

8. How important were gender differences in early societies? Give reasons for your answer.

Ans. There were a number of gender differences in early societies. Although woman had a respectable place in society, her status was inferior as compared to man's. Family was the very basis of society during the period under consideration. The structure of the family was patriarchal. The eldest man was the head of the family who was known as *Grihapati* and *Kulpati*. Since family was patriarchal, birth of a son was the common desire of the people. Man had important place in the society. People prayed to the gods for son. Since family was patriarchal, son inherited the property and all other resources of his father.

Although, the birth of a daughter was not considered as a cause of sorrow, birth of a son was a common desire of the people. Prayers were offered for noble and fine sons. The mantra, "*I free her from here, but not from there. I have bound her firmly there, so that through the grace of Indra she will have fine sons and be fortunate in her husband's love,*" chanted by the priest while conducting the marriage rituals, amply clears that the Aryans desired for noble and fine sons. Under patriarchal system while sons were considered important for the continuity of the patrilineage, daughters were viewed rather differently. Daughters did not have any claim to the resources of the household. A woman on marriage was expected to adopt the gotra of her husband and to give up that of her father's. It is worth-mentioning that each gotra was named after a Vedic Seer. All persons belonging to the same gotra were regarded as his descendants. We should keep it in mind that woman was given much importance as a mother during the period under consideration. It becomes amply clear from the names of the Satavahana kings who derive their names from that of their mother's.

We come to know from the inscriptions of the Satavahanas who ruled over parts of western India and the Deccan C. 2nd century B.C.–2nd century A.D., that their wives used to adopt the gotras of their respective fathers in place of that of their husband's, just as, raja Gotami-puta Siri Satakani, raja Vasithi-puta (Sami) Siri-Pulumayi. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad contains a list of successive generations of teachers and students, many of whom were designated by metonymics. However, it seems that neither this practice was in prevalence throughout the country nor it was widely followed.

Different rights of different genders regarding access to property have been laid down by the Dharamsutras and the Dharmashastras. The Manusmriti suggests that after the death of the parents, the paternal estate was to be divided equally amongst sons but the eldest one was to get a special share as well. The Manusmriti does not recognise women-right in paternal estate. It clearly suggests that women could not claim a share of these resources. However, the Manusmriti recognises the right of woman on gifts she received on the occasion

of her marriage. It was known as *stridhana* *i.e.*, a woman's wealth. The husband could not have any claim on it but it could be inherited by their children. But at the same time the Manusmriti warns woman that she should not hoard family property or even her own valuables without the permission of her husband.

The Manusmriti mentions regarding the means of acquiring wealth by men and women. It declares, "For women, there are six means of acquiring wealth; what was given in front of the fire (marriage) or the bridal procession, or as a token of affection, and what she got from her brother, mother or father. She could also acquire wealth through any subsequent gift and whatever her "affectionate" husband might give her". Similarly, the man, according to Manusmriti, could acquire wealth by seven means, *i.e.*; by inheritance, finding, purchase, conquest, investment, work and acceptance of gifts from good people.

Though some wealthy and upper class women had their access to economic resources, but generally resources like land, cattle and money were controlled by men. Perhaps, it was the reason that women did not enjoy as high status in society as was enjoyed by their counterparts. In the Mahabharata, the episode of Yudhishtira's staking Draupadi in the game of dice, amply clears that wife was treated as a property of her husband and was always under his control.

## **Significance of the Mahabharata**

The Mahabharata is a very important epic of the ancient India. It influences the Indian life in many-ways even today. It gives us a vivid description of almost all the aspects of the contemporary life. While assessing the significance of the Mahabharata Maurice Winternitz, a well-known historian of Indian literature, writes, "just because the Mahabharata represents more of an entire literature . . . and contains so much and so many kinds of things . . . it gives us an insight into the most profound depths of the soul of the Indian folk."

As has already been discussed, the Aryan influence had expanded throughout the country by the time of the Mahabharata. Several Aryan kingdoms were established in the nook and corner of the country. The war between the Kauravas and the Pandavas is a war between the Dharma and the Adharma and between the justice and the injustice. The Pandavas represent dharma and justice, whereas the Kauravas are the representatives of adharma and injustice. That is why that Shri Krishna, who is regarded as an incarnation of Vishnu, extends his support to the Pandavas. The victory of the Pandavas in the war is, in fact, the victory of dharma over adharma. The Indian masses have been encouraged to follow the path of dharma by various characters and stories in this war of dharma and adharma. Thus, Gandhari while advising her eldest son Duryodhana not to wage a war with the Pandavas, says. "By making peace you honour your father and me, as well as your well wishers . . . it is the wise man in control of his senses who guards his kingdom. Greed and anger drag a man away from his profits: by defeating these two enemies a king conquers the earth . . . you will happily enjoy the earth, my son, along with the wise and heroic Pandavas . . . . There is no good in war, no law (dharma) and profit (artha), let alone happiness; nor is there (necessarily) victory in the end—don't set you mind on war." History is a witness that Duryodhana did not listen to the advice of his mother. He waged and lost the war and thus finished himself. )

( In fact, the underlying object of the Mahabharata is to attract Indian society and culture to the basic values of human life. Shrimad Bhagwadgita, the essence of Indian philosophy is the most significant contribution of the Mahabharata. We find a beautiful amalgamation of Jnan, Bhakti and Karma, the three ways of attaining moksha in it.

The Mahabharata is also important from historical point of view. It furnishes us with significant

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information regarding the social and cultural conditions of some subsequent centuries of the later Vedic period. Undoubtedly, the epic has a deep impact on Indian life from political, social, cultural, moral and spiritual points of view. )