CONCLUSION

In the foregoing pages we have given a detailed account of the politico-cultural life of the republics in North-Eastern India (600 B.C. - 300 B.C.). They are significantly known to us not from the Brahmanical sources but from the early canonical texts of the Buddhists, and were designated by such terms as Samgha and Gana. They were not the offsprings of fortuitous circumstances; rather they had their moorings in a long and well-established tradition going back to the age of the Rig-Veda. The disparaging remarks of the western scholars on the nature of these republics are to be ascribed to the sense of pride in their cultural superiority rather than to any profundity of objective and dispassionate study.

These republicans were definitely not the 'offshoots' of Vedic aristocrats as asserted by J.P. Sharma. Rather, they had their genesis in the cyclic mode of political development in ancient India along with the other historical factors of the time.

The political history of these republics was long and eventful, characterised by an impressive pride
in patriotism and heroism. It is wrong to describe them as tribal states governed by primitive traditional rules. Indeed, they were well-organised, and administered according to established laws and practices. Their political sagacity and constitutional genius found expression in the organisation of different types of state - unitary, federal, confederal, etc., which resemble in some respects the developed constitutional mechanism of modern times. With all their limitations they represent a bold experiment in a variety of ways. The democratic element in their constitution is clearly visible in the location of ruling power, which was vested in a sovereign popular assembly. Their rules of procedure, surviving in the rules of conduct of the Buddhist chapter, bears a striking resemblance to the parliamentary procedure obtaining in the modern democracies. Their administrative system and institutions were highly developed. Their judicial administration deserves a special mention. It was carried out through a most ingeniously devised seven-tier judiciary which appears to have been guided by the principle that every man is innocent until he is adjudged guilty. We cannot accept J.P. Sharma's contention against the existence of such a complex judiciary, as his arguments are simply flimsy and unconvincing. Their success in financial and economic administration was equally impressive, marked by financial stability and the prosperity of the people.
Although social life in the republics was not very different from that of the contemporary monarchies, we find certain oddities and angularities, such as the courtesan system in Vaisali and Vidisha, and the ancient tradition of sister-marriage among the Sakya. Besides, certain personal traits and customs were really striking. Their life was disciplined and ennobled by religious faiths and practices. Buddhism and Jainism were their major faiths, while Brahmanism and other minor heretical sects came next in importance. Their revolt against Vedic orthodoxy inaugurated a new age in Hindu religious life. But religion did not obscure their reason. They displayed a keen interest in metaphysical queries which brought forth a host of philosophical systems of which the Buddhist and Jaina ones are most important. Moreover, the clash of faiths and philosophies, with which the age was resounding, did not lead to bloodshed as one finds in Sixteenth Century Europe. They appear to have accepted ideological differences as a means to discover the truth. Moreover, their healthy and robust sense of brotherhood cut across all differences in faiths and ideals. Further, these republicans put a high premium on intellectual culture. Distance and hazards of travel failed to dampen their thirst for knowledge. Their youth went to distant centres of higher learning like Taxila and Varanasi to complete higher education in arts and sciences. The liberal state patronage to education is evidenced by the story of Mahæli. It is no wonder that
these republics constituted important centres of learning 
and enlightenment. The Buddha, one of these republicans, 
has been most fittingly described as the 'Light of Asia.' 
Moreover, their keen aesthetic sense is amply displayed 
in their remarkable achievements in all forms of art.

The merits and demerits of the North-Eastern 
republics were inherent in the very nature of their 
polity and the age in which they flourished. They were 
at the peak of their prosperity and glory in the early 
period of the Buddha's ministry, but soon afterwards we 
find them set on the road to decline. The neighbouring 
kingsdoms of Kosala and Magadha made a short work of them. 
A variety of factors, some of which were fundamental, 
led to their fall. Indeed, as Ralph observes, "When 
civilisations fail, it is almost always man who has 
failed, not in his fundamental equipments and capacities, 
but in his will, spirit and mental habits." Thus these 
North-Eastern republics fell, but they left behind a 
blazing trail of rich experience in democratic functioning 
and in new systems of religion, ethics and metaphysics. 
Their achievements in the various spheres of life have 
an abiding place in our country's history.