Conclusion

It is very interesting to review in short the previous chapters and try to evaluate the women's values in the Mahābhārata in comparison with the women in our modern society by reflecting over the similarities and differences.

Among the two upajivya works viz., Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata, Mahābhārata is the most remarkable work in Sanskrit literature. It is the biggest of the world's epics. This work represents a whole literature rather than a single homogeneous work. It constitutes a veritable treasure-house of Indian lore. It is an authoritative book of law, morality and social and political philosophy, laying down rules for the attainment of dharma, artha, kāma and trivarga and also showing the way to liberation expounding the highest religious philosophy of India. Mahābhārata contains everything in this world. This epic consists of various types of women characters, which depicts the life of Indian woman in all its aspects.

Quite a large number of Mahā-kāvyas, Khaṇḍa-kāvyas, and plays based mostly on various episodes, and a few on the entire story of the Mahābhārata were written in classical sanskrit from the early centuries. Kṛiṭārjunīya of Bhāravi is
based on a simple episode from the Vanaparva and describes in eighteen cantos Arjuna's propitiation of Shiva for divine weapons. Māgha wrote his ŚiśupālaVadha - slaying of Śiśupāla, the king of Chedi, by Kṛṣṇa. Kālidāsa's early famous work, the Kumārasambhava, describes the marriage of Śiva and Pārvati, which is found in the Mahābhārata. The large number of Kāvyas, plays and Champus based on the story of Nala and Damayanti, which is one of the most romantic and pathetic episodes in the Mahābhārata. The most famous and also voluminous of such works is the Naiśadha-charita of Śrīharsa. The Nala-champu or Damayanti-kathā of Trivikramabhaṭṭa has been written in champu style.

Quite a large number of plays, based on the main story, or the various episodes of the Mahābhārata have been written in sanskrit. The earliest of them are the six Mahābhārata plays ascribed to Bhāsa. His Madhyama-vyāyogya deals with the reunion of Bhima with his demon-wife Hidimbā under exordinary circumstances and reminds one of the epic tales of the demoness's love for Bhima and the birth of their son Ghatotkaca. The Dūta-Ghatotkaca of Bhāsa deals with the message delievered by Ghatotkaca to the Kauravas, who were jubiliant over the death of Abhimanyu. The Pancharātra deals with the robbing of Virāta's cows by the Kauravas, but it differs from the original in many details. The Dūta-vākya deals with the Kṛṣṇa's message to Duryodhana demanding a half of
the kingdom for the Pandavas. The Úru-bhaṅga describes the duel between Bhima and Duryodhana in which the latter's thigh was broken by Bhima striking with his massive club. The Karṇābhara deals with the Indra's taking away the magic earrings of Karna after approaching him in the guise of a Brāhmaṇa. The Abhijnāna-Sākuntala of Kālidāsa, which has universally been acclaimed as one of the brightest gems in world literature, is a story of Duṣyanta and Shakuntalā as told in the Mahābhārata. The Veṇī-saṁhāra of Bhattarāṇayaṇa turns round the incident of the great insult suffered by Draupadi when she was dragged by her hair by Duryodhana's younger brother Duḥśyāsana in the former's court and Draupadi's promise of not braiding her hair until she was avenged.

The above mentioned works written by different scholars on the basis of the story of the Mahābhārata prove that Mahābhārata was read and had been accepted and praised. Hence it can be said that this epic is a voluminous work.

Ancient people believed that the woman is the object of love and respect. Manu says न बी स्वातन्त्र्यमहति | It means as "There is no occasion for a woman to be independent. Unfortunately, this has been wrongly translated as "Woman does not deserve freedom", and women are ill-treated in the society. On the other hand, Manusmr̥ti safeguards the interest and well-being of the women in the society. The constitution guarantees
equality of opportunity for women in every sphere of activity. Women must be given more freedom within their chosen life patterns and more freedom in choosing alternative life patterns. Woman is called Sahadharmini as she co-operates in Dharma and Kâma. She is also called Jâyâ as she takes man's sattva in her womb. Therefore, it is said that woman is the chief partner in Dharma, Artha, Kâma and Mokša. The ethical standards, ideals, life styles of the women in the Mahâbhârata are worthy to be followed by the women of modern society also. The women of respectable families virtuous and dutiful are highly praised and admired even today. Women, since ancient times, are respected mainly in their roles as daughters, wives, mothers and also daughters-in-laws. As daughter was said to be a source of misery, not because she was unwanted, but because of the anxiety of parents to find suitable bridegroom for her and for her future happiness. A son, unlike a daughter, could free his father from ancestral debt, could be an earning member and can take up the responsibility of the family and could be useful in wars. But in modern times, the idea of ancestral debt is disappearing and a daughter can earn and take the responsibility of the family and even help in war. Kalpana Chawla has shown extraordinary courage as an astronaut in the 21st century. This is definitely worth praising and clearly convinces the development of confidence developed in women to come up in various fields requiring male like courage in the recent decades.
Mahābhārata teaches the codes of life, and a philosophy of social and ethical relations and speculative thoughts on human problems. Many of the statements referring to women, are more or less theoretical rather than practical.

Marriage or vivāha saṁskāra is very important among the sixteen saṁskāras ordained by Dharmaśāstras. After this, women will be absolutely dependent on her husband for some time. During the married life, the man attends to his legitimate biological and emotional urges but not by deviating from the path of righteousness. A householder apart from supporting his family has five other duties viz., studying and teaching of holy books, worship of God, and observance of rites and rituals prescribed for him, rearing domestic animals and hospitality to guests and the destitute. To serve the guests well and to satisfy their desire was the primary duty of a house-holder (Grhasta).

गृहस्थस्य हि धर्मावृत्तम्: सम्प्रासात्तितिपूजनम् ॥
अतिथि: पूजितो यस्य गृहस्थस्य तु गच्छति ॥
नान्यस्तस्मात् परे धर्म इति प्रादुर्भनीषण: ॥
- Mbh.अनुशासन.2.69-70

शरणागतत्म कर्त्तव्यमातिथ्य हि प्रयत्नत: ॥
पञ्चम्यद्वृत्तेन गृहस्थे यिनेन विशेषतः ॥
- Mbh.शान्ति.146.6

Women co-operated with their husbands in following this
dharma by serving the guests in the absence of their husbands.

According to the Epic, marriage is also a Dharma for women. Hindu marriages are of permanent nature not to be dissolved at one's own sweet will. It is no longer a casual contract. It is not like even welding milk and sugar. Hindu marriages are based on spiritual grounds. That is why a Hindu woman desires to be associated with her husband not only in the present life but in many lives to come till eternity. The wedded couple no longer remains a couple, but moulded into one. Women should be respected as Gods reside there where women are worshipped. The Epic says that women are not independent right from their birth till death. She should be always protected by men, before marriage by her father, after marriage by her husband and in her old age by her son. After marriage, man enters into Gṛhaṇḍāḥṛama, or the stage of a householder, for which smṛti's give much importance. Without this marriage ceremony, man is not entitled to perform वाण or व्यञ्ज or any sacrifice. So, this stage of householder of Gṛhaṇḍāḥṛama is considered as the mother of all the āshramas. In case of females, all the saṃskāras or sacraments should be performed silently without the recitation of mantras. But only on the occasion of matrimonial sacrament, vedic mantras must be recited.

Girls knew from their childhood that marriage, the first
religious rite with vedic mantras, was obligatory for them even for attaining spiritual goals, as seen from the example of Subhrū. They considered that their parents or other elderly relatives had the authority to give them away in marriage. According to Yājnavalkya Śmṛti the father, grand father, elder brother, any senior member of the family or the mother are the authorised persons to make kanyādāna. The claim of father in respect of kanyādāna comes first and after him anyone of the above mentioned persons in the absence of the previous one is authorised. If none of them is available, the girl is free to make her own choice of the husband. So, the parents were particular about the daughter's marriage and about the suitability and virtues of the bridegrooms. They gave preferences to the choice of their daughters. Girls had the opportunity to find for themselves the husband to their liking and for love marriages also, as in the case of Shakuntalā, Savitri etc. But if a girl's marriage was not arranged by her elders after three years of her attaining maturity, she was to find a suitable person and get married.

A good marriage is a welcome while a bad one is worse than anything. It is not only the duty of a husband to protect his wife, but it is also the duty of the brother, father, kith and kins, mother-in-law, father-in-law, brother-in-law etc. by providing food, clothes and ornaments.
The Rgvedic society emerges with a well-established home which could not have been possible in the pre-martial stage of sexual relation. The Mahābhārata informs us that Svetaketu, the son of Uddālaka, established the institution of marriage, when he saw his mother being taken away by force by a brāhmin in the presence of his father. He could not tolerate this and established a restriction for human beings.

The eight types of marriages mentioned in the Dharmasastras are described in the Mahābhārata also. These forms seem to be the methods of settling marriage after each of which the actual religious rituals for the marriage were performed. Brāhma marriage was the best and the most popular in which a virtuous and suitable bridegroom was invited by the girl's elders and the girl adorned according to their capacity was given in marriage to him. This is the custom in modern society also. Mādri's is the only example of Āsura marriage in which Bhīshma had paid a large sum to her father as bride price. This was condemned as the sale of girl but according to some, if the money was gifted to the girl, it was an act of kindness and affection towards the girl and not a sale. In the Daiva marriage, the girl was married to the chief priest performing the Yajnā (sacrifice) for her father. This is considered meritorious. Sāntā's marriage with Rṣhyaśringa is the only example of Daiva marriage. In Ārsha marriage, a pair of bull and cow was given, and it was considered a sale and
was condemned. Paisācha in which a girl unconscious and helpless was carried away for marriage, was also condemned. Because, the wife, can not be secured simply by capture. Willingness of both the parties concerned is very necessary which prevailed even during primitive ages. This results a pre-arranged natural harmony between the husband and wife as both have united without any external force. That is the way Gāndharva form of marriage must have been accepted, praised and followed, than the Rākṣasa or the paisācha form of marriage. Prājāpatya, in which the bridegroom's people asked for the girls hand in marriage for progeny, was perhaps included later in the Brāhma. There are no examples of the three tyeps - Ārsha, Paishāchya and Prājāpatya. Gāndharva was love marriage consummated without rituals as in the case of Shakuntalā. Rakshasa, in which a girl willing as in the case of Subhadrā or unwilling as Ambā were carried away for marriage. This was recommended for kṣatriyas. Swayamvara is not included in the list of the eight types of marriages. Here, some condition was put to win the hand of the bride. Sometimes, it turned into Rākṣasa marriage in which the bride could be carried away for somebody by some powerful person who could defeat all opponents. If liked by the bride, it was like a Gāndharva marriage as was Rukmini's, who was already in love with Kṛṣṇa. But sometimes it proved disastrous for the girl, as was for Ambā who wanted to marry Shālwa in her swayamvara, but was carried away by Bhishma and then was
rejected by both. In the Mahābhārata, we find Draupadi's marriage as an exception, which is an example of polyandry. But the epic states that Draupadi's marriage with the five pāṇḍavās was ordained by God in her previous birth. Hence, it should not be followed by anybody. One man for one woman and the vice versa is the ideal condition and that must have been the intention of the ancient sociologists and law-makers. Drupada also expressed the same view. This shows that polyandry even then was not acceptable. That is why, for Draupadi's marriage so many arguments and illustrations had to be put forward to convince Drupada of its sanctity.

Marriage being a religious merit to last lifelong, there was no scope for Divorce. However, there were some contract marriages in exceptional cases which could be ended as was done by Gangā, Mādhavi, Hīdimbā etc. But after that, none of them remarried. Women had a special place of her own with regard to her aims, field of work and duties in which the question of equality with men did not arise. On the other hand woman was the counterpart of man and the two together became a complete being. As Milton has stated in his Paradise Lost, "He for God, and she for God in him," was true in the Mahābhārata. No vow, no fasting was necessary for woman to attain salvation other than serving her husband with full devotion. The matrimonial relation of the couple was based on mutual faithfulness and love. They were together in happiness
and misery. She was alert to keep him on the right path, if necessary using even harsh and powerful words. The woman, as a housewife along with her husband, was responsible for all religious and social duties. Wife herself was considered home, without her home is a forest. A housewife's good taste was seen in her management of the house, i.e. in furnishing and decorating her house, for her dress, ornaments, etc. A good wife should always keep her husband happy, with which, Gods will also be happy and bless her.

A wife must be true to her husband in her marriage vows and lead the life of an ideal pativrata. By keeping her house clean, she invites Goddess Laxmi to reside in her home. Hence, we can say that a good wife is a Lakshmi of the house. So, a man who has a good wife is called श्रीमान्. Druapadi clearly expresses the duty of a pativrata woman to Satyabhāma in the Vanaparva of the Mahābhārata, which are worthy to be respected by modern women also.
As told in the Śānti Parva of the Mahabharata, a house can be really felt as a house unless it has the Grhini (wife) in it. It is said that a house without a wife is as good as forest. This clearly emphasises the importance of Grhini, the women in the house.

Infact husband and wife are the two wheels of the chariot. Hence, it is but natural that both of them will have to have a perfect understading, patience, co-operation for leading a successful life. Otherwise the family peace will be up set. And in the modern days divorces are the ultimate result. The reason for this result may also be due to the fact that women is no longer weak. She is coming up in the various fields of life with confidence. Hence she need not depend on the man for her survival. Inspite of this fact, the normal tendency of the woman is to adjust herself to the situation and make sincere efforts to get the result tilting in favour of the family.

In the Mahābhārata, instances of pre-marital sex relations are also found. Some unmarried girls had sexual relations with a man and attained motherhood and in due course, they got
married according to the usual religious rights and the children born to them shared equal rights with the other children of the mother in the wedlock. Vyāsa, the legendary complier of the great Epic was himself a progeny of unwedded love. He is addressed as the son of Parāśara, and Karna as the son of Surya and not of Pāṇḍu. Vyāsa's mother Matsyagandha was the foster daughter of fisherman fell in love with sage Parāśara. Parāśara promised that her maidenhood would be restored to her after the intercourse, and a sweet-perfume would come out from her body. Kunti, the mother of Pāṇḍavas got a boon from sage Durvāsa, with which, she became very curious and to test it, she invited Surya by reciting mantras. He told Kunti that a woman was free to behave as she liked, and demolished the fears of Kunti by telling her that after the intercourse she would regain her virginity.

The episode of Mādhavi, as described in the story of Gālava also lays stress on virginity as a virtue even when cohabitation is allowed. She also had the boon that she will regain her virginity after each delivery with which her father gave her in marriage to the three different kings and as the bride-price, asked the horses possessed by each. Mādhavi accepted the situation whatever came before her without any hesitation. This is the sign of obedience to her father who was the sole judge of his daughter's morals.
During the vedic period, marriage was contracted outside the family circle, which is considered as incestuous relation. The epic evidence confirms vedic practice. Karna condemns sex freedom in the Madra and Bālhika countries. There is also a positive evidence in the epic condemning incestuous relation, particularly between the father and the daughter. Goddess Ganga was accepted by king Pratipa as his daughter-in-law, as she sat on the rightside of his lap reserved for one's children (apatyas) or daughter-in-law. This shows that not only the daughter, but also the daughter-in-law was unapproachable. Arjuna refused Urvasī saying that she was the wife of his ancestor and hence guru to him. Just as Kunti, Mā dri and Śaci are his mothers, so she also was fit to be worshipped. This shows that sex-relations between a mother and a son were not within the bounds of dharma. It is clear that the epic reflects the fact that not only the mother but any woman who may be considered to have the same status as one's mother is considered unapproachable, as seen in case of Uttuṇka. He was approached by the women of the āśrama with a request to cohabit with his preceptor Devāśarma's wife so that her ṛtu may not go waste. But he thought that he was not instructed by his preceptor to fulfill this demand. So, he bestowed upon him all the siddhis and permitted him to go home. This indicates that the preceptor's wife was given the status of the mother. Uttuṇkā's behaviour is ideal rather than normal. The
smṛtis enumerate sexual relations with the wife of a preceptor as the greatest sin.

Caste system (varṇa system) as we understand today, might have existed during the vedic age. Different scholars have ascribed different opinions regarding the development of caste system during the vedic period. Some scholars say that caste system was based on heredity, and was unknown in early vedic period. The scholars, who support the existence of caste system during early vedic period refer to the following mantras which is found in the tenth mandala of Ṛgveda.

\[ \text{स्रष्ट्रुथि वै रहस्यमाला न ज्ञातं} \]

The mantra says that the Brahmanas sprang from the head of Brahma, the Kṣatriyas from his arms, the Vaiśyas from his thighs, and the Śūdras from his feet. This mantra in no way indicates the existence of hereditary castes but refers to the division of society on the principle of division of labour. The Brahmanas who possessed learning are called the head of the society. The Kṣatriyas who possessed strength are called the arms of society. The Vaiśyas who were to go from place to place for the purpose of trade and commerce are spoken of as thighs of human society. And the Śūdras who were illiterate and unfit for the higher duties were represented as the feet of human society.
Rules regulating inter-varṇa marriage however was a serious lapse in social behaviour which was not tolerated. According to Bhisma, a brāhmin has a right to marry a woman of three varṇas. A kṣatriya can marry a woman belonging to the two varṇas while a vaiśya has a right to marry a woman of only one varṇa, because it is only on these wives that a progeny equal to one's own status can be produced. It was believed that a man of the higher three varṇas can marry a woman belonging to a śudra varṇa; but such a wife is meant only for pleasure, and not for acquiring religious merit or begetting progeny. Though a brāhmin is permitted to marry a woman of all the four varṇas, only a brāhmin woman can serve him better than the woman of other varṇas. Inspite of the theoretical ban on marriage with a śudra wife, the eminent persons in the Mahābhārata contract marriage with the woman of śudra or even lower varṇas. King Santanu married Matsyagandha, a daughter of a fisherman. Arjuna married Nāga woman Ulūpi by name. Bhimā married a rāksasa woman Hidimbā and her son was acknowledged as Bhima's son and fought with the Kauravas in the Mahābhārata war. Dhṛtarāṣṭra raised a son Yuyutsu on a vaiśya woman. The sage Dirghatamas, established sexual connections with a śudra woman and begot eleven sons upon her and declared them to be his own, and initiated them in the vedic lores. A brāhmin Gautama had a marriage with a dasyu woman, with which he
lost his brāhminhood and a fellow brāhmin who had preserved it, refused even to touch things or eat the food offered by him. If a brāhmin marries a sudra woman, he has to expiate sin and if he produces children on her has to perform double prāyascitta according to sāstras. This represents the final state in the anuloma marriages with a woman of sudra varṇa. Bhiṣma specifically states that only the savarna wife is entitled to participate in religious ceremonies. He clearly explains the rights of sons born to the parents of different varṇas, and established the difference firmly. Thus, we can conclude that anuloma marriage was allowed and encouraged. But pratiloma marriages on the other hand, were prohibited, which can be seen in Drupada’s words. When Pāṇḍavas disguised as brahmins took away Draupadi, he asked Dhṛṣṭadyumna, that whether his daughter was taken away by a sudra or a person of a lower birth or by a vaiśya. The Sānti parva of Mahābhārata also states the women (ती) Diamond (त्त्न) and water have no देख and hence it allows a man even to marry the woman of a lower varṇa.

Dowry or Stri-dhana was given by the parents of the bride and kins to provide her the economic security for any eventuality in her life. The transaction of wealth in the forms of Stridhana along with a woman in marriage and Varadakṣīna offered to the bridegroom by her parents and other kins do
have considerable sense of elevation of prestige of the donors of the woman. The new type of modernisation and educational system have brought new changes in the social structure. New values of status acquisition and achievement have become, to some extent, part of socio-economic system in present time. Now a system is evolved where persons with power and resources can accommodate their self interests easily while that of others are cornered because they do not have the adequate resources at their command. The new forces of modernisation along with the consumer culture of a partially profit-oriented society have induced the dowry-based marriages in which the better positioned bridegrooms are highly rated and demanded in the matrimonial market. In this situation, the value of woman is frequently under-rated in this male-dominated society. The parents are in competition to give their daughters in marriage to a desirable and better boy. The system of dowry is undergoing with uneven development. Well intentioned citizens and voluntary organizations have started voicing their concerns against it since long. Dowry, as a modern phenomenon has been compounded by certain other conditions of the economy and the society. For some people, it is customary or religious practice and for others it is to maintain or acquire a new status and prestige. Still for some, it may be an instrument to accumulate easy money out of greediness for varied purposes like to marry their own daughters or acquire economic security
for the parents who would have invested much money on the placement of their sons and now may think that after marriage their earning son may go away and stay out side without caring for them in the old age.

Mahâbhârata suggests the duties of all the four varṇas, Brâhmana, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya and Südra.

From this, it is clear that, only a Brahmin is entitled to perform Yāga or sacrifices. It is the duty of a Kṣatriya to participate in wars and fight for the victory. But, in the real sense, a Kṣatriya will not achieve more than a Brâhmin according to the dictum:

\[
\text{विन्न्तं क्षत्रियां श्राद्धे वर्जयं} \mid
\]

- Mbh.शान्ति.165.18-20

Mahâbhârata also advises the men to respect the man even of a lower varṇa if he is a learned person.
Even the man of a Śūdra Varṇa can use weapons to protect cows, brahmins and also himself.

The idea of fidelity to husband had some exceptions. Karṇa and Duhsāsana asked Draupadi in the assembly to leave her husbands and marry someone else. Nahuṣa was eager to marry Indrāṇi.

It is a fact that, the number of divorce cases in the courts of law are multiplying day-by-day. It indicates certain basic weaknesses of the social set-up and thinking behind it. It is natural to have differences of opinion among the couples but that certainly does not mean divorce. An understanding can be developed and a smooth life of compromise can be lived. Divorce takes place where marriage functions just as an agent or as a license to satisfy the lust. Difference of opinion between the couples vanish where the state of non-dualism is attained. This is clearly expressed by Manu -
In the Mahābhārata, there were some contract marriages in exceptional cases which could be ended as was done by Gangā, Madhavi, Hidimbā etc.

Thus, Hindu marriage, which took place in the presence of fire-God is religious and can be a real solution for the conjugal peace on which the social welfare wholly depends. The tendency of Hindu husband-wife is to feel that their relation is always uninterrupted. It can not be broken births after births. So, even if they indulge in quarrel, they find a way in bringing the quarrel to an end by surrender and patience. This tendency of surrender and patience is not found in the couples of America and Russia, and so the relation will come to an end or will result into divorce automatically. In Russia, the game - 'today marriage tomorrow divorce' is being played.

A devout Hindu wife can not live without her husband after his death.

पतिहीना तु का नरी सती जीवितमुत्स्थेन् ॥
- Mbh.साति.148.9
This means that the custom of sati might have prevailed during the Mahābhārata period in some cases. A man will be happy even in the forest if he is accompanied with his wife.

तत्र श्रद्धालुबल्के यद्य तदं गुरूम् ।
प्रासादोपपत्ति तत्व शीत: कान्तार इति निश्चिल्लम्।

- Mbh.शान्ति.144.12

Modern luxurious goods will not give happiness to a man in the real sense. This shows the importance of a wife in the life of a man. She is more valued than everything in this world. This is the basis of the purity of our Hindu culture. Now a days, these emotions are disappearing as some people give importance to qualification and money rather than other things in choosing their wife.

The third chapter deals with the women's role as a daughter-in-law, housewife, and a mother. It also deals with the educational, religious, political, social and economical achievements of women. Draupadi was a dutiful daughter-in-law and personally looked after his mother-in-law Kunti's needs like clothes, bed, bath, meals etc. Another women character in the Mahābhārata, Brāhmaṇi proved that the housewife was responsible for the welfare of the whole family. Sāvitri, was affectionate to her parents-in-law and inturn loved by them as a daughter. That is why Dyumatsena, her father-in-law allowed her to go to forest as it was her
first desire after marriage. Druapadi, won the heart of her mother-in-law Kunti and was blessed to become the mother of virtuous son, she also wished Draupadi all the happiness on this earth.

Hindus believed that mother is greater than all even to God. It is the mother who provides all the wants of the child. She looks after the child's growth, development and sustenance. We are more free with our mother. We open our heart more freely before our mother than before our father. She sacrifices all her desires for the sake of her children. She is known as the first Guru. Child is not born with social skills, which include talking, proper way of eating, dressing, the way to behave normally in different times and different occasions etc. The young child learns great deal from his parents and friends in general and from his mother in particular. As such the responsibility of the mother increases with the growth of the child for improvement of his habits, physical, mental and spiritual developments. The mother teaches the child to become a responsible matured person. It is believed that the child assimilates the teachings, if imparted to his mother when the child is in his mother's womb. It is said that when Abhimanyū was to be born, Arjuna, once started describing the design of the Cakravyūha (Battle Array) to Subhadrā. She learnt upto the way of entrance to the Cakravyūha but fell asleep afterwards and could not listen the way to exit. Because of
this, Abhimanyū entered the Cakravyūha formed by the Kauravas in the great war of Mahābhārata, but could not get out of it, as he was unaware of the passage to exit.

In the Mahābhārata, Gāndhāri always blessed her sons "यतो धर्मस्ततो जयः". She never differentiated between her sons and Kunti’s sons. Great kṣatriya women like Vidulā always wished her son Sañjaya to fight in the war for victory. She emboldened her son who was defeated by Sindhurāja, by saying that she would be more proud of a son who had sacrificed his life in the battle field than the one who returned home defeated. Her teachings to her son regarding the duties of a kṣatriya are worthy to be admired and gains political importance. Mother is glorified in the Mahābhārata, but on the other hand, the importance of father is not ignored. It is an accepted fact that mother takes care of her child more affectionately than the father. But both the mother and the father always wish their son victory, fame and wealth. In return, a son must fulfill the dreams of his father and mother to satisfy them.

Education is termed as the heart of the nation. Education has been regarded both as an end in itself and as a means of realizing other desirable ends. It develops the personality and rationality of individuals, qualifies them to fulfil certain economic, political and cultural functions and thereby improves
their socio-economic status. It has been recognized as a major instrument which societies can have to direct the process of change and development towards desired goals. In the early age, the aim of Indian social reformers was to use education to make women more capable of fulfilling their traditional roles as wives, and mothers and not to make them more efficient and active units in the process of socio-economic or political development. The attainment of independence and the constitutional guarantee of equality introduced new dimensions with the call on women to play multiple roles in the polity, the economy and the society. There is a Chinese saying - "If you are thinking of the year, plant rice, if you are thinking of a decade, plant trees, if you are thinking of a century educate the people." In the sphere of education women in India have been equal with men to develop the full potentialities from the ancient period. During the ancient period, the final aim of education was mokṣa or mukti - the attainment of a Life Immortal, and not the worldly success and prosperity. The Indian educational system lays great stress on the absolute necessity of a personal relation between the teacher and the taught. In ancient India, education meant vedic education. In those days, women studied vedic literature and participated in the sacrifices. But to recite vedic prayers, upanayana ritual was necessary, without which one is not entitled to study the vedas. This means that upanayana was obligatory even for the
The Atharva Veda clearly states that a maiden wins a young husband through Brahmacharya or Vedic studentship. In the Mahābhārata, Kunti was well versed in Vedic mantras which were granted to her by a great Vedic Brahmin. Royal ladies like Kunti and Draupadi are very good examples of incomparable strength of character, versatility and scholarship of women of ancient India. During the Mahābhārata people, women were taught arts or dancing, singing and instrumental music. Uttarā, daughter of king Virāta and her companions were taught these arts at home. Mādhavi, daughter of king Yayāti was expert in music. In modern society, the thread ceremony, after which boys were sent out for education to preceptors living in hermitages has lost its importance. Today, the thread ceremony or upanayana has become more or less a social festival with feasts and gifts. In modern times, however, there is no distinction in education between girls and boys. And all fields of knowledge are open to them for higher education. The aim of women’s education should be to prepare them for independent careers. Marriage should not be the sole aim of their lives. It is recognised that educated wives and mothers are an asset to a nation in general and family in particular. Women should get education according to their needs. She should be taught cooking, nursing, child psychology, nutrition, home economics, interior decoration etc. Other than this, she should also get
education, which helps her to work as a teacher, professor, lawyer, an engineer or as a doctor etc. as the case may be. By doing this, she will be economically independent. Modern inventions have made it easy in reaching the remote corners also to provide good quality of education to all possible. Education of women should generate awareness of values and attitudes, which determine the health and progress of a nation.

Women were not an impediment in the path of religion. Her presence and co-operation were absolutely necessary in religious rites and ceremonies, which increased her religious value. Gods do not accept oblations by a bachelor. This proves that the wife was indispersable from the spiritual and religious point of view. Mahābhārata does not allow the woman to observe fast or sacrifice separately from her husband. It suggests that for a woman, her husband himself is her God. Women observed pātivrata (fidelity to her husband). Women like Sāvitri on the strength of spiritual power attained by pātivrata, could bring back her dead husband Satyavan back to life and begot boons from Yama, the God of death. Women like Draupadi believed in God, and prayed Lord Kṛṣṇa when Duḥśāsana started pulling her sāri. It can be said that if an effort is made to spread rational knowledge of the fundamental principles of Hinduism among women, they would undoubtedly become much better representatives of our culture and religion.
Women had the power to curse on the strength of their spiritual power acquired by pātivrata. Damayanti, cursed Kali to face more difficulties than her husband Nala, with which Kali, who had taken resort in Nala, had to leave him. With the spiritual power of Gāndhāri, she could see through the covering on her eyes, and as a result, only the nails of his toes turned black by her sight. Another woman Brāhmaṇī, cursed Kalmāsapāda is an example of a lady who had extraordinary power.

In political life, women were not installed on the throne when sons were there, yet they did influence the political life of the country as the advice of wives and mothers were respected by rulers. War was not the field of women's activity as physical strength was necessity in fighting in battles. But, they played an important role as they made necessary attempts to encourage their husbands and sons to fight for victory. Modern age, being a mechanical age, physical strength has lost much of its importance. Now, women are capable of entering any field including war.

The Mahābhārata, being the story of heroic persons, the women mainly depicted are heroic daughters, heroic wives and heroic mothers, who soft as flowers could become harder than diamond when needed.
In the pre-independent India, two major forces, among others, which were important in creating awareness and hopes among women were nationalist movement and the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Despite their miseries and misfortunes, thousands of women of different communities and all walks of life came out of their homes to join the nationalist movement as political campaigner, participate actively in the protest marches and demonstrations. Nehru has said, "our women came to the forefront and took charge of the struggle. Women had always been there of course but there was an avalanche of them which took not only the British government but their own men-folk by surprise. There were these women. They were of the upper or middle classes leading sheltered lives in their homes, peasant women, working class women, rich women - pouring out in thousands against the government orders and police lathis. It was not only the display of courage and daring but what was even more surprising was the original power they showered." During the freedom struggle, women proved themselves of extraordinary capacities and projected a free, strong and courageous image of Indian womanhood. Without the co-operation of women, freedom struggle would not have succeeded. Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Nation, at whose call thousands of women of all classes participated in the political movement, declared that the independence struggle was "to gain independence not for the literate and the rich in
India, but for the dumb millions. I shall work in India in which the poorest shall feel that it is their country in whose making they have an effective voice. In India, in which there shall be no high class and low class of people." Gāndhiji's half of India's 'dumb millions' were women, for whom he wanted independence along with other half consisting of men. His life mission was to bring women on equal footing with men which he declared in the following terms:

"I am uncompromising in the matter of women's rights. In my opinion, she should labour under no legal disabilities and suffered by man. I should treat the daughters and sons on a footing of perfect equality."

"Women are the companion of men gifted with equal mental capacities. She has the right to participate in minutest details of the activities of man, and she has the same right of freedom and liberty as men. By sheer force of a vicious custom, even the most ignorant and worthless men have been enjoying a superiority over women which they do not deserve and ought not have."

During the Mahābhārata, some kind of purda was observed as seen during Dhṛtarāśtra's departure to forest. This is seen among certain families, probably on account of a notion of prestige, that royal ladies should not come within the gaze of vulgar eyes. Women who felt themselves to be in helpless
condition, would often avoid going out in public. Such was the case with the women who did not have proper male guardians. But women were an important member of the society. There were occasions when women come in contact with outsiders. In the social structure, the killing of a woman was banned. In the words of Brahmin's wife, and in so many instructions, slaying of a woman was a great sin. Men were not allowed to use weapons against women. That is why Bhīṣma did not use weapons against Śikhandi who was previously a woman. Thus, by establishing freedom and restriction, according to circumstances, society's purity was kept intact.

Women enjoyed economic independence during the Mahābhārata period. At that time women was the joint owner of her husband's property. Draupadi did not think that the husband has no right to sell or stake away his wife. She had a complete knowledge of the vast treasury of her husbands when Nala was losing in the gambling with Puśkara, Damayanti, sent financial information to him, and when the loss was complete, she started planning for the future. This shows that though the women were not an earning member of the family but was an important asset in monetary matters during the Mahābhārata period. But today women are educated and earn equally or even more by working in various capacities. Such working women can help in increasing the financial position of their families. Modern age, is a
technological age. Woman is capable of entering any field including war. After independence, choice of pregnancy due to means of birth control, Indian Government's recent policy of reservation of posts for women in all fields have inculcated a sense of individuality in modern Indian woman. Government is putting its efforts for the upliftment of women. But inspite of economic independence, she is still under the domination of male members of the family. Due to inflation in modern age, the average middle class woman has to take up some job to maintain the family. Mahābhārata states equal rights to both sons and daughters. It maintains that daughter must get atleast half the property, if not the whole. The acquisition of property was also on the basis of their births. Women's value is increased in modern India because of the new Government rules which are in their favour.

Government had passed many Acts during pre-independence and post-independence periods in favour of women.

1) **Bengal Sati Regulation XVIII.1829** :

Raja Ram Mohan Roy continued fighting the appeals and petitions from the orthodox Hindus against abolition of Sati. According to this Act, Sati was legally abolished.
2) **Indian Divorce Act 1869:**

This Act provided for divorce by the wife or husband under certain specific circumstances.

3) **The Married Women's Property Act 1897-1974**

According to this act, women could own the movable property awarded to them by their husbands or parents through the practice of Streedhan. This Act was enlarged in 1974, and hence the scope of Streedhan has been widened. It includes earnings by a woman and the money she acquired through her artistic and literary skills.

4) **Dowry Prohibition (Amendment) Act, 1984:**

This Act made both the giver and taker of dowry guilty.

Before independence, it was Mahatma Gandhi who first gave a call to women and mobilised their strength to achieve Independence. He made them come out of their homes and join the national programme of picketing and banning the foreign cloth shops and wine shops. In building up the nation, women have rarely occupied the leading position. Acharya Vinoba Bhave, feel that a movement to awaken the inner strength of women (Stree Shakti Jagaran) is essential to reassure the woman that she is a full fledged human being with powers of understanding and action.
Part III of the Constitution of India deals with the fundamental rights. Articles 12 to 35 are applicable to all citizens irrespective of sex. However, certain provisions pertain to the rights of women.

According to Article 15 (3) of the Constitution, discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, and place of birth shall not prevent the state from making any special provisions for women and children. Article 15 (1) prohibits gender discrimination. Article 15 (3) lifts that ignominy and permits the state to positively discriminate in favour of women to make special provisions to ameliorate their social, economic and political conditions and accord them parity. (Cf. Dr. S.C. Tripathi and Vibha Arora, Law Relating to Women and Children, Central Law Publications, Allahabad, Jan. 2005, Page No. 1)

Many Acts are passed in favour of security and welfare of women by the Government. For example:

1) Dowry Prohibition Act 1991
2) Breast Milk Substitute Feeding Bottles and Teats Act 1994
3) Hindu Succession Act 1992
4) Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act 1975
5) Prenatal Diagnostic Technique Act 1996
This Act has been amended in 2003. According to the amendment the abortion of female foetus has been prohibited.

The fourth chapter deals with the female deities in the Mahābhārata. God is being worshipped by the people in India since vedic period. Goddesses Durgā, Pārvati, Lakṣmi, Aditi, Swāhā, Indrāṇi, Vinatā and Kadrū, Sukanyā, Arundhati, Sāvitri and Sarasvati. These deities are still worshipped by modern women also. This shows that belief or faith in God is still prevailing in the modern people and they even now believe that God protects them in difficulties and hence pray and worship them.

As a conclusion, it can be said that women exhibited valuable qualities in the Mahābhārata period. They are worthy of inspiring even the modern women for fulfilling her aspirations. The names of these ancient women are everlasting. The Greatness of the Mahābhārata can be realized only by studying the life of these women with their precious qualities, which are valuable even for modern societies. The teachings of the Mahābhārata are worthy to be followed even today in the fast changing modern age. Even in the days to come, the safeguard of chastity is the most valuable and venerable wealth of a woman. In fact it is the highest goal of her life. The condition of Hindu woman is far better in comparison to the women of other countries and religions. She is more respected
in society and house and her powers are suprême. The western materialistic culture has made the life selfish and has disunited the chain of social peace and system. The creator has produced a great jewel like woman. Western scholars say that India was a cradle of culture and civilization since the very dawn of History. To cultivate such a glorious history Indian women played a prominent role. Hence, it can be said that because of women folk, India has reached a lofty peak of cultural development.

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