Glimpse of Ancient Social History through the Social Structure of *The Mahabharata* Period

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Abstract: The *Mahabharata* is one of the historical literature that displays the historical linkage of the sociocultural structure of contemporary society. In this context, this paper has focused on exploring the economic system, family structure, marriage patterns, slavery system, political leadership, Ashram system, and the dimensions of conflict as the social history and parts of the social structure of The *Mahabharata* period. It reflects a historical glimpse of an earlier epoch of 500 BC. Nowadays, observing and visiting the ancient social structure of the Mahabharata period is impossible. So, historical data was collected through the historical content analysis method as secondary sources to gain the objective. The objective-wise thematic stanzas and historical interpretations of The *Mahabharata* have been collected as qualitative data. Similarly, primary data was gathered using the experts' interaction method. The content analysis method has been used to analyze this study's primary and secondary data types. The social and cultural structure of the Mahabharata period was found to be constructed on the foundation of the historical context of slavery and the feudalistic mode of production system. The slavery and feudalistic social structure are always linked to patriarchal and patrilineage socio-cultural practices. Based on this background and roots, the social structure of The *Mahabharata* has been shaped, formed, and determined. These facts are congruent with the theoretical mode of production and interpretation of Marxism's conflict-oriented perspective.

Abstrak: Mahabharata merupakan salah satu karya sastra sejarah yang menampilkan keterkaitan sejarah dengan struktur sosiokultural masyarakat kontemporer. Dalam konteks ini, tulisan ini fokus mengeksplorasi sistem ekonomi, struktur keluarga, pola perkawinan, sistem perbudakan, kepemimpinan politik, sistem ashram, dan dimensi konflik sebagai sejarah sosial dan bagian dari struktur sosial periode Mahabharata. Ini mencerminkan sekilas sejarah dari zaman awal tahun 500 SM. Saat ini, mengamati dan mengunjungi struktur sosial kuno pada masa Mahabharata adalah hal yang mustahil. Jadi, data sejarah dikumpulkan melalui metode analisis isi sejarah sebagai sumber sekunder untuk mencapai tujuan. Bait tematik objektif dan interpretasi sejarah Mahabharata dikumpulkan sebagai data kualitatif. Demikian pula, data primer dikumpulkan dengan menggunakan metode interaksi para ahli. Metode analisis isi digunakan untuk menganalisis jenis data primer dan sekunder penelitian ini. Struktur sosial dan budaya periode Mahabharata ditemukan dibangun di atas fondasi konteks sejarah perbudakan dan cara sistem produksi feodalistik. Perbudakan dan struktur sosial yang feodalistik selalu dikaitkan dengan praktik sosial budaya yang bersifat patriarki dan patrilinease. Berdasarkan latar belakang dan akar tersebut, struktur sosial Mahabharata dibentuk, dibentuk, dan ditentukan. Fakta-fakta ini selaras dengan cara produksi teoritis dan interpretasi perspektif berorientasi konflik Marxisme.

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INTRODUCTION

Social history is the collection of past events and human activities in socio-cultural surroundings. Social history is not only the story of ruling people and groups. It always reflects the previous human relationships, norms, values, existence of power, source of conflict, and livelihood strategies as parts of the social structure of human civilization (Thapar, 2010). Social history is the foundation of human beings' contemporary socio-cultural practices. All parts of society are historically constructed, changed, and transferred as an evolutionary process of social structure. Mills (2000) has argued that studying the historical context of the social structure is essential to knowing contemporary society since there is a historical correlation between history and social structure. Supriatna (2021) also states that the available sources and evidence become the means of investigation through imagination for historians to draw the ancient social structure.

The structure reflects a combination of specific units. Similarly, society has a specific structure, which combines social units of social surroundings (Murdock, 1949). Human beings and groups of people are functioning as an essential part of society (Durkheim, 1984). Likewise, Ritzer (2021) quoted the theoretical concept of Karl Marx and mentioned that the production system determines the economic system, and the economy constructs the social structure. In other words, the economic system influences the relationship of all of the components of the social structure. So, it is argued that social structure is changeable with the change of economic systems. Turner (1995) quoted the theoretical concept of Karl Marx and argued that there is always a conflict-oriented antagonistic relationship between the components of social structure and the social groups. Marx (1848) claimed that the social structure was historically constructed in dialectical form. Based on the theoretical concept of Karl Marx, the social structure of the Mahabharata period was also historically constructed and dialectically formed, and the slavery and feudalistic modes of production of that period determined the social structure. Hence, this paper is also assumed and guided by the theoretical lens of a mode of production and conflict.

Social structure is always historically constructed. Each social structure has a specific chain (Adhikari, 2020), and contemporary society has its specific historical foundation. Akeem (2018) has defined history as an essential element and a guideline for comprehending how it shapes an under-

standing of the world of science. It is said that the memory of human experience is history. Akeem even quoted Daniels (1972), who said historical events have generated basic human groupings. Likewise, Darmawan et al. (2018) have stated that textbooks of history writing enhance social and historical writing, and one of the most important features of producing history is not isolated from the soul of the age. In this sense, the Mahabharat is also one of the historical documents, and it reflects the contemporary social structure of the historical. Purwanto (2005) has also claimed that age can generate different rhetorical historiography, which is affected through its period and connected with the socio-cultural historical structure of the then life.

Further, Harris (2016) has said that history deals with several dimensions of human life, incorporating human feelings, passions, emotions, and logic to comprehend why and how people performed in various circumstances and by making decisions they required and did the way they needed. Similarly, as a historical document, The Mahabharata also deals with the emotions, logic, and circumstances of the bygone days of social life. Moreover, Utami (2019) has argued that studying history is not extended to merely knowing the genuine history. It meant that learning history meant understanding the contemporary social structure of the time. Likewise, Cunningham (2009) pointed out that learning history means comprehending the perspectives and values of people of the ancient days by contemplating the situations and conditions that people faced during the time of the production of historical textbooks. Similar conditions and situations of the life and values of the people of the Mahabharata period have been reflected in The *Mahabharata*.

To reveal the historical foundation of the ancient society of the period is not possible physically. It is assumed that the sources of the knowledge and information produced, documented, and published literature contain the historical and social structure of the time (Thapar, 1978). Various literary and philosophical works are written and produced with the evolution of human civilization. Vedas are considered the ancient and oldest literature recognized in the world. The *Mahabharata* is one of the largest pieces of literature in the ancient world. Vaidya & Pusalker (1993) also interpreted The *Mahabharata* as one of the authoritative legal texts emphasizing morals, values, and social and political philosophy. Likewise, Karmarker (1993) has argued that the *Mahabharata* reveals the religious philosophy.

The social system, politics, social norms and

values, marriage systems, and the cultural structure of the Mahabharata period have had a social, practical influence even today. The *Mahabharata*, as one of the largest ancient literatures, is also the foundation of the creation of the Gita philosophy. The present society and the scholars, intellectuals, philosophers, thinkers, writers, political leaders, and professors are used to giving examples from *The Mahabharata* regarding the socio-cultural, political philosophy, wars, marriage, family, kinship, conflicts, and the social transformation process in day-to-day conversation in daily life (Brown, 1968). Even today, the public has taken The Mahabharata as the holy textbook of practicing in day-to-day affairs. Likewise, Gita has been regarded as the source of gaining knowledge, transformation of life, meditation, and as the leading goal of politics and the social structure even today. The Gita, functioning as a guiding principle of life, is generated from the *Mahabharata* during the battlefield narrated to Arjuna by Krishna (Belvalkar,1993). In this respect, without the in-depth analysis and study of *The Mahabharata*, the Gita philosophy, recognized and practiced in daily life in the public, also becomes impossible to comprehend the contemporary social structure. Therefore, the Mahabharata has to be studied, and it is essential to trace the root of the present social practice of the ritual of the society.

Even today, the Mahabharata's culture and social structure have influenced and guided the public. Pubic has taken it as a religious and holy concept, and the existing culture is based on historical structure as culture has been based on history. White (1993) argues that the culture dwells in the history. In this sense, historical literature has always shaped and guided the cultural and social structure. Historical texts such as Vedas, literature, religions, and the *Mahabharata* would reflect the ancient social structure. Among them, The *Mahabharata* has become an ancient text that reveals the social structure of ancient times (Basham,1991). So, *The Mahabharata* has been taken as a primary text to trace out and analyze the period's social structure.

In the context of identifying the research gap, Karve (1968) explored the character analysis of The Mahabharata and explained The Mahabharata from a historical point of view. Brown (1968) stated that Karve always provided examples of The Mahabharata in her daily conversations. Thapar (2010), Basham (1991), and Mishra (1977, 2087) have explained *The Mahabharata* only from the historical perspectives. Karmarker (1993), Belvalkar (1993), and Vaidya & Pusalker (1993) explained The Mahabharata more from a religious perspective. However-

er, the microanalysis of the various components of the socio-structure of *The Mahabharata* has yet to be excavated. The research mentioned has yet to explore the economic production system, marriage relationships, family structure, and conflicts on resource holding and power-gaining systems, Ashram systems, and political leadership. Hence, this research attempts to fulfill the existing research gap.

In this context, it has become essential to reach the socio-cultural structure of *The Mahabharata* to identify and explore the root of the present social practice and influence of the socio-cultural structure of the society. Hence, this study has focused on exploring the social history through the social structure of *The Mahabharata* period. The purpose of this paper is to explore the social history and social structure of *The Mahabharata* period. The required components of the social structure have been explored through historical data for analysis. It has focused on analyzing the economic system, family structure, marriage patterns, slavery system, *Varna* hierarchy, political leadership, *Ashram* system, various dimensions of conflict, and the social history and parts of social structure.

METHOD

The *Mahabharata* period is an ancient period of social structure. It reflects a historical glimpse of an earlier epoch of 500 BC. It is impossible to observe and visit the ancient period of social structure nowadays. So, the philosophical vantage point as an ontology of this research is that every social structure has a specific historical linkage and foundation. Hence, historical data was collected as a secondary source through the historical content analysis method to achieve the mentioned objective. The library research method has been adopted for the collection of historical data. In this context, Hamzah (2019, p. 7) emphasizes the library research method and mentions that it is strong for qualitative research in finding theoretical roots. Furthermore, Kurniawan et al. (2023) applied the library research method to collect historical data. This research paper also followed the library research method for the collection of historical dimensions of the social structure of *The Mahabharata*.

The thematic categories of social structure, economy, marriage patterns, ashram system, political leadership, and various dimensions of conflict have been classified. Then, objective stanzas of the *Mahabharata* were collected, and historical information from the literature was used as the qualitative data. Primary data was also gathered using the experts' interaction method. The historians, literary
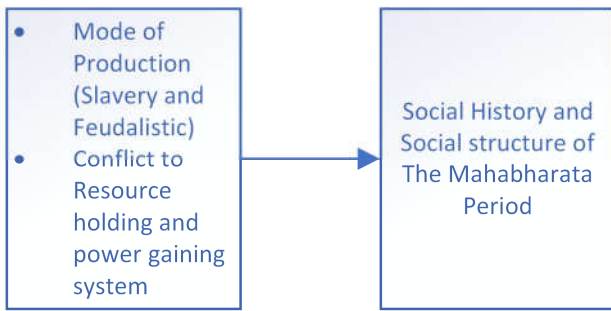
Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

persons, professors, and researchers have been selected as experts using the purposive and snowball sampling method. Experts' interaction methods have been conducted individually based on social structural issues based on thematic categories of social history and social structure of the *Mahabharata* period. Abidin & Laskar (2020) have also argued that the textual analysis of the historical book is not merely to evaluate the text but also to explore the explicitly intended meaning of the text and the verification between textual and contextual analysis, in some sense, can become useful in depicting the meaning of the text. In this sense, The *Mahabharata* was used to draw the various parts of the social structure of the ancient period. The content analysis method has been used to analyze this study's primary and secondary data types.

With the emergence of the concept of privatization of property, the gaining of resources and the holding and maintaining of power created conflict. The economy and mode of production construct the socio-cultural structure in the process of gaining and holding the resources for the sake of power. As Karl Marx (1848) pointed out in the conflict theory, private ownership created conflict by gaining and holding resources, with the unequal distribution of resources and the mode of production systems. Likewise, the cause of conflict has emerged based on the theoretical foundation of Karl Marx, even in the socio-cultural structure of *The Mahabharata*. The conflict found in *The Mahabharata* dwells in various levels, such as resource gaining and resource holding for mitigating the power in the state to state at a macro level and family and individual in micro units. So, the polygamy, slavery, political conflicts, and *Varna* hierarchy systems of *The Mahabharata* are the outcome of the resource gaining, resource holding, and maintaining of power. In this respect, this research is analyzed through the theoretical lens of conflict and Karl Marx's mode of production.

PERIOD AND GEOGRAPHY OF *THE MAHABHARATA*

The exact date and the period of *The Mahabharata* is disputable. Scholars and historians have presented their views, and most agree that the 5th century B.C. was the time of the production of *The Mahabharata*. Vaidya & Pusalker (1993) have argued that the stanzas of the *Mahabharata* were composed from the fourth century B. C. to the fourth century A.D. Likewise, Subedi (2018) has quoted Radhakrishnan and claimed that *The Mahabharata* was produced before 500 B.C. *The Mahabharata* was enhanced through three stages: "Jaya" epic in the initial stage has eight thousand stanzas; "*Bharata*" epic in the second stage and it was of twenty-four thousand stanzas and *The Mahabharata* in the last stage, and it has been recognized as *The Mahabharata* with hundred thousand stanzas (Subedi, D. P. Personal communication 26 June 2022). Based on the evidence above, *the Mahabharata period was* taken and assumed to have been produced around the 5th century B.C. It reflects the ecological area of the Indian continent. The battle area, Hastinapur, Kurukshetra, Panchal, Gandhar, Dwaraka, and the like are on the Indian geographical map. Ancient geographical locations have been found on the modern map of India even today.

THE ECONOMIC SYSTEM OF THE *MAHABHA-*
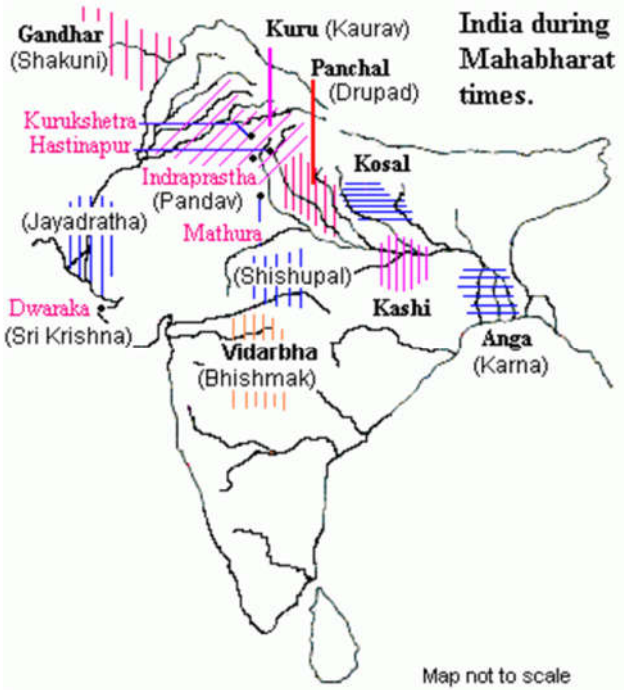
RATA PERIOD

Figure 2. Geographical locations of The *Mahabharata:*

Production systems and livelihood strategies are the major dimensions of the economic system. The *Mahabharata* reflects the agricultural and pastoral forms of the production system. Coser (1996) and Ritzer (2000) discussed Marxist theory and mentioned primitive, slavery, feudalistic, capitalistic, and socialistic production as the five categories of production systems. Based on this category, the production system of *The Mahabharata* period was related to both slavery and feudalistic nature. The production system of *The Mahabharata* period was based on animal farming and agriculture. Livestock was the most important wealth (Thapar, 2010, p. 636). Similarly, Mishra (1987, p. 299) mentions the three-fold divisions of the economy: agriculture, cattle, and trade. Agriculture was the main source of income for livelihood and social structure in the era of *The Mahabharata*. The land was a major means of production. Cattle were other sources of income apart from the land at the time of *The Mahabharata* period.

MARRIAGE PATTERN

Karl Marx pointed out that private ownership of the unequal distribution of resources creates conflict in the socio-cultural structure. Likewise, gaining and holding resources for mitigating power was a common trend even in The Mahabharata period. So, the marriage system of *The Mahabharata* as a form of polygyny, polyandry, and *Niyoga* (donation of sperm to continue the lineage of the nearest one of the kin members) *was* in practice as the major component of the social structure. From a sociological perspective, marriage functions as a ritual since human civilization is especially highly developed from Vedic civilization.

The different kinds of marriages and their acceptance can be read in the conversation between Bhishma and Yudhishthira (Debroy, 2014). In this chapter, Bhishma explains the importance of the marriage system to his grandson, Yudhishthira, as he asks him: "O grandfather! Tell me the foundation of all dharma concerning offspring, the home, ancestors, gods, and guests." (Debroy, 2014, p. 5971)

In the above query, Bhishma clarifies to Yudhishthira the dharma of bestowing a maiden. So, according to him, there are five forms of marriage in *The Mahabharata: Brahma, Kshatriya, Gandharva, Asura, and Rakshasa* (Debroy, 2014, pp. 5971-5972). However, Bhisma explained five forms of marriage to Yudhishthira in the above-given stanza. Hara (2014, p. 296) has stated other eight forms of marriage: *Brahma, Daiva, Arsha,*

Figure 3. Symbolic picture of polyandrous family, Draupadi as a single wife of five Pandavas.

Prajapatya, which are regarded as supreme qualities of marriage, and *Asura, Gandharva, Rakshaya, and Paisacha*, which are taken as the lowest qualities of marriages. These eight types of marriages were practiced in the Vedic period. Even though the polyandrous marriage of Draupadi was not classified in the Vedas but still the practice can be seen in *The Mahabharata* period as Upreti (2022) anthropologically claimed polyandry for the accumulation of the resources but not get it fragmented among the brothers in their partitions (Upreti, personal communication 2022). In this sense, we have found the A character Draupadi to be the single wife of five Pandavas, reflecting the practice of polyandry.

In the *Brahma* form of marriage, the Brahmana gives his daughter to an outstanding groom after knowing he has conducted good, learning, birth, and deeds through dharma, and this type of marriage represents dharma.

The *Kshatriya* marriage also consists of dharma, in which the groom is studied well before marriage to the bride. Nevertheless, he can marry two wives compared to the Brahman (Debroy, 2014, pp. 5972). Pandu's marriage of two wives, Kunti and Madri, reveals the tradition of Mahabharata's contemporary social structure of Kshatriya, which has married two wives and Kshatriya has polygamous practice.

The *Gandharva* form of marriage can be related to forceful weddings by ignoring the bride's father's wish and marrying the groom she wishes to marry, which is also a proper *dharma* or duty (Hara, 1974). Marriage between Bhima and Hidimba can be related to this kind of marriage where the choice of Hidimba to marry Bhima can be a form of this kind of marriage as presented in the Hidimba-Vadha Parva (Debroy, 2014, p. 139).

In the Asur type of marriage, the girl's relatives are lured by using the riches to buy her, and it

is not regarded as a proper *dharma* (duty) since such marriages continued in the social structure of *The Mahabharata* period. Marriage, a symbolic rite of passage, was compulsory for domesticated life, which even Dhand (2008, p 64) has emphasized. Marriage can be taken as a stage of sexual intercourse with the consent of the bride and groom to continue the social structure.

NIYOGA SYSTEM

Vichitravriya was the only alive son of Santanu, next to Bhisma, who had vowed not to get married for the sake of his father, and Vichitravriya also died without begetting any child. So, the resource holding and continuation of the patrilineage of Santanu got vanished. For the solution, *Niyoga*, donation of sperm to continue the lineage of the nearest one of the kin male members. *The* system was introduced by Satyavati by compelling Vyasa, Satyavati's son who was born from sage Parasara before she got married to Santanu, to Ambalika, and Ambika, respectively (Adi Parva in *The Mahabhrata* and personal communication with Modanath Prasrit, 2022). *Niyoga* was a socially accepted practice system when a male heir was sterile or dead. A family member was appointed to donate his semen to the wife so that the genealogy tree could continue, especially by the younger brother of the husband, where permission was taken from the husband or elders after his demise (Mishra, 1977). Still, there have been accounts of semen donations by people from outside the family lineage, such as the case of Kunti and Madri, whom the gods and autonomy impregnated in making decisions about Karna's birth. In *The Mahabharata*, its practice can be seen in many instances from the birth of Pandu and his sons, Dhritarashtra and Karna, which can be related to the practice of *Niyoga*. Even though it was practiced, it wasn't for sensational satisfaction (Mishra, 1977) because the role of the male was only to donate his sperm so that his brother's lineage could move on.

Firstly, after the death of Vichitravirya, who was without a son from both his wives Ambika and Ambalika for the throne, which made his mother Satyavati, very anxious in the beginning, asked Bhisma to copulate with the widowed wives of Vichitravirya but since Bhisma had taken the path of celibacy asked Ved Vyasa. Both Ved Vyasa and Vichitravirya happened to be stepbrothers, thus impregnating his wives Ambika and Ambalika with the practice of *Niyoga* (introduction, part). *Niyoga* can be seen in the royals and the Brahmana families rather than the common people since it has not been stated in the context of the common citizens in *The Mahabharata*. However, in the context of Kunti, the mantra to summon any god to grant her sons can also be seen as a way to *Niyoga* where the concept of using the younger brother to save the genealogy (Mishra, 1977) is not followed, and given birth to Karna from the mantra by summoning the sun god or Arka on her own will and later on Pandu's request gave birth to her other three sons through the recitation of the mantra by calling Yama, Indra and Vayu. When Pandu was convincing Kunti, he talked about the laws of Manu and its linkage to *Niyoga*.

Through the practice of this system, the main characters of *The Mahabharata* have been set, and it was legal at the time. Still, the donor's name was not known to the children as all the characters have been called either by the father's or mother's name and also, the sons are unaware of the fact that a third party conceived them. Even though its portrayal can be seen, followed by the royals, the common citizens practicing it are not shown in *The Mahabharata*. However, the crux of *The Mahabharata* is built in the *Niyoga* system.

FAMILY STRUCTURE

The patrilineage family structure was practiced for resource-gaining, holding, and mitigating power in *The Mahabharata period*. Dharma played a very important role in bringing the family together, where the eldest male heir would rule the family, and his word would be the voice of the whole family. For instance, after losing the dice game with the Kauravas, Draupadi supports Yudhishthira's proposition by saying that he is the supreme heir of the lineage and his words are absolute and also holds their lives (Debroy, 2014). Women were subjected to marriage and having children under the social foundation, which would shape the family under the ideal wife, which was the *Stree Dharma* of women at that time (Biswas, 2016, p 55).

It can be taken that women were subjected to form a family so that the genes could be transferred from one generation to another and were governed by the patriarchal ideologies of male dominance (Biswas, 2016, p 56). In addition, male dominance in the family can be taken out from the conversations where the male heir's name is used to denote the sons and daughters, such as Bharata lineage, Pandu's sons, or Kuru's Lineage. So, patriarchal dominance after one's demise can also be seen to be influencing the family. However, Kunti's presence in choosing to marry all the Pandavas to Draupadi can be seen as the power women had within the

family to make choices. The male heir was to follow it (Debroy, 2014) "Share it" (p 143). Here 'it' signifies how Kunti has also objectified Draupadi as goods for sharing, for which she was shamed publicly as a sex worker (Rajankar, 2015). The influence of the ancient social structure of *the Mahabharata period has been reflected* in the family structure even today.

ASHRAM SYSTEM AS THE DIVISION OF LABOR OF LIFE SPAN

The main objective of one's life, according to the value system in Hinduism, is *Moksha,* or spiritual liberation, and the way to attain it is through the Ashram System (Sharma, 2007, p. 1). Also, in the eighty-sixth section of *The Mahabharata,* i.e., the Moksha Dharma Parva, the ways of attaining liberation are discussed between Vyasa, Bhishma, and Yudhishthira which contains 6935 shlokas (stanzas) in the chapter of 186. Similarly, Hanuman emphasizes the practice being followed from the Satya Yuga with the principles of the Veda (Section Thirty-Three Tirtha-yatra Parva, Chapter 445) (148). In other words, it was a way of life to reach the ultimate goal of humans, i.e., Moksha, which can be divided into four parts and these parts have their importance in an individual's life and can be divided into four quarters, namely: *Brahmacharya, Grihastha, Vanaprastha,* and *Sannyasa.* Bhishma has expressed: "Even if a person follows any one of these *ashramas* appropriately and is free from desire and hatred, he will obtain greatness after death" (Debroy, 2014, p.234). This can relate to the importance that the *ashrama* system has played in a person's life in obtaining salvation from the materialistic world.

Firstly, in the *Brahmacharya* stage, the individual acquires knowledge related to material and otherworldly things, which makes the person self-disciplined (Sharma, 2007, p. 6), in which the supreme Rishis won the world through this *Ashrama* and lived a life with great rigor but containing and casting themselves out of the conflict of the society where all the living creatures were respected in following a strict guideline (Debroy, 2014). In this stage, the teachers are called 'Guru' while the pupils are called "Shishyas" who ask for alms (Sharma, 2007, p. 7). It starts from an early age to 25 (Sharma, 2007, p. 6).

The Grihastha system's main objective was to continue the lineage and to gain and hold the resources, and it was made mandatory for all. Grihastha is the second phase, which starts at the age of 25 and ends at the age of 50 (Sharma, 2007, p. 8); it

is portrayed in Chapter 1563(235) of the Moksha Dharma Parva with its practice and importance in obtaining Moksha. In this phase, according to Vyasa, the person lives in a house as the householder and pursues *dharma* by getting married to a wife, and four kinds of rules are outlined for the householder. It is reflected in Section Eighty-Six Moksha Dharma Parva Chapter 1563, 235: "The first of these is to maintain a store of grain, the second to maintain a pot of grain, the third is not to provide for tomorrow, while the last is to follow the conduct of pigeons."

Various tasks have been divided by following the four rules, and the latter has more merit than the previous ones in terms of dharma. If the person follows the first conduct, then he must follow six tasks: performing sacrifices for himself, officiating at sacrifices of others, teaching, studying, making gifts, and receiving gifts (Debroy, 2014, p. 624).

Vanaprastha refers to renouncing all worldly pleasures and moving on to live in the forest, whereas *Vana-* refers to the forest, and *Prashtha* refers to advanced move. Vyasa has explained in section eighty-six of Moksha Dharma Parva Chapter 1564(236)

When a householder sees wrinkles on his body and white hair, and when he sees the children of his children, he should then resort to the forest. The third quarter of the life should be spent dwelling in *vanaprastha.*

So, in this stage, sacrifices of leaving the house and living in the forest are prioritized, and strict eating habits with lodging should be followed. Vyasa has four rules, according to Veda, to be followed (Debroy, 2014)

Sannyasa is the last stage, starting from 70 onwards and ending at 100 years (Sharma, 2007, p. 15). Vyasa is often referred to as the dharma of the Upanishads, where one sacrifices all that one has and one's self from life. Through this stage, one can be freed by not letting anything hold him back. So, in comparison to the other stages, this stage is supreme and has the finest quality of all the stages. Likewise, Hawley (1994, p. 52) pointed out that Satyabhama practiced Sannyasa by becoming a Sannyasa and entering the forest as atonement of salvation.

Therefore, the Ashrama system can be taken as a social practice during the four stages of life, with the assumption of 100 years of lifespan in the *Mahabharata.* The ashram system is recognized as the pattern of labor division of human life in the ancient social structure of *The Mahabharata* period.

YAGYA AS A SOCIAL INSTITUTION

Yagya, the beginning of Yagya, means the protection of fire, and later, it started to worship fire as God, which was used even to destroy enemies' resources, gain power, and mitigate resources. Yagya -was functioning as a social institution in the contemporary society of the *Mahabharat* and has been functioning even in the present society. Yagya or sacrifice refers to converting something that is not holy into holy. The priests act as intermediaries between the gods and the gifts offered to them (Thapar, 1994, p. 311). So, the Rishis performed *Yagyas* according to their courses according to the gods and men who live in this universe for the objects that have been created (Section 3, Poushya Parva 4). In *The Mahabharata,* it can be related to the practice derived from the Vedas. It can be seen influencing the practice, such as the sacrifices used by Janamejaya when he organized a *Yagya* to kill all the serpents and offer these serpents as sacrifices to the fire of the *Yagya,* after his father died due to a snake bite. However, in the Bhagwat Gita Parva, the sacrifice for the Yagya can be related to various offerings rather than real animal sacrifices, which Krishna and Arjuna have stated in the Bhagwat Gita Parva. The Bhagwat Gita Parva outlines five different types of Yagya that should be performed daily that are: *Adhyana Yagya, Brahma Yagya, Pitri Yagya, Deva Yagya, and Bhuta Yagya* (Debroy, 2014).

According to Krishna, the motif of Yagya, as briefed to Arjuna, was that while performing Yagya, one should free oneself from all the materialistic things from the universe and not be attached to worldly things. If it is attached, then the action would not have any value. *Yagya* was not only a tool for sacrificing worldly things but also a tool for raising one's social status. The individual would give gifts of value to the Brahmanas, where the values of gifts determined the status of the individual, i.e., the greater the value, the greater the social recognition and the greater the status (Thapar, 1994, p. 313).
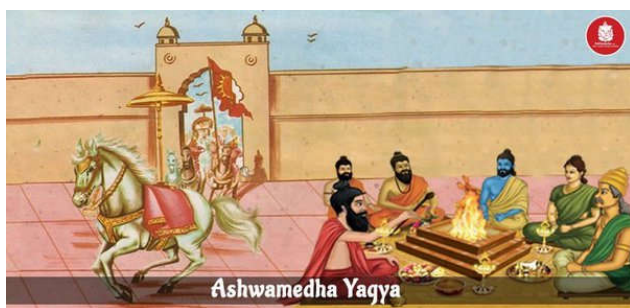

Figure 4. Symbolic picture of *Yagya* perform

So, the society then was regulated by the *Yagyas,* who played a vital role in achieving a greater good for their life by sacrificing materialistic worldly goods. It was a social structure of the ancient *Mahabharata* period.

THE *VARNA* HIERARCHY

The *Varna* system was linked with resource handling, utilizing and categorically managing the resources in the society. In the social structure of *The Mahabharata*, four types of *Verna* systems were in practice, and it created a hierarchal order to perform their roles accordingly. The Brahmin were in higher positions, such as the Kshatriyas, the warriors, and the Vaishyas, who had to provide for the needs of the individuals, and the *Shudras,* who had to serve the higher caste groups. The *Brahmins* were the priests who were the most powerful of the four *Varnas* because they were given privileges on everything in the social and cultural structure. The power practiced and installed fear upon the other *Varnas* was their curse, which is seen to have taken place in Pandu's life (Sambhava Parva, p. 91*).* In the incident between Arjuna and the Gandarva woman, it is also mentioned that a king cannot conquer any land without the presence of a Brahmana, and even if it is obtained, it cannot be sustainable (Section Eleven Chaitraratha Parva shloka 393).

On the other hand, the Kshatriyas were warriors and rulers who, in the presence of Brahmins, ruled over the lands and dominated the individuals of the land. So, it seems they were the individuals who could reign over the kingdoms and ruled other varnas except the Brahmins; however, while the power hierarchy can be deduced to *Brahmins and Kshatriyas* at that time Bidur who was born of a Shudra woman and a Brahman also is seen at the position of administering a state where the hierarchy of varnas can be seen not to follow the conventional system (Shivaraman, 1995, p. 133). In the four *Varna, Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya,* and *Shudra,* systems of the *Mahabharata* had specific roles to play in the social structure of the contemporary time.

CONFLICT

The Mahabharata is governed by conflict, and without conflict, the epic would not have moved forward. Conflict is seen among various entities, namely those holding power, resources, gender roles, and dharma. Firstly, conflict in *The Mahabharata* mainly revolves around power relationships to gain the position of ruler of Hastinapur. It is the struggle between Bharata's lineage, i.e., Dhritarash-

Figure 5. Symbolic picture of the field of *The Mahabharata*

tra's sons and Pandu. During the Dyuta parva, the Pandavas lost the dice game, and they were sent to exile for thirteen years, i.e., 12 years in the forest and a year in disguise without being recognized by anyone. It shows the conflict of the power struggle of the Kauravas that they had with the Pandavas to rule the kingdom because they were doing good in their domain and would take all of Hastinapur for themselves, which envy and greed can be taken as a sign of the conflict that Duryodhana created with the Pandavas which led to war (Section 1, Anukramanika Parva, chapter 1). It can also be said that the epic was a conflict between the two opposing sides, the Pandavas and the Kauravas, for their dominance over Hastinapur (Brook & Kalb, 2010, p. 63).

The male was supposed to be a safeguard to their spouse, but after losing the dice game, the role of Yudhishthira was not fulfilled, which conflicts with the role addressed to the male counterpart as stated by (Brodbeck & Black, 2007, p. 83). The events of The Mahabharata are centered on the conflict at the state level; family members and the *Mahabharata* would not have emerged without the conflict. The battle of *The Mahabharata* displayed the conflict at the state level for resource gaining and holding power, as reflected in the picture below.

The conflict of destiny and humans trying to avoid it can be seen. In contrast, Parikshit tried to save himself from the curse to die from the bite of the king of serpent Takshaka given to him by a hermit for disrespecting him; where Parikshit tried to save himself by trying various measures himself but died in the end (Section Five Astika Parva, chapter 34). Therefore, the conflicts seen in *The Mahabharata* can be over power, gender roles, dharma, various races, and destiny.

SLAVERY SYSTEM
The slavery system was born in resource expansion form, and those who were defeated in the war were enslaved in *The Mahabharata period*. In *The Mahabharata,* slavery is seen to be practiced where both the male and female sexes were kept to serve their masters. Firstly, when Kardu and Shouti make a wager on finding the horse's tail color for the loser becoming the slave of one another (Section Five, Astika Parva, Chapter 18), is the connotation of slavery being practiced in *The Mahabharata* where both males or females could be the slaves of one another. After losing the dice game, Yudhishthira became a slave who was compelled to wager his wife, who, as an enslaved person, could not have a spouse slave and also became a Shudra (Zalantar, 1997, p. 258).

On the other hand, according to the Bhagavad Gita Parva, the *dharma* of *Shudra* was servitude towards the higher caste groups, which can be linked to being oppressed and serving the higher caste groups who were masters to them. While betting, Yudhishthira elected his thousand slaves as a wager towards the dice game, which can relate to the servers of the Kshatriyas (*Debroy, 2014,* Section Sixty-Three, Bhagavad Gita Parva, Chapter 900-40). The case of Devayani and Sharmistha can be related to the birthright of one being the daughter of a *Brahman* and another of an Ashura to serve the Brahmana's daughter as a slave with her thousand slave maidens (Debroy, 2014). Moreover, it can be related to the slavery system the Yayati protected by taking in both the ladies and the other 1000 maidens (Brodbeck, 2016, p. 128). Therefore, power was one way to enslave people, with the wager being the other and the caste system the other through which slavery was maintained in the social structure of *The Mahabharata* period.

POLITICAL SYSTEM AND MONARCHY-BASED STATE LEADERSHIP
The political system was based on the resources gaining, resource holding, and mitigating power in The Mahabharata period. *The Mahabharata* contains the political doctrine, the system of various units, and their functions to rule the state and keep the social law and order in perfect form. It displays the process of becoming the king within the hierarchical order of the princess's birth. It has given the political history, and the multiple political units are found in *The Mahabharata* social structure.

The monarchy system was born by gaining resources, holding them from generation to generation, and even maintaining power as a parental property of the resources in t*he Mahabharata* period. *The Mahabharata* reflects different states, such as Hastinapur, Gandhar, Dwaraka, Madra, Panchal,

etc. All these states had the monarchy-based leadership. The first-born prince used to become the king of the state as its rule and the convention. *The Mahabharata* would not have happened if this system of the first-born prince did not have to be the king. Vishma was the first-born son of King Santanu and had the right to be the king of Hastinapur. However, King Santanu had to get married to Satyawati, whose father put the condition of making her son the king of Hastinapur but not Vishma. The king, Santanu, was nervous and in a dilemma. Vishma found out the truth of his father's melancholy. He took a promise of not getting married and abandoning his right to be the king of Hastinapur for his father's happiness. Then, King Santanu married Satyawati, whom Vishma supported to rule the state. Likewise, Pandu, the second-born son of Ambalika, was made the king of Hastinapur, but his death caused the first-born blind son of Ambika, named Dritarastha, to become the king.

Similarly, Kunti's first-born son, Yudhishthira, had the right to become the king, just as Dritharastha did. Gandhari was worried about getting her son faster than Kunti. There was a competition for conceiving and giving birth to a son. Gandhari had an internal conflict with Kunti. She gave birth to a heap of flesh through which it is believed that the flesh of the heap turned into 100 sons. Ultimately, Kunti's first-born son, Yudhishthira, became the king of Hastinapur (Chalise, 1911). The monarchy-based leadership in The Mahabharata period guided the political structure.

DIPLOMATIC RELATION

Diplomatic relations were related to obtaining and holding resources during t*he Mahabharata* period. *The Mahabharata* has exemplified how to maintain political diplomacy to keep the state from external invasion and strengthen its national position. In this context, the king, Gandhar, became ready to marry his daughter, Gandhari, to the blind prince, Dritarastha, to balance the power relationship with Hastinapur. According to Prasrita (Personal communication, 8 July 2022) and Subedi (2018), the Kuru dynasty was more powerful in all aspects, and the Gandhar state was weak. So, the king, Suwal, of Gandhar state accepted Vishma's proposal to marry his daughter Gandhari to the blind prince, Dritarastha, only to make his state safe from the invasion of Hastinapur. It was a kind of diplomacy played by King Suwal. It displays that diplomacy was applied in the different states of *The Mahabharata* era. Another fact is Krishna's diplomatic practice to avoid the war between Pandavas and the king, Dritar-astha. Krishna played as an envoy, and this diplomacy was for peace and justice. Political conflict and diplomacy were used to gain power, hold resources, and maintain power. Even today, the same political system has prevailed in all political conflicts, agreements, and dealings.

STATE AS A PARENTAL PROPERTY

The Mahabharata provided information that the state has been used as a parental property to divide among the princesses of the king. It was a resource obtaining and holding process as a parental property in *The Mahabharat* period. In this context, Vishma and Dritarastha divided Hastinapur into Pandavas and Kauravas. The Pandavas were ready to accept the division's proposal, but the Kauravas refused it since Duryodhan longed to become the ruler of the entire state. As a result, the Pandavas were exiled for 13 years. As the Pandavas were able to spend 13 years of exile, there was the threat of losing Hastinapur Duryodhan, which caused war for the sake of Hastinapur as a parental property (Chalise, 1911). It has displayed that the state was taken as personal property and created conflict in the social structure of *The Mahabharata*.

CONCLUSION

The social and cultural structure of *the Mahabharata* period was found to be constructed on the foundation of the historical context of slavery and the feudalistic mode of production system. The slavery and feudalistic social structure are always linked to patriarchal and patrilineage socio-cultural practices. Based on this background and roots, the social structure of *The Mahabharata* has been shaped, formed, and determined for the process of resource gaining and resource holding practice for mitigating power. So, the social structure of *The Mahabharata* is reflected as polygyny, polyandry, slavery, patriarchy, and patrilineage system.

The structure of family and the forms of conflict emerged for controlling resources, gaining power, and maintaining it, and Yagya, Ashram, and Verna systems were also associated with gaining resources. The conflicts were the most powerful form of socio-cultural structure in mitigating power through the resource-holding process in the *Mahabharata* era. The political leadership was structured based on gaining and controlling the resources of the state through power, and it was found to compel the queens to compete in begetting the son first to hold the position of monarchy as the first-born son of the king was the ruler to become the future king.

The production system's resources were based on private ownership in the ancient period of *The Mahabharata*. The distribution of resources was imbalanced in the ancient period of The Mahabharata and has generated conflict among the members of the political leadership. As a result, it has generated conflict, leading to the war. The conflict has become the seed of division among the family members for justice over evil, and the destructive war has taken place to gain impartiality and the right kind of social structure. The resource-holding system has created competition by spawning many childbirths for all members of society as the tools of the production system to generate a sound economic system. The slavery system was found to be related to the mode of the production system. Polygyny and polyandry also have got with human resources based on the mode of production and power. The state has been regarded as personal and parental property, and the Pandavas and the Kauravas have gotten into a conflict of gaining the state and dividing it among themselves. Despite the division of the state, the war was found to take place for the gaining and holding of the entire state, either by the Pandavas or the Kauravas. These facts are congruent with the theoretical mode of production and interpretation of the conflict-oriented perspective of Marxism.

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