CHAPTER VI

Literacy Doctrines in Mahābhārata

The glorious period in the ancient history of India has been said to be 'Mahābhārata'. The great scholars of ancient India propounded the deep, religious philosophy of the society of Mahābhārata. They mooted the idea of evolution of new society during the age of Mahābhārata. The domination of politics and propagation of religion led to the war of Mahābhārata in the ancient times. The different social systems and economic life could not solve the problems of society due to upsurge of many problems. The polity of India in the ancient times led to the formation of groups and associations. Therefore, Indian soil illustrated in the manifold forms of its organizations and all the vital and natural forms of human associations. The men, women and children had been facing the problem of illiteracy due to the dearth of schools and geographical barriers. Education had been unapproachable to the vast population to the society of Mahābhārata. The concept of religion was deeply embedded in the minds of people. Although the society remained dormant over the issue of caste-system but the caste-system had divided the Mahābhārata society into four groups.

The entire ancient society during Mahābhārata offered a good scope for the development of individual. But inspite of all hard efforts the Hindu society remained stagnant. Although the thinkers during Mahābhārata remained anxious to translate nebulous ideals into determinate concepts, vague social attitudes into specific rules of conduct and to
envisage the group life not as an indefinite aesthetic or romantic reality but as a system of laws. Due to the conflict in the minds of people during Mahābhārata time, the parents were unable to send their children to Pāṭhasālās existing at longer distances and due to non-availability of facilities. Both male and female children were denied education. It was available only to the children of Brāhmaṇas or kṣatriyas. The Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas were sent to the schools of Kripā and Drona to acquire the knowledge of Dhanurveda. However, among the Vaiśyas the concept of good economic life was prevalent. This factor somehow enlightened the people to receive education for developing the business and for leading a good economic life.

6.1; 6.2. Meaning and Types of Literacy

The concept of literacy was prevalent among the people of higher castes. Brāhmaṇas and Kṣatriyas were deeply confined to education according to their castes. Brāhmaṇas/ṛṣis had established the schools of learning for children. Those institutions were imparting two types of education i.e. religious and education related to warfare. The system of education was confined to the few people such as children of brāhmaṇas and that of Kṣatriyas. The Śūdras were denied the

1. Mahā., 1/120/20, 21.
2. Ibid., 1/122/39, 45 to 47.
3. Ibid., 3/156/5 to 14.
4. Ibid., 1/120/4; 1/120/20; 3/115/30; 3/116/21, 24 to 26; 3/117/7 to 10.
right of education. For example- Droṇa did not accept Ekalavya as his disciple.¹ The concept of literacy for adults was an elementary idea. It was considered to be sometime preparatory schooling enterprise and sometimes off-campus enterprise. Although the population was very small and the people were living in hermits and small groups at longer distances. Therefore, education was a hard entity. Infact upper groups were knowing the meaning of literacy and its advantages. During Mahābhārata time, education was not a fundamental right. Therefore, there was no agony which could force the concept of literacy in the minds of children or among the people. Although the right to learn is an indispensable tool for the survival of humanity, there had been growth in the number of adult illiterates. The women had no idea of education but some of women during Mahābhārata time in reality took lead in the sphere of education. They felt the need of education for their children not only depending on male-counterpart but the women themselves started acquiring knowledge at home. The concept of literacy for the people of Mahābhārata society was related to morality, religion, spirituality and development of mind. Yudhiṣṭhira was imparted education regarding moral values like truth² and self-restraint³ and Śṛṅgī was imparted

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1. Mahā., 1/123/12, 13.
2. Ibid., 17/109/4 to 18.
3. Ibid., 12/184/9, 10, 15.

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education of that of forgiveness.\footnote{Mahābhārata, 1/38/4 to 10.} Yudhīṣṭhira was imparted education regarding spirituality or mokṣa.\footnote{Ibid., 3/184/22 to 25.} The character-
formation could be the main objective of literacy. It was for shaping the personality and developing the abilities. For example-the education given by Gāndhārī,\footnote{Ibid., 5/127/9; 11/17/5, 6.} Kuntī\footnote{Ibid., 5/135/9, 13; 5/130/2, 32.} and Yidula\footnote{Ibid., 5/133/30, 32; 5/134/3, 9.} to their children helped in shaping their personality. Education was considered as an instrument of leading a harmonious life. But, in fact, the social development of individual was not much in profundity. During Mahābhārata time, individual was the chief concern of education. There was intimate relationship between the teacher and the taught but there were a few teachers and less number of pupils. Although the conception of education was moulding the pupils personality but the education was not a fashion in that society. Both male and female used to govern the knowledge of reading, writing and numeracy at the initial stage. Those who used to become capable of reading and writing were called literate individuals. Kṣatriyas were not sending their female children to āsramas but managing education for them at their houses to enable female children to manage their houses and to provide education to their children. For example-Uttarā, the daughter of king Vīrāṭa, was given education in
singing at home by Br̄hannalā.¹ A kind of preliminary knowledge used to be given to such children. They were, in fact, prepared for the future life. Through religious education the concept of morality and character used to be developed in the females for self-control, self-restraint and right conduct. For example, Draupadī delivered a lecture to Satyabhāmā on the duties and responsibilities of a wife.²

But unfortunately this type of facility of education was not available for all the children irrespective of any difference of caste, creed, colour and sex. A fractional population belonging to higher castes has been said to be literate as referred by Hopkins and Grierson who visited India and studied Indian literature in the national libraries of India.

During Vedic period, education was to promote human personality which would have been more religious, spiritual, worshiping God and performing all Vedic rituals and rites. Since morality and character were two important slogans in Vedic period but these could be promoted only through Vedic knowledge. The tradition of education of Vedas was followed during Mahābhārata time.³ Children belonging to the Brahmin sect used to be provided religious education. The society was highly developed during Mahābhārata time. Even the son of Kṣatriya could pursue religious education. For example—

2. Ibid., edited by Śatvaś, Damodar, 3/22/13 to 59; Chapter 323.
3. See 3.7 of the thesis.
ascetic Markandeya explained to Yudhiṣṭhira the theory of Karma, the virtue of a chaste woman, the virtue of Brahmans, the description of Soul, attainment of mokṣa and ill omens. Bhīṣma told Yudhiṣṭhira the definition of religion.

6.3 Associations for Literacy

During the age of Mahābhārata the society was highly advanced. The people were conscious and aware. They were well-acquainted with the rules, regulations, codes and conventions of the society. They were following the code of conduct advocated by Vedas. They followed religious rituals and studied Vedas in wider perspective. But, however, Vaiśyas and Śūdrās had to follow the codes of Vedas. Therefore, they were busy in providing service to the people belonging to higher castes. The business was completely controlled by Vaiśyas. Maheśwara told Umā that the duties of the Vaiśyas were: the keeping of cattle and agriculture. The other duties included trade, adopting the path of truth, hospitality, peacefulness, self-control, welcoming the Brahmans and

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2. Ibid., 3/197/1 to 43.
3. Ibid., 3/197/30.
4. Ibid., 3/200/23, 24, 26, 31, 33 to 38.
5. Ibid., 3/200/49, 50, 52.
renouncing things. The Vaiśya, engaged in trade and adopting the path of truth, should not sell sesame, perfumery and juices or liquid substances. Sudrās were for devotion to all other three sects. Maheśwara told Umā that the duty of the Sudrās was the service of the three twice-born classes. The Sudrā who performed the duties of hospitality towards a guest, acquired meritorious penances. That Sudrā, who was intelligent, master of virtuous conduct and worshipper of deities and Brahmins, got desirable rewards of virtue.

It is more heartening to study that there were associations formed by male and female teachers (gurus) for the promotion of education during Mahābhārata. The educated and enlightened women such as—Sulabhā, daughter of Śāndilya, Gautamī, Gāndhārī, Kunti, Draupadī, Vidulā, Damayantī, Sāvitrī, Sukanyā, Lopāmudrā, Šakuntalā and Jaratkāru served the cause of promotion of education. Although above-mentioned educated women belonged to higher castes and elite families and some of them were ascetics also, they were holding social gatherings and meetings and discussing about the education of their bards and also for all the children. They wanted sound education for the children of Mahābhārata society and making literate the children of other castes. The small associations had also been formed by the enlightened women of Mahābhārata time which served the cause of

2. 13/128/56 to 58.
3. For detail see 5.1 of the thesis.
education. They had also felt that female children were ignored in providing education and they used to be considered as rearing machines. The main objective of parents was only to get daughters married. The concept, in fact, was only the marriage, managing others' houses and giving birth to children. But beyond this, the educated women also preached that the child was to be given education by the mother. Therefore, she should be well-educated and could also participate in religious and social functions. She should be able to know her rights and duties.

There had been schools (āsramas) such as: 1. Agastya school, 2. Arṣṭisena school, 3. Jamadagni school, 4. Kaṇva school, 5. Śāradwān school, 6. Vasiṣṭha school, 7. Vriṣaparva school, 8. Kripa school and 9. Droṇa school in Mahābhārata time. 1 The gurus of above-mentioned schools had formed groups of their śiṣyas (disciples). The discourses used to be held within the groups and among the groups. The gurus used to be present in the discourses but sometimes the senior disciple had to hold the discourse. The scholars of these āsramas, when coming out of the schools, they were forming associations in order to provide education to the needy. They were moving from place to place and making the children literate. The gurus used to instruct their disciples with regard to providing education in the surrounding areas of their houses and also inviting children to their houses to educate them. As such the parents who were interested in

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1. For detail see 3.1 of the thesis.
providing religious education, making the children Jyotiśāchārya and performing marriage and other rituals such as yajna, havana, janma and maraṇa, sent their children to the āśramas.

6.4 Mobile Schools for Literacy Promotion

In the ancient times there were many āśramas established by great gurus. There were different departments within the periphery of the āśramas. There was the department of war-techniques and veterinary training, department of Veda, department of religious study and the department of Yoga. The disciples had to pass through rigorous mental and physical exercise. The perfection used to be developed in the disciples.

In the Vedic period, the highest literature was developed by the āśramas. There were established schools of brahmins and Kṣatriyas. Brahmanic schools were providing religious education whereas Kātriya's schools had been responsible for imparting training in weapons and warfare techniques. The legacy of institutions (āśramas) was derived from the legacy of Vedas and the Indian education during Mahābhārata reached its climax and achieved the highest degree of efficiency and success in this period. The scholars from Asia and the western world found to be much keen in the study of Vedas, Upaniṣads, Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata. Therefore, many travellers from western countries and China visited Indian libraries and worked on Mahābhārata and other texts related to India and Kashmir. These scholars were themselves mobile schools and involved themselves in
discourses with Indian scholars at different places. They did not stop at one point and derived material on holy texts related to the philosophy of ancient India. Grierson, Hopkins etc. moved from place to place in the form of mobile schools with Chinese and Indian literature. They left no stone unturned to acquaint the Indian scholars with Chinese culture and tradition. They rather taught them and broadened their vision. The Indian scholars of ancient times also learnt from them to reflect themselves in the form of mobile schools and to move from place to place to educate the people. The Pandits who were preparing their disciples instructed them that whenever they completed their education they had to go from place to place to provide education to the needy people of Mahābhārata society. It was hard nut to crack to move from place to place when there was no facility of transportation. Under such circumstances, scholars like Dhoumya travelled a long distance and stayed with Pāndavas providing them religious education by way of describing Tīrthas and āsramas. Even the disciples used to provide preliminary type of education while moving from place to place. As such they were considered the mobile schools.

6.5 Continuing Education for Adults

Life-long education means self directed growth and understanding oneself and the world. It means acquiring new skills and powers the only true wealth which never deserts a man. It is investment in oneself. It views education in its
totality. Formal, nonformal and informal systems of education are covered in it. It gives great importance to flexibility in time, place, content and techniques of learning. Continuing education is available to persons of any age, part-time or full-time, voluntary or compulsory. The function of continuing education is to round off the individual’s education and provide further education or retaining so that the individual may become competent to meet increased or new professional demands. The concept of life long education is the keystone of the learning society.

Life-long education and continuing education was prevalent in the society during the Vedic as well as Mahābhārata’s time. The pupils used to continue their education even after completing their education in the āśramas and returning to their homes during the Mahābhārata time. This helped the pupils in keeping their learning intact throughout life and therefore, they did not relapse back into illiteracy. Continuing education revealed the originality of the students. The pupils were aware to a certain extent of the need to develop their personalities and live their life as fully as they could. For example- Gandhārī imparted political\(^1\) and religious education\(^2\) to her son Duryodhana. Kuntī imparted political education\(^3\) to her sons and Vidulā

2. Ibid., 11/17/5,6.
3. Ibid., 5/130/2,32; 5/135/9,13.

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gave political education\textsuperscript{1} to her son Sanjaya which helped in the all-round development of their personality. Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Pāṇdu, Vidura\textsuperscript{2} and the Pāṇḍavas\textsuperscript{3} had studied science of morality which helped in the development of their personality. The students strived during the Mahābhārata time to leave their own imprint on the contributions they made to their environment, to their times and to the type of civilization of which they were a product.

During Vedic period the concept of continuing education was prevalent in the society. The disciples were receiving education by squatting at the holy feet of the gurus. After leaving the āśramas they used to join the family life and marry and make their families. But at essential point of time they used to feel the necessity of feed back in terms of knowledge. Therefore, they had been writing letters to the gurus. As such gurus in response to their letters provided guidance in the area where they were facing any difficulty. They used to refer the books and references with regard to their enquiries. The gurus at that time used to be considered the fountain of knowledge which was flowing towards the disciples. Similar type of continuing Education was in bogue during Mahābhārata time. The concept of continuing Education, in fact, was derived from the educational system which was in practice during Vedic time.

\textsuperscript{1} Mahā., 5/133/30,32; 5/134/3,9.
\textsuperscript{2} Ibid., 1/102/17.
\textsuperscript{3} Ibid., 1/144/5.
The disciples of Drona school also sought help from the guru even after leaving this school of thought. The great scholar of Mahābhārata Vidura, — — — , whose wisdom was reflected through his advice to his disciples and those who used to visit his house also sought his advice continuously on crucial issues. Even Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas and mother Kuntī followed continuously the pieces of advice which he used to give.

There were pūndits who had established schools within the four walls of their houses and used to give instructions to their disciples who had completed their religious education at their holy feet. The disciples used to give highest regard to their teachers and this practice is still existing in the institutions of lower and higher learning.