

ORIGINAL ARTICLE



MJSSH
Muallim Journal of
Social Science and Humanities

TIMELESS GEM: HOW MAHABHARATA CAN BE THE GAME CHANGER IN INSPIRING RESPECT FOR ELDERS

Tamil Arasi Muniandy ^{*1}; Rajantheran Muniandy ²;
Fonny Dameaty Hutagalung ³

¹ Department of Indian Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Science, University of Malaya, Malaysia. Email: tamilarasi@utar.edu.my

² Department of Indian Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Malaya, Malaysia. Email: rajanmun@um.edu.my

³ Department of Educational Psychology and Counselling, Faculty of Education, University of Malaya, Malaysia. Email: fonny@um.edu.my

*Corresponding author

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33306/mjssh/291>

Abstract

Mahabharata is the longest epic poem and a product of ancient Hindu civilisation, written post Ramayana between 3rd century BCE and the 3rd century CE. Scholars unanimously agree the Mahabharata is a Hindu moral treatise. However, the fundamental moral values relating to the family as depicted in the epic is very much understudied, notably the element of respect given to the elders. The mainstream interpretations of the Mahabharata text focus primarily on its spiritual element, limiting its application and relevance to wider moral living. In reality, the epic promotes family values, notably the enduring respect for older family members by the younger ones even when they treat the latter unjustly. This paper contributes to literature on morality, namely the value of respect as discussed and portrayed in Mahabharata. Respect is a universal value; however, this moral value as discussed in Mahabharata is unique and worthy to be promoted as a moral ideal because it has significant scientific and cultural implications. Therefore, the current study further seeks to identify moral values associated with family life, namely respect for the elderly. Relevant data is extracted and later analysed using Hermeneutic Approach, while Murray Bowen's Family Systems Theory is utilised to understand intra-familial relationship. Kohlberg's Moral Development Theory meanwhile is used to delineate the moral phases of important characters. Certain methods and expressions are used in the epic that reflect familial respect, namely: i) Salutatory Respect; ii) Acquiescent Respect; iii) Consultation Respect; iv) Linguistic Respect; v) Gift Respect and Reverence. Mahabharata is potentially a valuable moral resource for the younger generation and including its moral values in the educational syllabus will pave way to create generations that respect and honour its elderly and older members of society.

Keywords: Mahabharata, Family values, Moral values, Murray Bowen's Family Systems Theory.

This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial 4.0 International License



Received 12th January 2024, revised 27th February 2024, accepted 13th March 2024

Introduction

The Mahabharata (*Mbh*) is the world's longest epic poem (Vemsani, 2021). It is a tale, a Hindu scripture, a philosophical treatise, and a national history all rolled into one. It is India's most comprehensive collection of information about Hindu philosophy and life in ancient India. According to Hudson (2013), *Mbh* is a key source of dharma (moral) and social etiquette for Indians till this day. It is an omnibus tale of human characteristics and a spectacular story or narrative. The epic poem explains many Hindu beliefs and values, much like the Odyssey seeks to explore western ideals and values. Although the story's plot revolves around the conflict between Pandavas and Kauravas, its relatively narrow subject matter, underlying themes, and message transcend millennia as well as being deeply rooted in familial values. Family values particularly respect to elders is perceived as the most important behaviour because elders is perceived as reservoirs of wisdom and their knowledge are valued by the younger generations. In *Mbh*, absolute respect was given to the eldest, and it was truly admirable. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to analyse and discuss the value of respect exercised in the *Mbh* family, particularly by the younger generation, towards the elders. This study will be a groundbreaking attempt to revisit and revive ancient Indian culture, traditions, and family values.

Review of literature

The *Mbh* has attracted the curiosity of western and eastern researchers. Fitzgerald (1985) explained that *Mbh* has been a major source of education for Indians in the past 1500 years. Rice (2010) in his journal article entitled "A Persian Mahabharata: The 1598–1599 Vemsani (2021) pointed out that the *Mbh* was recognised as an important literary work in the Muslim Kingdom of Mughal. It was called Razmnama and was used as a political reference for the Mughal court and as a moral guide for its society populace. Woods (2014) discussed the interplay of destiny and human agency in *Mbh* while Hooper (2018) examined the core ideas, elements, teachings, and aspects of parenting in the Mahabharata. Ashokkumar (2014), an Indian scholar, pointed out how the concepts of business ethics and social responsibility were already discussed in the Mahabharata. Manikutty (2012) in his journal article "Why Should I be Ethical?" discussed the complex ethical issues in the Mahabharata while Singh (2001) noted the Mahabharata is 'the richest source of knowledge and understanding of ethics even today. Haefner (2014) explored how chastity is portrayed and performed in ancient India by examining the Mahabharata in "Chastity in Ancient Indian Texts: Precept, Practice, and Portrayal". Roy investigated women's social and reproductive rights by evaluating the standards of chastity, virginity, and Pativrata, which are interpreted according to the patriarchal order of society and applied to strengthen patriarchal control. While, Kaur (2019) investigated Arjuna's moral turmoil on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. The authors contended that when a person believes that two commitments, A and B, are equally important but fails to prioritise one over the other, a challenging scenario arises. Even though the careful study

and resolution of moral conflicts is common in language speech, employing normal deontic logic to express moral conflicts indicates that they are unmanageable.

There are debates whether the Kuru family crisis and the battle of Kurukshetra actually took place. According to National Institute of Oceanography's Marine Archaeology Centre, which collaborates with Archaeological Survey of India on common projects, the stories narrated in Mahabharata is true as it is supported by archaeological evidence (Vanamali, 2018). In Southeast Asia, the Malay adaptations of the Mahabharata, some of which were most likely abridged prose renderings of the Old Javanese *Bhratayuddha*, the oldest, *Hikayat Perang Pandawa Jaya*, or "The Tale of the Victorious Pandawa," was written between late 14th and early 16th centuries (Resink, 1975; Prasojo & Arifin 2022). Even after the arrival of Islam, the Mahabharata remained popular. In fact, the Malays were told absorbing stories about heroes displaying military valour and the exemplary and courteous behaviours of the Pandavas. Therefore, *Mbh* is undeniably replete with moral ideas and can serve as a universal moral guide.

Defining the Concept of Moral Value

Moral values are a set of beliefs that arise from one's or society's core values. It represents a person's or society's perception of what is the ultimate good though there are various definitions of it. Morality or moral values are a collection of principles, beliefs, and standards that are used to discern or distinguish between what is right and what is wrong. Though the concept of "good" and "happy" is culturally biased, moral worth typically relates to attitudes and predispositions that underpin respect, responsibility, honesty, and integrity (Kaur, 2015), humility, truthfulness, tolerance, love, cooperation, sympathy, cooperation and spirit of service and sacrifice (Bhakta & Dutta, 2015).

What is Familial Value?

Families are core of society and familial values are foundation of a strong family. Specifically, Familial values are informed by customs, beliefs, principles, respect and love passed down from generation to generation. These values include religious influence, direct social pressure, and the larger community (Allender et. al, 2013). Early experiences in the familial setting have an impact on the individual's beliefs, norms, and behavioural patterns throughout their life (Alberts et al., 2021). Familial values are not usually verbalised but they determine how the family feels, thinks, believes, and acts. Such values are often deeply embedded in family life and are difficult to change. All cultures have familial values but there may be perceptual differences. The fundamental familial values in Europe are equality, liberty and efficiency (Alberts et, al., 2021). Japanese family values are based on traditional, feudal and Confucian values of filial piety (Ronald & Alexy, 2017). In Malaysia, respect, collaboration, cleanliness, and frugality are familial values inculcated in the young culturally and through education and learning at schools. The family values of ethnic Chinese for example, are rooted in Confucianism and Buddhism while those of the Hindus, including their beliefs and daily practises, are strongly founded in Hindu religious scriptures. In essence, *dharma*, governs Hindu ideals and through it, the followers are taught to be responsible, honest, and ethical toward themselves, their families, and society.

Defining the Value of Respect

Respect is defined as admiration or appreciation for someone, something that is good, noteworthy or important (Merriam -Webster, 2021). Respect in the family involves being respectful to its senior members by listening to their opinions and points of view. Respect, according to De Lellis (2000), consists of admiration, appreciation, honour, fear, reverence, regard, and deference. According to Frei and Shaver (2002), respect encompasses a disposition and attitude toward someone based on their positive attributes. Respect, according to the authors, is an attitude that includes cognitive qualities, such as affective elements, namely happy sentiments, behavioural elements like honouring someone in various ways, and appreciating them (Hendrick et al., 2010; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Respect for individuals broadly speaking is ethical and a fundamental value for most human societies (Song & Kim, 2009). It is therefore, considered essential to develop a close bond between individuals leading to a harmonious human interaction (Hendrick, et.al 2010). In Western European families, equality, liberty and efficiency are fundamental familial values (Alberts et al., 2021). Western individualism has led to young people generally showing little regard or respect towards their extended families and their elder family members. This is in direct contrast with Asian communities which are generally more family-oriented and where children are taught to look up to their parents and older family members. The Malays for example, emphasise respect towards parents and grandparents with the younger family members expected to bow down while walking towards the older members as a symbol of respect, speaking softly and kindly by decreasing the tone of their voice. Honouring their parents is basically derived from the Islamic doctrine, namely the Qur'an and Hadith (Khosim et al., 2018). Respect and filial piety are also valued in Chinese society (Newendorp, 2016). This paper will specifically look at the element of familial respect for the older or senior family members as expressed in *Mbh*. It explains using relevant theories supported by data from *Mbh* why this value is unique and should be included in civic curriculum/moral studies. Evidence will be presented as to why the cultural characteristics inherent in *Mbh* are both universal and scientifically relevant, most notably the yoga postures contained in the salutatory expression of respect.

Objective

This study aims to explain familial respect as described in *Mbh*, specifically the respect shown by the younger family members towards their elders, and why this value should be part of the learning and education of school students in Malaysia. It is crucial for students to learn values based on their culture, tradition, and ancestral roots. Understanding familial value in *Mbh* which is a comprehensive work of Indian culture and value system, will help students connect with their cultural roots, fostering a sense of identity and belonging. It provides a foundation for self-discovery and a deeper understanding of their heritage. Anecdotal evidence as well as data analysis will clearly show how this could contribute to improving and elevating the morale of school students.

Methodology

Familial values, namely children's respect for the elderly, are analysed using the hermeneutic approach, an interpretative approach. Hermeneutics is employed as it grasps the deeper meanings, historical content, and cultural nuance to gain a richer understanding of the subject matter, which

consists of four steps to interpret the data. The first step is identification and documentation, where the primary data (*Mbh*) that is related to respect value is identified and documented. Secondary data sources were also identified during the process, including scholarly journals, books, dissertations, government records, and policy reports. Scholars' reliable and authoritative academic materials on familial value, family life, and moral values were researched and documented in the form of notes. They helped create a meaningful and relevant understanding of the study's subject. In the second step, investigation and compartmentalization, the primary and secondary data are documented and evaluated to assess their relevance and alignment with the study's purpose. The documented data was classified and compartmented carefully. This procedure allowed critical and relevant material to be classified based on the subject of discussion. The third step is interpretation and analysis, in which events from *Mbh* relating to younger people's respect for elders are analysed, interpreted, and recommendations offered. Finally, under the integration and conclusion step, all the findings were synthesised to arrive at a conclusion. The findings are described in brief and concluded based on a deductive approach.

Application of Theory

Two theories have been applied in this study, mainly to discover the moral characters in *Mbh*. Kohlberg's Moral Development Theory are used to identify the moral stages of *Mbh* characters. Kohlberg (1975) Moral Development Theory consists of 3 level which leads to moral development and moral thinking. First level is the pre-conventional morality. The pre-conventional stage is defined by obedience and punishment. Children in this stage are responsive to cultural rules, right and wrong and good and bad behaviour. In second level, the conventional level the child applies rules set by their family, teachers, and the community. There are two stages here: good conduct and compliance with the social system. The third level is the postconventional, autonomous, or principled level. This is the most advanced degree of moral thinking according to Kohlberg's moral development theory. The individual begins to consider options based on his or her moral thinking. They create their own moral and ethical standards based on the concepts of the social contract and universal values. At this level, an individual's viewpoint may take precedence over societies. They may break rules that are incompatible with their own values. Morality, according to post-conventional moralists, is a set of norms for society that are not unchangeable and do not require total obedience. They have their own ethical ideals, which encompass fundamental human rights like life, liberty, and justice. As a result, at this level, an individual will be extremely attentive, considerate, and adhere to universal ethical ideals.

Bowen's family system theory is used to explain human interaction within a family, relationship management skills, and a method to enhance resiliency in the face of family challenges (Keller & Noone, 2019). Bowen defined family function as a system in which each member of the unit has a position, a responsibility, and rules to follow. According to the family's relationship agreement, each member is obligated to respond to the other in accordance with their roles. Bowen additionally viewed the family as the primary form of relationship that shapes character traits and behaviour. These behaviours are learnt and reinforced by the members.

Data Analysis and Finding

Data analysis pointed to five different expressions of respect, namely: i) Salutatory Respect and ii) Acquiescent Respect; iii) Consultation Respect; iv) Linguistic Respect; v) Gift Respect. Table 1 describes the expression and the concept.

Table 1:
Expression of Respect and the Concepts

No	Expression of Respect	Concept
1	Salutatory Respect	Physical gestures, such as kneeling down, prostrating, and circumambulating are used to greet the elderly.
2	Acquiescent Respect	Complying with or accepting the elder's directives and wishes
3	Consultation Respect	Seeking advice from elders
4	Linguistic Respect	The use of courteous and polite words or honorifics while speaking to or addressing one another.
5	Gift Respect.	Giving a present to someone we like and respect

Salutatory Respect

Table 2:
Data from Mbh on Salutatory Respect.

No	Event	Expression
1	Drupada greeted Vidura, followed by Pandavas	Hands folded in front of chest
2	Pandu bowed down at Bhishma's feet after he returned to his kingdom upon defeating the kings who defied Hastinapur's reign.	Bowed down to touch the feet
3	Draupadi bowed low at Kunti's feet as she first entered Pandavas's hut after svayambara.	
4	Pandavas bowed down and touched Bhishma and Dhritashtra's feet and embraced them before leaving to Varanavata.	
5	Pandavas prostrated themselves at the elders' feet and stood with their palms folded. Whenever she	Prostration

saw Vyasadeva, Pandavas immediately prostrated in front of him.

- | | | |
|---|--|----------------|
| 6 | Arjuna circumambulated his brothers before leaving to Himalayas and Pandavas walked around the ladies with folded palms. | Circumambulate |
| 7 | Pandavas circumambulated Krishna before he left for Hastinapur for peace talks. | |

Source: Researcher's analysis based on data extracted from Mbh.

In most Asian countries, respect for the elderly is ingrained in their social fabric. Respecting the elderly is a feature of many civilisations throughout the world. However, Indian gestures of respecting the elders are unique and with profound scientific and cultural meaning. The profundity of Indian culture, particularly in paying respect to the elders, is admired across the world (Vimalananda, 2004). This genuine acknowledgement of and respect for seniors is exhibited through customs, one of which is *Pratyutthana*, a means of giving respect to someone as you rise to welcome a visitor. *Namaskhara* is paying homage in the form of *Vanakam* or *Namasthe* while *Shaashtaanga* is prostrating completely in front of the senior, with feet, knees, stomach, chest, forehead, and arms on the ground. Touching the feet of the elderly or teachers is known as *Upasangrahan* (Vimalananda, 2004). Circumambulating is a ritualistic movement that involves walking in a circle (Robinson, 2009). The Pandavas, in particular, set a good example by performing these actions religiously toward the family's elders. Krishna, Bhishma, and Drupada all showed great respect for their elders. The respective gestures and their meanings are discussed below.

Namaskar or Namaskaram

Namaskar is a ceremonial greeting in which a person greets family or guests with their hands folded in front of their chest. It simply means "salutation." When the hands press together and are lifted, it signifies "respect", "reverence", "benediction", "salutation" or a type of "supplication" that Hindus have employed for generations to show respect. This gesture has a cultural meaning that reflects humility and a reduction in one's ego, as well as the surrender of emotion and gratitude to one's elders. From a cultural standpoint, *Namaskar* is also a sort of nonverbal, visual communication to the audience. However, in yoga science, it is a mudra (mark, seal, or gesture) known as the "Anjali" mudra that is included in numerous yoga asanas and Indian dance (Carroll, 2012). Anjali means to honour, rejoice, make a divine sacrifice, or make a reverent gesture. When the hands are brought together at the heart in yoga, they physically link the right and left hemispheres of the brain. Yoga has been recognised for thousands of years for its scientific foundation as a healthy living practise (Singh & Mishra, 2021). Joining both hands ensures that the tips of all fingers are linked together, indicating the pressure points of the eyes, ears, and mind. It is thought that pressing them together activates the pressure points, allowing us to remember that individual for a long period of time. Additionally, there is no physical contact with strangers, there is no fear of germs or infections being passed around. Therefore, *Namaskar* has a scientific and cultural foundation. When Vidura came to Kampilya, Drupada greeted him with reverence, bending down to greet, salute, and honour him. The Pandavas rose to their feet and wept as they

greeted him. This is a gesture of respect and veneration, as well as a symbolic message of gratitude and adoration on Vidura's visit and egoless.

Bowed down to touch elder's feet and prostrating

Bowing down to touch one's feet is common in Indian culture and Hindu tradition. Bowing down to touch the elderly's feet (*Upasangrahan*) and prostrating (*Shaashtaanga*) while lying stretched out on the ground with one's face downwards in front of them is also a mark of respect. Bowing down and prostrating at the feet of the elderly is more than just a show of respect; it also has a scientific and cultural message. Each posture corresponds to a yoga position, and the poses collectively activate all seven chakras (energy fields) in the body (Imamoğlu, 2016). For thousands of years, yoga has been recognised for its healthy lifestyle practice which has been scientifically proven (Singh & Mishra, 2021). In yoga, *Ardha Uttanasana* is bowing while *Balasana* is prostrating. In terms of physical advantages, it helps to strengthen the upper body, wrists, arms, and abdominal muscles, and improves digestive and urinary function while calming the mind and body (Priyadarshi, 2020). It also helps to align the body and boosts strength and mobility (Berry, 2017; Priyadarshi, 2020). *Balasana* or prostration engages the parasympathetic nervous system and encourages relaxation, while relieving anxiety, stress, and fatigue (Schmid & Puymbroeck, 2018).

In cultural terms, bowing down and touching one's feet means "respectful salutation" or "reverential bowing" before another, usually the elderly, teachers, or someone deeply respected. This gesture is an acknowledgement of the elderly person's superiority and an opportunity to acquire intellect, knowledge, strength, and fame by touching their feet. It also gives one a feeling of humility. Hindus consider the elders to be more knowledgeable and wiser. Touching feet and prostrating is a way to seek their blessing and guidance to prosper in life. Specifically, touching the feet of the elderly or any wise person is a way of acknowledging their help, support, grace, superiority, humility, and experience. This also conveys a message of complete surrender of one's self at the feet of the elder. Furthermore, in Hinduism, surrendering to someone entails the possibility of immediately becoming acquainted with that person via his/her wisdom and blessing. In actual fact, the tradition of respect is also to ensure one's physical health and these two aspects are brilliantly intertwined.

In another episode, Pandavas touched Bhishma's feet before making a state visit to Varanavata due to the urging of Dhristhira, who didn't want send his own sons to visit the city. Yudhisthira had noted the king's unusual kindness and realised he had stumbled across something. Yet, the Pandavas bowed down in reverence to him and other elders on the day of their departure. They hugged them with love, touching Bhishma and Dhristhira's feet. It is customary among Indians to seek blessings from their family elders before embarking on a long journey to ensure their journey is safe and their goals are met. Despite the fact the Pandavas were aware of Dhristhira's evil intentions, they nevertheless venerated them, suggesting that the respect for elders is paramount and trumps everything else.

Draupadi bowed low at Kunti's feet when she first entered the Pandavas' hut. She touched Kunti's feet in reverence, accepting her dominance and relinquishing her ego at her mother-in-law's feet. It is a symbolic way for a newly married daughters-in-law to express her respect and humility, as well as to send a message that she will use her knowledge well as preserve the family tradition, and pass it on to the next generation. Though a queen, she humbly welcomed Kunti as her elder, who was wiser and more knowledgeable than her. There was no indication of a conflict

or ego clash between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law throughout the epic. This would surely be a desirable moral value to instil in family life.

In another episode, following the *svayambara*, Krishna and Balarama paid a visit to Kunti and the Pandavas in the jungle. With a courteous fold of his palm, Krishna touched Yudhishthira's feet. In *Mbh*, Krishna is regarded as the greatest lord and an avatar of Lord Vishnu. It's incredible that Krishna stooped down and individually touched the elderly person's feet. This deed demonstrates unrivalled moral worth and it teaches today's youngsters that the elderly should be treated with decency and respect, regardless of their socioeconomic status or background. Despite one's high status and talents, one must remain submissive and be respectful towards our elders, like Krishna. This is a valuable moral value to encourage in the family.

After defeating the kings who disobeyed Hastinapur's rule, Pandu returned to his kingdom. After a year-long absence, the moment he reached the palace, he bowed down at Bhishma's feet who welcomed him with joyful tears and blessed him. Pandu touched Bhishma's feet in a show of respect and acknowledgement of Bhishma's superiority, wisdom, and experience. Furthermore, when Pandu's bow touched Bhishma's foot their success, wealth and achievements were handed over to the family's eldest member, who shared in the delight. In return, Bhishma blesses him, bestowing upon him the great attributes. The Pandavas prostrated themselves at the feet of the elders and stood with their palms clasped in front of Sage Vysa. Vyasadeva once appeared to the Pandavas while they were in the forest. The Pandava brothers knelt the instant they met Vysa. This tradition suggests the level of respect the younger generation had towards their elderly during *Mbh*'s time. When one surrenders at the feet of the elderly, the seniors feel respected or honoured, which gives the individual a favourable image and good vibes persist.

Circumambulation

Circumambulation (*Pradakshina*) is a ritualistic action in which people walk in a circle (Robinson, 2009). According to Kumar (2021), the Rig Vedic definition of *pradakshina* in Hinduism is "pra" used as a prefix to the verb and takes on the sense of "onward, forward to Dakshinam" (south). After darshan (seeing God), Hindus circle the interior of the temple slowly with folded hands in a clockwise orientation. It is argued that all other religions have adopted this concept of circumambulation, a gift from Hinduism (Manoj Singh, 2021). These rituals, once again, are not based just on Hindu beliefs, but also on scientific evidence. Most Hindu temples are created with a geometrical notion in mind. Hindus move clockwise to increase the magnetic moment in the direction of the Earth's magnetic field in order to obtain energy from it. Hence, most temples in ancient India were more than just temples; they were energy spots. In short, they were positive energy centres, a complex blend of cosmocised structure and local sacrality (Kumar, 2021; Singh, 1994). The temple architecture creates a link between the human form and the proportional system, which was discussed by Leonardo da Vinci and Le Corbusier in their modular system of measurement. In a similar way, the elderly are circumambulated in a mark of recognising and honouring the divine in them as they are considered sacred. At the same time, it is aimed at imbibing the sacred and positive vibration from the elders.

In the context of veneration of the elderly, there was a scene in *Mbh* where Arjuna circumambulated his brother Yudhishtira before departing to the Himalayas and the Pandavas went around the ladies with folded hands before exiling themselves. They obviously believed good vibrations of the elders will help to protect them via their blessing them before they embark on a

difficult path. The Pandavas circumambulated Krishna before he left for Hastinapur for peace talks. This gesture means that they surrendered to Krishna and respected him as their supreme lord, while believing he will be able to bring peace between the Kauravas and Pandavas. When Krishna visited Kunti, he circumambulated her, offering his aunt the same respect as his mother. This shows that circumambulation is not merely a gesture of respect, but that they will be energised by the elders' good vibration; it additionally sends a message that parents and elders in the family are the most valuable gift that one can have. This is a major moral value that should be replicated in familial life, particularly among the younger generation who copy the western culture indiscriminately and look at it with awe.

Namaskar, bending to touch feet, prostrating, and circumambulating the seniors are all rituals that the youngsters in *Mbh* perform on a daily basis to obtain blessings from the elders. The blessing of the elderly, which is usually done by touching their heads, is an energy-emitting technique that has significant scientific basis. Every individual possesses an aura. The energy field or vibration of those giving blessings has a powerful influence on people near them and the environment in which they dwell. As a result, aura has the ability to influence the emotional state of a person (Lafayette, 2019). The fingers, eyes, and head emit an aura. When the elderly are regarded as holy, the nobility is seen to have a favourable and harmonious aura. A favourable aura is transferred to the individual who comes to get the blessing through their contact. A favourable aura will be bestowed upon the person receiving the blessing. This is why the elder's blessing is crucial and Hindus are advised to spend time with good people because their positive energy will recharge and revitalise others' positive fields (Prakash, 2009). He who salutes and reveres the elderly on a regular basis gains four advantages: increased longevity, wisdom, fame, and strength. The younger generation in *Mbh* are aware of this and, therefore, they constantly seek the blessing of the elders. Showing respect by bowing down and prostrating to touch the elderly's feet is a reflection of a dignified familial life.

Acquiescent Respect

The term "acquiescent respect" refers to complying with or honouring an elderly person's directives and wishes. Acquiescent respect is defined as politely listening to the elders' words and views, following their counsel, and agreeing or consenting to their wishes. Obeying a direction entails doing what our parents, elders, and superiors tell us to do without hesitation or patience (Sung, 2001).

Table 3:
Data from *Mbh* on Acquiescent Respect.

No	Event	Expression
1	As Dhritarastra stated' I'd want to offer the Pandavas half of the kingdom so that we 'don't have any more disputes. Go to Khandavaprastha, Yudhisthira, my child. Yudhisthira looked respectfully at his uncle, and the Pandavas acknowledged their uncle's gift with folded palms and replied “, "It shall be this." Oh, my lord.	Acquiescent respect

Vidura told Dhritarastra's wish to invite the Pandavas to enjoy a dice game with their cousin. Yudhisthira was apprehensive upon hearing the news and told his uncle Vidura. "O uncle, if we gamble, we shall probably fight". "Gambling is the root of all misery. I tried "to dissuade Dhritarastra, but he could not hear my advice. Yudhisthira felt obliged to go, knowing that it was Dhritarastra who had sent the invitation.

Some expressions of the acquiescent respect were truly astounding. This extraordinary behaviour may come as a surprise to today's generation. During the *Mbh* era, it was common to strictly follow the dictates of the elders. The remarkable part of this practice is that, even though following the elders' orders would put them in a terrible situation, the younger one did so without hesitation. The Pandavas were given the Khandavaprastha, which was a jungle and desert. However, Yudhisthira looked at Dhritarastra respectfully without anger and resentment at the unfairness of the 'gift'. Yudhisthira regarded the elders as superior, and obeyed their commands without question and this is a sign of extreme respect. He strongly believed that they should not disobey the wishes of their elders. Therefore, with folded palms, the Pandavas accepted the gift full-heartedly, even though all the other elders in the family thought it was unfair to give them a kingdom that had no cities, settlements, and was cursed by a rishi. Despite knowing all her uncle's manipulations, respecting the wishes of the elders meant Yudhisthira and her siblings accepted what was offered without raising objections in order to avoid creating a situation that displeased her uncle.

Similarly, in order not to offend their elders, the Pandavas joined the dice game as per their uncle's wishes. Vidura was directed to invite the Pandavas to enjoy a dice game with their cousin. At first, Yudhisthira was apprehensive hearing the news and told his uncle Vidura that the game would probably end up in a fight, but when Yudhisthira learned it was his uncle's wish, he felt obliged to participate. Yudhisthira had vowed never to refuse his elder's orders. Even though he was the emperor of the world, his uncle was a respectable superior and told him he should not disrespect his instruction. Indeed, this is an extraordinary behaviour that appear alien in today's struggle for self-respect and freedom of expression. The younger generation can learn that honouring their elders' desires is a duty, but if they disagree, they should do so in a peaceful manner.

The elderly was regarded as important and significant members of the family in the *Mbh* period. Regarded well as excellent moral guide due to their wisdom, experience, and maturity, as well as in instilling positive and moral ideals in the younger generation, they were held in high esteem. They were additionally considered as moral exemplars and thus, their counsel and support were seen as crucial for the younger generation's well-being. The ancient poet *Avvaiyar's* Tamil moral book further affirmed the value of the elderly: ""Words of wise men are sweet." Hence, complying with and honouring the elder's wishes is a very important trait instilled in the younger members of the family.

Consultation Respect

Seeking the advice of the elderly before doing or starting something is referred to “respect consultation.” This reflects respect for their wisdom and experience (Sung & Dunkle, 2009).

Table 4:
Data from Mbh on Consultation Respect.

No	Event	Expression
1	Yudhishtira asked Krishna’s opinion and pleaded with him to clear his doubt. Dhritarastra wants peace without giving them their rightful kingdom. They lived 12 years in the forest as he commanded, and they were truthful. However, following Duryodhana’s wish, Dhritasthira took a deceitful course. He enquired about the path of virtue and whether he should follow Krishna.	Consultation respect

Consulting the eldest in the family is a common tradition among Indians. Historically, the Indian family is an extended (joint) one that consists of grandparents, brothers, cousins, uncles, aunts, nieces, and nephews living under one roof (Basham, 2002)⁴⁴. In joint family units, the elderly act as the head of the household. The head of the family is often consulted by other family members before doing embarking on anything important, from investing the family money to the nitty-gritty of traditional wedding rites and intra-family problems, and this is not simply passive advice; their word is final in settling disagreements. As a result, the consent of and the views of the family’s head and other elderly members are critical in decision making process or in settling disputes. The *Thirukural*, an Indian moral treatise, encourages seeking the company of great men to ward against one’s miseries.

Yudhishtira was undecided on how to respond to the injustice perpetrated by the Kauravas and Dhritasthira. They could not endure adversities like Kshatriyas. As a result of the Kauravas’ wicked deeds, the Pandavas, as Kshatriyas, were unable to fulfil their duty as rulers and helped the Brahmins and the poor. On the other hand, Dhritasthira wanted the Pandavas to remain beggars. If the Pandavas were to wage a war to reclaim their kingdom, everyone will be affected, and Yudhishtira did not want this as his family and friends would suffer. He sought Krishna’s assistance in resolving his challenging circumstance and stated he and his siblings were eager to accept Krishna’s suggestion. Although Yudhishtira and his brothers were great warriors of that time as well as undefeatable and renowned princes who possessed the abilities to make rational judgement and intelligent decisions, the elders were still consulted. This event exemplifies how the elders’ decisions and expertise were honoured. Krishna’s advice was highly respected, and his words were considered the ultimate. It is apparent that the elderly were held in great regard and treated with the highest respect when it comes to resolving family issues. However, this is being challenged in modern times where the individualistic culture is growing and which prioritises the interests of the person over the collective based on independence and autonomy. Ethical egoism is the normative ethical view which is predicated on protecting one’s self-interest (Osterberg, 2012). Decisions that are considered jointly and that consider the well-being of all members, particularly in the family, are crucial to guaranteeing the well-being of the family. Self-interest in family

decision-making may be detrimental. Here, it must be reiterated that Yudhishtira’s approach to consulting Krishna is a great and important in familial life that consolidates harmony and bond in the family.

Linguistic Respect

Linguistic respect pertains to utilising honorifics while speaking to or addressing someone as well as conversing with them in a proper language to reflect politeness.

Table 5:

Data from Mbh on Linguistic Respect.

No	Event	Expression
1	Dhritarastra, Bhisma and other elders arrived at Indraprastha for Rajasuya. Yudhishtira welcomed them lovingly and bowed at his elders’ feet and said, “All my wealth and my dominions are yours. Please command me as you desire.	Linguistic respect
2	Arjuna seeks permission from Yudhishtira to go on pilgrimage. Arjuna said, “My Lord, I have heard from you that virtue must be practised without hesitation or quibble. I shall not waver from truth. Grant me permission to leave and I shall proceed to the forest today	

Traditionally, the function of language is to express feelings, emotions, and passions (Joseph, 2004). Emotions and passions are closely related to the body and stand in contrast with the rational operation of the intellect, which serve as the foundation for representation and communication (Joseph, 2004). The use of proper language is critical as it exemplifies social structure and serves as a prerequisite to social cooperation. Spoken words should be polite, kind, and uplifting, rather than offensive. If a person is capable and skilled in a field, it is courteous and customary to honour and celebrate their accomplishments which also serve as a moral exemplary. When the Kuru elders attended the *Rajasuya* sacrifice, Yudhishtira knelt at their feet and declared that they have full rights to their wealth and dominions, and he asked them to command him according to their wishes. Here, it is important to note how those wishes were carefully worded and expressed to avoid offending anyone. At this juncture, Yudhishtira's language indicated high regard for the seniors, as he was willing to place all of his riches, wealth and prestige in the hands of his family's elders, even though he was a renowned monarch at the time. This action also points to Yudhishtira's kindness and ego lessness toward the elderly. In short, his carefully prepared words followed by his actions suggested that his prosperity and honour belonged to his family, and he did not want to claim credit for it alone.

Arjuna is a major character in *Mbh*. Well known for his ‘linguistic respect’. He was also a great warrior and a skilled archer - no one could compete with him in archery. He helped to vanquish monarchs and conquer their kingdoms. Arjuna was, nevertheless, courteous, and

attentive to his elders, especially to his elder brother Yudhisthira. Yudhisthira opposed Arjuna's plan to go on a year-long journey. With utmost respect, he attempted to persuade his brother. In Christianity, the term "Lord" refers to God or Jesus Christ, whereas Hindus refer to the Gods as "Lord." In many religions, this demonstrates the supreme power known as the Lord. Arjuna offered his brother the same level of grandeur, treating him as if he were God. He gently requested his brother's permission, stating that he learned from his brother that virtue must be practised without doubt, and hence he cannot deviate from the truth. He pleaded with him to allow him to go to the woods. Arjuna's remarks revealed his deepest admiration for his brother. After hearing Arjuna's comments, Yudhisthira eventually consented to his demands.

Gift Respect

Gift respect entails giving a present to someone you like and respect (Sung & Dunkle, 2009). Receiving a gift has a strong positive effect on one’s emotions. Typically, the recipient is glad and delighted, which helps to create a stronger bond and cement the relationship. A gift is a nonverbal means of expressing appreciation, thankfulness, or gratitude. Essentially, it allows us to connect with someone we care about. Table 1 describes gift respect in *Mbh*.

Table 5:
Data from *Mbh* on Gift Respect.

No	Event	Expression
1	Drupada gifted 100 golden chariots drawn by four excellent steeds, one hundred mature elephants, and one hundred maidservants adorned with ornaments and flower garlands.	Gift respect
2	Krishna arranged a vast amount of wealth to be sent as a gift to the Pandavas.	

Giving presents to family members at important events is a family tradition as described in *Mbh*'s. Following their wedding, Drupada and Krishna lavished the Pandavas with several costly gifts. The Pandavas were considered noble, just, and wise by both of them and they were treated with great reverence and offered lavish gifts. Drupada's gift was meant as a token of appreciation towards his son-in-law and Krishna's was out of love as an uncle towards his auntie’s sons. Krishna and Drupada’s gift was a symbol of appreciation, thankfulness, or gratitude for having the Pandavas as their family members.

It is common in Indian culture for those in the *mama* (uncle) position to present a gift. This tradition is still followed by the Indians, notably at weddings where "*nallugu*", a pre-marriage ceremony, is practised to honour the bride or groom. Uncles and relatives bring food, jewellery, and gold to offer to the bride and groom and perform the "*nallugu*" ritual. A puberty ceremony is held when the sister's daughter reaches puberty. The girl is also visited by her uncle, aunties, and other relatives, who bring various gifts. In this way, Indian tradition is designed to honour love and togetherness.

The art of giving is considered a true gift in Indian culture. Giving is considered dharma, or a part of religious duty. The Bhagavad-Gita a sub story in *Mbh*, describes three types of gifting. First, a gift given without any expectation of recognition or reward benefits both the donor and the recipient. Second, a gift offered unwillingly and with the anticipation of some benefit is harmful to both the donor and the recipient, and third, a gift given without consideration for the recipient's sentiments and at the wrong moment, bringing shame to the recipient, is hurtful to both the giver and the recipient.

Kohlberg's and Bowen's Family Theory and Its Application to *Mbh*

Most human beings are governed by moral beliefs which act as a compass to their behaviour and to distinguish between right and wrong or evil and good. Moral values are universal but moral reasoning or moral development varies between individuals. Lawrence Kohlberg (1958) seminal theory is one of the most prominent theories related to moral reasoning and moral development and it has had a strong impact in academia. This can be attributed to its assumption that how an individual reason morally is a yard stick of his/her moral behaviour. In explaining individual differences in moral development, Kohlberg' classified moral development into three levels: pre-conventional level (driven by self-interest); conventional level (driven by desire to maintain social-order, and rule of law); and post-conventional level (inspired by social contract and universal ethical principles). At the post-conventional level, individuals follow highly esteemed social rules. They appreciate others on the basis of human rights, equality, and universal justice. The dignity of an individual and mankind are given paramount importance. *Mbh*'s main personalities, notably, Krishna, can be classified as belonging to the post conventional level. Although possessed of almighty powers and divinity and as an avatar, Krishna remains submissive and accepts Yudhishtira's supremacy and touches his feet as a mark of respect. This event suggests that even God, when in a human body, is subservient to his elders. Lord Krishna, who in human form, is undoubtedly at the highest moral level based on Kohlberg's moral development theory. The Pandavas are noble personalities as well. They are always respectful towards the elders, even if the elders do not act in their favour all the time. Post-conventional thinkers usually avoid self-condemnation and adhere to social rules that are highly esteemed by society. The Pandavas remained respectful even though Dristastira behaved unjustly, because honouring the elders was a highly valued social etiquette.

Bowen family systems theory views the family as an emotional unit and uses systems thinking to describe its complex interaction. A family, according to Bowen, is a system in which each member has a role to play and rules to respect. Members of the system are required to respond to one another in a specific way based on their role, as defined by relationship agreements. Further, the theory asserts that individuals are inseparable from their network of relationships. Drawing from Bowen, it is clear Pandavas, Vidura, and Krishna all played important roles in the family to resolve conflict and uphold familial values. Family rules, particularly respect for the elderly, are not compromised in the face of conflicts in family relationships. Additionally, as per Bowen's theory, family members such as Pandava, Kunti, Vidura, Draupadi, and Krishna are intensely connected emotionally, and their bond/togetherness empowered them to cope with all the stresses the Kauravas had caused. Amazingly, most of the protagonists particularly the Pandavas, remain morally upright while navigating familial problems and hardships.

Conclusion

During the *Mbh* era, the younger generation displayed great respect for their elders. Every gesture is performed with the goal of instilling positivity in the younger person towards their elders, and this in fact has a scientific and global meaning and relevance. In sum, the primary finding of the paper points to the importance of respect, especially towards the elderly. It is suggested that the respect shown to the eldest in *Mbh* should be promoted in education/moral studies of primary and secondary school students. It is clear these practices are not outdated but are in fact, more than ever relevant for the new millennial in view of declining moral values globally. It is crucial to look back at ancestral values as it offers a valuable perspective on tradition, heritage, and shared wisdom.

References

- Albert, I., Emirhafizovic, M., Shpigelman, C. N., and Trummer, U. (2021). *Families and family values in society and culture*. Charlotte: Information Age Publishing Inc.
- Allender, J., Rector, C. & Warner, C. (2013). *Community & Public Health Nursing: Promoting the Public's Health*. Philadelphia: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.
- Ashokkumar, S. (2014). Thoughts on business ethics and corporate social responsibility from Vedic literature. *Procedia Economics and Finance*, 11, 15–22. doi:10.1016/s2212-5671(14)00171-3.
- Basham, A.L. (2002). *The wonder that was India*. New Delhi: Rupa. Co.
- Berry, M. (2017). *Two-hundred-hour yoga teacher training manual: A guide to the fundamentals*. Bloomington: Balboa Press.
- Bhakta. K., & Dutta. N. (2015). Degradation of moral values among Indian youth: An emerging issue. *Asian Journal of Educational Research & Technology*, 5(1), 80–83.
- Carroll. C. & Frawley. D. (2012) *Mudras of India: A Comprehensive Guide to the Hand Gestures of Yoga and Indian Dance*. United Kingdom: Singing Dragon. clients. *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, 52(3), 250–260.
- DeLellis, A. J. (2000). Clarifying the concept of respect: Implications for leadership. *Journal of Leadership Studies*, 7(2), 35-49.
- Eagly, A.H & Chaiken, S (1985). *The Psychology of Attitude Change*. In *Opinion Control in the Democracies* (pp. 73–87). United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Fitzgerald, J. L. (1985). India's fifth Veda: the Mahābhārata's presentation of itself. *Journal of South Asian Literature*, 20(1), 125-140.
- Frei, J. R., & Shaver, P. R. (2002). Respect in close relationships: Prototype definition, self-report assessment, and initial correlates. *Personal relationships*, 9(2), 121-139.
- Haefner, J. (2014). An application of Bowen family systems theory. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, 35(11), 835–841.
- Hendrick, S. S., Hendrick, C., & Logue, E. M. (2010). Respect and the Family. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 2(2), 126–136.
- Hooper, C. (2018). The Mahabharata. *A Quarterly Journal of Jungian Thought*, 61(1), 76–91. doi:10.1080/00332925.2018.1422931.
- Hudson, E. T. (2013). *Disorienting Dharma: Ethics And the Aesthetics of Suffering in The*
- Imamoğlu, o. (2016). Common Benefits of Prayer and Yoga on Human Organism. *International Journal of Science Culture and Sport*, 4(18), 639–639.

- Joseph, J. E. (2004). *Linguistic identity and the functions and evolution of language*. In Language and Identity. London: Palgrave Macmillan *Journeys of the Mahabharata*. New York: Springer International Publishing.
- Kaur, S. (2019). *Moral values in education*. Tap Chí Nghiên Cứu Dân Tộc, 8(1).
- Keller, M. N., & Noone, R. J. (Eds.). (2019). *Handbook of Bowen Family Systems Theory and research methods: A systems model for family research*. United Kingdom: Routledge
- Khosim, N. S., Salaeh, A., & Luqman Ayob, A. (2018). *Family Values and Its Importance from the Qur'anic Perspectives*. The 4th YRU National and International Conference in Islamic Education and Educational Development (The 4th YRU-IEED 2017: Future and Challenge), (May 2017), 85–92.
- Kohlberg, L., & Hersh, R. H. (2013). Theory Into Practice Moral development: A review of the theory Moral Development: *A Review of the Theory*, 37–41.
- Kumar, S. (2021). Circumambulation in Indian pilgrimage: Meaning and manifestation, *International Journal of Scientific & Engineering Research* (1), 232–243.
- Lafayette, M, (2019) *Secrets of Aura and Inner Energy. How to Read People Just by Looking at Them*. New York: Times Square Press. *Mahabharata*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Manikutty, S. (2012). Why should I be ethical? Some answers from Mahabharata. *Journal of Human Values*, 18(1), 19-32.
- Manoj Singh (2021). *Sanatan Dharma: Vaidik Gateway to the Next Century*. New Delhi Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Merriam-Webster. (2021). Respect. In *Merriam-Webster.com.dictionaty*. Retrieved on April 23, 2021 from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/respect>.
- Newendorp, N. (2017). Negotiating Family “Value”: Caregiving and Conflict Among Chinese-Born Senior Migrants and Their Families in the U.S. *Ageing International*, 42(2), 187–204. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12126-016-9269-z>.
- Osterberg, J. (2012). *Self and Others: A Study of Ethical Egoism*. Amsterdam: Kluwer Academic Publisher.
- Prakash, Vishwa (2009). *Who Stole My Soul? A Dialogue with the Devil on the Meaning of Life*. Austin: Synergy Books.
- Prasojo, E., & Arifin, M. (2022). Manifestasi Transformasi Nilai-Nilai Ajaran Islam Dalam Tokoh Wayang Kulit Pandawa Lima pada Cerita Mahabharata. *Jurnal Dirosah Islamiyah*, 4(2), 304-321.
- Priyadarshi, S. (2020). *Never visit a doctor: How to stay fit and healthy forever*. Chennai: Notion Press.
- Resink, G.J. (1975). *From the old Mahabharata- to the new Ramayana*. Bijdragen tot de Taal-Land- en Volkenkunde, Deel 131, 2/3de Afl. pp. 214-235.
- Rice, Y. (2010). *A Persian Mahabharata: The 1598-1599 Razmnama*. Manoa, 22(1), 125-131.
- Robinson, James B. (2009). *Hinduism*. New York: Infobase Publishing.
- Ronald, R., & Alexy, A. (2017). *Continuity and change in Japanese homes and families*. In *Home and Family in Japan* (pp. 21-44). United Kingdom: Routledge.
- Schmid, A. A., & Van Puymbroeck, M. (2018). *Yoga therapy for stroke: A handbook for yoga therapists and healthcare professionals*. London: Singing Dragon.
- Singh, R. P. B. (1994). *Sacred Geometry of India's Holy City, Varanasi: Kashi as Cosmogram*. *National Geographical Journal of India*, 40(108), 189–216.
- Singh, R. P. B. (1994). Sacred geometry of India's holy city Varanasi: Kashi as cosmogram. *National Geographical Journal of India*, 40, 189–216.
- Singh, S.B & Mishra. K.P. (2021). *Scientific Insights in Yoga (Prabhat Prakashan)*. New Delhi: Prabhat Prakashan.

- Söng, K., & Kim, B. Jung. (2009). *Respect for the elderly: implications for human service providers*. Lanham: University Press of America.
- Sung, K. T. (2001). Elder respect: Exploration of ideals and forms in East Asia. *Journal of Aging Studies*, 15(1), 13–26.
- Sung, K. T., & Dunkle, R. E. (2009). How social workers demonstrate respect for elderly
- Vanamali (2018). *In the lost city of Sri Krishna: The story of ancient Dwaraka*. Rochester: Inner Traditions India.
- Vemsani L. (2021) Introduction: Feminine Journeys of the Mahabharata. In: Feminine
- Vimalananda, S. (2005). *The Indian culture*. Mumbai: Central Chinmaya Mission Trust.
- Woods. (2014). Destiny and Human Initiative in the Mahabharata. *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 61(4).