

**MARGINALIZATION IN S. L. BHYRAPPA'S PARVA***Vishnu Vandana Devi. V., Research Scholar, Krishna University, Machilipatnam**Dr. N. Usha, Professor, Krishna University, Machilipatnam***Abstract:**

*The timeless, universal themes and characters of the epic, The Mahabharata are reinterpreted in later centuries too, but with a difference. One such creative phenomenon is Bhyrappa's Parva (1979), where the writer gives a rational and realistic picture of the times. Bhyrappa's excellence lies in imagining all these events by rejecting the myths, and to bring to the fore the fact that the Mahabharata would have been possible and the events would have occurred under the said constraints. The novel has been translated into English by K. Raghavendra Rao entitled Parva, A tale of War, Peace, Love, Death, God and Man. The paper observes the aspect of marginalization as observed in the novel, with a special focus on the Sutas, a community of the Mahabharata times. The paper attempts at looking at the roles of Vidura, Yuyutsu and Karna as portrayed in the novel.*

**Key Words:** *The Mahabharata - Parva - S. L. Bhyrappa - marginalization - Sutas*

The two epics the Ramayana and the Mahabharata captured the quintessence of human lives, their joys, their sorrows, the challenges they come across with a possible reason and solution. Sometimes, the solution could be improbable, as these two legends have their deep roots in Indian mythology, which is received and interpreted with a sense of reason by the modern writers. The timeless, universal themes and characters appear again and again in later centuries too, but with a difference. One such creative phenomenon is Bhyrappa's *Parva* (1979), where the writer gives a rational and realistic picture of the times. Bhyrappa's excellence lies in imagining all these events by rejecting the myths, and to bring to the fore the fact that the Mahabharata would have been possible and the events would have occurred under the said constraints. The novel has been translated into English by K. Raghavendra Rao entitled *Parva, A tale of War, Peace, Love, Death, God and Man*. The paper observes the aspect of marginalization as observed in the novel, with a special focus on the *Sutas*, a community of the Mahabharata times. The paper attempts at looking at the roles of Vidura, Yuyutsu and Karna as portrayed in the novel.

The concept of marginalization is used to present a picture of the underprivileged groups of the society. Social exclusion is a global phenomenon which may take place in the name of race, religion, gender, caste, colour and community. Such groups are denied of participation in the political, cultural, legal and economical spheres and they are pushed off to the margins. This exclusion leaves them in a helpless situation and leads to the stratification of the society, horizontally into higher and lower levels. The consequences of marginalization affect the life style of the marginalized group and sometimes it may lead to emotional hurt or grievance resulting in animosity towards the dominant group, and the group experiences an identity crisis. The Encyclopedia of Public Health defines marginalization as, "To be marginalized is to be placed in the margins, and thus excluded from the privilege and power found at the center." Merriam-Webster's online dictionary defines the term marginalize as, "to relegate to an unimportant, or powerless position within a society or group". (egyankosh 49)

The topic of marginalization encompasses the examination of socio-economic, political and cultural fields, where the underprivileged fight to receive access to utilize resources and seek participation in societal activities in all spheres.

In their article, *Some Principles of Stratification*, Kingsley Davis and Wilbert E. Moore, put forward the need of stratification for a society, and they argue that no society is “classless”.

If the rights and perquisites of different positions in a society must be unequal, then the society must be stratified, because that is precisely what stratification means. Social inequality is thus an unconsciously evolved device by which societies insure that the most important positions are conscientiously filled by the most qualified persons. Hence every society, no matter how simple or complex, must differentiate persons in terms of both prestige and esteem, and must therefore possess a certain amount of institutionalized inequality. (243)

To assist the smooth running of the social order of the society, where one generation is replaced by the other, social positions acquired by people in the society become a functioning mechanism and people are encouraged to execute the duties and responsibilities that go with the position. This could be the reason for the *varna* system which was in vogue in those days.

Giddens definition suits the context as he says, “Stratification can be defined as structured inequalities between different groupings of people” (Moore E. Wilbert and Kingsley Davis). Social inequalities in India are mostly based on religion, women, community, caste and power. All these phenomena are reflected in the life style of people which denotes the culture of that place, community, religion, caste, gender or race. Rajani Jairam defines marginalization in the words of Louis Wirth who considers a minority group as, “A group of people who, because of their physical or culture characteristics are singled out from others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collaborative discrimination” (20).

In most of the societies, the existing discrimination practices are accepted and consented upon by the sub-ordinate group, as they do not know that they are being victimized or sometimes, it happens to be a common experience to them.

The geographical, social, political, cultural and economical aspects of the time are to be analyzed as the reasons for the marginalization or social exclusion of some sects of the society. Marginalization is a multidimensional and historical phenomenon and it can occur in any manner, provided the conditions suit the dominant to subjugate the oppressed or the weaker sections of the society. Such conditions obstruct them from gaining access to cultural and intellectual knowledge patterns of the society. Gramsci's cultural hegemony represents that the dominant groups in society maintain authority by receiving the 'spontaneous consent' of the lower classes through negotiation of political and ideological accord which includes the dominant and subjugated groups.

The marginalized sections of the society possess some characteristic features such as apart from leading a subjugated life, they are bestowed with some distinct physical and cultural attributes which are not approved by the dominant class. Their collective conscious is observed in the sharing of a common identity and problems. A certain set of norms are framed regarding their identity and belongingness to the group. Marriages happen within the group. Marginalization is characterized by its complexity and transferable phenomenon which is associated with social status. During the times of the Mahabharata, caste played a major role apart from the Aryan and non-Aryan descent, which had a more crucial role in the establishment of kings, kingdoms and expansion of the territories. Caste system led to the perpetuation of inequality in Indian society. It is associated with the hierarchical alignment of people who possessed a common identity. It associated itself with the availability of natural resources and the occupations people pursued depending on the resources. Brahmins played the role of intellectuals, scholars and priests, Ksatriyas were the warrior clan, Vaisyas mostly took to cultivation and Sudras pursued various occupations according to the needs of the society. Every caste had its own identity and sect of principles to be followed. Thus, caste system in India also led to the establishment of an empirical idea of the hierarchy of occupations. Ram Sharan Sharma in his notable work on *Sudras in Ancient India: A Social History of the*

*Lower Order Down to Circa A.D. 600* mentions that the verses of the Mahabharata were originally 8800, enhanced to 24000 and then ultimately made to 1, 00,000 according to the 'social needs' of the society. He makes the statement keeping in view the day to day rituals, fertility rites and the process of reproduction which enforced the writer to update the story from time to time.

It has been noticed that caste system or inequality among people in society is not only the concern of India, but it has been a disquietening aspect all over the world. In France, a survey conducted by Stephen Fuchs (1981) identified 630 castes that comprised of mostly artisans who were untouchables. He considered that,

...the ancestors of the present low castes and outcastes were, on the whole, the artisans and manual workers in this culture. They performed the tasks of blacksmiths, porters, weavers and leather workers. They were well skilled in the arts, in singing, in playing musical instruments and dancing, in the composition of songs, poetry, legends and ballads” (40).

If this concept can be related to the jobs taken up by Sutas during the Mahabharata time, it is astonishing that Sutas and people of other low castes carried out the same work. “Carpenters, stone-dressers, brick-makers, mortar-raisers and cultivators. More than enough work for everyone. With what excitement and zeal they set about their tasks! The enthusiasm generated by the act of creating new things” (Parva 179). This speaks about people's active participation in the building of the society without any resentment.

Apart from the usual division of the society into Brahmin, Ksatriya, Vyasya and Sudra castes, there is also a reference to *Sutas* who formed a separate community and represented the illicit progeny of the *Ksatriyas*. Narrators were referred to as belonging to a separate *Suta* category who earned great respect from all cross-sections of the society. Vyasa and Ugrashrava belonged to this category who belonged to the tradition of the narrators of the epic.

In her research work entitled, '(Re) Examining Marginalized Characters: Caste And Gender In Select Retellings of the Mahabharata in recent Indian English Fiction', Tanvi Mohile quotes S. V. Ketkar who called the Mahabharata, the Ramayana and the *Puranas* as *Sauta* literature, 'literature belonging to the sutas, preserved and sung by the sutas, and perhaps largely composed by the sutas' (3-4) and James Fitzgerald described the Mahabharata as “the Veda of women and sudras” (185).

Children born to a *Ksatriya* man and a woman of lower caste are called *Sutas*. Most of the *Sutas* in *Parva* play important roles, living up to much humiliation and formed the single largest community in Hastinavati. Their occupation is mainly to serve the kings or to work as the charioteers. They report events, deliver messages and narrate stories of the greatness of the kings. They are supposed to be the confidants of the kings, act as advisors to them. Marginalization is spotted in the treatment of the king, they are never treated equal to the king, nor are they considered friends by him. Cultivation is their chief occupation and they serve the country during war time. *Sutas* follow the traditions of their ancestors, and the marriages are done among their own caste.

The *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* were probably composed and performed first in the interstices between engagements on a battleground, to an audience that probably consisted largely of Kshatriyas and miscellaneous camp followers. The first bards who recited it were a caste called Charioteers (*Sutas*), probably but not certainly related to the chariot drivers who appear frequently in narratives, ... Each charioteer would have gone into battle with one warrior as a combination chauffeur and bodyguard. And then at night, when all the warriors retired from the field and took off their armor and had their wounds patched and got massaged and perhaps drunk, the bards would tell the stories of their exploits as everyone sat around the campfires. Thus the Charioteer served not just as a driver but as a herald, friend, and confidant, providing the warrior with advice, praise and criticism. (Doniger 218, 219)

Rajani Jairam quotes Wing Leung in his paper on *Conservatism and Marginalization* which describes a marginal person as, “one who does not belong to the marginal man (dwells) at the margin of two cultures and two societies (and possesses) a marginal mentality with unresolved identity crisis” (20). *Sutas* undergo a lot of humiliation and insult as their life everyday centers around the *Ksatriyas*, and the royal treatment is denied to the former though one of their parents belongs to the *Ksatriya* caste. In every walk of life, they are sought after by the kings, but always look down upon them, and as such their birth makes them marginal relegating them to an insignificant status in the society, whereas their noble deeds and actions mark them as individuals of importance.

Vidura, Sanjaya, Yuyutsu and Karna --- these prominent men of the novel from the *Suta* community do display amazing consciousness combined with a rare acumen in matters of principles of governance, righteousness and management. The king can accept the *Suta* as his legitimate son by sniffing on the latter's forehead, which a king never does, for the fear of him becoming an heir to the throne. After the Kurukshetra war, after the death of all the Kauravas, only Yuyutsu, the son of Dhritarashtra born to a servant maid is left. But, he does not become the ruler of either Hastinavati or Indraprastha, he remains a minister at Indraprastha. In Karve's *Yuganta* also Yuyutsu finds a mention as “Yuyutsu the suta Dhritarashtra's own son--- got nothing” (68). There is a difference of opinion on Vidura being addressed as a *Suta*, as he is born to Vyasa and a servant maid. Among all the three, Dhritarashtra, Pandu, and Vidura, the last one is highly intelligent, hale and healthy. It is a discriminating factor that both the brothers are married to *Ksatriya* women; while Vidura is married off to Parashavi, born to King Devaka, a *Ksatriya* and a *Sudra* woman, where Bhishma plays the major role.

Vidura and Karna command high respect among the *Suta* community, the former for his knowledge on the principles of *Dharma* and the latter for his skills of archery. Vidura is fondly addressed as 'uncle' and Karna earns their reverence as 'Maharaja Karna', as he is made the king of Anga by Duryodhana as a result of the courage and nobility Karna possesses. Dhritarashtra seeks the association of Vidura to share his views, pains and pleasures and often abuses him of his low status. In spite of this, Vidura finds it that it is his *Dharma* to be at the beck and call of the king, not attaching any importance to his own wishes. Vidura serves his life-time in the palace of Dhritarashtra, for which,

He told himself, “When I tendered him unpalatable advice, how often had not Dhritarashtra called me a son of the servant-maid and asked me not to cross his threshold again? And how often had he not sent for me like this?” (Bhyrappa 729)

Duryodhana though is a self-conceited *Ksatriya*, to win the war he makes friendship with the *Suta* families. He allows them to be called his brothers, as only fourteen of them are born to his mother, the rest of the Kauravas are born to Dhritarashtra from his servant-maids. Yuyutsu understands this and develops contempt towards such an attitude. He opposes and rejects the way of the life *Sutas* are compelled to lead and experiences a mental turmoil. They are not allowed to live in the palace and their colony is built behind the palace. Their wives work as servant maids in the palace.

These creatures were denied even the opportunity of a *Vaisya* to cultivate his own land and enjoy a life of independence. And they were denied the status of a prince. If the child was a female, it became a servant-maid to a princess when she married, and allowed her husband to enjoy her body and produce children to perpetuate the *Suta* community. (Bhyrappa 589)

Vidura and Yuyutsu are the *Sutas* who had the courage to speak their mind, though it did not win the appreciation of the rulers. Vidura boldly announces his decision not to participate in the war and Yuyutsu being a Kaurava joins the Pandava camp. Sanjaya, another from the same community is the chief-narrator who narrates the incidents of the Kurukshetra war to the blind couple. He is suggested by Vidura to give an exact account of the war-front without any distortions, as the other way may perpetuate the thinking of the dominated class about the lower class.

Let them not get the impression that the *Sutas* are only cheap flatterers of the rulers. Let them know that we have the courage to speak out the truth, come what may. You know about Yuyutsu. He is a son produced by Maharaja Dhritarashtra, though through a servant-maid. He had the guts to tell even such a self-obsessed person like Duryodhana to his face whatever he thought was right and true. (Bhyrappa 719)

Karna is brought up in the caste of charioteers and bards, but learnt the art of *Ksatriyas*, the art of war. Karna is seen in *Parva* as a person who does not stick to caste and its conformities and always wants to come away from the clutches of the caste system, but he is always looked upon as a man belonging to a marginalized caste. It is because of Duryodhana he becomes dominant instead of dominated. He lives the life of a masked *Ksatriya* who is devoted to loyalty, service and kingship. It is Karna's low self-esteem that makes him vulnerable to the reverence offered by Duryodhana and put at stake all his principles and wisdom, in the guise of loyalty and friendship. Karna suffers for being brought up among the *Sutas*. He fondly cherishes the love of his foster parents and refuses to acknowledge Kunti as his mother for all the benefits he would get in life as the eldest Pandava. He acknowledges his father for encouraging him to become a world class archer,

Father used to say, "It is not enough to make bows like me, but you must learn to aim and shoot arrows accurately". It was his wish that I should rise above the status of mere charioteer---I who had *Ksatriya* blood without attaining a fully *Ksatriya* status, one who made bows but could not aspire to be an archer, one who designed chariots but did not become its master. He advised me, 'Child, I have spent all my life as a charioteer of King Dhritarashtra. You should never become anybody else's charioteer' (Bhyrappa 467-468).

Karna is denied education for being the son of a *Suta* and the rejection of Draupadi from being a part of her *Swayamvara* are the other well-known incidents from the life of Karna from the original text.

Vidura, Yuyutsu and Ekalavya are marginalized by the *Ksatriya* rulers and they are the victims of societal power dealings and master-slave dialectics. Bhyrappa makes them powerful by giving them voice as they announce their non-participation in the war. Vidura supporting Yuyutsu's decision, "Don't go stealthily. Go like a man after openly proclaiming that you find Duryodhana's cause unjust, and that you are joining the side you have judged to be more just. Confront, and never be a coward" (Bhyrappa 597).

Apart from these characters, there are also others like Keechaka, the younger brother of Sudheshna, Queen of king Virata, Tushta, the charioteer of Arjuna, Vajradhara, the charioteer and many others play significant roles in *Parva*.

The characters validate that though *varna* is received by birth, their actions make them glorious and eternal in the history of India. Marginalization, though denies the society from being an egalitarian one, the then society and the people, in the name of *Dharma*, followed the established principles. It has been observed that the caste system led to the establishment of peace and harmony in the society as people pursued occupations according to their *varna*. On the other hand, Krishna through his *Bhagavad Gita* conveys the principle that all men are born equal initially, and the caste differences in the society are brought in depending on the duties performed by them. He emphasizes that "*varna* is determined by temperament and vocation not by birth or heredity" (Glimpses of Divinity). It is only when one can come out of this illusion, that one can recognize the real truth. It is only the conduct of a person that determines his/her caste. Hence, the text, the Mahabharata raised some pertinent questions against *adharma*, or injustices met out by people in the name of caste and made place for some exemplary characters who made themselves ideal for the next generations by fighting against such social ills.

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