Gender Inequality in Historical Context of The Mahabharata Period: Analysis Through the Sociological Vantage Point

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Abstract: Gender is a kind of unit of socio-cultural structure which is always socio-culturally and historically constructed. To identify and analyze gender, historical, social, and cultural structures must be traced from the ancient literary scriptures. The gender study of the ancient time becomes possible only through the history, scriptures, religions, and literature produced in the ancient period. Therefore, the research has focused on identifying and analyzing the gender inequality in the period of The Mahabharata's social structure. The historical content analysis method has been used to collect and analyze the data to achieve the objective. The gender inequality has been found in the society of The Mahabharata period. Men have been found superior to dominate the women who have been victimized through polygyny and polyandry. The men have been depicted as superior and the women as inferior in the socio-cultural structure of The Mahabharata. The women seem to be found as whores and as the sexual abuse of the male characters because of the power domination of the patriarchal system in which men have been in the position of resource gaining and resource holding that seems to have been witnessed abundant in The Mahabharata era. The women are submissive and loyal to their husbands and have been used as commodities by male characters. Such conditions of women characters in the period of The Mahabharata era have been aptly found to be the outcome of the theory of the mode of production and the principle of the patriarchy.

Abstrak: Gender merupakan salah satu unit struktur sosial budaya yang senantiasa dikonstruksi secara sosial budaya dan historis. Untuk mengidentifikasi dan menganalisis gender, struktur historis, sosial, dan budaya harus ditelusuri dari kitab suci sastra kuno. Kajian gender pada masa lampau hanya mungkin dilakukan melalui sejarah, kitab suci, agama, dan sastra yang dihasilkan pada masa lampau. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini difokuskan pada identifikasi dan analisis ketimpangan gender pada periode struktur sosial Mahabharata. Metode analisis isi historis digunakan untuk mengumpulkan dan menganalisis data guna mencapai tujuan. Ketimpangan gender ditemukan dalam masyarakat pada periode Mahabharata. Laki-laki dianggap lebih unggul dalam mendominasi perempuan yang menjadi korban poligami dan poliandri. Laki-laki digambarkan sebagai pihak yang lebih unggul dan perempuan sebagai pihak yang lebih rendah dalam struktur sosial budaya Mahabharata. Perempuan tampaknya ditemukan sebagai pelacur dan sebagai korban pelecehan seksual terhadap tokoh laki-laki karena dominasi kekuasaan sistem patriarki yang menempatkan laki-laki pada posisi sebagai pihak yang memperoleh dan menguasai sumber daya yang tampaknya telah banyak disaksikan pada era Mahabharata. Para wanita tersebut ternyata tunduk dan loyal kepada suami mereka, dan mereka telah dijadikan komoditas oleh tokoh-tokoh laki-laki. Kondisi tokoh-tokoh wanita tersebut pada periode Mahabharata secara tepat telah ditemukan sebagai hasil dari teori cara produksi sekaligus prinsip patriarki.

INTRODUCTION

From the time of birth, human beings have been identified through the sexual categories of male and female. The physical structures of humans have been differentiated through sexual organs to males and females. Sex is biological and natural and it is beyond the construction of human beings. On the basis of sexual categories, the humans have got different works and rights, and opportunities to function in the social structure. The various functions, roles, and opportunities have been endowed to males and females on the basis of their biological formations. And such biological construction is called gender. In this sense, Sandy (1973) has stated that the social roles between men and women differ. In the context of different roles of men and women, gender differences have been formed by the sociocultural structure. The male's and female's roles have been guided, classified, distinguished and assigned through social norms, values, customs and conventions. A male has to perform his role given to him by society, and the female has to follow the duties and responsibilities assigned to her by the conventional system. Women have to be engaged in cooking and preparing vegetables at home whereas men are in the role of controlling and managing the resources. The power and role have not been shared equally between men and women. However, gender is always guided through social structures and cultural systems as part of the practices of society.

Gender is a kind of unit of socio-cultural structure which is always historically constructed (Adhikari, 2020b & Adhikari and Acharya,2020). In this respect, gender has been constructed through historical framework. In the same way, Risman (1998) has advocated that gender must be conceptualized on the basis of the socio-cultural structure and gender is comprehended within the socio-cultural anecdotes. To know the historical position of gender in the contemporary ancient time or of the primitive society, physically to be there is beyond reach and the only one possible way to explore gender's position in the primitive society is to seek through the roles and the responsibilities that males and females have acted in the ancient scriptures like *Vedas*, *Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*. The scriptures are a storehouse of the knowledge of the time and are socially produced. Such scriptures reveal the position of gender roles in primitive society. In this respect, Lorber (1994) has argued that gender is an institution and it is found in day-to-day life practices. It cannot be explored the gender condition of social inequality in society unless the differences are seen as being exercised and practised

in a common and normal form in the roles of gender in social institutions. So, gender is socially constructed and it has been universally unified. Likewise, even social construction has historically been formed. In other words, gender is socially and structurally guided. To identify and analyze gender, historical, social, and cultural structures have to be traced to ancient literary scriptures. History is always a learning process (Abidin & Laskar, 2020). The gender study of ancient times became possible through the history, scriptures, religions, and literature produced in the ancient period. In this respect, *The Mahabharata* has revealed the factual and real condition of the gender of the contemporary time. The study of the roles of the male and female characters in *The Mahabharata* depicts how the gender condition existed in the ancient time. The roles and responsibilities exhibited by the male and female characters found in *The Mahabharata* mirror the existing position of gender in society at the time. Hence, to trace gender inequality, we have focused on the ancient text, *The Mahabharata.*

A large number of scholars have estimated that the audiences of *The Mahabharata* are females. In this aspect, the critics, Bairdeuan and Peterfailvi (1985) have explained that women characters were beyond the range of the voice while the text of *The Mahabharata* was written. So, Bairdeuan and Peterfailvi's idea is that women did not have decision-making power, and neither did they have a powerful voice. They had to remain as the audiences of *The Mahabharata*. On the contrary, Hiltebeitel (2001) has suggested that the authors of *The Mahabharata* listened to their mothers, wives, sisters and daughters. In this respect, women were the center of providing suggestions invisibly to the authority holders. In other words, male characters often had to listen to the female characters in *The Mahabharata*. However, Minkowski (1989) stated that *The Mahabharata* is a story that is framed in epic form. It narrates the story within the linkages of the stories in its serial format. In this context, Minkowski has not discussed *The Mahabharata* from the gender perspective and he has merely presented his views about *The Mahabharata* from the point of view of its structure and the style of narration.

Unlike Bairdeuan & Peterfailvi (1985), Hiltebeitel (2001) and Minkowski (1989), *The Mahabharata* has been presented from the Philosophy of Politics. Krishna has been interpreted as the hero of political power exercise in the epic. It has discussed how Krishna was born and brought up and how Kamsa attempted to kill him through his agents. However, it has not analyzed the gender roles found

in *The Mahabharata.*

Likewise, Brodbeck (2009) has argued that *The Mahabharata* is the tale of a family feud. It has presented the conflict between *Kauravas* and *Pandavas* for the sake of power struggle (Adhikari et al., 2024a & Adhikari et al., 2024d). Furthermore, Brodbeck and Black (2007) have focused on the concept of having male first for the heir in *The Mahabharata*. But Brodbeck and Black have not discussed regarding the role of female from the gender perspective. On the contrary, Custodi (2007) has reflected the transsexuality in *The Mahabharata*. However, Custodi has not analyzed the gender roles of male and female superiority and inferiority, but he has focused on the concept of transsexuality only. In the same way, Simson (2007) has linked the similar idea as of Custodi and claimed that the gender study must be done metaphorically in *The Mahabharata*. Simson has emphasized for gender study only through the metaphorical perspective. However, he has omitted the male and female functional roles seen in the multiple episodes and anecdotes of The *Mahabharata* as part of the gender analysis.

The Mahabharata has even been analyzed and explained from the point of view of morality and ethics as one of the most significant ancient holy scriptures known as the foundation of Gita Philosophy of the world (Adhikari et al, 2024a). From this perspective, *the Mahabharata* has been considered the ideal scripture in South Asian culture and society. Political leaders, preachers, experts and scholars often cite the *Mahabharata* in their day-to-day speeches. Brown (1968) has also pointed out that experts, scholars, and intellectuals frequently take the example of *The Mahabharata's* events in their daily speech. In the same way, the critic, Dhand (2007 & Dhanda, 2009) focuses on the aspects of being moral and ethical one in *The Mahabharata*. However, the standard of ethics and moral values have not been applied aptly in *The Mahabharata*. Dhand has become silent regarding the gender role of masculinity and femineity in the character analysis of *The Mahabharata*. Different from other critics, Fitzrald (2007) reveals how Bhisma was able to remain alive as long as the war of *The Mahabharata* ended. Regarding the gender roles and the male as well as female characters of *The Mahabharata*, all of the aforementioned critics and scholars, such as - (Adhikari et al., 2024a; 2024d). Bairdeuan and Peterfailvi (1985), Hiltebeitel (2001), Custodi (2007), Simson (2007), Dhand (2007), Brodbeck (2009), Brodbeck and Black (2007), Minkowski (1989)   and Fitzrald

(2007)-have not focused their reanalysis about the gender inequality of male and female in *The Mahabharata*. The gender inequality has not been found to be explored yet in the analysis of the aforementioned scholars in *The Mahabharata*. Therefore, this research has explored the remaining gender inequality gap found in *The Mahabharata.*

The era depicted in *The Mahabharata* offers insight into an ancient social structure, and this research aims to identify the gender inequality of that period. This research has focused on exploring the gender relationship of the historical period of *The Mahabharata*. There is no possibility to visit the historical period of society. Each piece of knowledge and literature has been socially produced (Adhikari, 2020a; 2020c). The literature reflects the socio-cultural relationship of that period of society (Adhikari, 2021; 2022). We can draw out the social facts of that period through the historical content analysis of the literature (Adhikari et al., 2024b; Adhikari et al., 2024c) Hence, to achieve the objective, this research has gathered historical data using the historical content analysis method. Additionally, primary data has been obtained through interactions with experts. These experts, selected purposively, comprise historians, literary figures, professors, and researchers known for their expertise in the realm of social history and the social structure concerning gender inequality in *The Mahabharata* period. These interactions with experts were conducted individually and focused on exploring the social structural aspects of gender inequality within the identified thematic categories.

Similarly, secondary data has been collected through the articles, published in various journals of related issues. The research has chosen to use the qualitative research method to collect historical data, a method that Hamzah (2019) and Adhikari et al. (2024e) have highlighted for its effectiveness in qualitative research and uncovering theoretical origins. Kurniawan et al. (2023) and Adhikari et al. (2024f) have also utilized this qualitative research approach for gathering historical data. This study follows the same path to gain historical insights into the social structure concerning gender inequality within *The Mahabharata*. The content analysis method is a major method for analyzing data in qualitative research design (Adhikari, 2020d; 2024). All of the data were analyzed using the content analysis method.

Various thematic categories within the social structure concerning gender inequality have been identified. These categories include aspects such as the depiction of inferior female characters, the pres-

ence of superior male characters, obligatory acceptance of polyandry, women captured by men, the loyalty of females to males, women used as the commodity, women had been forcibly participating in a sexual relationship, women's rebels against patriarchal domination, male's sexual abuse to female, polygyny as a weapon of exploitation, and women as whores. These themes encompass multiple dimensions of gender inequality in the social history of The *Mahabharata* period.

Theoretical Discourse

Various theoretical concepts have been developed in gender analysis. This research has been viewed from the lens of the theory of patriarchy and the theory of modes of production. Firstly, the Theory of Modes of **production.** The emergence of property privatization led to conflicts rooted in social structure in resource acquisition, ownership, and the subsequent assertion of power (Marx & Engels, 1948). This dynamic, as Karl Marx highlighted in his theory of conflict arising from unequal resource distribution and the different modes of production, pertains to the socio-cultural structure (Coser, 1996). The private ownership of resources incites conflict (Engels,1984) in gaining and retaining them, evident not only in Marx's theoretical framework but also observable in the socio-cultural fabric of *The Mahabharata*. In this epic, conflicts manifest at various levels, encompassing the acquisition and possession of resources for power, seen both at the macro level between states and at the micro level within families and individuals. The presence of male and female characters, gender roles and responsibilities in *The Mahabharata* all stem from the pursuit of resources, their control, and the maintenance of power. This analysis explores these elements through the lenses of Marx's theory of modes of production.

Secondly, the Theory of Patriarchy**.** Gender role disparities are predominantly linked to the concept of patriarchy, a system characterized by hierarchal and unequal power dynamics. Reinforcing societal stereotypes of masculinity and femineity that further perpetuate the unequal power dynamic between genders. Walby (1990) describes patriarchy as a male-dominated family structure, a social and ideological construct that positions men as superior to women. Patriarchal societies promote the idea of motherhood, encompassing the nurturing, education, and upbringing of children within the family. In other words, women's roles, their identities as well as their due values have not been recognized in the patriarchal system of the socio-

cultural structure**Top of Form.** These two doctrines such as the theory of patriarchy and the theory of modes of production have been used as the lenses to interpret and analyze the concept of gender inequality of *The Mahabharata*.

Thirdly, the Social Context of *The Mahabharata***.** The socio-cultural structure of *The Mahabharata* era was heavily influenced by a pastoral mode of production and a patriarchal family system (Adhikari et al, 2024a). Thapar (2010) points out that this society predominantly relied on pastoral activities, with cattle herding, in particular, being a major occupation. The success of this pastoral system hinged on having dependable grazing lands and the ability to build and expand cattle herds, which constituted the primary source of wealth. During the post-Vedic period, as noted by Chudhari (1996), family structures were patriarchal, with the eldest male member exercising absolute authority over the family and its property, including movable assets like cattle. People during the Rig Vedic to *The Mahabharata* period primarily lived in rural villages (Thapar, 2008), and The Aryans, who formed the core of this society, were primarily pastoral, emphasizing the importance of cattle and bullock husbandry (Adhikari, 2020a). Socio-cultural structure of *The Mahabharata* period comprised various units, including marriage, family, the varna system, ashram system, three debts (Pitri Rina-parental debts, Rishi Rina- debts of teachers, Deva Rina-debts of God), *Yagya* system, slavery system, and conflicts (Basham, 1991). This social context of *The Mahabharata* has displayed the patriarchal system in the contemporary society.

GENDER ANALYSIS IN *THE MAHABHARATA*
Women Captured by Men

The marriage system in the era of *The Mahabharata* used to be by the principle of forcefully captured to the brides by the most powerful warriors. Karve (1969) has narrated the wedding of Vichitravirya by capturing three princesses, Amba, Ambika, and Ambalika, from the king of Kashi by Vishma, the son of Santanu in the palace of Hastinapur. Likewise, Chalise (1992: 9) has mentioned that Devbrat was the son of King Santanu. Devbrat had declared to stay unmarried and does not claim the post of king lifelong. Because of this kind of declaration, he was recognized as the Vishma. Vishma seriously thought about the marriage of his little brother Vichitravirya. One day, Vishma got the message that the King of Kashi had organized the Swoyamber ceremony to marry his three daughters Amba, Ambika, and Ambalika. Vishma started the journey

Figure 1. Symbol of fight of Vishma in capturing the three princes-Amba, Ambika and Ambalika, the daughters of the king of Kashi.

Figure 2. Symbol of a Female Being Captured Forcefully by Males..

with the blessing of Mother Satyawati to search for her daughter-in-law. Vishma reached in the Swoyamber ceremony and picked out Amba, Ambika, and Ambalika, who were the daughters of the king of Kashi.

Vishma fought with other princes who participated in the Swyamber ceremony, defeated all of them, and captured Amba, Ambika and Ambalika. (A.M. Dixit, Personal communication, July 5, 2022) claimed that not only the events of *The Mahabharata* but also all of the social history have been rounded to the power of the males. This event of capturing three daughters of the king of Kashi by Vishma has revealed how women were forcefully captured against their will and married to men in the period of *The Mahabharata*.

This data is gathered from the Adi-Parwa of *The Mahabharata,* which is the first chapter of *The Mahabharata*. Based on the mentioned fact of capturing women forcefully by the powerful warriors, as Vishma has done to the daughters of the king of Kashi, we can analyze the situation regarding the marriage age of women. Without any consultation with women, men captured them to marry the un-

known person. Women were captured by a powerful man in a filmy style with the power of the king's tradition and patriarchal social structure.

The Loyalty of Females to Male
Women used to be loyal to men in *The Mahabharata* period. Karve (1969) has explained how the widows of Vichitravirya, Ambika and Ambalika, had to be loyal to Vyasa, the first son of Satyawati, for the sexual intercourse with him as the donation of sperm for the continuation of Kuru Bamsa, after the death of Vichitravirya. In the same way, Chalise (1992:16) has mentioned that without a successor, Vichitravirya died. Vichitravirya had two wives: Ambika and Ambalika. They became widows. The question was raised about the continuation of Kuru's lineage. Queen Satyavati and Vishma were in a problem. Satyavati shared about her elder son Krishna Dwaipayan and said to Vishma ...". I can request Krishna Dwaipayan to donate the sperm to the widowed brother-in-law Ambalika and Ambika" (Chalise, 1992, Adi Parva p. 14). After the request of Satyabati, Krishna Dwaipayan agreed to donate the sperm to the widow Ambika and Ambalika and participated in a sexual relationship. Firstly, he participated with Ambika, but Ambika was afraid and closed her eyes during the sexual process. Krishna Dwaipayan had a very black body and beard. So, Ambika was fearful at that time. The cause of the sexual process was her closed eyes, and a blind son was born. The blind son was recognized as the Dhritarashtra. The blind Dhritarashtra married Gandhari. Gandhari was the daughter of the king of Gandhar's Suwal. Gandhari always covered the eyes with a piece of cloth for the salutation and loyalty to her blind husband, Dhritarashtra.

This information indicates the loyalty of females to males. Gandhari's eyes were able to see but she always suffered as a blind person. She did not hate any time to her blind husband. she had always respected to her husband and she applied blind life for the loyalty of her blind husband.

Obligatory Acceptance of Polyandry
A patriarchal system dominated the era of The Mahabharata. However, the polyandry system of marriage was to be accepted as an obligation. In this context, L.P. Uprety has mentioned that from an anthropological perspective, polyandry has resulted in using resources for livelihood. He has argued that it is questionable in *The Mahabharata* period. According to him, it is not clearly reflected in all kinds of families in the social structure of The *Mahabharata* (Personal communication, July13,2022).

Figure 3. Symbol of Draupadi Being Shared by Five Brothers as the Order of Their Mother Kunti

It was often practiced in the polyandry system of weddings in the socio-culture of *the Mahabharata* period.

Draupadi was the daughter of King Drupad. King Drupad had declared who would be able to pick up the *Dhanush* (heavy arrow or bow) that person would be able to marry his daughter Draupadi. Then, King Drupad organized a special ceremony to choose the husband for Draupadi. So, many brave people who were warriors had tried to succeed in performing the act of lifting the heaviest Dhanush, but all of them were unable to pick out the Dhanush. At that time, Shree Krishna provided the sign to Arjun for that performance. After the signing of Shree Krishna, Arjun immediately started the process of performing and succeeded, too. All of the participants felt surprised by the successful lifting of the heaviest Dhanush.

When Arjun had succeeded in the performance, Draupadi offered the garland of *Swyamber* (wedding ritual) to Arjun as the symbol of acceptance of the marriage ritual. This was the auspicious event for Panch-Pandav (five brothers). They went to the shelter, provided the surprise to their mother Kunti, and said "We have brought a thing…." Without observation of that thing, immediately Kunti replied to them "equally share to five brothers and consume it commonly …"(Chalise, 1992: Adi Parva, P.73). Kunti's advice was to divide the thing that Arjun had brought at home, but the thing that Arjun had brought was not any commodity except the daughter of Drupad, named Draupadi as his bride.

The Panch-Pandav obeyed their mother. They could not deny their mother's request. This event became more interesting and complex. Panch – Pandav felt how we can commonly share the Draupadi…. In the end, Draupadi had been used as the common wife of all Panch-Pandav. Then, the practice of polyandry started in the social structure

of *The Mahabharat*a period. It resulted from absolute obedience to the mother and respect for the mother's blessing and ruling (D.P. Subedi, Personal communication, 26, June,2022). The principle of sharing Draupadi as the common wife of five, Pandavas, has initiated the polyandry marriage system. The power of mother, Kunti, was beyond the disobedience of Pandavas.

This event provides the facts of the power of the mother and the obedience of sons. On the occasion of the *Swyamber* process, Draupadi had chosen to Arjun as her husband. Draupadi was not concerned with others, but by the cause of family norms and obsession with kin members, Draupadi faced the obligatory situation of acceptance of polyandry. This kind of gender relationship was constructed by the loyalty of the mother's leadership. It indicates the socio-cultural structure of *The Mahabharata* period when it had been developed the Bhakti Yog (Value of Loyalty). Karve (1969) has clarified a similar event of Draupadi's marriage and how Draupadi had to become the wife of five brothers-Pandavas.

Woman Used as the Commodity
When Yudhisthira was defeated in gambling with Kauravas, then Shakuni asked him for gambling ahead with what he had left. Yudhishthira put himself in "Dau" (gambling) for gambling but Shakuni said, "You have your queen Draupadi as the property, So, you put your Queen in a "Dau" for gambling then you put out from the "Dau". At that time Yudhisthira had become very angry and aggressive and announced "I put my dear wife Draupadi at the "Dau" for gambling". At that time, Dhritarashtra and Duryodhana became very happy and regularly asked about the result. In the end, Kauravas won the gambling. Duryodhana announced to carry the wife of Yudhisthira, Draupadi in assembly. According to an order from Duryodhana, Karna went to Draupadi to carry her to the assembly (D. R. Panta, Personal communication, July 20, 2022). This event displays how women were treated as commodity in the era of *The Mahabharata*. Karve (1968) has explained the same event of gambling and dishonoring Draupadi in the assembly of Hastinapur palace by the males in *The Mahabharata*.

Karna has explained the description of the gambling situation and the cause of coming to Draupadi in the assembly of the males as a commodity to be gambled by the Pandavas to Kauravas. Draupadi got surprised, and she requested to ask the cause of putting her in gambling, "Dau". Why did Karna delay carrying Draupadi to the Assem-

Figure 4. Symbol of Dishonoring Draupadi by attempting to make her naked in the King's assembly.

bly? Duryodhana asked and ordered Dushasana to carry her to the Assembly. Draupadi was in the inner garment, but Dushasana misbehaved with her and caught the hair of Draupadi and carried her with the Sari in the assembly.

All of the assembly members including Vishma were there but did not react against bringing Draupadi in the assembly as the commodity of gambling. Only Bidur reacted to Duryodhana. Draupadi was carried and she begged all the males for the saving of femineity but it was not listened. This context indicates that females were used as commodities by the family and their husbands. All of the cultural ethics and justice were dominated by power. Many members of the assembly had an inner feeling that was very irrational and not only unethical activity, but they even were silent because of the fear of the power of Duryodhana.

Draupadi was an innocent lady who had not made any kind of mistake but was neglected, captured and demonstrated in a half-naked situation in the assembly of males. They were trying to make completely naked to Draupadi. This was a very vicious picture of the assembly (G.P Poudel, Personal communication, July 20,2022). These types of roles of Duryodhana and Dushasana were constructed by "Damva" (pride) of political and economic power. Vishma and Bidur reminded silent in such acts of Duryodhana and it was blunder. But all the people were like dumb people because of the domination of power of the Duryodhana, and all of the people were there as merely witnesses. So, females were regarded no more than the commodities of the individuals and the commodities of the families in the era of *The Mahabharata*.

Women had Forcibly Participated in a Sexual Relationship

Two widows of Vichitravirya, Ambika and Ambalika, were forcefully engaged in a sexual relationship with Vyasa according to the order of Satyawati to carry on the patriarchal lineage of Kuru Bamsa as it

is narrated in *The Mahabharata*. Karve (1969) has explained this event as the forceful participation of women characters in *The Mahabharata*. In the same way, according to Chalise (1992:P14-15), Vichitravirya had two wives: Ambika and Ambalika but they had no sons. Vichitravirya died and both queens became widows without sons. Mother Satyawati and Vishma became very worried. They were thinking about the problem of the continuation of the lineage. At that time, Satyawati remembered Krishna Dwaipayan, Vyasa who was born from the sexual relationship between Satyawati and sage Parashar as a son. Mother Satyawati explained the reality and requested Vyasa for a sexual relationship with their widow daughters-in-law Ambika and Ambalika. But widows Ambika and Ambalika did not know about Vyasa. The physical structure of Vyasa was also a different and fearful form. Vyasa had very black skin and long beards. Forcibly they had participated in sex without emotion. So, they had afraid of Vyasa in the process of sexual relationship. As a result, Ambika gave birth to a blind baby Dhritarastra and Ambalika gave birth to a baby Pandu (white color skin) son. This narrative has mentioned in Adi Parva of *The Mahabharata*. This narrative indicates that women did not have any authority to share their emotions in the process of a sexual relationship. M.N Prashrit (Personal communication, July 8, 2022) has argued that women were forcibly used for sex and reproduction in *The Mahabharata* period. They had a compulsion to obey to orders of the family. They should have participated forcibly in unknown and fearful people. This kind of gender role was constructed as a continuation of lineage to lead the state and hold the resources.

Male's Sexual Abuse to Female

The history of The *Mahabharata* is based on the sexual events of Matsyagandha and sage Parashar. S. Mainali (Personal communication, July 8, 2022) has mentioned that the sexual relationship of Matsyagandha and sage Parashar was not mutually accepted. He added that Matsyagandha had been afraid to sage, Parashar at the event of sexual intercourse.

She had cried and wept during the moments of a sexual relationship. Mainali claimed that it was the rape of Matsyagandha by sage Parashar. Similarly, A.M. Dixit (Personal communication, July 8, 2022) said that the sexual relationship of King Santanu and Satyawati was also tricky and criminal.

The sexual event of Satyawati and the king, Santanu was disguised and dominated by the power

Figure 5. The symbol of sage Parashar having sexual abuse with Matsyagandha and Vyasa was born out of this act.

of king. Prashrit (2022) has added that the sexual relationship of Vyasa and Ambika and Ambalika was also a kind of sexual crime in the form of the Niyoga system. Widow Ambika and Ambalika were not mentally prepared for the sexual relationship with Vyasa. They both had been afraid of black-skinned and full-bearded Vyasa. These sexual events of Vyasa with Ambika and Ambalika, the sage, Parasara and Matsyagandha and the king Santanu and Satyawati reveal that females were sexually abused by males in *The Mahabharata* period.

Polygyny as a Weapon of Exploitation
Male members had become free to do multiple marriages. They used to exploit the women with the socio-cultural principle of patriarchal system. *The Mahabharata* period was the eye of Patriarchal society in which polygamy used to be common and general social norms, values, customs and the resource curbing and maintaining power by the males. For this, it was one of the easiest social systems developed to do the practice of polygamy. The elite and ruling class had the common practice of having multiple wives as seen, as the evidence, in *The Mahabharata*. Arjun had the wives Draupadi and Suvadra; the sister of Krishna. Likewise, Bhima had a wife, Hiddimba, apart from Draupadi.

D.P Subedi (Personal communication, June 26, 2022) has mentioned that several examples of polygyny traditions are reflected in the social history of *The Mahabharata*. Vichitravirya had two wives Ambika and Ambalika. Similarly, Pandu also had two wives, Kunti and Madri. Yudhistir, Vim, and Arjun also had other wives apart from Draupadi. M.N Prashrit (Personal communication, July 8, 2022) has claimed that Polygyny was practiced as women's violence in *The Mahabharata* period. She has added that Ambika and Ambalika

were captured by Vishma without acceptance of them to marry Vichitravirya. Pandu had married Madri as a second wife without honeymoon night to Kunti. She further said that women had no independent lives. Man did anything whatever they wanted. Polygyny was also the symbolic practice of male dominancy in the socio-cultural structure of *The Mahabharata* period.

Women as Whores
The Mahabharata has applied prostitution as the weapon to control and dominate the male and to gain the power. Institutional prostitution had been established in the valid form in *The Mahabharata*. Thousands of women whores used to appear in the welcoming process to the guests in the socio-cultural structure of *The Mahabharata* era. There were various envoys used to settle the various conflicts between the Pandavas and the Kauravas in *The Mahabharata*. The envoys got to be involved via prettiest and most beautifully dressed whores in welcoming the guests. The practice of using women as consuming goods was not far from the elites in the contest of *The Mahabharata*. Women seem to be used to gain power by the elites. In Udhog Parba (86/15) the King, Dhritarashtra ordered to arrange the most beautiful whores for The Lord Krishna in welcoming process of him (Subedi, 2018, p. 270). Similarly, in the description of Ban Parba (139/27), the Pandavas had been sent to the forest from the defeat of the gambling from the palace. The lifestyle of the forest was so struggleful and painful. It was the most melancholic and troublesome for the prince. When the Pandavas were in such a plight, the prince, Duryodhana wanted to know how the Pandavas got suffered. So, Duryodhana went to the forest with women whores, maidens, and other women helpers who served him as he needed. Kande (1992) also has argued about the women prostitution prevailing in *The Mahabharata*.

Superior Male Characters
The Mahabharata has provided the superior and inferior male characters in the social structure. The superior characters are those who are good to use weapons like bows in the war. The learned and visionary diplomats, wise, far-sighted, obedient, and loyal to parents, tolerable, brave and courageous characters are regarded as the superior ones.

Yudhisthira has been categorized as the wisest and ideal person in the Pandavas family. He is obedient to his seniors and he knows how to deal with whom. He gets identified as the image of performing the truth. He seldom loses his patience

even in the crisis of life either in the forest or in the war. He respects his seniors like Vishma, and takes care of the juniors. None of his brothers goes against him, even in crisis. He controls himself and his bothers when Draupadi gets disgraced in the palace by Duryodhana. His characters and good conduct would lure all other senior characters and he has been regarded as the symbol of law and order in the social structure. He dwells in the hearts of the entire public of *The Mahabharata (S.D.* Gautam, Personal communication, July 10, 2022). The characteristics of Yudhisthira and Vishma reveal the quality of the superior male characters in *The Mahabharata.*

Vishma has stood as the loyal and devoted son of his father. He maintained his promise throughout his life. He was for the peace, law and order and establishment of the welfare state as he had been loyal to his father's vision. The contemporary society took him as a superior and promising character. As a result, the social norms have been established as "Vishma Pratigya"- Vishma promise- which means grand determination upon the oath taken by Vishma with his father.

Arjun has been identified as superior and ideal social character in *The Mahabharata*. So, the proverb "Arjun Dristi"- Arjun insight- has been established in the social tongue. His skill of aiming and shooting via bow has elevated him in social values. Hence, he is often regarded as superior, ideal and skillful bow shooter in the social structure of *The Mahabharata* period. He was able to get married with Draupadi by the skill of bow shooting as superior clerk.

As a brave and courageous warrior, Bhima is recognized in the society of *The Mahabharata* era. Bravery of Bhim functions as the superior and ideal personality to identify him in the social structure even today. The word "Bhimakaya"- terrible figure as Bhima- has been used in referring to the giant personality of a person in the society. This term has become popular in the social tongue.

Bidur has been reflected as a diplomatic character in the social structure of *The Mahabharata*. He is against of the war and its result. He attempted to negotiate and settle the battle of the brothers and brothers at his best but he failed. He was the focal point in diplomatic strategy and the social justice for all the superior and significant characters in the social structure of *The Mahabharata* (M.N. Prashrita, Personal communication, July 19, 2022). His character has reflected him as one of the superior male characters in *The Mahabharata*.

Krishna's character is the superior of superiors due to his role of a motivator, councilor, inner insight vision of future events and their results. He has applied the knowledge of Karma Yoga, Gyana Yoga and Bhakti Yoga which are popular as the philosophy of Gita and applied in the day-to-day life in the society even today. Bidur's forecasting came to be true as said in Aadi Parba (14/ 28-29). Various scholars and researchers have drawn different concepts regarding gender roles and their position in *The Mahabharata*. In this context, Van Buitenen (1978: 168) has claimed that *The Mahabharata's* primary function is story of making men heroes. It has focused on war, courage, ideas of heroism, and masculine traits. It reveals the supremacy of men and the inferiority of women.

Inferior Female Characters
Inferior female characters are those women who did not have children, whores, and did not become loyal to their husbands. Bidur's mother was slave of Ambika, widow of Vichitravirya and, daughter-in-law of Satyawati. She was induced by Vyasa by disguising her as Ambika with her costumes and beautiful ornaments by Ambika. The slave woman, Bidur's mother, was too unknown about it, and it was an injustice for her that was done by her owner, Ambika. She conceived and gave birth to Bidur, but she never got the equal position and status of Ambika and Ambalika in the role of *The Mahabharata* in the then social structure (Subedi, 2018, p. 548). The daughters of the kings, emperors, and of elite groups were regarded the most powerful, dignified, distinguished, honored, respectable and supreme ladies in the social structure of *The Mahabharata*. It is exemplified through the marriage ceremony and the condition of getting married to Draupadi as her father Draupad arranged. (Chalise, 1992). Similarly, Hiltebeitel (2007) has also explained that Draupadi has been found and reflected as a fragile, weak, submissive and compassionate throughout the epic, *The Mahabharata*. Similarly, Black (2007:53-66) has drawn the feeble position of women in *The Mahabharata*. The female characters do not have proper roles in the formation of the policy, and neither do they have the decision-making position in *The Mahabharata*. The female characters have been depicted as the listeners of the events, policies and rules made by the males. The two heroines, Gandhari and Draupadi, have become prominent listeners to the entire *Mahabharata event*. They are good listeners about the battle, deaths and misfortune of their sons. They cannot act and change the situation through their own role but remain as helpless and

passive heroines to hear the news narrated by others. Likewise, the social structure of *The* Mahabharata has been interpreted through the point of view of patriarchal vantage point. Female characters have been drawn and reflected as dominated, silenced, suppressed and in oppressed condition. Patriarchy has dealt with male chauvinism in it and claimed that women have to do more household labor than men. It is the oppression to women by men.

Based on this evidence, it is generalized that the slave women, lower class females, whores and marginalized women were considered as inferior class female characters in the contemporary society of *The Mahabharata*.

CONCLUSION

The gender inequality has been found in the society of *The Mahabharata* period. Male members have been found superior to dominate the female members who have been victimized through polygyny. The female characters seem to have been miserable, without their proper identity and strong roles in their performance in *The Mahabharata*. Women have been found to be forcibly participating in sexual relationships. The loyalty of females to males seems to have been found and the woman appears to have been used as the commodity by males in *The Mahabharata* era. The women seem to have been treated as whores, and the concept of polygyny appears to have been found as a weapon of exploitation. The superior male characters seem to have been depicted as the domination of patriarchy and, inferior female characters have been revealed as the outcome of male chauvinism in the era of *The Mahabharata*. The women characters have always been found dominated, exploited, maltreated, and used as commodities and objects of sexual abuse in *The Mahabharata*. The data of this research is analogue to the theoretical explanation of patriarchy.

The resource holders are male members of the society of *The Mahabharat* era. The resource gainers and resource holders naturally seem to have found dominating in comparison to female characters who do not seem to have found resource gainers and resource holders in the socio-cultural structure of *The Mahabharata*. The males have been found superior and the females inferior. The women seem to be found as whores and as the sexual abuse of the male characters because of the power domination of the patriarchal system by resource gaining and resource holding disparity that seems to have been found abundant in *The Mahabharata* period. The women seem to have found loyal to their husbands, and they are being used as the com-

modities of male characters. the condition of women in the period of *The Mahabharata* era seems to have prevailed as factual evidence of gender inequality. The data of this research seems to be concurrent with the theoretical concept of the mode of production of Marxism, too. This research has explored the gender issues of ancient social history with reference to *The Mahabharata* period. It will apply to gender-related planning and policies and draw out the social history of *the Mahabharata* period.

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