the days of Nalacarita people were very religious and they worshipped the Moon and the Sun. They were afraid of telling lies. They also performed Sandhyāvandana, Śūryopāsana and worshipped various gods like Viṣṇu and Śiva because they believed that by praying to gods they can fulfill their desires. In this way, Dharma in both the senses of a sacred duty and worship of god was fully practised by the people.
THE ETHICS REFLECTED IN PAñCAMAHĀKĀVYAS: A COMPARITIVE STUDY

Sanskrit literature is broadly divided into Vedic and Classical Sanskrit literature. The Vedas are considered the religious books of Hindus whereas the Classical literature is secular and comprises the epics Rāmāyaṇa, Mahābhārata, Mahākāvyas, Khaṇḍakāvyas, Nītikāvyas, Gadya, Padya and dramas. The Mahākāvyas tradition became prominent with fixed features like having cantos and dealing with the eighteen descriptions as defined by Vidyānātha, Viśvanātha etc. The epics are wonderful creations moulding the destiny of mankind. They have profound impact on our thinking and actions. In the same way the Mahākāvyas of great poets like Kālidāsa, Bhāravi, Māgha and Śrīharṣa are considered the best creations possessing unique features though the theme of the works was borrowed from the epics Rāmāyaṇa, Mahābhārata and Purāṇas like Padmapurāṇa etc. because of the versatile genius of the poets, these works delighted the Sahṛdaya’s and attracted the attention of the scholars. Some of the merits of these works are their striking characterization, wonderful presentation, the everlasting messages relevant to all ages and to all nations. Because of this background, Kālidāsa’s Raghuvamśa and Kumārashambhava, Bhāravi’s Kirātārjunīyam, Māgha’s Śiśupālavadha and Śrīharṣa’s Naisadhām are
considered as the five best poems in Sanskrit literature. They are popularly called Pañcamahākāvyas.

The epics Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata are eternal poems. They have profoundly influenced the life of the people and also the poets of the classical period. Some of the incidents in these two epics teach illuminating lessons of life and moulded the character of our nation. These stories of Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata had powerfully influenced millions of people transcending the barriers of caste and creed etc. Their popularity is ever increasing because of their unique character and also peculiar virtues. They have made a permanent impression on classical Sanskrit literature also. The poets of the Classical period derived inspiration from these two epics. Apart from significant characterization, narrations and descriptions, they expound eternal principles of ethics designated by a comprehensive term dharma. Though these two poems are intended to provide aesthetic delight to the readers they also obtained a prominent place in dharmasastras. The stories of Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata are living legends providing solutions to all in the form of innumerable memorable sayings. The language of these two epics produces an enchanting impression. The characters are simply superb and each character, as we observe, face many trials but they face them boldly with a sense of self respect and determination. Even in the
worst circumstances they exhibit remarkable virtues of tolerance, truth, exercising conscience and a host of such praiseworthy qualities. Because of these great virtues the two epics influenced sages, philosophers and statesmen as well.

A number of Mahākāvyas flourished in Sanskrit literature. They are Aśvaghoṣas Buddhacaritam, Saundarānandam, Bhaṭṭis Rāvaṇavadha, Kumāradāsa’s Jānakīharaṇa, Vedāntatādeśikas Yādavābhyaudyayam, Ratnākaras Haravijanam apart from the Pañcamahākāvyas namely Kālidāsa’s Raghuvamśa and Kumārasaṃbhava, Bhāravi’s Kirātārjunīyam, Māgha’s Śiśupālavadha and Śrīharṣa’s Naiṣadhīyacaritam.

The famous Mahākāvyya Raghuvamśa in nineteen cantos is a wonderful work of the poet Kālidāsa. Though the theme is based on Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa it possesses original flavour. Kālidāsa is indebted to Vālmīki in the artistic presentation of the subject matter, descriptions, characterization and poetic imagery, yet he possesses his own unique, inimitable independent style and his matchless poetic genius unfolds in many places of Raghuvamśa. The poet selected twenty nine kings of the Solar dynasty for presenting the whole range of social institutions of life, birth, education, marriage, family life, the old age the widows. As he selected the kings, naturally the political institutions like the state, administration, the
duties of the kings, ministers and all branches of politics...etc are also
touched. The most significant and highly commendable aspect of the poet
is the discussion of ethical principles and codes to be followed by the
social and political institutions.

Kālidāsa was a firm believer of Vaidikadharma. Indian scriptures,
Vedas, Vedāṅgas, Purāṇas, Dharmaśāstras and Smūtis like Manu Smṛti,
YajñaValkyaSmṛti and Kauṭilya’s Arthaśāstra had a profound impact on
him to formulate his views on various aspects of life and society. The
fundamental doctrines of Indian heritage and culture reflected in ancient
scriptures are transmitted into his poems. He strongly felt that he can preach
ethical principles through the attractive media of Kāvya. We can understand
clearly that only the manner of presentation differs but the message is the
same. In the Vedas the messages are like injunctions whereas in the poetry
of Kālidāsa, Bhāravi, Māgha and Śrīharṣa they are like sweet and pleasant
suggestion of a beloved.

Kālidāsa believed in the purity of life. So, in every activity of man,
from birth to death, this purity should be maintained. That is why Kālidāsa
says that even birth should be pure and pious.¹ His views on

¹. सोहमाजन्मशुद्धानामाकलोदयकर्मणाम्
   आसुमुद्विक्षितीशानानामाकर्मवर्त्तनाम्।

RV., I - 5.
Varṇāśramadharma though appeared as a repetition of views of the Smṛti’s etc, at all stages, the poet stresses the need for firm discipline and sincere work. He expected these virtues from all castes. As a true Advaitavedantin he did not approve of social inequalities which affect social harmony. According to the poet boyhood should be used for good education¹ and for widening one’s knowledge and wisdom in all branches of knowledge. Religious studentship should go with adherence to Truth, Honesty, Plain speaking, Simple living and freedom from hypocrisy. The second important stage in a man is youth. Kālidāsa upheld Indriyanigraha as advocated by all sages like Yajñavalkya, Manu etc. He is for performing all actions with a sense of propriety and enjoying pleasures with a sense of legitimacy. If one behaves contrarily the consequences would be dangerous. The poet says that education should purify a man and develop a sense of detachment from ariṣādvarga namely Kāma, Krodha, Lobha, Moha, Mada, and Mātsarya.

Unlike in Raghuvamśa the poet has no scope to describe his views on Varnāśramadharma in Kumārasambhava but we can have a fair

1. "शैशवेयं द्वित्वादिचानां, यौवनेविषयिष्ठितां।
वार्तके मुनिवृत्तीं योगोनत्तो तमुत्तज्ञाम्।" RV., I - 8.
understanding that he has similar views as expressed in Raghuvamśa. He describes the second gārhasthya in detail while describing the marriage of Pārvati and Śiva. He is of the opinion that even marriage should not be for serving selfish interests but for the larger interests of the society just like the marriage of the Pārvati and Śiva.¹

The themes of Bhāravi’s Kirātārjunīyam and Māgha’s Śiṣupālavādha are such that they have no scope to express their views on Varṇāśramadharma and education clearly. However, we find some references which show the impact of Smṛtis and Dharmaśāstras on them.

Śrīharṣa expresses his views on the same lines of Kālidāsa, but not as elaborately as Kālidāsa has done. We can definitely say that Varṇāśramadharma was more strict during the days of Śrīharṣa.

Next, coming to another important phase of life, namely marriage, Kālidāsa firmly believes that it is a sacred institution for discharging religious duties apart from continuing the creation through progeny. He prefers spiritual union to physical grace. His concept of love is sublime and universal.

1. विदितं वो यथा स्वार्थं न भो कस्थित्रवृत्तवः।
   ननु शून्यांमित्वामित्वथः भूतोक्षेमिः सूपिताम्॥

   KS., VI - 26.
in that he expects proper understanding between wife and husband, which should ensure perennial love from the beginning to the end of life. The poet also gave great importance to chastity and his heroines like Sītā, Pārvatī, Sakuntalā are symbols of Pātivrata. He depicts motherhood as a great boon to mankind. Women are embodiments of the noble virtues of patience, nobility, deep commitment and a sense of sacrifice...etc., They stand by their husbands through thick and thin. Apart from looking after children they serve the elders of the family and sometimes advise their husbands in the proper discharge of their duties. In brief, the views of Kālidāsa on marriage, family life, on the role of the woman¹ are universally held good for all times and climes.

In the case of Kirāṭārjunīya and Śīṣupālavadha there is no scope for the poets to state their views. In Kirāṭārjunīya Draupadī a symbol of Pātivrata bears all sorts of humiliations just for the sake of her husbands.² Though she pours out her anger she always maintains decency and never crosses limits.

1. तामगौरवमेंदेन मुर्नीश्चापश्चलीनः।
   स्त्रीपुमाणित्यनास्येषा वृत्त गिम हैं महितं सताम्॥
   K.S.VI - 12.

2. इमामहं वे न तावर्त चिरं विविष्यरुपामूं खङ्गु विनिवृत्तः।
   विविषयत्त्वः भवदायं परं रुक्षति चेतः प्रसं ममायेः॥
   KA., I - 37.
In Naśadīya-caritam the sublime love of Nala and Damayantī is depicted. Just like Sīta, Pārvatī, Damayantī is also a virtuous woman. She is truthful and firm in her love towards Nala. She refused to marry Gods like Indra etc. just for the sake of Nala. The virtues of hospitality, service to husbands, elders, and steadfast devotion to husbands and their cause are to be noticed in the women of Śrīharṣa’s times. One most despicable practice is the existing of Satī system and also the difficulties faced by women due to polygamy.

During the time of Kālidāsa, Bhāravi, Māgha and Śrīharṣa monarchy was the form of the government. As such the king occupied the pivotal position and all powers were vested in him. As they should be the leaders, they are expected to possess all good and ideal qualities. They should be wellversed in Rājāniti and should maintain good rapport with ministers, soldiers, and officials. The sole aim of the kings must be the welfare of the subjects. The kings should always follow hitamārga and Śreyomārga. They should preserve social harmony and dharma should be their ideal. Though monarchy was the system of the government during the time of Kālidāsa, the exercise of powers by the kings was not absolute. The wise sages like Vāsiṣṭha offered intellectual guidance and maintained checks and balances over the kings. The kings should follow judiciously the fourfold policy of
Sāma, Dāna, Bheda and Daṇḍa combined with Sandhi, Vighraha, Āsana, Samśreyā and Dvaidībhava. Punishing criminals for the preservation of order and rewarding the meritorious people is the important duty of the kings. The poet strongly felt that the kings should be models to the society and they should inspire and guide the people. Their behaviour should be noble and exalted. If the kings are bad the people will be bad. Some of the virtues prescribed for kings by the poet are Indriyajaya, Ārṣādvarganigraha, the pursuit of Artha and Kāma in consonance with Dharma, fair understanding of the people and society, wisdom in using the three Śaktis namely Mantraśakti, UtsāhaŚakti and Prabhusakti. The king should be ever conscious that if he deviates and deflects from the ideal conduct, the society will distract from the right conduct and thus the whole progress of the society will be in peril. In this way in Raghuvamśa taking twenty nine kings of the Solar dynasty, the poet Kālidāsa elaborately presented the political ethics which is significant and relevant to all times. For doing so, it is obvious, that he was indebted to Smṛtis, like Yajñāvalkya and Manu, Kauṭīlyyaś Arthaśāstra and epic Rāmāyaṇa.

Though theme of Kumārasambhava is the love and marriage of Śiva and Pārvatī and the birth of Kumārakārtikeya, we should remember that for the welfare and the protection of the world alone Śiva desired to marry
Pārvaṭī so, as to give birth to Kumārakārtikeya who would be able to destroy the demons threatening the Gods and all good people. As the theme of this poem belongs to divine parents there is less scope for political ethics except of course for one or two references here and there.

The theme of Bharavi’s Kirāṭarjunīyam and Māgha’s Śiśupālavadha are based on Mahābhārata which describes a family feud over the kingdom that ultimately ends with a war and consequent killing of a lot of people. Both the poems deal with a political theme where deliberations take place on how best the enemies can be attacked. Diplomatic plans, tricks and intrigues characterize the discussions of the speakers. The characters Yudhiṣṭhira, Draupadī, Bhīma and Arjuna. In Kirāṭarjunīyam Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma, Uddhava in Śiśupālavadha are portrayed as matured politicians pondering over the merits and demerits of various plans to attack their enemies. Through these characters both the poets Bharavi and Māgha depict their knowledge of Rājanīti discussed in Smṛtis like Manu and Yajñavalkya, Arthaśāstra of Kauṭūlya, Śukranīti etc., They also are

1. यद्वर्गसम्यगम्यात्तदम्मी विनित्वा हुतम्।
   यच्च तत्त तपस्तस्य विपकङ्क फलमद्ध नः।।
   तामसससङ्कर्ष युष्मभिभिषिद्वद्व हिमालयः।
   विक्रियायेत्न कल्पनेत्र सम्भवात संमुष्टिताः।

KS., VI - 16.

Ibid., 29.
influenced by the elaborate discussions of Bhīṣma in Śāntiparva of Mahābhārata. Though both the poems are intended to give aesthetic pleasure to Sahṛdayas we are not in a position to say that this purpose is achieved. The matters of nīti presented here through the poetry frequently divert our attention frequently. The poets exhibited their thorough knowledge of ancient political science and presented it through the theme of these works. Both the works appear as though they are treating the subjects of political science instead of lively and interesting poems meant for pleasing the readers. Though Kālidāsa also presented political ethics, he clubbed it with the ethics of social ethics. Here the poets, it seems, are interested in exhibiting their knowledge of political science. So, it is not at all surprising that both the works simply appear as works of politics rather than of genuine poetry intended to provide aesthetic pleasure.

Coming to the Kṛītārjunīya the main theme is regaining of the lost kingdom by Pāṇḍavas from the Kauravas and for this purpose Vyāsa advised Arjuna to meditate on Śiva to win his grace in order to obtain the Pāśupatāstra. Here Śiva comes in the form of a kirata to test the sincerity of Arjuna towards him. In the first two cantos the main discussion is on assessing the pros and cons of waging a war against Suyodhana. In the midst of this discussion the fourfold policy of Sāma, Dāna, Bheda and
Danda, the sadgunas namely Sandhi, Vigraha, Asana, Samsreya, Yana and Dvidhībhāva and when to employ each one of them to one's own advantage and the disadvantages if any one of them is not properly employed are highlighted by the poet.

The characters like Yudhishthira, Bhīma, Draupadi an Arjuna refer to political maxims from reputed works of Rājanīti to support their standpoint of view. All the characters behave as matured politicians. It is very significant to observe that all their arguments though political are invariably based on ethical foundations. The numerous proverbs employed by the poet Bhāravi clearly indicate that politics must be based on ethics otherwise the system degenerates and ultimately collapses. The one character who appeals to entire mankind is Yudhishthira who never yielded to the provocations and protests of Draupadi and Bhīma and maintained the path of equipoise and never budged an inch from the noble values of patience, forbearance because he knows very clearly that decisions are to

1. सहसा विद्याधीत न क्रियामविवेकः परमापदां वदम्।
   वृणते हि विमृश्यकारिणं गुणलुब्धः स्वथथेव सम्पदः॥
   KB., II - 30.
   शुचि भूषयति श्रुतं वपु प्रशस्तस्तस्य भवत्यलिङ्किया।
   प्रशासनमर्ण पराक्रमः स नायापादित सिद्दिमूहणम्॥
   Ibid., 32.
be taken in a spirit of calmness and not in an emotionally surcharged atmosphere. Another important virtue presented in this poem is that it is very difficult to conceal one’s own nature. Though Suyodhana tried his best to convince people that he was not a wicked man and was really interested in the welfare of the people he could not succeed because he was not on the side of Dharma. Ultimately Pāṇḍavas alone succeeded because of this Mahābhārata saying

दिप्तमेतत्पुरा चैव नात्र शोचितुमहसि।
न चैव शक्यं संयत्त्रं यतो धर्मस्ततो जयः।।

The keen study of the various speeches of the characters like Yudhishṭhira, Draupadī, Bhīma..etc enables us to say that Bhāravi is a great scholar and proficient not only in Rājanīti but one who understood the various dimensions of human nature. The numerous proverbs employed by the poet amply testify to this fact. The poet stressed in different contexts on a number of ethical principles like self control, forgiveness, forbearance, truth, adherence to dharma, self respect, self confidence, hard work, sweet speech and respecting the people. These values according to him should

MB., VI.2 - 14.
form the basis for men to attain higher spiritual ends. On the other hand, haughtiness, pride, thirst for power, deceitful nature, tricks, violence, jealousy, harshness in speech, anger, dubious character, greediness, arrogance, dissatisfaction, indulgence to senses, reasonless behaviour are the vices which are hurdles for the progress of mankind according to Bhāravi. The two characters of Yudhiṣṭhira and Suyodhana are the examples of the above virtues, and vices respectively.

As already pointed out in Śīṣupālavadha Krīṣṇa seeks the opinion of his brother Balarāma and the Wise minister Uddhava whether to wage an immediate war on Śīṣupāla or he should be attacked in due course of time. As Balarāma is an emotional being he advocates immediate war on Śīṣupāla not pondering over the consequences. On the other hand, Uddhava who is a scholar and a man of wisdom and commonsense advocates a cautious approach in attacking Śīṣupāla. He is for assessing the strength and weakness of himself and also of the enemy. At the right moment Śīṣupāla should be killed so that there would not be any censure of his deed by the public. Taking this simple theme the poet presented a number of ethical principles through the speeches of Balarāma and Uddhava relating to politics. Just like his predecessor Bhāravi, Māgha also in his Śīṣupālavadha exhibits wonderful knowledge of ethics as
discussed in the works of Šmrta Kauṭilya Arthaśāstra and Sukraṇīti...etc. The ethics relates to kings, the ministers, the state, and the dangers that would arise if the enemy becomes strong, the place of counsel and enterprise, time favourable to wage a war and systematic planning, the preference of human efforts to God's grace. On the other hand, pride, arrogance, insulting the great hatred...etc are the vices condemned by the poet through the character of Śišupāla.

Śrīharṣa's Naiṣadhāma deals with two royal families of Nala the king of Nishada Nala and Damayantī the princess of Vidarbha. The theme furnishes more historical details of kings. It also touches on the ethics relating to kings and their politics which is not at all different from that of Kālidāsa, Bhāravi and Māgha.