



## THE FORTUNES OF THE TRAGIC CHARACTER 'KARNA'

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The character of Karna in the Mahabharata is one of its most complex and ill-fated figures. Despite variations in his portrayal across different Sanskrit texts, the essence of his life is marked by relentless misfortune from birth to death. The stories of Karna's birth and life exhibit significant differences between the Mahabharata composed by Vyasa and the Bengali Mahabharata written by Kashi Ram Das, though both sources confirm the constant theme of fate's cruelty in Karna's life. According to Vyasa's Mahabharata, the story of Karna's birth is revealed in the 'Udyoga Parva' when Kunti reveals the secret of Karna's birth to him:

“प्रकाशकर्मा तपनो योऽयं देवो विरोचनः।  
अजीजनत्त्वां मय्येष कर्ण ! शास्त्रभृतां वरम्।”

[Bhattacharya, Haridasa Siddhantavagis, April, 1383 Bengali Year, Mahabharatam(16 th Chapter), Udyog Parva, Kolkata, Viswavani, 2<sup>nd</sup> ( Viswavani ) Publishing, Page-1202]

Additionally, Kunti's act of casting Karna into the river is mentioned directly:

“उत्सर्जकुमारं त्वं जले महाबलम्।”

[Bhattacharya Haridasa Siddhantavagis, Vaisakh, February 1383 Bengali Year, Mahabharatam(3 rd Chapter), AdiParva, Kolkata, Viswavani, 2<sup>nd</sup> ( Viswavani ) Publishing, Page-1208]

Supporting this claim, the Sun God himself confirms the truth of Kunti's words to Karna. In the Bengali Mahabharata by Kashi Ram Das, Kunti's actions are described in a more subtle manner:

“কৌতুকে জপিনু মন্ত্র সূর্যে ধ্যান করি।।  
তখন আসিল সূর্য মোর বিদ্যমাণে।  
সূর্যে দেখি ভীত আমি হইলাম মনে।।  
অজ্ঞান স্ত্রীজন দোষ ক্ষমিবে আমার।  
শুনিয়া হাসিয়া সূর্য কহে আরবার।।  
কভু মিথ্যা নাহি হয় মুনির বচন।  
কভু মিথ্যা নহে কন্যা মম আগমনে।।  
বিবাহিতা নহ, চিন্তা করিছ অন্তরে।  
মম বরে মহারাজ বরিবে তোমারে।।

এত শুনি বশ আমি হইনু তাহার।  
সূর্যের প্রসাদে হইল জনম তোমার।।”

[Das, Kashirama, November 2017, Mahabharatam, Udyogparva, Kolkata, Dej, Tenth Publishing, Page- 649]

In another version from Kashi Ram Das's Mahabharata, Kunti's act of abandoning Karna is portrayed as:

“যমুনায় ভাসাইনু তাম্রকুণ্ড আমি।”

[Das, Kashirama, November 2017, Mahabharatam, Udyogparva, Kolkata, Dej, Tenth Publishing, Page- 64]

To hear this incidents Karna Speakes,

“এত শুনি কৰ্ণ কহে করিয়া মিনতি।  
এ সকল গুপ্তকথা জানি যে ভারতী।।”

[Das, Kashirama, November 2017, Mahabharatam, Udyogparva, Kolkata, Dej, Tenth Publishing, Page- 649]

When Karna learns about his birth and the circumstances of his abandonment, he speaks to Kunti acknowledging his knowledge of these hidden truths.

“রাধার নন্দন বলি ঘোষে ত্রিভুবনে।”

[Das, Kashirama, November 2017, Mahabharatam, Udyogparva, Kolkata, Dej, Tenth Publishing, Page- 649]”

Despite the acknowledgment of his birth and abandonment, Karna remains resolute and loyal to his own values and actions. On this Karna says to the lord Krishna

“কন্যা গৰ্ভ সমাধত্ত ভাস্করাণ্মা জনাৰ্দ্দন।  
আদিত্যবচনাচ্চৈব জাতং মাং সা ব্যাসর্জয়ত্।।”

For introducing ownself Karna speaks to Kunti -

“রাধেয়োহহমাধিরথি: কৰ্ণস্ত্বামভিবাদয়ে।”

[Bhattacharya, Haridasa Siddhantavagis, April, 1342 Bengali Year, Mahabharatam(16 th Chapter), Udyog Parva, Kolkata, Viswavani, 2<sup>nd</sup> ( Viswavani ) Publishing, Page-120]

The Mahabharata written by Vyasa presents Karna's life as a series of tragic events influenced by his destiny. Although Karna is depicted as a great warrior and a noble figure, he is also subject to the misfortune of being a “Sutaputra” or son of a charioteer, a term used derogatorily by the Pandavas and others. In the Vyasa version, this derogatory term reflects the societal prejudice and the attempts to diminish Karna's status.

In contrast, Kashi Ram Das's Mahabharata highlights a more compassionate view of Karna's circumstances, noting his unwavering loyalty and virtues. Karna's true identity as a Kshatriya and his inherent nobility are underscored despite the societal scorn he faces.

Karna's life, marked by ongoing humiliation and struggles, is ultimately a reflection of his fate and his adherence to his principles. His complex interactions with other characters in the Mahabharata, including his relationships with the Pandavas, Draupadi, and Duryodhana, reveal the multifaceted nature of his character. While Vyasa's depiction of Karna emphasizes his heroic qualities and his tragic downfall due to destiny and societal rejection, Kashi Ram Das portrays Karna with a more emotional and sympathetic lens, reflecting his inner struggles and personal honor.

“व्यपयातु भयं तेऽद्य कुमारं प्रसमीक्षसे।  
मया त्वञ्जाप्यनुज्ञाता पुनः कन्या भविष्यसि॥”

[Bhattacharya, Haridasa Siddhantavagis, April, 1383 Bengali Year, Mahabharatam(3rd Chapter), AdiParva, Kolkata, Viswavani, 2<sup>nd</sup> ( Viswavani ) Publishing, Page- 1207]

“বয়সে বালিকা তাহে গর্ভ উদরেতে।  
বেদনা অসহ্য নারি প্রসব হইতে॥  
হেন ভাবি স্মরণ করিল দিননাথে।  
পুত্র প্রসবিলা কুন্তী কর্ণ রন্ধ পথে॥  
কর্ণমূলে জন্ম তেঁই কর্ণ সব কহে।  
জন্ম হইতে অক্ষয় কবজ ধরে দেহে॥”

[Vandhyopadhyaya, Debnath(Edited), February 2020, Kashidasi Mahabharata( 1 st Chapter), Adiparva, Kolkata, Sahityasanshad, 1<sup>st</sup> Publishing, 7 th Edition, Page- 89]

From the birth the Karna was revealed as a valueless unrespectful character . One very important proof of this is Kunti's speech to Pandavas about failure Karna in the Kurukshetra war.

“পাইবে তোমার পুত্রগণ রাজধানী।  
নিশ্চয় আমার মৃত্যু হইবে জননী॥”

[Das, Kashiram, November 2017, Mahabharata, Udyog Parva, Kolkata, Dej, 10 th Edition, Page-650]

From this speech a softminded, weak, determined to own future Karna though came out but in the speech of Vyasa's Karna not as a weak character came out. Instead of a strong speech was revealed from the mouth of Karna.

“न चैतच्चप्रद्वेषे वाक्यं क्षत्रिये भाषितं त्वया।  
धर्मद्वारं ममैतत् स्यान्नियोगकरणं तव॥  
अकरोष्मयि यत् पापं भवति सुमहात्ययम्।  
अपाकीर्णोऽस्मि यन्मातः। तदयाशः कीर्तिनाशनम्॥”

[Bhattacharya, Haridasa Siddhantavagis, April, 1342 Bengali Year, Mahabharatam(16 th Chapter), UdyogParva, Kolkata, Viswavani, 2<sup>nd</sup> ( Viswavani ) Edition, Page- 1205]

So it is easily say that this Karna is a real hero and strong character in Mahabharata.

From the story of Karna's birth we can know that he is the son of God Surya and the human being Kunti. But Karna grows in the home of Adhirath and Radha. Though according to Mahabharata Karna was insulted again and again as 'Sutaputra' which term is renowned as scheduled caste in society status. On this perspective Nrisingha Prasad Bhaduri says that Jayanti and Debjani's first son is Yadu, his descendants are called Yadav. Lord Krishna is also belong to this family to whom Pandavas worshiped very much. So that was not fair to say Karna as a scheduled person on that time society measurement because he was also related with Yadavas.

In various renditions, such as the play "Karna Varm," Karna's life is depicted with a focus on his valor, loyalty, and the personal dilemmas he faces, including the moment when he gives away his divine armor and earrings to Indra disguised as a Brahmin. This act of generosity is portrayed differently across texts, but it consistently highlights Karna's nobility and his tragic end, driven by the relentless cruelty of fate and the circumstances beyond his control.

Ultimately, the narrative of Karna in the Mahabharata illustrates the tragic interplay between destiny, social status, and personal virtue, revealing a character who is both a hero and a victim of relentless misfortune.

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