



## SUPERNATURAL ELEMENTS IN ADITI BANERJEE'S *THE CURSE OF GANDHARI*

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### ABSTRACT:

Myths are particular accounts focusing Gods- Goddesses, demi-Gods and supernatural beings and exceptional events in a time which is totally different from the normal human experience. The aim of this paper is an effort to analyse Banerjee's novel *The Curse of Gandhari* which is mainly concerned with supernatural elements. She focuses on feminism and many critics also examine the same in this work. Supernatural elements have also taken place but mostly ignored. The term 'supernatural' means a power or force beyond normal or humanness. Banerjee portrays many sages with supernatural powers but Gandhari alone ordinary female character in the novel possessing extraordinary power. These powers of cursing and blessing someone are the results of their hard tapasya. It is seen that those people who walk on path of dharma, gets boon but those who don't, gets curse. They use these powers for those who either please them or hurt them by their behaviour.

### KEYWORDS:

SUPERNATURAL ELEMENTS, REVISIONIST LITERATURE, MYTHOLOGY.

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### INTRODUCTION

Indian epics 'the Mahabharata' and 'the Ramayana' influence a large number of writers and exalt them to adopt some aspects for their writings. Aditi Banerjee's novel 'The Curse of Gandhari' is also one among the foremost popular retellings of Mahabharata. The novelist mainly describes the story from female point of view. In that Gandhari is seen as a helpless female character who blindfolded herself as a devoted and faithful wife and unable to stop the great war as a unsuitable mother. But this novel also witnesses a supernatural world in which marvellous events happen. This novel is enriched with supernatural elements. For instance, Gandhari, being a personality of miracle, has the implausible power to protect and guard her son by gazing and to curse even Lord Krishna. There are other incredible characters who get boon from sages like Satyavati who receives boon of fragrance from Sage Parasar, Kunti who gets boon of provoking gods and having sons from Sage Durvasa, Gandhari who obtains boon of having sons from Lord shiva, and Sanjaya who gets divya drishti that makes him ready to see past, present and future from Sage Dvaipayan.

The term supernatural deals with anything which is magical and beyond normal. Banerjee's novel *The Curse of Gandhari* displays supernatural power at the very

beginning when Gandhari remains together with her husband and Kunti within the forest. She goes to the river for bringing water for her husband. "She leaned over the surface of the water to wash her face... a blast of cold air pushed against her from beneath the water and her eyes flew open beneath the bondage" (Banerjee 4). She also hears from spirits of water saying, "Gandhari it is a time for you to die!".

Gandhari possesses a boon from Lord Shiva when he appears in her dream and asks for boon. She asks for a husband with same qualities as Shiva himself that he would make her happy as Parvati. Gandhari is not able to go forest for worshipping Shiva as Parvati did but every Monday she goes to Panjkora river and worships him as chanting his names, offering water from copper vessel and telling mantra of his name repeatedly until she would have his glimpse within the below water; only when she would eat or drink. After learning this, Bhishma comes to Gandhar and asks her father, "It is said that Shiva has given her the boon that she will bear one hundred sons (Banerjee 18). Attracted by this quality, he takes Gandhari with him to Hastinapur for marrying Dhritarashtra.

The birth of Bhishma Pitamaha is also having supernatural affects as her mother is river Ganga. Gandhari further

remarks that her mother drowns seven new born babies in the river because they have been received cursed to possess earthly life. The eighth child is Bhishma himself who has received this earthly life because his father saved him from drowning in the river. Gandhari also gets to realise that Bhishma has taught by Devas in the heaven.

Venerable one, they say that you learned from Brihaspati, the guru to the devas, himself. (Banerjee 47)

Banerjee further represents supernatural power when Satyawati reveals the reason of Dhritarashtra's blindness. When Satyawati has forced her daughters in law to perform *niyoga* together with his illegitimate child sage Dwaipayana. Ambika, one of her daughters in law, is closed her eyes because of his ugly appearance and his son born blind. Eventually, Ambika, other one, is feared him and have become pale and so that her son is born weak and pale.

One grandson ended up blind because one daughter in law couldn't bear the sight of my son; the other ended up a pale weakling because my other daughter in law shuddered in fright at my son's countenance. (Banerjee 52)

Satyawati also reveals her story to Gandhari that she is born from fish who conceived King Chedi's virya. When the King has gone for hunting in the dark forest and overcome with sexual desire and after satisfying himself, he has kept virya in leaves which is taken away by an eagle and other eagle has come to fight for leaves and is felled on river and eventually conceived by a fish. His adoptive father has caught and killed that fish and she is born human but smell remained with her. "... Then the fish was caught by the head fisherman my adoptive father. When he sliced open the belly of the fish, he found me there and I became his daughter" (Banerjee 55). But this smell is concerted in fragrance by Sage Parasara who is agreed to Satyawati's condition in return of sexual satisfaction. In

Dwapar yuga, sages have the power to curse or boon someone which is the result of their conducts. Another character of Kunti asks for a boon which will be needed the most in future and gradually gets the boon of having sons. It is so amazed to know that Sage Durvasa has the power to see anyone's future. Supernatural power of the boon receiving from Sage Durvasa enables Kunti to bear children from Devas. Similarly Sage Dwaipayana has given the blessings to Gandhari to have 100 sons. Madhavi S. Mahadevan draws unnatural event in her novel as the rishi Krishna Dwaipayana blessed Gandhari to have hundred sons "The sage had whispered secret mantras that, purportedly, gave rise to life inside the jars" (Mahadevan 206).

Banerjee has emphatically shown the characters of sages who play very important role in creating supernatural world. Sage Dwaipayana has given a boon of having hundred sons to Gandhari that seems very suspicious when she becomes pregnant and more than a year passes. In frustration, she unknowingly aborts her own children for whom she is waited desperately. Sage Dwaipayana suggests her that if she still wants to have these children and remarks, that this ball separates into 100 pieces and each

part should be placed separately in the jars after layering with oils and other herbal ointments into it. "Dwaipayana warned that the pots had to be guarded and watched over until the babies were ready to be born" (Banerjee 136). This event is also found in the book of *Indian Mythology* in which Devdutt Pattanaik has also shown this exceptional event. Gandhari is seen as bearing hundred sons at a time which is the outcome of the blessings given by Sage Vyasa. After nine months, these hundred pieces turned into hundred sons through the chanting and blessing the pot by Sage Vyasa.

The sage Vyasa had blessed Gandhari that she would bear a hundred sons...Distraught, she approached Vyasa, who asked Gandhari to cut the ball of flesh into a hundred pieces and place each piece in a jar of clarified butter. (Pattanaik 172)

Banerjee has depicted Shakuni as an evil spirit who is able to produce an unnatural-affects in the world by using his black magic. He tries to convince her sister, Gandhari, in his plan of destroying Kuru clan for forcing her to marry the blind one and for killing their family. When Gandhari tells him to abandon his plan that Kauravas are no one but her sons and she herself is a Kuru Queen. He would fail in his plan because Pandavas are sons of Gods and gradually he remarks, "Sister, I'll tell you- these dice, they are special dice... Sister they are made with our father's bones! I made them myself." (Banerjee 186)

In this novel, Banerjee further implies something unnatural and strange about the Indraprastha palace. The division of the land between Kauravas and Pandavas is completely unequalled. Kauravas get Hastinapur palace on other side, Pandavas get barren forest which is converted into beautiful palace by Mayasura with the help of Krishna. To show the unusual beauty that earth seems like water and water seems as earth. Duryodhana and other Kauravas are invited to see the beauty of Indraprastha palace in inauguration ceremony. While visiting the place, Duryodhana accidentally falls into the pool which is appeared as floor to walk on. "Duryodhana had tripped and fallen into a pool, an illusory body of water created by the divine architect, Mayasura" (Banerjee 196). Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni depicts the beauty of this same extraordinary magical in her novel *The Palace of Illusions*. Like corridors are lighted only by the gems, assembly halls are filled with trees, walls are built with crystal that make anyone bump into the wall because of its transparency, and marble- floors are appeared as pools. That is why they call it the palace of illusions.

Several times we stepped into pools that were disguised as stretches of marble flooring and ruined our elaborate court attire. (Divakaruni 146-147)

Banerjee draws unnatural events but religious and supernatural allusions in the novel. When Draupadi is insulted and humiliated by Kauravas before elders in the Kuru Sabha. She is found herself helpless and tries to question the law of society which proves futile. She starts chanting the name of God Krishna when Dussasana tries to

disrobe her in public. The more he pulls, the more gathers at her feet. There seems to be a presence of an invisible spiritual being in the Kuru Sabha that can be perceived in the lines.

Beyond the periphery of her eye, the hand of Duhshasana was tugging at Draupadi's single rough-spun cotton cloth, pulling it away from her body, but before her body could be a revealed, another garment took it's place. (Banerjee 210)

After this insulting scene, it is very clear for all that war would have been happened. Sage Dvaipayana comes to Dhritarashtra, the King of Hastinapur, with the suggestion that it would be great harm for all. The King is the one who has the power to stop but when he shows helplessness before his son's will. Sage Dvaipayana gets angry and tries to boon Dhritarashtra to see the ruin of Hastinapur himself. But he stops him by saying that he is not able to recognise his sons and Pandavas. Eventually, he gives the boon of divya-drishti to Sanjaya so that he can able to witness the war even from the palace. Sanjaya explains each movement of the battlefield of Kurukshetra but Gandhari does not want to hear this news about the war.

The novel presents a scene in which Gandhari wants her son, Duryodhana, to stand nude before her. Duryodhana agrees at his mother's command and he wants to come unclothed before her mother but in the mid way Krishna interrupted him. Krishna suggests him to cover at least waist. Duryodhana finds his recommendation correct that it would be shameful to go completely naked before mother. He covers waist and thigh area of his body part which is remained unseeable and goes to meet mother Gandhari. Gandhari says, "I protected you with my eyes, everywhere... But the cloth you wore blocked my vision, so your thighs are vulnerable while the rest of you has become invincible" (Banerjee 264). But after using all her power which she has gained by hard tapsaya, Duryodhana's thighs are left unprotected. In the battlefield, Krishna reminds the oath of smashing Duryodhana's thighs on which he has commanded the helpless and hopeless Draupadi to sit.

Then, in his rage, he smashed his mace below Duryodhana's waist and ripped his thighs apart mercilessly. Duryodhana's groans thundered as he writhed in pain. (Kane 293)

Gandhari as a strong character who not only has gazing power but also enable to curse Lord Krishna. After knowing that it is Krishna who is responsible for death of her son. Once Duryodhana is interrupted by Krishna and remains unprotected. Further, in the Great war, Duryodhana is killed by Bheema because Krishna points his waist that remain unsecured. And it is against the law of mace fighting that anyone cannot target their thigh. She is outraged at this unjust act. When the winners come to meet Duryodhana's mother, Gandhari who is extremely angry at their conducts of killing all her sons. She finds Krishna guilty for violent death of her sons and curses him by saying, that your clan would also be destroyed within thirty-six years.

Just as you have brought the ruination of our clan... so too, in thirty-six years, your entire clan shall be destroyed from within. (Banerjee 278)

### CONCLUSION

Aditi Banerjee has beautifully portrayed the characters of Gandhari, Kunti, Satyawati, Bhishma, Sage Dvaipayana who have some extravagant power. These characters are not simple as laymen that can be easily seemed in their unnatural born. The author makes use of magical elements in the novel which bring difference between common people and God. If the characters are portrayed as normal human then they are not seemed as ideals for common people. They view them as normal human beings and do not worship them or learn from them. These supernatural values make characters much more alive than ever.

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