

= Satyavati =

Satyavati ( Sanskrit : सत्यवती ) ( also spelled Satyawati ) , or Setyawati ( Indonesian ) was the queen of the Kuru king Shantanu of Hastinapur and the great @-@ grandmother of the Pandava and Kaurava princes ( principal characters of the Hindu epic Mahabharata ) . She is also the mother of the seer Vyasa , author of the epic . Her story appears in the Mahabharata , the Harivamsa and the Devi Bhagavata Purana .

Daughter of the Chedi king Vasu ( also known as Uparichara Vasu ) and a cursed apsara ( celestial nymph ) -turned @-@ fish Adrika , Satyavati was brought up as a commoner ? the adopted daughter of a fisherman @-@ chieftain Dusharaj ( who was also a ferryman ) on the banks of the river Yamuna . Due to the smell emanating from her body she was known as Matsyagandha ( " She who has the smell of fish " ) , and helped her father in his job as a ferryman .

As a young woman Satyavati met the wandering rishi ( sage ) Parashara , who fathered her son Vyasa out of wedlock . The sage also gave her a musky fragrance , which earned her names like Yojanagandha ( " She whose fragrance is spread for a yojana ( 8 @-@ 9 miles ) " ) and Gandhavati ( " fragrant one " ) .

Later King Shantanu , captivated by her fragrance and beauty , fell in love with Satyavati . She married Shantanu on condition that their children inherit the throne , denying the birthright of Shantanu 's eldest son ( and crown prince ) Bhishma . Satyavati bore Shantanu two children , Chitrangada and Vichitravirya . After Shantanu 's death , she and her prince sons with the help of Bhishma ruled the kingdom . Although both her sons died childless , she arranged for her first son Vyasa to father the children of the two widows of Vichitravirya through niyoga . The children ( Dhritarashtra and Pandu ) became fathers of the Kauravas and Pandavas , respectively . After Pandu 's death , Satyavati went to the forest for penance and died there before witnessing the Kurukshetra War .

While Satyavati 's presence of mind , far @-@ sightedness and mastery of realpolitik is praised , her unscrupulous means of achieving her goals and her blind ambition are criticized .

= = Literary sources and names = =

Little is said about Satyavati in the Mahabharata ; however , later texts - the Harivamsa and the Devi Bhagavata Purana ? elaborate her legend .

Satyavati is known by numerous names in the Mahabharata , among them Daseyi , Gandhakali , Gandhavati , Kali , Matsyagandha , Satya , Vasavi and Yojanagandha . The name " Daseyi " ? a term often used by her stepson Bhishma used to address her ? means one of the Dasas ( slaves ) , or a Dasa aboriginal princess . Vasavi means " daughter of king Vasu " . Her birth name , Kali ( the dark one ) , indicates her dark complexion . Her other birth name , Satyavati , means " truthful " ; satya means " veracity " . As noted above , she was also known as Matsyagandha or Matsyagandhi in her earlier life ? and Gandhakali ( " fragrant dark one " ) , Gandhavati and Yojanagandha in later life .

= = Birth and early life = =

According to the Harivamsa , Satyavati in her previous life was Achchhoda , daughter of the Pitrs ( ancestors ) and cursed to be born on earth . The Mahabharata , Harivamsa and Devi Bhagavata Purana assert that Satyavati was the daughter of a cursed apsara ( celestial nymph ) named Adrika . Adrika was transformed by a curse into a fish , and lived in the Yamuna river . When the Chedi king , Vasu ( better @-@ known as Uparicara @-@ vasu ) , was on a hunting expedition he had a nocturnal emission while dreaming of his wife . He sent his semen to his queen with an eagle but , due to a fight with another eagle , the semen dropped into the river and was swallowed by the cursed Adrika @-@ fish . Consequently , the fish became pregnant . The chief fisherman caught the fish , and cut it open . He found two babies in the womb of the fish : one male and one female . The fisherman presented the children to the king , who kept the male child . The boy grew up to become

the founder of the Matsya Kingdom . The king gave the female child to the fisherman , naming her Matsya @-@ gandhi or Matsya @-@ gandha ( " She who has the smell of fish " ) due to the fishy odor which came from the girl 's body . The fisherman raised the girl as his daughter and named her Kali ( " the dark one " ) because of her complexion . Over the course of time , Kali earned the name Satyavati ( " truthful " ) . The fisherman was also a ferryman , ferrying people across the river in his boat . Satyavati helped her father in his job , and grew up into a beautiful maiden .

= = Meeting with Parashara and birth of Vyasa = =

The Devi Bhagavata Purana narrates that when Kali ( Satyavati ) was ferrying the rishi ( sage ) Parashara across the river Yamuna , the sage wanted Kali to satisfy his lust and held her right hand . She tried to dissuade Parashara , saying that a learned Brahmin of his stature should not desire a woman who stinks of fish . She finally gave in , realizing the desperation and persistence of the sage and fearing that if she did not heed to his request , he might topple the boat midstream . Kali agreed , and told Parashara to be patient until the boat reached the bank . On reaching the other side the sage grabbed her again , but she declared that her body stank and coitus should be delightful to them both . At these words , Matsyagandha was transformed ( by the powers of the sage ) into Yojanagandha ( " she whose fragrance can be smelled from across a yojana " ) . She now smelled of musk , and so was called Kasturi @-@ gandhi ( " musk @-@ fragrant " ) . When Parashara , tormented with desire , approached her again she insisted that the act was not appropriate in broad daylight , as her father and others would see them in sex from the other bank ; they should wait till night . The sage , with his powers , shrouded the entire area in fog . Before Parashara could enjoy her , Satyavati again interrupted him to say that he would enjoy her and depart , robbing her of her virginity and leaving her shamed in society . The sage then blessed her with virgo intacta . She asked Parashara to promise her that the coitus would be a secret and her virginity intact ; the son born from their union would be as famous as the great sage ; and her fragrance and youth would be eternal . Parashara granted her these wishes and was satiated by the beautiful Satyavati . After the act , the sage bathed in the river and left , never to meet her again . The Mahabharata abridges the story , noting only two wishes for Satyavati : her virgo intacta and everlasting sweet fragrance .

Ecstatic with her blessings , Satyavati gave birth the same day to her baby on an island in the Yamuna . The son immediately grew up as a youth and promised his mother that he would come to her aid every time she called on him ; he then left to do penance in the forest . The son was called Krishna ( " the dark one " ) due to his colour , or Dvaipayana ( " one born on an island " ) and would later become known as Vyasa ? compiler of the Vedas and author of the Puranas and the Mahabharata , fulfilling Parashara 's prophecy . After this , Satyavati returned home to help her father .

= = Marriage with Shantanu = =

One day Shantanu , the Kuru king of Hastinapur , came to the forest on a hunting trip and was mesmerized by the musk @-@ fragrance emanating from Satyavati . Allured by her sweet scent , Shantanu reached Satyavati 's house and , seeing her , fell in love at first sight . The king asked the fisherman @-@ chief for his daughter 's hand ; the fisherman Dusharaj said his daughter would marry the king if ? and only if ? her sons would inherit the throne .

The king , shocked and dejected , returned to the palace since he had already anointed his son , Devavrata , as heir apparent . Devavrata was distressed by his father 's condition ; he learned about the promise asked by the fisherman @-@ chief from a minister . Immediately , Devavrata rushed to the hut of the fisherman @-@ chief and begged for Satyavati 's hand on his father 's behalf . The fisherman repeated his condition and told Devavrata that only Shantanu was worthy of Satyavati ; he had rejected marriage proposals from even Brahmarishis like Asita .

Devavrata renounced his claim to the throne in favour of Satyavati 's son , but the fisherman contended that Devavrata 's children might dispute his grandson 's claim . Intensely , Devavrata pledged the " terrible " vow of Brahmacharya - celibacy . The fisherman immediately gave Satyavati

to Devavrata , who was henceforth called Bhishma ( " the terrible " ) . Bhishma presented Satyawati to Shantanu , who married her .

In the Devi Bhagavata Purana , Satyawati 's premarital first @-@ born , Vyasa , laments that his mother abandoned him to fate immediately after birth . He returns to his birthplace in search of his mother who , he finds out , is now the queen of Hastinapur .

= = Birth of children and grandchildren = =

After their marriage , Satyawati bore Shantanu two sons : Chitrangada and Vichitravirya . The Harivamsa tells of Bhishma recalling events after Shantanu 's death . During the period of mourning after Shantanu 's death , Ugrayudha Paurava ( usurper of the throne of Panchala ) demanded that Bhishma hand over Satyawati in return for wealth . Bhishma killed Ugrayudha Paurava , who had lost his powers because he lusted after another 's wife . However , the Mahabharata does not include this event ; it only describes Bhishma crowning Chitrangada as king under Satyawati 's command . Chitrangada was later killed by a namesake gandharva ( a celestial musician ) .

After Chitrangada 's death his young brother Vichitravirya was crowned king , while Bhishma ruled on his behalf ( under Satyawati 's command ) until Vichitravirya grew up . Vichitravirya married the princesses of Kashi @-@ Kosala : Ambika and Ambalika , who were won by Bhishma in a Swayamvara ( marriage choice ) . The childless Vichitravirya met with an untimely death from tuberculosis .

With no heir to the throne , Satyawati asked Bhishma to marry the widows of Vichitravirya ( following the practice of niyoga in its narrower sense , as a levirate marriage ) and rule as king . Bhishma refused , reminding Satyawati of the promise he made to her father and his vow of bachelorhood . He suggests that a Brahmin could be hired to father children on the widows , thus preserving the dynasty . Revealing to Bhishma the tale of her encounter with Parashara , Satyawati well knew that this was the time to call her son Vyasa to aid her . Satyawati coaxed Vyasa to have niyoga with his brother 's widows , saying : " from affection for thy brother Vichitravirya , for the perpetuation of our dynasty , for the sake of this Bhishma 's request and my command , for kindness to all creatures , for the protection of the people and from the liberality of thy heart , O sinless one , it behooveth thee to do what I say . " After convincing Vyasa , Satyawati managed ( with great difficulty ) to obtain the consent of her " virtuous " daughters @-@ in @-@ law . In the Mahabharata , Vyasa agreed immediately to the niyoga . In the Devi Bhagavata Purana version , Vyasa initially refused Satyawati 's proposal . He argued that Vichitravirya 's wives were like his daughters ; having niyoga with them was a heinous sin , through which no good could come . As a master of " realpolitik " , the hungry @-@ for @-@ grandsons Satyawati asserted that to preserve the dynasty , wrong directives by elders should be followed if they are going to reduce the sorrow of a mother . Vyasa finally agreed to that " disgusting task " , but suggested that offspring of perversity cannot be a source of joy .

During the menstrual period of the older queen , Ambika , Satyawati invited Vyasa to Ambika 's bedchamber . However , during sex with Vyasa , Ambika noticed his dark appearance and closed her eyes . Vyasa declared to Satyawati that due to Ambika 's cruelty , her son would be blind ( but strong ) and have a hundred sons ? later known as Kauravas ( descendants of Kuru ) . Satyawati considered such an heir to be an unworthy king , so she asked Vyasa to have niyoga with her other daughter @-@ in @-@ law . During their niyoga , Ambalika fell pale due to Vyasa 's grim appearance . As the result the child would be wan , Vyasa told his mother , who begged for another child . In due course , the blind Dhritarashtra and the pale Pandu were born . Satyawati again invited Vyasa to Ambika 's bedchamber ; she remembered Vyasa 's grim appearance ( and repulsive odour ) , and substituted a Shudra ( lowest caste ) maid in her place . The maid respected the sage and was not afraid of him , and Vyasa thus blessed her ; her son would be the most intelligent man , and she would no longer be a slave . Vyasa told Satyawati of the deception , and then disappeared ; Vidura , an incarnation of the god Dharma , was born to the maid .

= = Last days = =

Consequently , due to Dhritarashtra 's blindness and Vidura 's birth from a maid , Pandu was crowned king of Hastinapur . However , he was cursed ( by a sage ) , renounced the kingdom and went to the forest with his wives Kunti and Madri . There , his wives had children - the Pandavas , or " sons of Pandu " - for him through niyoga with the gods . Pandu died , due to the curse , in the forest ; Madri died with him . Kunti returned to Hastinapur with the Pandavas . Satyawati was grief stricken because of Pandu 's death , and did not wish to live any longer . After the funerary rites for Pandu were done , Vyasa warned Satyawati that happiness would end in the dynasty and devastating events would occur in the future ( leading to the destruction of her kin ) , which she would not be able to bear in her old age . At Vyasa 's suggestion , Satyawati left for the forest to do penance with her daughters in law Ambika and Ambalika . In the forest , she died and attained heaven .

= = Assessment = =

Though all the texts mention Satyawati 's fisherman father a reason of Bhishma pledge and the indirect downfall of Hastinapur ; but some well known authors consider Satyawati and not her father for both the reasons .

Dhanalakshmi Ayyer , author of Satyawati : Blind Ambition , introduces Satyawati as " the embodiment of the driving force of womanhood , with motherly ambition blinding her vision at every turn " and further says that " [ i ] n a way , Satyawati exemplifies what Rudyard Kipling succinctly put " :

The female of the species must be deadlier than the male .

For Satyawati , the end justifies the means . Her life goal and ambition became the ensurance of succession of Shantanu 's lineage and inheritance of his fortune by her sons but ironically ( Ayyer comments ) , Bhishma - whose right to the throne was snatched because of her - outlives her children in life and in fame . Her actions ( and decisions ) indirectly create a generation encompassed by greed which ultimately leads to its annihilation . Ayyer concludes that " Satyawati 's story teaches the new generation women that determination and commitment are different from avarice and calculation . One should know where greed takes over from ambition . "

Pradip Bhattacharya , author of Of Kunti and Satyawati : Sexually Assertive Women of the Mahabharata , praises Satyawati 's handling of her encounter with the sage Parashara . He notes that although young , she tackles the persistent sage with great maturity and presence of mind . Bhattacharya remarks , " With a maturity and frankness that astonishes us even in the twenty first century , she points out that coitus ought to be mutually enjoyable . " She is not deluded by the belief that the sage will marry her , and asks for virginity to ensure her future status in society . Bhattacharya further comments on the sequence of her requests : the bodily fragrance to make the sexual act pleasant for both , the veil of mist to keep the act a secret , virginal status for her future and fame for her child - securing his fame and , after practical aspects are sorted out , " eternally feminine " boons of lifelong youth and fragrance . Bhattacharya says : " Modern day women could well wish that they were half as confident , clear headed and assertive of their desires and goals as Satyawati . " He further praises her " characteristic far sightedness " , when she ensures the future of her children with Shantanu by indirectly disposing of the crown prince Bhishma . She brings her illegitimate son , Vyasa , onto the scene to father sons with her dead son 's widows ? turning the renowned " lunar dynasty , into the lineage of a dasa ( slave ) maiden " .