

Understanding the Meaning of Life in the Life of Madhavi

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this research paper is to understand the psychological dynamics of a character of the Vedic era. **Method:** The character has been studied through content analysis of a holistic single case study method (Yin, 2003). **The character:** The story of Madhavi was narrated in a brief in the Udyoga Parva of Mahabharatha. She was a daughter of a king Yayati. She agreed to marry kings, a way to get money to fulfill the indebted Brahmin student Galava. In the process, Madhavi married to four kings, each wedlock, got unlocked after she delivers a baby as per the contract. However, she did not marry any person during her self-choice ceremony, but chose the forest and leaves to the forest as an ascetic. She comes back into the picture, when her father Yayati needed support to go back to the heaven, which she fulfilled and made her children to do so. **Discussion:** The paper attempts to explore the underlying psycho-social and socio-cultural dynamics of incidents in the life of Madhavi through analyzing the narratives holistically. She showed matured adult behavior through asserting herself as an individual as well as supported the collective through contractual marriages. Finally, she was neither the victim of self-assertion nor the collective, but emerges herself as an epitome of values, finding the meaning in her every deed as well as in her life. **Conclusion:** The narrative of Madhavi looks like an exploited character, but holistic analysis of her behavior shows that it was the finest character for understanding the self oriented behavior in finding the meaning while asserting for Self and nurturing the cause of collective without losing her identity.

Keywords: Narrative Analysis, Mother Archetype, Meaning Of Life, Self-Actualization, Story Of Madhavi

Background

Madhavi was not an epic character of Mahabharatha. It was neither a sub tale, it was framed into assist the other characters. When Krishna and Bhishma failed in their negotiation with Dhuryodana for making peace with the Pandavas, Narada pitches in (M.B.Udyoga Parva, Sec.106). Narada observes Dhuryodana is a person of obstinacy; Does not listen to a friend's

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counsels. Narada says obstinacy and adamant nature is not good and explains with cases belongs to the earlier generations. In citing how obstinacy disgraces Galava, he narrates this story, probably belongs to Vedic/pre-Vedic era.

METHOD

Any incident of non contemporary nature uses historical method as a research strategy. However, in this paper, we use a contemporary understanding of the phenomena in question; will be put in the ancient context. Nevertheless, we do neither know the phenomena, nor do comprehend the context in totality. At times, we retrospectively understand the phenomena in the context not in a linear manner, provides a holistic understanding about the phenomena and context together. So, we are using case study design rather than the historical method in answering our research inquiry. Assertiveness and nurturing, two qualities in the background of other values, which all facilitates the self-actualizing tendencies of Madhavi has been studied through content analysis of a holistic single case study method (Yin, 2003). The distinctiveness of Madhavi's character is highly complex, cannot understand through one sense or theory of human personality or behavior. It requires panoramic, diverse perspectives and must be inclusive of all characters within the context. This could be achieved through the holistic case study than any other methodology.

Madhavi: A transaction of commodity or the transaction of personal choice

When Yayati was not in a position to offer 800 white steeds with one ear black horses as alms to Galava, a disciple of Sage Viswamitra. He was disappointed and looked for other options. Here, some critics say that Yayati's decision is due to fear of the Brahmin's curse (Bala Srinivasan, 2014). However, it is evident from the narrative that Yayati' was aware of such possibility, but his present decision is based on the principle of a giver, a generous value, his race inherited for that he became famous, as well as he was a last resort for the guests to get the alms on the earth. Then he suggests distressed Galava to take her daughter Madhavi. Yayati narrates Madhavi as a person who could prompt every virtue in others (M,B,Udyoga Parva, Sec. 115). Yayati did not mean to take her and go away like an ordinary saleable commodity, but a facilitator to Galava for accomplishing virtues in everyone she connects. When Yayathi was saying, 'she is capable of prompting every virtue', He might have had the confidence in her righteous behavior as well as her capability to encourage righteous behavior in others. Adding to that, Yayati had a (sole) desire to have a daughter's son by her. If she was sold/ bartered, Yayati could not have any right on the sold property.

Madhavi in the eyes of the beholder

When King Yayati was narrating to Galava about Madhavi, he says that she was incomparable and most sought by Gods and Asuras also reveal that Madhavi was not only competent to attract anybody through her virtues, but also she was the most beautiful person of that time, where a king or a prince could not reject her on any basis. Harvashwa also appraises Madhavi as per the guidelines or norms of the time as deserving to be an appropriate woman to give birth to a royal child, who could continue his lineage, goes well, more or less with the evolutionary psychology theory on physical attractiveness and sexual

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selection (Barber, 1995) and some of these criteria of evaluation for attractiveness of a woman has been linked to good cardiovascular health, longevity and a capacity to give birth to healthy and successful offspring (Lents, 2017). Overall, Madhavi fulfills both the criteria of evolutionary psychology, where in one sense, she is the most eligible and legitimate partner for sexual selection and also due to her promoting virtues in other people, where social survival is higher in the community or contextual group that makes her would be the preferred person at any cost. Late the sage Vishwamitra also says in such a way that he would have compromised his fee, if he would have gotten her before, which shows that it was not only about physical attractiveness, but also her qualities might have influenced those people in appraising her.

Filial duty

For the query about Yayati asking permission of Madhavi, whether she is going or not, becomes insignificant in the context. Because parents did have the authority to ask or request from their offspring. However, in many cases, the son or daughter used to follow father's saying more than anyone else like Rama of Bhargava, Rama of Dasharatha as well as Bharatha-Kaikayi (V.R.Ayodhya Kanda, Ch.18), Shantha of Romapada (V.R. Balakanda, Ch.9) and Bhishma or Devaratha (M.B.AdiParva, Sec. 100). It was more of a principle than exploitation. Even in some other cases, the unreasonable demand was not met by their children and got consequences, like in another context, Yayathi himself asks his sons to exchange his decrepitude, when they refuse, he curses them. Jamdagni also curses his sons, when they did not obey to kill their mother. These incidents reveal that the intention behind the particular request, context and consequences of the action, which upholds the cultural values matters than just an action.

Marriage-Parental choice and self-choice

It was evident in Sage Ruchika's case (M.B. Anushasanika Parva, Sec.4), the king Gadhi did not accept the demand of Ruchika immediately. He asked Ruchika to show the competency to take care of the princess and once it was evident, he had given the princess-daughter. It was the same in the case of Sage Agasthya also. Someone could argue that the kings were afraid of Brahmins curse, if not meeting their demands, like in Viswamithra and Durvasa case. However, these were exceptional cases. Many kings thought that Brahmins were poor and not able to take care of their daughters (M.B. Anushasanika Parva, Sec. 2). In many cases kings did not give in to the demands of Brahmana's or put some conditions (M.B. Anushasanika Parva, Sec.4;). It is also evident in Galava's response before leaving Pratisthana that he will again see Yayati that clearly indicates that the transaction is unfinished and he is committed to come back. For the query that Yayati was pushing Madhavi to have sexual relationship with many people, is again false because in those times, it is the woman, who used to initiate the conjugal relationship than men. It is observed in the story of Sharmistha, Madhavi's mother or stepmother, who had desired to have children from Yayathi, when she reached the age of menarche (M.B.Adi Parva, Sec. 81-82). In another incident, when old Yayathi approached Ashrubindumathi, daughter of Rati, Ashrrubindhumathi did not give her consent to marry Yayathi immediately, even though he

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was a great king (note that Devayani, daughter of Shukracharya, also taken initiative and proposed King Yayati, before these incidents). Ashrubindumati put certain conditions like he has to shed his old age and also her son should get the heir of his kingdom (Bhumi Kanda, Padma Purana). In many other cases, Damayanthi (M.B.VanaParva, Sec.53-79), Shakunthala (M.B.Adi Parva, Sec.71-74) were clear in their position with respect to a sexual relationship and incident shows that they stood up for themselves than exploited. It shows that the Vedic women or post Vedic women did indeed have the say when it comes to the sexual relationship as in Madhavi's case.

During their interaction with Haryashwa of Ikshwaku at Ayodhya, where Haryashwa was unable to give 800 steeds as Dakshina for Galava, it is Madhavi, who took control of the situation and suggests Galava that

A reciter of *Brahma* granted me a boon that I would after each delivery, be a maiden again. Give me away, therefore, to this king, accepting his excellent steeds. In this way, full eight hundred steeds may be obtained by thee from four kings in succession, and I also may have four sons. Collect thou the wealth intended for thy preceptor, in this way. Even this is what I think. It depends, however, on thee, O Brahmana, as to how thou shouldst act (M.B.Udyoga Parva, Sec. 116).

This sentence clearly indicates that it was Madhavi, who was an independent, self-controlled and decisive woman. A slave or submissive woman, whatsoever of her intelligence, due to conflicting emotions, could not express like this. She was not given to Galava in assisting his goal, but it was probably a combined decision (Yayati and Madhavi) to follow the sage Galava and free him from the debt. The analysis can be concluded that Madhavi was not a slave or an exploited woman and she was capable of exercising her thoughts and opinions freely. Was she a sex slave or machine? Our interpretation concludes that she was neither a sex slave nor a machine. She tells Galava that 'I also may have four sons' reveals that she also wanted to have children and have equal rights on those begot children from her contractual marriage.

Boon to be a virgin

Here, the author of Mahabharatha, Krishna-Dwaipayana says through Madhavi that she got a boon to be a virgin after every childbirth is more a psychological in nature (Srinivas Rao, 2011). Our analysis is also similar and extended. It is a natural tendency for a woman to feel for a child as well as for the husband after childbirth. However, Madhavi was distinct in this context; she could detach from the child and her husband without much emotional disturbance. This kind of detachment, we could observe in Apsara women, probably due to their nature of the assigned work and where they need to continue to be virgins. Madhavi, after 'duly wedded' to Haryashwa and borne a baby boy, called later as Vasumanas, leaves him after Galava returns to Ayodhya to take her back. She goes with him as decided earlier without going through the emotional disturbance for the newborn child and her husband. However, she had a feeling for the loss, which was observed in the Galava's expression 'grieve not' to her (symbolically he was empathetic to Madhavi). She does the same thing

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with Divodasa of Kashi and Ushinara of Bhoja kingdom. In the case of Renuka, wife of Jamadagni, was cursed by Sage Jamdagni for emotional involvement for a very short time for 'other person'. This kind of involvement is natural, but probably not accepted by the social mores of the Vedic era. This can be attributed to keeping their family tree and genealogy pure and not 'mixed' by others. The purity of the genealogy was ascertained by a woman than men; they are the 'carriers of the race than men and do not want women to have more sexual freedom, where the man could not know the offspring belonged to him 'biologically' or others. (Horne, 2004).

Physical non-virginity was a necessary criterion to be a wife and consequently bear the dignified child during Vedic period is not clear. However, the way Madhavi interfered in the transaction reveals that the non-virginity may be an issue and she had to bring a special condition, where, the boon was incurred on her, the boon provides a special 'provision to be a virgin' after every childbirth along with the side, shows Madhavi's psychological make-up; her capacity to be detached and ready to involve newly with the new relationship, wanted to be on her own so that she could continually support for common cause, her willingness to interfere and change the circumstances in favor of Sage Galava. Social acceptance for all her children was normal, as showcased in their social status and religious merit they got. At the individual level, The boon is a power of supernatural forces, a high ranking religious priest, where the subject is not ordinary, symbolically represents a psychological condition, which shows the individual's extraordinary-unique personal quality or psychological competency, capability and behave in the manner, which otherwise may not be normal personal-social behavior. The reason could be that the so called variation in the normalcy should not be made as a normal social behavior, where the practice becomes common and lead to chaos in the familial-social integrity. So Madhavi wanted that special status, or power to promote her interested altruistic social behavior (Kirkpatrick, 1999), where she helps four families to continue their family tree in the socially accepted manner. Adding to that, the incident of the boon was brought to the notice of the relevant people by Madhavi herself than others, reveals that it was her personal choice and willingness to help the distressed Galava that provided additional fame for her and also saved four distinct families from the verge of distinction. We also need to notice that the personal qualities and values Madhavi is held at this stage became instrumental in her self-actualizing tendencies in her later life.

Marital life

Madhavi leads a normal marital life like many other noteworthy couples of the Vedic era. The author of Mahabharatha gives many examples to showcase that. Here, all the couples were not of Vedic era, and inserted later by some scribes. The point is many of the couples mentioned here were incidental only to make the readers feel that the Madhavi's marital life was also of a significant and worthy and as good as others. She had a fulfilled marital life, within this contractual marriage, where both the couples enjoyed their intimacy and affection with each other.

Swayamvara incident

As Madhavi already enjoyed fruitful marital life, she might not want to get into again, but move in the higher level of personal achievement, to be fulfilled and to find the meaning in her life, which is a state of self-actualization (Maslow, 1970). So her self-choice must be different than other normal princesses. Madhavi went with her brothers and father to the hermitage near the confluence of Ganga and Yamuna. She did not choose any prince or king, but selected the forest. She chose a simple, austere life and continues to live in the forest with a deer. She gained a lot of virtues there. The incident did not reveal angry or dejected Madhavi, She is neither the rebel. In this incident, Madhavi wanted to earn more virtues, which many sages do, after some time in grihastha life style like Viswamitra, Agasthya and Ruchika. However, did not want to disgrace her father through saying that she did not want to marry, or not marrying may have some social sanction to be an ascetic person (some rituals can only be performed by a married person and some by brahmacharini's. It is neither similar to Vanaprastha, where they end their life, nor sanyasa, a complete detached life of the material world. Madhavi comes back in the later Vajapeya sacrifice scene and continues her role as a daughter and mother. The four children of Madhavi revered her, which was evident in their interaction with her at the sacrifice, where she was accidentally happened to be there. She was not new to them, even though she left them soon after the delivery of the child, shows that there must be some interaction has been happening between them and they had a positive opinion towards her and they add to it in their expression that she deserves to command them shows that she had a higher place in their mind as a morally bound mother.

The author talked about purposeless wandering, which is not same as in the cases of emotionally disturbed or helpless person. It is more to do with her Brahmacharya austere life, where she did not limit herself to hermitage or Ashrama. She was moving from places to places with full awareness about herself is evident in the lines 'wandering with the deer in forests destitute of lions and tigers, in deserts free from the forest-conflagration, and in thick woods, that maiden, leading the life of a wild doe, earned great religious merit by the practice of *Brahmacharya* austerities'. An angry or frustrated person could not earn all those merits. The sages lose their earned virtues, if they get into any of the six qualities-Arishadvarga's (meta pathologies?) and indulge in it. The similar thing has been theorized by Maslow in his self actualization tendencies, where the person is motivated and guided by Being-values, which are intrinsic values rather than a quest for goal objects (1970).

In the Vajapeya sacrifice

When Yayathi was hesitant to take the virtues of those four kings, it was Madhavi, who solves the problem saying 'they are her sons and his grandsons'. And clarifies that he has every right to have his share in their virtues. The clarity in her thinking and expression reveals that she was free from any kind of disturbance and fully in her control and keen to help the needy Yayathi. She also gives half of her virtue to him, keeping her high in the austere merits. The way Madhavi related to her father and then her children clearly shows that Madhavi was nurturing the legacy of values, which were increasing the value of collective integrity, harmony and well-being, but not losing herself and her identity as a

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woman. The recent study on the moral values are evolutionarily advantageous has been revealed (Price, 2015) shows that the reasons behind the reverence of Madhavi by the people and the society, for upholding the values. We see in the Madhavi an assertive person, who kept her integrity and values, a fulfilled individual, who gained all virtues and committed to her duties as a daughter and prompted four dynasties to keep the virtues. In the end, Madhavi has not met a tragic end like many other women mentioned in the epic. She was a symbol of mother archetype-*Kshamaya dharithri*, depicted in the epics. She lead a life, equal to any man or woman, who earns respect through her own committed values and action, she gave a different meaning to her life, a person of self-actualized and transcended woman-heroine.

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