The Rāmāyaṇa is the oldest work of ornate poetry in Sanskrit literature. It was written by Vālmīki who took upon himself the task of composing the story of Rāma on being made to utter the famous 'Sloka by the sight of a Krauṇḍa killing. It is a poem which has fascinated the Indians through the length and breadth of the country, breaking all barriers of regions and cultures. Not only that, it crossed the boundaries of India and the sea beyond, and reached other countries like Indonesia and Thailand; there, too, it became an immortal source of eternal joy and solace.

Thus, the Rāmāyaṇa is the story of Rāma’s life and depicts events like his birth, early exploits, marriage, sojourn in the forest, conquest of Lāṅkā and the happenings during his rule. In other words, it describes the life of the hero from his birth to death and has - in addition to that - the accounts of the origin and rise of the Nākṣatas and the Vānara heroes, namely Valī and Hanumān.

The Rāmāyaṇa depicts a clear picture of the political scene of the period. It is obvious from the epic that the area beyond the Sindhū river was occupied by the Gandharvas, who were, probably, governed by an oligarchy and were defeated by the combined forces of Kekaya and Ayodhyā. Most parts of the land beyond the Gāṅgā were not much populated, the only inhabitants being sages who had hermitages scattered
over a large area of the forests. The rākṣasas under the leadership of Rāvana and the command of Khara were busy in tormenting and killing the sages in the area in order to get it vacated and occupy it themselves. Their presence near the Gāgā is evident from the description of Rāma’s fight with Tātakā who attacked him immediately after he had crossed the river. The confrontation between Rāma and the Rākṣasas at the time of Viśvāmitra’s sacrifice eliminated the menace from a part of area; but towards the end of the book IX we find that the Rākṣasas under Khara were present around Citrakūṭa and had their head-quarters at Janasthāna. It is further learnt from the epic that the area, a little away from Janasthāna, was under the Vānara king Vālī.

The Rākṣasas did not like the presence of sages in the area of Dandakāranya and tried to get them out forcibly. The sages were not ready to vacate the area. They tried to resist the manoeuvre of the Rākṣasas and, for that purpose, thought of a plan to annihilate the Rākṣasas (VII.13.32). There are many references in the epic to the above, which prove that the events of the Rāmāyana were the result of a strategy planned by the sages and others.

The sages of the Dandakāranya knew that all the kings in India were afraid of Rāvana and, therefore, were not prepared to have any confrontation with him. Daśaratha, we read, was not ashamed of admitting before Viśvāmitra
that he could not have a fight with Rāvaṇa (I.20.20-23). But the sages like Viśvāmitra, Bharadvāja, Agastya and others were not afraid of him or his Rākṣasas. They were busy planning to clear them off the main land. They got Rāma and his brothers married to the daughters of king Janaka and his brother with a view to unite their powers. The marriages seem planned because the originally scheduled test of valour had been over long before Rāma reached Mithilā with an apparent motive to participate in the sacrifice arranged by king Janaka, and even then the marriages could be possible.

Rāma, it seems, was very popular as an accomplished hero and was, therefore, given a test by the sages by making him fight the Rākṣasas at Siddhārāma. When he proved there that he could be a leader of the Aryas in the fight against Rāvaṇa, the sages manipulated his exile in order to take him to the forest.

The Rāmāyaṇa points unambiguously to the plan chalked out by the sages as the following proofs would establish:

1) The sages were deeply interested in the events taking place in Ayodhya. When Rāma reached the hermitage of Bharadvāja, he heard the sage saying, "I have been waiting for your arrival since long." (II.94.21).

2) Kubera told Rāvaṇa, "The gods and the sages are planning for your death." (VII.13.32).
3) Agastya told Rāma, "You have been brought here in the forest to exterminate the Rākṣasas (III.29.31)."

4) When Sītā was abducted by Rāvaṇa, the sages said, "The job is done." (III.32.11).

The Rāmāyaṇa seems to be a story of war between the Aryas of the northern states led by Kosala, with the help of sages, and the Rākṣasas of Lanka led by Rāvaṇa, both making use of polity to the best of their ability.

Both sides tried to increase their strength by making alliances. Ayodhya had enhanced its power by having matrimonial alliances with the king of Kekaya and Mithilā, and established friendship with the kings of Aṅga, Kāśī and other states. The confederate kings, we read, were present in Ayodhya, along with their armies, when Rāma was fighting Rāvaṇa (VII.38). The Rākṣasas on the other hand made peace with the Vānarā king Vālī, which was broken by Rāma later when he killed Vālī and made Sugrīva an ally.

After the war, Rāma came back to Ayodhya and was anointed as the king. Bharata, who had been supervising the administration of the state from Nandīgrāma, placing Rāma's sandals on the throne, was made the Yuvarāja. On becoming the king, he ruled in such a way that all his subjects remained happy and contented, and thereby established highly coveted standards of administration.
The Rāmāyana, thus, provides an excellent scope for a study of the political ideas and institutions of its age. But while the social ideas and institutions in the Rāmāyana have attracted a good number of scholars, the political ideas and institutions referred to in the epic still require a more critical study.

The functioning of the state as described in the Rāmāyana has been infatuating the minds of the public as well as the righteous rulers in India so much that its hero Rāma has always been an object of imitation in matters of polity and administration. The modern Indian political thinkers like Gandhi, too, dreamt of witnessing the Rāmarājya in India again. That arouses one's interest in finding out the administrative set-up and the type of personal care the king offered to his people for their moral and material uplift and contentment.

In the Mahābhārata as well as in the other works on polity, we find well established and perfected ideas and institutions of polity even from modern standards. The Mahābhārata discusses elaborately almost all the aspects of polity. Our attempt in the following pages will be to see as to how far such aspects had been accepted in the times of the Rāmāyana which, no doubt, manifests a mature political thinking.

The date and authorship of the Rāmāyana have been discussed by many scholars. Even then we have made a humble
attempt to add what we have found conducive to the fixation of the date and assignment of the authorship, besides analysing the problems and evaluating the various views on the subject, with the help of the text of the epic.

The ideas about the origin of the state and the number of its elements have been projected in the *Mehabhārata* and in the works on polity. In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, it is found that there are germs of various theories on the origin of the government. Besides, it is familiar with all the seven constituents of the state referred to in our ancient works on polity, and gives out their names, qualifications and calamities. We have made an effort to discuss comparatively the various theories and the elements of the state found in the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

K.P. Jayaswal propounded what is known as the *Paure-Jānapada* theory. Both these words occur in the *Rāmāyaṇa* in singular as well as plural compounded forms. We have tried to explain the connotation of these terms on the basis of their appearances in the epic.

Similarly, many institutions and ideas of polity have been alluded to in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. For instance, the whole of the bureaucracy has been indicated by the polity writers by the single word 'Amātya'. We have made an effort not only to differentiate it from the word 'Saciva' and 'Mantrin', but also discussed the other main functionaries comprising the bureaucracy during the times of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. 
Though the king was the fountain-head of all the activities of the state, the *Rāmāyaṇa* does not conceive of him as an autocrat. We have attempted to bring out the various devices spelled out in the epic to trim the autocratic tendencies of the king.

The diplomatic measures and the norms of inter-state relationship do not find a systematic description in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. However, we find all the measures of the *Śāṅgavepa* policy and the four *upāyana* being employed by the states on different occasions, which manifest the *Rāmāyaṇa*’s views on the diplomacy to be adopted in the matter of inter-state relationship. We have discussed these views in detail.

The *Rāmāyaṇa* alludes to a fairly well knit administrative and judicial set-up although the information available in the epic does not present a vivid picture of their exact functioning. We have tried to put together as much information as can be found and present a composite picture of the state and the military organisation of the epic-period.

The state of the *Rāmāyaṇa* had well defined sources of income and the heads of expenditure, which outline the budgetary provisions of the age.

The concept of the welfare state seems to have been well engraved in the popular minds by the times of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The king took upon himself the responsibility for providing a happy life to his people and the people on their
part looked upon the state as a beneficent institution. We have tried to explain what contributed to such a state in the age of the Rāmāyaṇa.

We have tried to compare the information furnished by the Rāmāyaṇa with what is found in the Mahābhārata, the Arthaśāstra, Manu, Yājñavalkya, Kāmandaka, Śukra and many ancient works on the subject. Thus, our effort presents a comparative study of the Rāmāyaṇa vis-a-vis the other important works on polity.

It gives us satisfaction that we have been able to discover many new aspects of the subject. We have shown that many of the earlier notions about the ideas and institutions in the Rāmāyaṇa are not well founded. For example, we have thoroughly discussed and proved that the only institution which can be called a successor of the popular Vedic institutions was the Pariserd, and that the word Pariserd is not just a synonym of Sabhā or Samaṇḍa, the other two terms appearing in the Rāmāyaṇa. Similarly, we have shown that all the elements of the state are present in the epic in one and the same Sarga, and that all the expedients of the six-fold policy are found being employed by the kings, but the other writers believe that the Rāmāyaṇa is not aware of all these measures.

Thus, we have tried to make our study more thorough, probing, critical and comparative.
In the end, we express our deep regard and sincere gratitude to our learned guide Dr. V.C. Pandey, who guided us at every stage of our study and showed the way whenever we were in doubt. The completion of this work is the result of the great pains and interest he took in our task.