who follow the path of righteousness, are capable of crossing the sea of the world but those who choose the path of sin certainly sink into the ocean like hell and good people always follow the path of righteousness. As also her saying that the child was destined to die on that very particular moment show that she was a religious-minded lady. Pativratā said that virtue is eternal and difficult to attain and has its roots in truth. This as well as other characteristics of dharma as described by her prove that she had a deep knowledge of religion. Kuntī served the sage Durvāsa with all attentions who, in turn, gave her a boon in the form of a Mantra and also told her that she could call any celestial through this mantra. It means that women of those days were taught mantras with the method of using them.

The wife of the Nāga said that the duty of disciples was to

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1. Mahā., 1/43/14, 15, 17, 17.
2. Ibid., 13/1/15.
3. Ibid., 13/1/19.
4. Ibid., 13/1/19.
5. Ibid., 3/197/39.
6. Ibid., 1/113/32 to 35.
serve their preceptors, that of Brāhmaṇas to study the Vedas, that of servants to obey their masters, that of the king to protect the people, that of the Śūdra to serve politely Brāhmaṇas, Kṣatriyas and Vaiśyas and that of the householders to do good to all creatures.¹ These utterings of the wife of the Nāga prove that she had been imparted religious education. Satyavati possessed the knowledge of two types of dharma-parā and aparā.² A brahmin lady described the virtue of women to her husband.³

Education regarding four stages of human life viz. Brahmacharya, Grhastha, Vānaprastha and Sanyāsa āsramas was given to women. For example—when Dhṛtraśtra and Gāndhārī decided to lead a life of asceticism, Kuntī also decided to enter Vānaprastha āsrama along with them.⁴ After the death of king Pāṇḍu, Satyavati and her daughter-in-law Ambalika⁵ and after the demise of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, Satyābhāmā and other queens⁶ entered the Vānaprastha āsrama to practise penances. Sulabha and the daughter of Śāndilya embraced a life of celibate asceticism.⁷ It means that Gāndhārī, Kuntī, Satyavati, Ambalika, Satyābhāmā and other queens, Sulabha and the

¹. Mahā., 12/247/5, 7.
². Ibid., 1/94/36.
³. Ibid., 1/146/4 to 7.
⁴. Ibid., 15/21/9.
⁵. Ibid., 1/117/11.
⁶. Ibid., 16/8/72.
⁷. Ibid., 12/308/184; 9/53/6 to 8.
daughter of Śāndilya possessed knowledge regarding four stages of human life and had been given such education.

**Moral Education**

The imparting of moral education to women can't be denied during this age. For example, when Kṛṣṇa went to Hastināpura with peace-proposal to avert the ruinous war, Kuntī said that only Vidura among the Kauravas was worthy of reverence because it was he who protested against the inhuman dragging of Draupadī by Duḥśāsana and further said that a person attained reverence through his good conduct. This indirectly proves that Kuntī had been given moral education.

**Cultural Education**

Cultural education was also imparted to women during this age. It was nothing else but the impact of cultural education that when Gandhari came to know that her father had decided to bestow her on the blind king Dhrtrāstra, she immediately wrapped her eyes with the manifoldded bandage and decided to remain so throughout life. The lecture delivered by Draupadī to Satyabhāmā on the duties and responsibilities of a wife itself proves that Draupadī had been given such education. When Nala asked Damayantī to go to her parents' kingdom, she refused to leave her husband upon whom a great

2. Ibid., 1/103/12, 13.
3. Ibid., 3/722/18 to 591, Chapter 223.
calamity had befallen. It was nothing else but the result of cultural education of that time. This was the influence of cultural education that after choosing Satyavăn as her husband Sāvitrī refused to select another person as her consort and after her marriage with Satyavăn she put on the dress of barks and red clothes. Further, she pleased her mother-in-law by way of attending to her physical needs, her father-in-law by worshipping him like God and her husband by her sweet disposition. When the king Sryāti decided to give her daughter Sukanyā in marriage to the sage Chyavana, she accepted old Chyavana as her husband without any grudge and served him by practising asceticism. Further, when Aswinkumaras desired Sukanyā to choose one of them as her husband, she rebuked them by saying that the celestial should not doubt her fidelity. It was the magic of cultural education imparted to her. When Agastya asked the king of Vidarbha to give the hand of his daughter Lopāmudrā to him, her parents could not decide what to do. She requested her father to marry her to the sage Agastya. As desired by her husband, Lopāmudrā discarded her precious robes as well as ornaments and accepted rags, bark and deer-skin as her dress. All this happened as a consequence of cultural

2. Ibid., 3/278/25, 26; 3/2/9/18, 19 to 23.
3. Ibid., 122/26; 3/123/10.
4. Ibid., 3/95/2 to 10.
education received by Lopamudrā. Sukanyā used to serve the guests of the sage Chyavana. It means that Sukanyā was imparted cultural education. Sakuntalā welcomed the Guest of Honour in the absence of her father Kaṇwa and also worshipped him in due form. Sakuntalā paid the king due regards by offering him a seat, pādyā and arghya. This was all due to cultural education of that tome. Jaratkāru accepted the old sage named Jaratkāru as her husband without any demur and also agreed to the undignified condition of her husband that if she did anything or uttered any word which would annoy him, he would immediately desert her. As a consequence of cultural education Jaratkārum used to serve her husband of hard life with the means of śveta-kā-kīya. When the sage Jaratkāru decided to desert his wife, she was worried not about her personal happiness but was sad at the very thought that the son who would be the saviour of the Nāga race had not been born. It was the result of cultural education which had taught Jaratkāru to give preference to the welfare of others. Pativratā was engaged in the service of the guests, the servants, the mother-in-law and the father-in-law. The way in which she used to serve her husband and the

2. Ibid., 1/65/4, 5.
3. Ibid., 1/43/7, 8.
4. Ibid., 1/43/10.
5. Ibid., 1/43/33 to 36.

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place ascribed by her to husband prove that she had been imparted cultural education. A Brahmin lady said to her husband that to remain busy in the service of husband was a higher duty for a woman as compared to sacrifices, asceticism, vows and charities. It was the result of cultural education imparted to Brahmin lady that had made her a dutiful wife. Kuntī blessed Draupadī to be a faithful wife towards her husbands in the same manner as Śachī was to Indra, as Swāhā to Vivāvasu, as Rohinī to Soma, as Damyantī to Nala, as Bhadrā to Vaisravana, as Arundhatī to Gautama and as Lakṣmī to Nāryaṇa. It means that Kuntī had been imparted cultural education in which stress was given on being a faithful wife. Kuntī used to serve the guests in her father's house and she also satisfied the great sage Durvāsa by her service. Meaning thereby that Kuntī had been given cultural education related to the service of the guests.

Political Education

Political education was imparted to women, especially to women of royal blood, during this age. The intelligent political discussion of Gandhari with her son Duryodhana in the royal court of Hastināpure in which she emphatically advised her son to desist from war proves this thing. Kuntī

1. Mahā., 3/197/12 to 14, 28 to 30.
2. Ibid., 1/146/24.
3. Ibid., 1/191/4 to 6.
4. Ibid., 1/113/32, 33.
5. Ibid., 5/127/9, 19 to 53.

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gave message to Yudhisthira through Kṛṣṇa that he should fight against Kauravas in the battle-field according to Rājadharma. She said that the path of virtue leads the king to Godliness and the path of vice leads him to hell. This exhibits her intimate knowledge of politics. When Yudhisthira, at the end of Kurukṣetra war decided to follow the path of renunciation, it was Draupadī who persuaded him not to do so. While encouraging him to rule over the kingdom, she reminded Yudhisthira of the duty of the kings. Meaning thereby that Draupadī had been imparted political education. Vidulā, while exhorting her son Sanjaya to fight against enemies, asked him to perform his duty (the duties of a king). She told him that greedy, weakened and persons eclipsed by their foes in the enemy camp could stand by him in the battle. This exhibits her sound knowledge of politics.

Vocational Education

Women were also imparted vocational education during this age. For example— when the Pāṇḍavas had to reside in incognito during the last year of their exile, Draupadī chose the work of a Sairandhṛī (a maid servant skilled in hair

1. Mahā., 5/130/32.
2. Ibid., 5/130/12.
3. Ibid., 12/14/19, 20, 6.
5. Ibid., 5/133/30.
dressing etc.) in the palace of king Virāṭa⁴ and performed it well. Meaning thereby that Draupādi might have been given such education.

Education regarding different arts

Women were taught different arts like dancing, singing and instrumental music during this time. Uttārā, the daughter of king Virāṭa, her companions and serving maids were imparted education in singing and instrumental music at home by Brhannalā.² The Pāṇḍavas were sung into sleep by beautiful girls.³ This means that these girls were imparted education in singing. The king of the Matsyas had erected a house for dancing where the girls used to dance during the day.⁴ It means that women were imparted education in dancing during those days.

Other type of Education

Other type of education was also given to women. For example- Tarā, wife of Bāli, was acquainted with the voice of all creatures.⁵ It proves that she was imparted such education.

Education regarding Brahman

Women were also imparted education regarding Brahman

2. Ibid., 4/10/12.
3. Ibid., edited by Satavalekar, Damodar, 2/56/36.
4. Ibid., edited by Sukthankar, Vishnu S., 4/21/16.
5. Ibid., 3/264/19.
in this age. For example Gautamī possessed the knowledge of the ultimate reality called Brahman. When her only son died as a result of snake-bite, she could deliver a scholarly lecture on the state after death due to this very supreme knowledge. A woman scholar Ansūya, was a Brahmavādini (or an expounder of Brahman).

Thus, it becomes evident that different types of education was imparted to the women during this historic age.

5.3. Role of Women in Educating Children

Women played a key role in educating the children during the Mahābhārata age. Gāndhārī, Kuntī and Vidulā are the examples of such women. They imparted political as well as religious education to their children. The education provided by them helped in shaping the destiny of the child like that of Sanjaya, the son of the queen Vidulā.

Gāndhārī, the mother of Kauravas, imparted political education to her son Duryodhana. She advised Duryodhana to settle the family problems amicably with the Pāṇḍavas. When Duryodhana rejected the peace-proposals of Śrī Kṛṣṇa prior to the outbreak of Kurukṣetra war, she expressed her strong resentment in the royal court of Hastināpura. She told Duryodhana that the path of war did not lead to welfare and advised him to desist from war. She also imparted religious

1. Mahā., 13/1/10, 14 to 18, 19, 20, 22, 24.
2. Ibid., 13/14/65.
education to Duryodhana indirectly. When the ruinous Kurukṣetra war broke out, Duryodhana tried his level best to seek the blessings of his mother to emerge victorious but she declared prophetically that victory always accompanies Dharma:

यतो धर्मायतो जयः

Kuntī, the mother of Pāṇḍavas, gave political education to her sons. She emphasized the need of war with the Kaurvas in her message to her sons through Śrī Kṛṣṇa. She reminded Arjuna to fulfill the purpose for which a Kṣatriya woman gave birth to a son. She inspired Nakula and Sahadeva that their choice should fall only upon those comforts and luxuries attainable by a display of prowess rather than even life itself. She also exhorted Yudhishṭhira to indulge in war according to Rājadharma and not to cast a slur on the name of his grand-fathers. She told him not to meet such end as was bereft of puṇyas alongwith his younger brothers. Describing the virtue of a king she told that if a king followed the path of virtue, he attained Godliness and if he followed the path of sin, he might reach hell.

Vidula exhorted her son Sanjaya to fight against the

1. Mahā., 11/17/5,6.
2. Ibid., 5/135/7.
4. Ibid., 5/130/32.
5. Ibid., 5/130/2.
enemy after the defeat of her son at the hands of the king of Sindhu. While motivating her son to fight, she imparted political education to him through her speech. She told him that the confidence of many persons amongst his enemies could be won through the means of courtesy, respect and friendship. In her opinion, many fortune-seekers could stand by him on being bribed and some men who were jealous with his enemies holding high positions, such persons would deceive their master to improve their position and take revenge. Persons who were angry with his enemies, greedy, weakened and eclipsed by his foes could do his great help. Thus, he would be capable of making his army stronger and that of enemy weaker.\(^1\) She told her son that many persons were dissatisfied with the king of Sindhu and waiting for suitable time. Such persons and the enemies of the king of Sindhu would join him.\(^2\) She advised him to follow the policies of sāma, dāna, danda and bheda. In her view Sanjaya should not be aggrieved at the very thought of lack of sincere friends because his well-wishers would stand by him in weal or woe.\(^3\)

In this way, Gāndhārī, Kuntī and Vidulā played a pivotal role in educating their children.

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1. Mahā., 5/123/30, 32.
2. Ibid., 5/124/3.