



## SHEDDING LIGHT ON SURYAPUTRA

*Breaking Contemporary Perceptions Around Karna by Referring Ami Ganatra's Mahābhārata Unravalled*

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**Abstract :** This research paper dives into the character of Karna in the Mahābhārata, comparing Vyāsa's original portrayal with the contemporary beliefs and perceptions. This study challenges the prevalent notions and aims to provide a deeper understanding about Karna's true nature, by analyzing the facts presented in the book, 'Mahābhārata Unravalled: Lesser-Known Facets of a Well-Known History' by Ami Ganatra. This paper examines common contemporary perceptions, like Karna's caste-based discrimination and his moral and ethical integrity, and evaluates them using facts and citations from Mahābhārata Unravalled. By delving into the subtle details and exploring the importance of this comparative analysis, this research paper aims to enhance our understanding about Karna's character and its relevance in today's era. It highlights the importance of distinguishing between truth and fiction when studying historical figures, encouraging a more analytical of the Mahābhārata.

**Key Words –** Karna, Dharma, Adharma, Suta, caste, perception, debunk

### I. INTRODUCTION

**The Mahābhārata**, often acclaimed as one of the greatest epics in human history, is a mesmerizing tale that encompasses profound philosophical teachings, intricate family dynamics, and epic battles. With its roots deeply embedded in ancient Indic knowledge systems, **Mahābhārata** serves as a timeless repository of wisdom and moral and ethical dilemmas that continue to captivate audiences across generations. The deep emotions and inspirations, the **dharma sankatas**, faced by the characters in the **Mahābhārata** are so relatable and real that even 5,000 years later it still inspires authors, social scientists and us. Spanning generations, it narrates the story of two family branches, the **Pāndavas** and the **Kauravas**, locked in a fierce struggle for power, righteousness, and the ultimate victory of good over evil. Filled with a diverse combo of characters, divine interventions, and dramatic twists, the **Mahābhārata** stands as a testament to the complexities of human nature and the eternal battle between **dharma** and **adharma**. As we dive into the depths of this epic, we unravel a treasure trove of wisdom, guiding us to navigate the intricacies of life, relationships, and the pursuit of truth.

Exploring the intricate character of **Karna**, one of the most intriguing figures in Indian epic literature, requires a comprehensive analysis of his portrayal in **Vyāsa's Mahābhārata** and the misplaced facts and conclusions about his character, which may be a result of later adaptations of the epic. This research paper aims to compare and contrast the real character of **Karna** as depicted by **Vyāsa**, keeping the book *Mahābhārata Unravalled: Lesser-known Facets of a Well-known History*, authored by **Ami Ganatra**, as the primary reference, with the contemporary perceptions held by individuals today. By studying the original epic text alongside the common perception, we seek to gain insights into the evolution and reinterpretation of **Karna's** character, throwing light on the potential deviations, amplifications, and reinterpretations offered by the influencing factors and cultural shifts.

For the purpose of conveying the correct pronunciations of names, I have used the diacritic ā in Sanskrit nouns and names that have an 'aa' (□) sound and the names ending in 'a' without the diacritic are pronounced as □. For example, Arjuna is to be read as □□□□□□.

### II. INTRODUCING MAHĀBHĀRATA UNRAVELLED: LESSER-KNOWN FACETS OF A WELL-KNOWN HISTORY

'Mahābhārata Unravalled: Lesser-Known Facets of a Well-Known History' by Ami Ganatra is a distinctive literary work that takes readers on an engaging journey through the epic tale of the Mahābhārata. Ami Ganatra mentions in her work that the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyana have been called itihāsa (iti hāsa: thus it has been), the history of our ancient Indian Civilization. According to Ami Ganatra, for a story of such prominence as the Mahābhārata, it is very important to know the facts as they were mentioned by Veda Vyāsa, from the authentic sources available in contemporary times. That is the very purpose of this book.

By the medium of her book, Ami Ganatra has made a genuine effort to throw light on some frequently asked questions, debunking some myths and add not-so-well-known facets of personalities and relationships in the Mahābhārata. Some questions which she has answered are:

Who narrated the version of the Mahābhārata that is known to us today?

Was 'caste' the reason for Karna's downfall? Was he always discriminated against because of his caste?

Why was Arjuna given so much limelight and love?

Why was Yudhishtira called Dharmarāja?

What happened after the Mahābhārata war ended?

The primary reference for the book is the *महाभारत* by Gita Press, Gorakhpur, the edition with Sanskrit text and Hindi translation. The Pune-based Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute's *Critical Edition of Mahabharat*, also referred as BORI CE, and Kisari Mohan Ganguli's English translation *The Mahabharat of Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa* have also been referred to by the author.

### III. CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF KARNA'S CHARACTER IN VYĀSA'S MAHĀBHĀRAT

Karna was a very strong and brave character of the Mahābhārata. He was capable and ambitious. Karna was the son of Surya deva and Kunti, who being an unwed mother, put him in a basket and let it float away in a river. The basket was found in the city of Champa in Anga desh by Adhiratha and Rādhā, who were from the Suta community. Karna was born with a natural kavacha, a golden armour, and kundala, a pair of golden earrings. Anga desh was the janapada, often translated as district, ruled by Karna's foster father, Adhiratha. It was under allegiance to Hastināpur. Karna grew up amongst all the amenities and was later sent to Dronāchārya's āshram to gain expertise in warfare and scriptures. It was here he met Duryodhana and their jealousy for the Pāndavas brought them closer to each other.

Karna always believed that he was not getting the recognition he should otherwise receive only because everyone was biased towards Arjuna. The war at Kurukshetra was undoubtedly a result of his ambition. In her book, *Mahābhārata Unravalled*, Ami Ganatra mentions:

*"While introducing the Mahābhārata to Rishi Shaunak and his students in Naimishāranya, Ugrashravā Sauti says, 'Duryodhana was a huge tree of rage. Karna was the trunk of this tree, Shakuni its branches and Duhshāsana its fruit. Dhritarāshtra was the root of this tree.'"* (A Friendship of Doom, p. 99)

Throughout his life, Karna showed jealousy towards Arjuna. Whenever the Kaurava elders would insist Duryodhana to return Pāndavas' wealth and kingdom back to them, Karna always jumped in the scene and not only did he stoke Duryodhana's false sense of confidence but also disrespected the Kaurava elders like Bhishma and Kripāchārya. Karna always boasted about his valour and his acquisition of the Brahmāstra from Parashurāma, although done deceitfully, but when it was the time to practically show his strength and bravery, he was always routed by Arjuna. In one such incident of the Battle of Virāta, Arjuna decimated the entire Kaurava army, including Karna, not once but multiple times.

In Draupadi's swayamvara, he was one amongst the warriors who could not even manage to tie the string to the bow and perhaps enraged by this, at the game of dice, surpassing all the lines of decency, he called Draupadi a prostitute and justified her being pulled by her hair and brought into the hall covered in just a single piece of garment. He, however, did not stop at this and provoked Duhshāsana to disrobe Draupadi.

He never let Duryodhana settle for any negotiations and always pushed him for a war with the Pāndavas. But when it was time to choose between himself and Duryodhana, he always kept himself ahead. For example, Karna had a self-imposed oath of never denying anything asked of him, if a seeker asked for it after he has performed his morning rituals. One such morning, Indra, disguised as a Brāhmin, approached Karna and asked for his kavacha and kundala. He was expecting Indra as Surya, his biological father, had forewarned him. The occurrence of the war had been finalised by then. These kavacha and kundala could have protected him during the war, making it difficult for his opponents to kill him, and could have helped the Kaurava side in the war. Despite knowing this he foolishly gave them away in charity to Indra. Another time he decided to opt out of the war just because he had an ego tussle with Bhishma, stating that he will join only after Bhishma's downfall so that Bhishma, being the commander-in-chief, does not get credit for his warfare skills. Ami Ganatra, in the chapter, 'A Friendship of Doom', in *Mahābhārata Unravalled* has said: *"All this while, Karna had opposed tooth and nail any attempt at peace with the Pāndavas. He desperately wanted the war to happen. A full-fledged war would be his only opportunity to prove his superiority over Arjuna and repay the debt of Duryodhana's friendship. Yet, his claims of doing only that which would be in Duryodhana's interest rang empty when the choice was between his ego and his friend's victory."* (p. 125)

Overall, Karna was a fierce and valorous warrior, no doubt, but he had a major flaw of being imprudent in his speech and constant bragging. His lack of restraint with words had angered the Kaurava elders many times, both on and off the battlefield. On every such occasion, Duryodhana had to intervene to settle the matters. Karna always exactly said that which pleased Duryodhana and went a step ahead and insulted Bhishma, Dronāchārya, Kripāchārya, Vikarna and all others whenever their statements were not to Duryodhana's liking. The issues of being right or wrong and ethical or unethical mattered little to Karna. None of his actions - his humiliation of Draupadi, giving away his kavacha and kundala to Indra to upkeep the reputation of his generosity, his staying out of the Kurukshetra war for the first ten days due to an ego tussle with Bhishma and his continuous stoking of Duryodhana's rage to make the war inevitable against the wishes of everyone else - were in Duryodhana's favour.

#### IV. CONTEMPORARY PERCEPTIONS ABOUT KARNA'S CHARACTER

In today's times, most individuals consider Karna to be the most tragic and unfortunate character of the Mahābhārata. He is believed to possess much more strength than Arjuna because he could not have been defeated by Arjuna without the help of Shree Krishna and Arjuna's biological father, Indra. Individuals look up to him for possessing all the qualities distributed among the five Pāndavas and believe that he was a man of great ethical and moral values.

Throughout his life, Karna is believed to have suffered utter humiliation and disgrace. Everyone looked down upon him as he was from a low caste by birth. Even Draupadi is said to have rejected him at her swayamvara for being a 'Suta putra', due to which people justify he humiliating her at the game of dice.

The very idea that Karna was disregarded for being a 'Suta putra' builds an image of a casteist ancient Indian society in people's minds. They believe that the Sutas, belonging to the lower strata of the society, were oppressed and discriminated by the higher castes. According to them, over a thousand times Karna had to face insults in the name of his low caste. To mention a few nuances, Dronāchārya refused to impart him the knowledge of warfare skills and scriptures owing to his caste; Draupadi did not allow him to participate in her swayamvara and insulted him in front of all based on his caste; Bhishma did not allow him to participate in the Kurukshetra war until he himself was fighting due to his low caste.

His character has been universally praised for his charity and he has been conferred upon with the title 'Dānveer Karna'. He did not let anyone return empty handed from his abode. Kunti, his biological mother, is believed to have taken the undue advantage of this quality of Karna and he helplessly promised her about not killing any Pāndava except Arjuna in the Kurukshetra war.

People today perceive that Karna also tried his best to dissuade Duryodhana from the war, especially when Shri Krishna himself went as a messenger to Hastināpur to make a final attempt at peace. There he conveyed that the Pāndavas were ready to settle for just five villages for averting the war. Karna too, among others, is believed to have advised Duryodhana for settling with this suggestion. But Duryodhana is adamant to wage a war against the Pāndavas and Karna eventually supports him out of his loyalty for his friend.

To summarise, Karna is believed to possess all the potencies required to shine in life and make an identity of his own but he was not able to accomplish this because of his inferior ranking. He was unable to elevate himself from that position and neither did the higher strata of the society let him rise. Only after meeting Duryodhana, he is believed to have been garnered some honour as Duryodhana accepted him as his friend and made him 'Anga Rāja', the king of Anga Desh. He is believed to be a puppet in the hands of destiny and many see him as a tragic hero and feel sympathetic for his disadvantaged upbringing and struggles with acceptance by the society.

#### V. DEBUNKING CONTEMPORARY PERCEPTIONS ABOUT KARNA

In this section, we will compare and contrast Vyāsa's depiction of Karna with the contemporary beliefs about his character. I have presented this part in a point wise format, mentioning each contemporary perception about Karna, followed by debunking that perception using facts and citations from the book Mahābhārata Unravelled.

1. The most critical perception about Karna is that his low caste was the reason for his downfall and he was always disfavoured due to his caste, with the episodes of Draupadi rejecting him and calling him a 'Suta putra' at her swayamvara and Dronāchārya refusing to accept him as his student, cited to prove this point.

According to me, having clarity about the Suta community in the Mahābhārata is a prerequisite for having a clear understanding against this perception.

The progenies of a Kshatriya father and a Brāhmin mother made up the Suta community. One of the main occupations of the Sutas were being Sārthis, meaning charioteers, of the warriors in a battle. In today's times people equate this job of Sārthi with the modern-day drivers. The Sārthis were not mere drivers but they were required to be equally brave and have equal expertise in war strategy and warfare as the warriors fighting in the battlefield. Along with that, they were required to have a thorough understanding of the battlefield and the body language of the opponent as well as the warrior they were driving. They played the role of a guide in the war and made sure the warrior they were driving stayed safe and motivated.

The Mahābhārata mentions that Arjuna asks Shri Krishna to be his Sārthi in the Kurukshetra war, which otherwise would have been blasphemous if being a Sārthi was a low-level profession.

Additionally, Sutas were also employed as story tellers, history keepers and ministers in royal courts. Many of them were warriors and commanders too. One of the Suta warriors was Keechak, the commander of King Virāta's forces of Matsya Desh, where the Pāndavas spent the last year of their exile in disguise. Keechak is mentioned to have made indecent propositions to Draupadi, of which the latter complains to King Virāta, who being too dependent on Keechak, is unable to deliver her justice. This example of Keechak is an evidence that being a Suta did not deprive anyone of opportunities in warfare.

The other famous Sutas in the Mahābhārata are:

- a. Sanjay, the narrator of the Bhagvad Gitā and the Kurukshetra war to Dhritarāshtra. He acted as Dhritarāshtra's Sārthi, friend, trusted messenger and mentor.
- b. Sudeshna, the queen of King Virāta of Matsya desh.

c. Rishi Bandī, a great sage whose story appears in the Vana Parva of the Mahābhārata. (Mahābhārata Unravelling, Janamejaya's Revenge on the Nāgas, p. 17-18)

These examples convey that the individuals from the Suta community held important roles, had immense wisdom, and were revered members of the ancient Indian society, and highlights that being a Suta was neither an indicative of a low caste nor did it result in the lack of opportunities in any field.

Now, discussing about whether Dronācharya refused to teach him because of his caste. Ami Ganatra writes in the chapter 'A Friendship of Doom', under the section 'The Making of the Bond' in the book Mahābhārata Unravelling:

*"Karna and Duryodhana met in the āshram of Dronāchārya as students. Their jealousy of the Pāndavas brought them close. Karna wanted to learn the Brahmāstra from Dronāchārya to be able to fight with Arjuna. Drona refused his request. He did not consider Karna to be capable of responsibly handling such a deadly weapon. Moreover, he was aware of Karna's ill will towards Arjuna. Karna went away to Parashurāma, lied about being a Brāhmin and implored the latter to become his guru. Unaware of the falsehood, Parashurāma agreed."* (p. 100)

Thus, it is clear that Dronāchārya never refused to accept Karna as his student but he refused to impart him the knowledge of the Brahmāstra because he was not qualified to handle such a powerful weapon due to his haughtiness, and being a teacher Dronāchārya has the invaluable authority to decide what knowledge was necessary for each student, considering their age and individual character traits.

Hence, his jealousy towards Arjuna prompted Karna to leave Dronāchārya's āshram himself and go to Parashurāma.

Furthermore, it is perceived that he faced rejection by Draupadi based on the grounds of his caste. In the chapter, 'The Marriage That Tied', from Mahābhārata Unravelling, Ami Ganatra writes:

*"One after another, the suitors came forward to take on the challenge. But none including Duryodhana, Karna, Shālva, Shalya and Ashwatthāmā could even manage to tie the string to the bow."* (p. 68)

Therefore, it is very clear that Karna tried and failed to fulfil the challenge at Draupadi's swayamvara. Ami Ganatra has written a note regarding the episode of Draupadi rejecting Karna in her book. According to this note, out of the 1,259 manuscripts that were studied to compile the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute's Critical Edition of Mahabharat, only 6 manuscripts mentioned this episode. Thus, it appears to have been interpolated at a later stage. (Notes, The Marriage that Tied, 2, p. 355)

Hence, the comprehensive elucidations presented above compellingly demonstrate that the Suta community did not experience any kind of oppression or discrimination from the higher segments of the ancient Indian society, and it is evident that Karna's downfall cannot be attributed to his caste, rather it was a result of his ill-will towards Arjuna and his imprudent nature.

2. Another perception about Karna is that he possessed all the qualities that could have brought him great success, and he was deeply rooted in Dharma and moral integrity.

Undoubtedly Karna was a brave and skilled warrior, but his irresponsibility of speech and incessant boasting was the biggest flaw in his character. Throughout the Mahābhārata, there are several instances where in Karna, in spite of not being directly provoked or addressed, gave in to provocation and exhibited disrespectful behaviour towards the Kuru elders. One such incident occurred when in the battle of Virāta, Dronāchārya sensed some unfavourable omens and identified the eunuch opposite the Kaurava army as Arjuna, and expressed his concern, to which Karna reacted in the following manner:

*"Karna, however, took Drona's words personally. 'You always praise Arjuna, but truly he isn't even a sixteenth as skilful as Duryodhana or myself,' he charged. Addressing Duryodhana, he said, 'The āchārya has always been biased towards the Pāndavas. That is why he talks about omens now. By declaring the eunuch as Arjuna, he is trying to scare our soldiers. Teachers like him are only good for teaching and telling stories. They are prone to timidity in a real war. You better place him at the back of the army and fight.'"* (Mahābhārata Unravelling, A Friendship of Doom, The Battle of Virāta, p. 113)

Another time, when Kripāchārya urged to make a fair assessment of the Pāndava army, Karna called him a weak and old Brāhmin and threatened to chop off his tongue, if he said anything in the favour of the Pāndavas to displease him.

These two incidents indicate that Karna may have played a role in promoting casteism in the society rather than being a victim of it.

During the game of dice, Karna crossed all the boundaries of decency by using derogatory language, labelling Draupadi as a bandhaki, a prostitute, and encouraging Duhshāsana to commit the heinous act of disrobing her in that assembly, which was filled with men. In the Mahābhārata Unravelling, in the chapter 'The Marriage that Tied', under the section 'A Question of Legality', author Ami Ganatra has mentioned:

*"Encouraged by the silence of the court, Karna instructed Duhshāsana, 'Take this slave woman home.'"* (p. 79)

Karna was actively involved alongside Shakuni and Duryodhana in conspiring the unjust game of dice where Yudhishtira was tricked and lost his kingdom, and the lac palace, where Duryodhana intended to set the Pāndavas and their mother on fire.

The facts and incidents above underline the shortcomings in Karna's character. His tendency to brag, react impulsively, and engage in derogatory language reveals a lack of moral and ethical integrity and debunks the perception of him possessing all the qualities for great success.

Karna's actions during the Battle of Virāta, where he insulted his teacher Dronāchārya, and his inclusion in the game of dice where he assassinated Draupadi's character and incited her disrobing, further challenge the perception of Karna being deeply rooted in Dharma.

Despite possessing exceptional skills in weaponry, Karna's downfall was a direct result from his lack of humility. In stark contrast, Arjuna, one of the greatest warriors of that era, demonstrated remarkable humility, which brought him immense success and garnered him the love and respect of one and all. On the other hand, Karna's unfavourable attitude led to the resentment of people.

3. In the eyes of many, Karna is seen victorious from every battle that he fought and that he was vanquished by Arjuna in an unjust manner, when he was unarmed.

In the book Mahābhārata Unravalled, Ami Ganatra has added a chapter by the name, 'Kurukshetra Encounters: Bheema and Arjuna versus Duryodhana and Karna'. In this chapter, she has explicitly mentioned about Karna being defeated not only by Arjuna but Bheema, Sātyaki, and Abhimanyu as well during the Kurukshetra war. (p. 143)

Also, as mentioned previously in the paper, Arjuna had single-handedly caused all the Kaurava warriors, **including Karna**, to retreat in the Battle of Virāta, not once but many times.

Additionally in the chapter, 'A Friendship of Doom', under the section, 'The Cattle Inspection (Ghosh Yatra)', an entourage of Duryodhana, along with Karna, Shakuni, the other Kauravas with their large procession of servants and women, went to the forest of Dwaita, where the Pāndavas were residing with the intention of showing off their riches to them. Ami Ganatra describes: *"While trying to pitch their luxurious tents, Duryodhana and his army had a run-in with the Gandharvas who were also in the forest at that time. The clash quickly degenerated into a full-fledged battle. Karna and the other Kauravas put up a brave fight but the Gandharvas were way more powerful and elusive. At one point, Karna was so overpowered and injured that he ran away from the battlefield to save his life."* (p. 107). Duryodhana, although being injured, continued to fight but was eventually captured by the Gandharvas, and was later rescued by the Pāndavas.

The above instance not only debunks the perception of Karna emerging victorious from every battle but also raises doubts about his celebrated unswerving loyalty towards his friend, Duryodhana.

When discussing whether Arjuna's act of killing Karna was unjust, a deeper exploration of the circumstances and facts becomes important. In an incident, mentioned in the Mahābhārata Unravalled, in the chapter, 'A Friendship that Groomed', under the section, 'The Killing of Jayadratha', it is mentioned:

*"The sun had begun to move westwards. Arjuna realised his horses were exhausted and injured. He requested Krishna to feed the horses and remove the arrows stuck in their bodies. Krishna loosened the reins and stopped. Seeing Arjuna stranded, the Kaurava army attacked him. But Arjuna was more than a match for all of them. He fought with them standing on the ground."* (p. 182-183)

Moreover, the book Mahābhārata Unravalled mentions the context of Arjuna killing Karna, according to which, Karna ignores the sinking of the wheel of his chariot into the ground at first and makes a failed attempt to invoke the Brahmāstra, given by his guru Parashurāma. Karna had not given up yet and fought valiantly and cut the string of Arjuna's bow eleven times. Eventually, Arjuna pulled out the dreadful Raudrāstra, and upon seeing the weapon, Karna jumped out of his chariot to pull the stuck wheel out. Following this, he urges Arjuna to follow his Dharma and wait until he pulls out the wheel stuck in the ground, hearing which Krishna gets furiously angry at Karna and recounts him all the Adharmas he had committed throughout his life along with Duryodhana. Further, writer Ami Ganatra mentions:

*"Karna could say nothing. He picked up his bow once again to fight Arjuna. Turning to Arjuna, Krishna said, 'Kill Karna with your powerful celestial weapons.' Krishna's words had the expected effect on Arjuna. The painful memories of the past floated before his eyes, burning every cell of his body. Arjuna pulled out a powerful arrow, the Anjalikā, infused it with powerful mantras and shot it at Karna with all his resolve. The arrow hit where it was meant to and severed Karna's neck."* (A Friendship of Doom, The Final Face-off, p. 134-136)

Based on the above event, it becomes evident that Arjuna did not kill Karna unjustly. Instead, Karna was perplexed upon witnessing Arjuna pulling out his mighty Raudrāstra, and wanted to buy some time by pretending to remove the wheel of his chariot stuck in the ground, to think of a move to counter Arjuna's. **Also, when Arjuna struck the arrow, severing Karna's neck, it was important to note that Karna still held his bow in his hand, suggesting he was not unarmed.**

Additionally, as mentioned above, Arjuna also found himself in a challenging situation when the Kaurava army, including Karna, attacked him, while he was out of his chariot. But despite fighting on the ground, Arjuna proved his mettle by single-handedly warding off the enemy forces.

This incident can be used to argue that if the Kauravas' attack on Arjuna while he was out of his chariot was not considered an Adharma, then the same principle should apply to Karna also. Arjuna was more agile than Karna in his advances, and struck him. Just as Arjuna's situation did not grant him immunity from the Kaurava army's attack, Karna's confusion and low agility, compared to Arjuna, should be seen in a similar light.

## VI. INFLUENCING FACTORS

This section explores the various factors that may have led to the differences between Vyāsa's portrayal of Karna's character and the contemporary perceptions.

The Mahābhārata is the longest epic in the world which revolves around family dynamics and is source of interest and constant inspiration to authors and poets, not only in inside the boundaries of India, but beyond. The complexities of the epic and the brilliant portrayal of characters has inspired several adaptations and creative retellings. 'The Mahābhārata, like a rolling stone gathered all it can as it rolled from one generation to another and as a result it had multiple versions in different parts of the world.' (Kumar, p. 795)

The Mahābhārata has been rewritten and readapted many times laying emphasis on some specific character. Many such retellings have been adapted in the postcolonial era and emphasize a great deal on the marginalized voices in that era. It is perhaps from these versions of the Mahābhārata, the perception of the Sutas and Nishādas as low castes and victims of discrimination has emerged.

Moreover, there exist several folk versions of the epic throughout the different regions of India, some of which even change the basic framework of the epic. Additionally, these versions of the Mahābhārata attribute the social problems and resentments of their own communities to certain characters within the epic.

The Bheel version of the Mahābhārata is a notable one. The Bheels have added many new episodes like Karna goes in search of his biological father, Surya and meets him, Vāsuki, the Nāga King, forces himself on Draupadi, and many more. Most individuals today perceive Karna to be a great and righteous man and sympathetically analyze his lifelong humiliation as a Suta putra primarily due to this version of the Mahābhārata.

Furthermore, these retellings and versions of this great epic often reach individuals through media. Media plays an active role in our society and affects the lives of people every day. There are hardly any individuals who do not own a television and a cable connection at home. Not only do people watch the various shows that air on the TV, but also get influenced by watching them.

In the recent past, multiple shows, daily soap operas, based on the epic Mahābhārata have been aired on the TV. Some of the famous shows are- B.R. Chopra's Mahabharat, Star Plus Mahabharat, Suryaputra Karn, based on Shivaji Sawant's novel, *Mrityunjaya*, and Karn Sangini, a visual representation of Kavita Kane's *Karna's Wife- The Outcast's Queen*. These shows have significantly influenced the individuals today, in spite of the potential twisting and portrayal of incorrect facts within them. These shows are visually appealing and easily accessible because of which they have the power to shape popular, but incorrect perceptions and a partially correct understanding of the epic. Hence, it is pivotal to recognize the importance of knowing the correct facts from correct sources. Seeking accurate information from reliable and authentic sources is important to have a true and comprehensive understanding of a historical account as vast and complex as the Mahābhārata. By gaining a subtle understanding to differentiate between fictional adaptations and genuine scholarly works, individuals can make sure that their knowledge of the Mahābhārata is accurate and preserves the consistency and integrity of this precious cultural heritage.

## VII. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the comparative analysis of Vyāsa's depiction of Karna and contemporary perceptions about his character provides valuable insights into the complexities in his personality. These perceptions surrounding Karna can be debunked through a careful examination of the facts provided by Ami Ganatra in her book *Mahābhārata Unravalled*.

The analysis presents that Karna's downfall cannot be attributed to his caste, as the Suta community, of which Karna was a part, held respected positions and played important roles in the ancient Indian society. Moreover, the incidents of Draupadi's rejection and Dronāchārya's denial to accept Karna as his student, are either interpolated or misconceived narratives.

Further, the perception of Karna possessing all the qualities distributed among the five Pāndavas and being deeply rooted in Dharma is challenged by his proneness to brag, use derogatory language, and display disrespectful behaviour towards his teachers and elders. Karna's actions during the infamous game of dice and the Battle of Virāta further underline his flaws in moral and ethical integrity.

Additionally, the belief that Karna never lost any battle and was unjustly killed by Arjuna when he was defenseless is contradicted by the incidents mentioned in *Mahābhārata Unravalled*, where Karna faced defeat at the hands of Arjuna, Bheema, and other warriors. The circumstances leading to Karna's death depict a subtle and complex scenario where in both Arjuna's actions and Karna's own choices lead to his demise.

This comparative analysis deepens our understanding about Karna's character by revealing the true nature of his personality. It encourages us to question the prevalent and popular perceptions and recognize the requirement of seeking accurate information from authentic and reliable sources. It encourages us to look at historical personas with critical thinking and to distinguish between fact and fiction. By presenting such comparative analyses, we can gain a more subtle understanding of complex characters in our epics and appreciate the lessons and moral dilemmas they symbolize. Ultimately, this research contributes to a deeper acknowledgement and understanding of the Mahābhārata and its relevance in today's world.

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