I. Introduction

1. Aim of thesis

Ancient Epics in India like the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata, and the Analects of Confucius in China have exerted great influence on the social life, traditions and customs of India, China and other South-East countries of Asia. Through a comparative study between the Analects of Confucius and India’s two Great Epics, I would like to study in the following pages the social norms and ethical values upheld by them. Also, what impact these texts had had on the contemporary Indian and Chinese societies will also come in the purview of my attempt.

For example, topics like ‘What is virtue?’, ‘Who is a righteous man?’, ‘Which one is a good government?’, ‘Which qualities make a ruler ideal?’ ‘What is the significance of rites and rituals?’, ‘What was Confucius’ view on education?’ ‘How significant was education in the age of Vālmīki?’ and so on and so forth, on which great thinkers have been thinking to find answers thereof, will be dealt with in the dissertation, which I am happy to present before the scholarly world.

While answering these questions, I will try to find out wherein exactly the concerned texts and the societies of the two countries with great ancient civilisations depicted in them differ from each other and at which places their similarities lie.

Further, in my humble capacity I would venture to discuss the impact these texts still have in present-day India and China. Are the Dharma of the Indian great epics and the Virtue of the Analects of Confucius, or in other words, the old values embodied in them, have a place any more in the space age of the 21st century, when individual freedom and well-being find more consideration over and above those of the society?

The Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata encompass a wide arena of concepts and contain a gamut of views and stories that at times may appear to be contradictory. Owing to the voluminous size and contents of the epics, especially of the Mahābhārata, a detailed treatment of which is impossible in one life, I was compelled to restrict my domain of research to certain specific portions of the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata. In the Mahābhārata, my focus has been drastically restricted primarily to the Karma-yoga and the
Jñāna-yoga chapters of the Bhagavad-gītā as also the Anuśāsana-, Āśramavā-, Udyoga- and the Śānti-parvans, but I have also tried to touch upon many other portions sporadically. Else, the thesis would have remained an even after a lifelong endeavour.

2. Structure of the texts worked on and their authorship

In this chapter, the authorship, structure and contents of the concerned texts and their place in literature, etc. will be discussed in short.

1) The Rāmāyaṇa

i) Introductory

The Rāmāyaṇa is regarded by millions of Indian Hindus as the Ādi Kāvya, i.e. the first [classical Sanskrit] poetical composition, and rightly at that, since in the domain of grand or, if I am allowed to say, ornate poetry, the great writer of the above, Vālmīki, was the first to have arrived intuitively, after the Vedic seers, at the true concept of poetry and started with the creation of his work the genre of a literature with the object of providing aesthetic joy to its listeners and readers. It was he who discovered the sublime truth that real poetry is a spontaneous outflow of the poet’s heart in response to the pains and anguished cries of the universe (cf. Sharma R.: 1). As Matthew Arnold wrote: “Poetry is simply the most delightful and perfect form of utterance that human can reach; it is nothing less than the most perfect speech of man, that in which he comes nearest to being able to utter the truth”. It is a criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such a criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty. In other words, poem is the crème de la crème of literature. And Vālmīki was the pioneering Indian in this field.

The Indian tradition recognizes Rāma (as also Kṛṣṇa later) as a historical personality, though judged by the modern touchstones of archeology and epigraphy, the Buddha, sarcastically the ninth avatāra of the Hindus, and not the seventh and the eighth ones, would be regarded as the first such historical figure, and as the greatest son of India. Anyway, Rāma is said to have been born as the eldest son of Daśaratha, the ruler of Ayodhyā, in the
Tretā Yuga i.e. the third aeon in the orthodox traditional Indian calculation of the eternal, un-ending time. Even, to say the least, at least a few Western scholars are prone to assume a historical basis behind the kernel of the Rāmāyaṇa.

The scholars who ridiculously ascribe to the epic or the Tretā Yuga a much earlier date simply ignore the obvious archeological as well as linguistic and copious other textual internal and external evidences which beyond a reasonable amount of doubt establish that the Rāmāyaṇa was a poetic composition approximately its initial form belonging to the 1st century BCE., long after the whole Vedic corpus had come into existence and also much after the emergence of the Buddha or the early spread of Buddhism. In evaluating the authenticity of the events and conditions described in the Rāmāyaṇa, a few modern scholars appear to have confused the period(s) of the actual occurrence of the events with that of their narration by Vālmīki. In other words, they seem to have pathetically failed to distinguish between historical records and a poetical version of those events.

Contrarily, the great pains were taken by, i.e., H.D. Sankalia to show, principally on archaeological grounds, that the Rāmāyaṇa is only a myth and not a reality. This appears to be somewhat sensible. Of course, a ring with a bezel, a silken ‘śāri’ (one of women’s clothes), weapons and other articles made of iron, the lavish use of gold in the palaces and other structures of the Rākṣasas, references to the ‘Śāla’ trees in the South and the likes, do not fit well with the period of the actual event when Aryan settlements were confined to Āryāvarta (North India), and Dakṣṇāvarta (South India) was still an isolated region inhabited by the original highly civilized non-Aryan peoples. But surely, there is nothing inappropriate if such objects readily appear in the imagination of a gifted poet of circa 1st century BCE.

Rāmāyaṇa has come down to us in India in three recensions, the North-Western, the Eastern and the Southern. All the known commentaries of the Rāmāyaṇa – more than fifty in numbers and ranging between the 13th and the 18th centuries ACE. being recorded till date – were written after the various recensions had been fixed and were being preserved in written form.

1 For other views one may consult, e.g., Guruge: 326.
2 I refrain from giving the profuse references lest this dissertation becomes bulkier.
3 The editors of critical editions are of the opinion that there are only two recensions of the Rāmāyaṇa the Northern and the Southern. North-Eastern, North-Western and Western are the subdivisions of the Northern recension.
What is worthy of note is that all these recensions and commentaries recognize a text of the Rāmāyaṇa that has been now handed down to the present day as divided into seven kāṇḍa as, from the Ādi-kāṇḍa or Bālakāṇḍa to the Uttarā-kāṇḍa. Notwithstanding this unanimous age-long tradition, Jacobi, an unquestionable authority on the epic, asserted the view that the original Rāmāyaṇa had consisted only of five Books, viz., from the Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa to the Yuddha-kāṇḍa or Laṅkā- kāṇḍa as, and that the Ādi-kāṇḍa or Bālakāṇḍa and the Uttarā-kāṇḍa were subsequently prefixed and suffixed to it much later by one or presumably more persons.

It is also worthwhile to note in this context that, unlike in the early Vedic period, in the age of the Rāmāyaṇa, Indra was no longer the symbol of a national martial hero. Though, however, Indra had retained the title Devarāja (‘king of gods’), in the later and post-Vedic periods, his position became subservient to the members of the Trinity (Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Maheśvara i.e. Śiva). In the Rāmāyaṇic mythology, it is quite evident that pre-eminent positions were held by Brahmā as the Creator, but more prominently by Viṣṇu as the Sustainer, executing plans for the welfare of gods and mortals alike, as also by Śiva the Annihilator. Throughout the Rāmāyaṇa, Indra is but a tame replica of the Indra of the Ṛg-veda, his position as ‘success-giver’ and ‘savior god’, along with many of his titles, being totally usurped by Viṣṇu⁴, but often by Śiva as well.

The Rāmāyaṇa had originated in the North and continued to be recited in oral tradition as a popular poem entertaining the audience for no less than several centuries before it reached the South. The South received it as a religious work and standardized it with the help of commentators who belonged to a period as late as between 1250-1700 ACE. In this process of standardization, the text was approached from two distinct viewpoints. Some considered the text received from the North as sacred and inviolable, and therefore preserved all the archaic forms of language and style, without taking any liberty with the text so received. But the other camp made a serious effort to idealize the Aryan character of the personae of the epic. As a result of all this, the Southern recension bears a very deceptive character – in form it appears archaic but in matter and spirit it is, judged by the standard of the period, very modern, yet puritanical.

The Rāmāyaṇa contains somewhat 24,000 verses (but approximately 50,000 lines taking into account those having three or even more hemstitches, and is much bulkier than either the Iliad or the Odyssey. The epic is divided into seven kāṇḍas (‘books’) of five hundred sections. A mere abstract of the contents of the seven kāṇḍa as is as follows:

1. Bāla-kāṇḍa: deals with the boyhood and adolescence of Rāma.
2. Ayodhya-kāṇḍa: delineates the court of Daśaratha and the scenes that set the stage for unfolding the main story, including the heated intercourse between Daśaratha and Kaikeyī resulting in the exile of Rāma and the could-have-been installation of Bharata, should the latter have accepted it.
3. Aranya-kāṇḍa: narrates Rāma’s turbulent days in forest regions culminating in the abduction of Sītā by Rāvana.
4. Kīśkindhā-kāṇḍa: describes Rāma’s stay in Kīśkindhā, his quest for Sītā, the slaying of Vālin and friendship with his brother Sugrīva and his retinue.
5. Sundara-kāṇḍa: as the name most probably indicates (‘beautiful’), this book contains a description of the landscape over which Rāma roams (and as is but expected, offering numerous passages of lyrical beauty), and his arrival along with his allies at Lāṅka.
6. Yuddha-kāṇḍa: is the “book of war”, the major incident of the epic ending in the defeat of Rāvana, the subsequent rescue of Sītā, restoration of the throne of Lāṅka to Raavaṇa’s righteous brother Vibhīṣaṇa, the return of Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā with others to Ayodhya and the coronation of Rāma as the king of Ayodhya.
7. Uttara-kāṇḍa: the ‘later or final, perhaps for interpolated, book’, details Rāma’s life in Ayodhya, the banishment of Sītā, the birth of Lava and Kuśa at the hermitage of Vālmiki who amusingly was none else but the writer of the epic itself, the reconciliation of Rāma and Sītā, her death or absorption by the Mother Earth (mādhavī devī), and Rāma’s ascent to heaven.

ii) Authorship

The kernel of the Rāmāyaṇa might have been composed by a single human being whom the Indians justifiably designate as their Ādi-kavi of the Classical Sanskrit literature, and not Vyāsa (= the editor?) of the Mahābhārata fame, it was definitely preserved for long in oral tradition, many new portions being added later in course of time. The poem or
different segments thereof, as pointed out by Vaidya: xxix, “had a very fluid wording” and “[were composed] in the form of a verse which was also equally fluid”. Naturally, the wandering minstrels enjoyed full freedom to expand or abridge the original according to the taste and interest of the audience. Thus there is not the least of doubt that over the course of centuries the original composition of Vālmīki has suffered from additions, alterations and modifications.

Some modern scholars, in their approach to the Rāmāyaṇa, seem unfortunately to forget that this composition was the product of a great poetic genius who has all along been singularly acknowledged in Indian literary tradition as the Ādi-kavi, ‘the poet-pioneer’. This distinction was earned by Vālmīki not because, as is erroneously supposed, he had invented a new meter, the classical “śloka” (the more so because the “anuṣṭubh” of 32 letters had already existed in the Vedic literature), but since he had discovered the concept of poetry. Though a continuous stream of lyrical, religious as well as secular, poetry had existed in Vedic literature right from the Rg-veda onward, the fact remains that in that period there had yet been no, judged by the standard of these days, “developed” concept of poetry which Vālmīki could somewhat formalize by adopting a particular metre throughout almost the whole bulk of his work, and moreover could popularize it as a form of entertainment for the common folk beyond the boundaries of religiosity.

In passing, though rather not directly concerned with the topic being dealt with, let me record that the epic had its germ in the particular incident narrated by Vālmīki himself at Rāmāyaṇa 1.2.15:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{‘mā niśāda pratiśṭhāṁ tvam agamaḥ śāśvatiḥ samāḥ|} \\
yat krauṇca-mithunād ekam avadhīḥ kāma-mohitam| ‘,} \\
i.e., ‘O hunter! Curse, you won’t flourish for eternity,} \\
since you had killed one of the pair of sexually aroused krauṇca birds’.
\end{align*}
\]

This tradition was repeated also by a rather late but at the same time the greatest Classical Sanskrit poet, viz. Kālidāsa, who described in his inimitable style in a splendid verse (Raghu-varṇāśa 14.70), how the Rāmāyaṇa originated, as:
‘tām abhyagacchad ruditaṁsūrī/ kaviḥ kuśedhmāharaṇāya yātah |
iśāda-viddhāṇḍaja-darśanotthah/ ślokatvam āpadyata yasya śokah | ’,
i.e., ‘The poet -- whose grief aroused at seeing the bird pierced by the 
fowler, had manifested in a lyrical form --, while away to fetch (the sacred) 
grass and fuel, reached her following [her] wailings’.

Kālidāsa only intended to express, in other words, that the Rāmāyaṇa is but the 
outcome of the earliest poet’s tragic emotion ("karuṇa-rasa") caused by the pitiful 
wailings of a bird at the sight of its consort being pierced to death by the fowler’s 
arrow. This has been -- though rather tamely but expressing almost verbatim the 
idea of the above Raghu-varṇīṇa verse -- echoed by Ānanda-vardhana, the greatest 
Sanskrit rhetorician however, at Dhvanyāloka 1.5, as:

‘kāvyasy ātmā sa evārthas/ tathā cādikaveḥ purā |
krauṇca-dvandva-viyogotthah/ śokah ślokatvam āgataḥ| ’,

which may somewhat be rendered into English like:

‘That very [emotional] suggestion (is) the soul of literature (lit., perhaps, 
‘poem’), which is why (lit., ‘and likewise’) formerly the grief of the First 
[and the Foremost] Poet, aroused by the separation of the pair of the 
curlews, had assumed the form of a verse’.

Of course, the Vedic literature frequently uses the term “kavi”, but only in 
the meaning of ‘a prudent person with foresight who describes things or his 
experiences and can foresee things which are beyond the perception of 
ordinary people’, and not to mean ‘a poet’ following its popularly 
promulgated etymology. The use of the term “kāvyā” in the sense of ‘a poem 
or poetical composition with a coherent plot by a single author’ is 
conspicuously missing in this literature. Generally “kāvyā” in the Veda means 
‘the performance of a kavi, i.e. ‘a wise man’. This is quite natural, for speech 
owes its genesis to the gregarious instinct in man that urges him to establish 
contacts with others and to mutually share thoughts and feelings. At this 
stage the emphasis naturally lay upon “kavi”, the possessor of superior 
thoughts and feelings, and the “kāvyā” could therefore be understood only in 
the sense which the word kavi- was expected to acquire with the addition of 
a secondary suffix, after the name of its writer, or in Indian tradition seer, i.e. 
composer.
With the passage of time position changed. It came to be realized that in the context of ‘kāvya’, the position of its receiver – the listener or reader – was also equally important. This means that matter alone was not important in poetry, but the manner of its presentation, too, had an equal, if not greater, significance. As a result of this realization, “kāvya” could not now be associated with any composition whatsoever which just expressed the writer’s ideas but acquired a restrictive application for only such compositions as successfully awakened the corresponding emotion in the heart of others, the receivers, with the sole object of amusing them. This change in looking at the “poet” from a different angularity led to the characteristic distinction separating the Vedic literature from the Classical one. The Vedic seers employed speech for the propagation of “dharma”, whereas the poets in the Classical period, while not eliminating from it the element of “dharma”, made it at the same time delightful for the people. How wonderfully this idea found expression at Agni-purāṇa 3.9:

‘āpāre kāvya-saṁsāre/ kavir eva (v.l. ekaḥ) prajāpatiḥ|
yathāsmai rocate viśvaṁ tathedāṁ parivartate ||
ś.r:ngārī cet kaviḥ kāvye jātaṁ rasa-mayaṁ jagat/|
sa eva viṭa-rāgaś cem nīrasaṁ sarvam eva tat |’
I.e.:
‘In the limitless [ocean that is the] world of poetry, the poet is alone the Creator;
This world changes in the way it appeals to him.
The world is full of Eros if the poet is erotic in [his] work,
And, if he be without sentiments, that all appears dry’.

It is necessary to recall that this transition in the field of Classical Sanskrit literature was initiated by none else but Vālmīki.

Celebrated Classical Sanskrit poets like Kālidāsa and Bhavabhūti have not only with the greatest reverences showered their praises on Vālmīki and composed sublime works on the Rāmāyaṇa theme, they have also freely drawn upon his literary devices and even expressions as well. One may take into account Kālidāsa’s Raghu-vāmśa, the biggest among the Laghu-trayī or ‘the smaller triad’ of the Classical Sanskrit epics of art -- or Kumāradāsa’s Jānakī-harana, another lesser known Classical Sanskrit epic of art --, as also
the dramas Mahāvīra-carita and the Uttara-rāmacarita of Bhavabhūti, whom the Indians point at as their greatest dramatist after Kālidāsa. A huge mass of literature based on the “Rāma-kathā” i.e. Rāma story, bearing testimony to the potentiality of the theme conceived by the Ādi-kavi, evolved during the course of centuries, nay millennia. And, down to the present day, the ideals of filial devotion, brotherly and parental love, all-out loyal services to the master, conjugal fidelity and friendliness go inseparably with those values associated with the various characters of the epic, viz. Rāma, Sītā, Lākṣmana, Bharata, Daśaratha, Hanūmant, Sugriva and so on and so forth. Thus, Vālmīki’s creation, with so many magnanimous characters, has served as a specimen for the later “ācāryas” (teachers) in evolving the conception and later the definition of “mahākāvya”, the most sublime and grand and complete form of poetry in Sanskrit.

The “Rāma-rājya” (Rāma’s kingdom) has ever remained the ideal for socio-political peace, prosperity and justice, which any government could aspire for. All this is a sure vindication of the loftiness of Vālmīki’s benign imagination. No wonder, the Rāmāyaṇa has become the most cherished treasure of Indian people. Winternitz: 476 has rightly observed about the Rāmāyaṇa: “… [S]arcely any other poem in the entire literature of the world, has influenced the thought and poetry of a great nation for centuries”. It is not for nothing that the proverbial verse yāvat sthāsyanti girayah saritāś ca mahī-tale] tāvad rāmāyaṇī kathā lokeṣu pracāryati|| (‘So long as mountains and rivers will exist on [this] planet, the story of the Rāmāyaṇa will circulate in the mundane worlds’) has come into existence. In fact, the Rāmāyaṇa has exerted more influence on the Indian society than even the encyclopedic Mahābhārata itself. A single touchstone to prove this is the fact that almost all the bhajans i.e. devotional songs of classical or popular Hindustani music have Rāmāyaṇic, not Mahābhārata themes. I can not resist myself from quoting only one of such sublime doxology of Rāma in Hindi:

‘yo hi rām daśrath ke betā/ so hi rām ghaṭa ghaṭa mem letā|
vaḥ hi rām jagat- paserā/ so hi rām dil hamārā’

i.e., ‘The very Rāma (who is) Daśaratha’s son, that Rāma indeed is discernible in every minute particle; that very Rāma exists in Entirety, that Rāma alone is [all] my love’.5

5 Let me once and for all record that in writing the above portions on the Rāmāyaṇa I have heavily drawn upon the introduction by R. Sharma to Dutt+Arya, pp. v-xvi.
2) The Mahābhārata

i) Introductory

The Mahābhārata is one, and the more voluminous of the two great epic poems of India, originally a vast compilation of over 1,000,000 couplets according to the Indian tradition (eka-śata-sāhasrīṁ cakre bhārata-samhitāṁ), but in course of time much reduced by now. The central matter of the epic, the struggle for supremacy over Kurukṣetra between the two rival families, the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas, is based on historical events which took place at least not later than 10th century BCE. But perhaps even earlier, the nucleus of the Kurukṣetra war, the main event of the epic, being probably attested as early as in the Ṛg-veda itself, viz. in the Dāsarājñā or the ‘war of ten (in fact many more) kings’ recorded in the 3rd and 7th maṇḍalas thereof, the maṇḍalas ascribed to the priests of the two rival camps, or their sons and descendants or disciples. The Mahābhārata contains countless episodes, narrated to emphasize numerous themes in the main narrative, which have themselves gained individual renown. It is no mean achievement for the writer(s) of this epic of growth that the themes of all the three bigger epics of art in Classical Sanskrit, jointly referred to as the Bṛhat-trayī, viz. Bhāravi’s Kirātārjunīya, the Śiśupāla-vadha of Māgha and the Naiṣadha-carita of Śriharṣa have Mahābhāratan episodes as their subject-matters.

The Mahābhārata is the most voluminous and undoubtedly the greatest of all the four epics of growth ever produced in the literatures of the Indo-European family of languages, viz. the present epic, the Iliad or the Ramayana and the Odyssey, and in that order so far as their bulk and importance are concerned, the Mahābhārata being bulkier than the two Homeric epics taken together in size, not to say the least that it is twice the length of the Old Testament of the Bible. So much so, that it has almost gained not only the shape, but also the reputation of being a sort of an encyclopaedia; cf. the proverbial saying, perhaps a floating verse:

‘yad ihāsti tad anyatra/ yan nehāsti na tat kvacit’, i.e.,
‘Whatever is here [= in the Mahābhārata, may be found] elsewhere; whatever is not here, is [surely] nowhere’.
This has been echoed in the famous Bengali line, stressing the epic’s encyclopaedic character:

‘yāhā nāi bhārate, tāhā nāi bhārate’, i.e.,
‘Whatever is not [to be found] in the [Mahā-]bhārata, does not exist in Bhārata i.e. India’.

In the form in which it survives today, it is indeed the world’s longest poem, bulkier than the Gilgamesh or Tirukkural or any other epics composed also in the non-IE languages.

The Mahābhārata is divided into eighteen books (each called parvan-), with a supplement, entitled Harivarmśa.

The voluminous story of the Mahābhārata may, but almost impossibly, be sketched skeletally thus:

1. Ādi-parvan: begins with an account of the genealogy of the Rg-veda-famed Bharatas and goes on describing the story of the Candra-varmśa or Lunar lineage. It then concentrates elaborately on the origin of the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas. The till now traced ancestor of the royal house of the Kurus is ‘Śāntanu’ who married Gaṅga, and their son is Bhīṣma. Śāntanu takes as his second wife Satyavatī who gives him two sons – Citrāṅgada and Vicitravīrya. Both die without children. As a result of begetting with the help of Satyavatī’s illegitimate son Vyāsa, the widows of Citrāṅgada and Vicitravīrya get sons, Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Pāṇḍu respectively. Dhṛtarāṣṭra, married to Gāndhārī, gets one hundred sons and a daughter. Pāṇḍu has two wives, Kuntī and Mādrī. The former, who had already one sort of illegitimate son, viz. Karṇa, by the Sun-god, gives him three more sons, Yudhishthira, Bhīma and Arjuna. The other wife gives birth to the twin sons Nakula and Sahadeva.

2. Sabhā-+: deals with the infamous dice-play, which begins at the invitation of Duryodhana, envious of the Pāṇḍavas’ fabulous awe-inspiring wealth. Ṣakuni, a pathological cheat in gambling and casting the dice on behalf of Duryodhana, taunts Yudhishthira after he lost each and every throw of the dice and became penniless. Unable to digest Ṣakuni’s sarcastic remarks, he flares up and goes to the length of staking even his wife, Draupadī who eventually faces the heinous treatment at the hands of Duḥśāsana in the presence of not only her five husbands, but also of the entire audience
including Pitāmaha Bhīṣma, throughout depicted as an epitome of righteousness.

3. Vana-स: narrates the exile of the Pāṇḍavas to forests for a long twelve after they lost even the second round of dice-play. Kṛṣṇa visited them and incited them to fight, and though Draupadī and Bhīma supported him, Yudhiṣṭhira stuck to his commitment before the gambling that the pawn would be twelve years’ exile and another one unrecognized, incommunicado as Pāṇḍavas.

4. Virāṭa-स: tells the story of the Pāṇḍavas’ living incognito during their last year of exile. They spend this time in the Virāṭa kingdom without being recognised. When Kīcaka, the brother-in-law of king Virāṭa tries to molest Daupadī, Bhīma kills him. At the end of the thirteenth year, Pāṇḍavas reveal their identity.

5. Udyoga-स: Kṛṣṇa makes a serious effort for reconciliation between the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas. Duryodhana declines this offer. Kṛṣṇa tries to persuade Karna to take the side of the Pāṇḍavas, but gratefully remembering the honour he received from Duryodhana who made him the king of the Aṅga country, thus saving his prestige during the archery competition, Karna refuses. Armies from both sides march toward Kurukṣetra.

6. Bhīṣma-स: describes the long preparations for the Great War. The world famous preaching of the Bhagavad-gītā is found in this canvas, when Kṛṣṇa urges Arjuna that he must not hesitate to fight, be his enemies his own relatives, though. Because of this apparently odd setting of the Gītā, which has though been considered to be an Upaniṣad (Śrīmad-bhagavad-gītāpaniṣad) in Indian tradition -- being commented on by one and all the major Indian philosophical schools claiming it to propagate their own particular tenets --, has been proclaimed to be a spurious portion of the epic by some Westerners. But as Ananta Lal Thakur claimed (verbal communication), even if the whole of the Gītā be omitted from the Bhīṣma-parvan, it can be reconstructed fully from the rest of the text of the epic. Even if that be re-deleted, some 75% of the whole Gītā can be restored from the remaining Mahābhārata.

Bhīṣma refrains from fighting face to face with Śikhandin (a sort of eunuch or hermaphrodite, more a woman than a man) placed by Arjuna as a human shield. The latter pierces Bhīṣma with arrows, and Bhīṣma, being an “icchā-mṛtyu” (i.e. one who would die, like the Buddha, only when he wished for it), subsequently, but only at long last until the late Anuśāsana-parvan,
succumbed to death after staying on his well-known bed of arrows (śara-
śayyā).

7. Drona- is dwells mainly on the stories of how Abhimanyu and Dronācarya
were murdered. With this, the fifteenth day of the war comes to an end.

8. Karna-: Bhīma kills Duḥśāsana, thus avenging the loss of Druṇadī’s
honour at the latter’s hands. A terrible duel takes place between Karna and
Arjuna. The wheels of Karna’s chariot sink into mud and Arjuna kills him
while engaged in pulling them out, an act, of killing an unarmed warrior,
prohibited in Indian socio-political texts like i.e. in the Manu-saṁhitā
(chapter 7).

9. Śalya-: deals with the slaying of Śalya by Yudhiṣṭhira. Sahadeva kills the
old and mischievous Śakuni. Duryodhana, now alone, takes refuge in the
Dvaiḍāyana lake where, through magical power, he hides himself under
water.

10. Sauptika- has as its main story the brutal slaughter, stealthily at night,
of the five sons of Uttarā, the wife of Arjuna’s son Abhimanyu, by
Aśvatthāman who thus took revenge of his father, Drona’s killing through
deceit (cf. aśvatthāmā hata, and then in whispers, iti gajah, the infamous
words uttered by Yudhiṣṭhira for which sin the wheels of his chariot started
touching the ground). Still, Uttarā forgives Aśvatthāman since he was the son
of his father-in-law’s preceptor, thus surpassing others in kṣamā-guṇa,
according to Kṛṣṇa.

11. Strī-: describes the visit of the battle-field by the widowed Kaurava
ladies. Gāndhārī, pulling out for the first time and once and for all the piece
of cloth -- by which she had hitherto blindfolded herself after her marriage
with the blind Dhṛtarāṣṭra, an acme of pāṭivrātya -- describes her horrible
experience of witnessing the ghastly scene. Her daughters-in-law,
dishevelled and frantic, lament wildly over the dead bodies of their husbands.

12. Śānti-: tells that Yudhiṣṭhira decides to expiate his fratricide, once the
ture story of Karna’s birth was revealed, by retiring to the forest, but is
dissuaded from doing so, and is installed on the throne. But, the real
importance of this biggest of the later books of the Mahābhārata (as also of
the following rather small book), lies in the fact that it is the epitome of
endless moral, social and even political sayings, its verses being cited in
course of studying i.e. even the Manu-saṁhitā, Artha-śāstra and the Śukra-
nītisāra.

13. Anuśāsana-: gives the main events related to Bhīma’s expiry. In the
presence of a great concourse of people, his “spirit” ascends to heaven. Like
the preceding, this rather small book also affords many moral and socio-political maxims, compared and contrasted in the study of Sanskrit texts on similar topics, and sometimes quoted also in this dissertation.

14. Āśvamedhika-śr.: tells that Yudhiṣṭhira is advised to perform the Aśvamedha sacrifice. Uttarā, Abhimanyu’s widow, gives birth to his posthumous son, Parīkṣit, the father of the famed king Janamejaya to whom Vaiśampāyana will eventually recite the Mahābhārata.

15. Āśrāmavāsikā-śr.: dwells with the Vānaprasthāsrama (‘retirement to forests’) of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Gāndhārī, where for a long fifteen years cursing their nephews, especially Bhīma, for killing one and all of their sons, they renounce the saṁsāra and adopt sannyāsīhood.

16. Mausala-śr.: is a sort of sequel to the Strī-parvan, when Gāndhārī blamed Kṛṣṇa for not ever trying to prevent the Pāṇḍavas from slaughtering all of her sons and cursed Kṛṣṇa that his entire tribe, too, would meet the same fate. As a result thereof, a fierce fight ensues among the Yādavas in a free-for-all, eat-drink-and-be-merry raving yum-yum party when they, in an inebriated state, fatally struck one another with clubs and perished entirely, leading even to the death of the proverbially alcoholic avatāra Balarama. Kṛṣṇa, too, called it a day, mistakenly shot by a hunter with his arrow.

17. Mahāprābhūtānā-śr.: describes the Pāṇḍavas’ final journey to heaven. While the five brothers accompanied by Draupadī retire initially to the fabulous mount Meru, all except Yudhiṣṭhira and a dog (none else than Dharma in disguise) following him die.

18. Svargārohaṇa-śr.: Yudhiṣṭhira, on reaching heaven, in hallucination sees Duryodhana seated on a throne, but does not find his own brothers and Draupadī. Eventually he meets them, and the epic ends in the manner of the stories of later Western literatures, with a sort of “and thereafter they lived happily together for ever”.

ii) Authorship and the period of composition

Though Vyāsa, an abridgement for (Maharṣi Śrī) Kṛṣṇa-Dvaipāyana Veda-Vyāsa, is traditionally regarded in India as the author or the real composer of the Mahābhārata, the word vyāsa- doubtless means ‘the compositor’, or better ‘the editor’. It is unthinkable that a single human being could alone “compose” the whole Veda (cf. the name Veda-Vyāsa) and could write the voluminous Mahābhārata as also each of the eighteen Mahā-purāṇas, some of which no less bulky than the great epic. Evidently, the sobriquet Vyāsa can
at the most stand for ‘editor’ or ‘arranger’ or so, implying that Vyāsa was but
the designation of a class of editors. And so, it automatically follows that
Vyāsa stands for numerous entities. Any way, the author of the kernel of this
great epic successfully succeeded in presenting the religious values of the
age, nay, even improving upon the literary style of his contemporary
colleagues through his ingenious art.\(^6\)

But a minute analysis of the Mahābhārata reveals that the whole epic was
not written in one era and by one person. Western as well as Indian scholars
have convincingly established that the main story had been there for ages
before it was finally written down or took its final shape. In other words, with
the passage of time, the original story got extended and the Mahābhārata in
its present form is the amplification of an originally much smaller work.

Regarding the time of the composition of the Mahābhārata, Western
scholars assume that the events described in the epic are all imaginary, and

\(^6\) For analogies throughout Indian tradition when a generic term stood for specific
personalities, only a few instances may suffice. The Kātyāyana of the Kātyāyana-śrauta-
sūtra of the later Vedic Sūtra literature can never be the same person, or persons as has been
conclusively established by the researches of modern scholars, who wrote the vārttikas, i.e.
the rules supplementary to the aphorisms of Pāṇini’s Aṣṭādhyāyī, or Kaccāyana (the MIA
form for Sanskrit Kātyāyana) the famed Prakrit lexicographer. Coming to the Classical
Sanskrit literature, Daṇḍin (lit. ‘the holder of a daṇḍa or stick’, i.e. ‘a sannyāsin i.e. ascetic
[who has renounced the world]’ or ‘parivrājaka i.e. wandering [ascetic]’) must be a generic
term for Daṇḍin the author of the novel Daśakumāra-carita, Daṇḍin the rhetorician who has
Kāvyādārśa to his credit and another Daṇḍin who appears to have been a great Sanskrit poet
whose work(s) -- like the dramas of Bhāsa or Kauṭilya’s Arthaśāstra or the Paippalāda-
samhitā of the Atharva-veda, unknown only one and a half centuries ago -- have
unfortunately not come down to us, but whose caliber is more than enough hinted at such
floating verses like:

upamā kālīdāsasya/ bhāraver artha-gauravam| naiṣadhe (but notably with a variant
legomenon daṇḍinah pada-lālityam/ māghe santi trayo guṇāḥ, i.e. ‘Kālīdāsa excels in
similes, Bhāravi in depth of meaning, the [author of] the Naiṣadha-carita (v.l.: Daṇḍin) in
the use of mellifluous words, while Māgha possessed all the three qualities’,
or in the amusing verse incorporating the dialogue between Sarasvatī and Kālīdāsa:
Sarasvatī: kavir daṇḍī kavir daṇḍī/ kavir daṇḍī na saṁśayaḥ|
Kālīdāsa: ko ’haṁ tadā vāda bāle/
Sarasvatī: tvam evāhaṁ na saṁśayaḥ, i.e.
Sarasvatī: ‘Daṇḍin is doubtless the, the poet’,
Kālīdāsa: ‘O lady! Tell then who I am’,
Sarasvatī: ‘You and me are one entity, is there any doubt about it?
Down to the grass-root level, in the mediaeval period of the history of Bengal, the staunch
Hindu king Ganeśa’s son Kālāpāhār who embraced the Islam and was christened as Jalal-
ud-dīn Shah, is held to be responsible for destroying all the temples and images of gods and
goddesses throughout the province, which met with the normal decay or defacement though.
the characters thereof are not real, i.e. not historical. This is a great obstacle in ascertaining the exact time of its composition. Moreover, though there is some sort of description regarding the composition of the epic in the text itself, its historicity or authenticity or reliability is completely questionable. As a result thereof, various scholars, none of any less authority then the others, have advanced various theories regarding the age of the Mahābhārata episodes and the actual period of the composition of the epic, differing from one another not only by centuries but sometimes even by millennia. Some Western scholars have tried to propound that a rather small nucleus of the seed of a historical event, viz. the Dāsarājña or “the War of Ten Kings”, described in maṇḍalas 3 and 7 of the Rg-veda, the earliest available text of the Indo-European languages, grew into the colossal tree with numerous branches, leaves, fruits and flowers in the Kurukṣetra war, the central theme of the Mahābhārata. If at all there be any worth in this hypothesis, the most one can say with some certainty is that a few major events of the Mahābhārata might have taken place only one or two centuries earlier than the actual composition of the Rg-veda, for which circa 14th to 13th centuries BCE. appears to be the most acceptable date thereof. Beyond this, it is impossible to go till now.

Without going into the details of various arguments advanced by various scholars regarding the period of the composition of the Mahābhārata, quite superfluous for this thesis, suffice it to say that the epic took some 400 years, possibly from 2nd century BCE to the 2nd century ACE. Contrarily, the kernel of the Rāmāyaṇa was composed a little later than when the Mahabharata had already been started to take an initial form, but it took much less a period than the Mahabharata to assume its present complete form, possibly from the 1st century BCE. to the 1st century ACE. This is why the Indians regard the Ramayana to be their earliest epic (Ādi-kāvya), and perhaps this is the only way out to reconcile this fact with the one that the Mahābhārataan society appears to be rather earlier and sometimes uncivilized in contradistinction to that depicted in the Rāmāyaṇa.

There were, broadly speaking, three major editions of the Mahābhārata published from the three major metropolitan cities of India:

1. The Calcutta edition of Mahabharata was once published between 1338-1343 B.S. (1931-1936 ACE.) and it was edited by ‘Haridāsa Siddhāntavāgīśa’ and published by Viśva-vāṇī. The second edition of this book was published between 1383-1400 B.S (1976-1995 BCE.). It also included the two

2. The Bombay edition, also in Nāgarī, and with the well known commentary of Nilakaṇṭha, saw the light in 1862.


Consulting all these and countless other editions of the epic, a host of Poona scholars led initially by V.S. Sukhthankar, published, after toiling thereon for nearly half a century, the most authentic, critical and till now unsurpassed BORI (Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute) edition in no less than 24 volumes.

iii) Significant points of the epic

The Mahābhārata is significant on many accounts:

1. Literary significance: The Mahābhārata is an epic. Hence it is of great importance from the point of view of literature. Almost all Indian poets have more or less depended on it and drawn inspiration from it. Perhaps there is no Sanskrit poet who has not taken any help from the Mahābhārata, the lucidity thereof inviting their attention. Hence, later literary characters as also figures of speech were greatly influenced by this work, and for all these qualities, it was most relied upon by the Classical writers.

2. An encyclopaedia: The Mahābhārata is the encyclopaedia of that age, in which is embodied all the knowledge and sciences of those days of yore. It contains the principles of religion, moral and ethical sciences, laws and canons of life, worldly stories, mythological and legendary fables, popular beliefs, customs and social practices, doctrines about human knowledge and gospels of life. It accommodates the methods and modes of living, family happiness as well as of one’s spiritual aspirations. One should be astonished to find all these combined together in a single text. Indeed, it is a gigantic text full of descriptions, codes of conduct, religion and culture.

3. Historical significance: The Mahābhārata is significant also historically. This provides mainly the story of Candra-vamśi kings, the warrior princes called the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas. These were the two branches of the royal clan of the Kurus who lived in northern and north-
eastern India thousands of years ago. The Mahābhārata not only gives the story of the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas, but also supplies information about the Janapadas, contemporary as also of the time of the Buddha. Hence it is one of the most valued scriptures of the Hindus and a national history of those far-off days.

4. Cultural significance: In the Mahābhārata, culture and the cultivation of good qualities and behaviours were assigned a high position in social life. Moreover, the Mahābhārata is a combination of many different cultures. On the one hand it gives the code of conduct for the ruler and on the other it provides a way for salvation. It is a happy co-ordination of Karma Yoga and the Jñāna Yoga.

5. Religious and philosophical significances: In the Mahābhārata may be found nearly every branch of religion knowledge. In India, it is often called “the fifth veda”. The real philosophical significance of the Mahābhārata is embedded in the Bhagavad-gīṭā, the essence of the Mahābhārata and an epitome of devotion for the Indians. An important trait in the Mahābhārata is that it dealt with both Dharma and Adharma. Along with the flow of the main plot these two aspects of human life have been studied comprehensively, and with all their complexities. Their traits and qualities have been touched upon in the minutest detail conveying all aspects – religious, moral, ethical, political and so on. Its subject matter is the religious attitudes of Hinduism. Morality and moral values have been treated with such importance in this great work that the Mahābhārata can aptly be called a text of moral science.

6. Social significance: The Mahābhārata is a superb mine of social sciences, practically covering all aspects of social life. Almost an all-out picture of the then society can be visualized in it. The problems relating to morality, ethics, education, sex and psychological views, and so on, have been discussed elaborately.

7. Political significance: The Mahābhārata is both an economic and a political science. Both economics and politics have been analysed. The Śānti-parvan affords important insights into the duties of a king. Surprisingly high thoughts about political and economic situations of the people of those days emerge. Military science dealing with tactics of warfare and martial strategies as dealt with in the Mahābhārata is unique in nature and character in the sense that it found its culmination in the later politico-economic text like the Manu-samhitā and the Artha-sāstra of Kauṭilya. It focuses on the awareness of individual rights, but
Unfortunately it highlights the frailty in women though it is not their exclusive characteristic. It also provides glimpses into the duties and responsibilities of the four varṇas in Hindu social system.

8. Geographical significance: The Mahābhārata can also be termed as a geographical science too. In Vana-parvan, we find a clear indication that the poet had an extensive and thorough knowledge of the topography of quite a vast region of today’s India. Herein, we find the mention of the names of rivers, mountains, lakes and places of pilgrimages. We have to admit the extensive geographical knowledge of the writer(s) of the epic.

In short, the Mahābhārata is a treasury of information on various aspects of the then contemporary society.

‘ācakhyuh kavyah kecit/ sampraty ācakṣate pare|
ākhyāsyanti tathaśvē/ itihāsam imarī bhuvi|’ (Ādi-parvan 1.26)
‘Some bards already sang this myth, others teach [it even] now; Others as well will narrate [it] on earth.’

3) The Analects of Confucius

i) Introductory

The former Han dynasty (BCE. 202-ACE. 24), had chronicle in the memoirs, the history of China from ancient times till there rule. In one of the chapter called the history of literature they talk about how after the death of Confucius, there was an end of his exquisite words; and when his seventy disciples had passed away, violence began to be done to their meaning. Before the Han dynasty came to power, there was a conflict and chaos in China and many great ancient literary works were burnt under the Ch’ìn dynasty (BCE. 220-205).

It appeared that the great works of Masters were lost to people, however thankfully some sincere disciples hid the teachings of Confucius and also other literary works for posterity. The far sight of these scholars allowed Han rulers opportunity to collect and revive the ancient wisdom scattered across the kingdom.
Interestingly, as the Han representatives were unearthing and collecting ancient literary works, two sets of the Analects were discovered from two states. One form Lu, the native State of Confucius, and the other form Ch‘i, the State adjoining. Between these there were considerable differences. The former consisted of twenty Books or Chapters, the same as those into which the Classic is now divided. The latter contained two Books in addition, and in the twenty Books and the chapters and sentences were somewhat more numerous than in the Lu exemplar.

Luckily a third copy of the Analects was discovered about BCE.150. It was hidden in the walls of the K‘ung family home, believed to be the house where Confucius himself had once lived. This third book is referred to by Chinese writers, as ‘The old Lun Yu.’ The script being too ancient had to be reworked by the head of the K‘ung family, K‘ung An-woo under the imperial instruction and he finally published it as a work called ‘The Lun Yu, with explanations of the characters, and Exhibition of the Meaning’.

This discovery helped to settle the discrepancy in the earlier version as the third copy was closer in content to the Analects discovered at Lu. The third copy was divided into two parts, the chapter beginning, ‘Yao said, forming a whole Book by itself, and the remaining two chapters formed another Book beginning ‘Zi Zhāng’. With this trifling difference, the old and the Lu copies appear to have agreed together. It is said that the Analects were compiled by the disciples of Confucius coming together after his death. Since the work came to take the present over a certain period time it is safe to assume that the master’s disciples were not the only ones recording the ancient saying but it was compiled by the disciples of the disciples of the sage, making free use of the written memorials concerning him which they had receive, and the oral statements which they had heard, from their several masters. Based on this information, if we determine Analects’ date it would be about the end of the fourth, or the beginning of the fifth century before Christian era.

ii) The life of Confucius

Now I shall discuss in brief the life of Confucius, as it is important to know the author whose wisdom and advice will form a major part of my thesis. He was said to have been descended from a noble family in the state of Sung. In the early years of the eighth century BCE., one of Confucius' ancestors died when the young duke of Sung who was in his charge was assassinated, and his descendants fled to Lu and settled in Tsou. In the Tso chuan under the
tenth year of Duke Hsiang, it is recorded that one Shu He of Tsou held up the portcullis with his bare hands while his comrades made their getaway. The Shih chi, however, gives his name as Shu Liang He and added the information that he was Confucius’ father. Of Confucius’ mother nothing certain is known.

K’ung Ch’iu or K’ung Chung-ni, commonly known in the West as Confucius, was born in either 552 or 551 BCE., and was orphaned at a very early age. Of his youth little is known except that he was poor and fond of learning.

In 517 BCE., Duke Chao of Lu had to flee the state after an unsuccessful attempt to make war on the Chi Family. It is likely that it was at this time when he was thirty-five that Confucius went to Ch’i. If he did, he soon returned to Lu. It was in the time of Duke Ting of Lu (509-494 BCE.) that he became the police commissioner of Lu. During his term of office two events took place which is recorded in the Tso chuan. First, he accompanied the Duke to a meeting with Duke Ching of Ch’i and scored a diplomatic victory. Second, he was responsible for the abortive plan to demolish the main city of each of the three powerful noble families.

It was probably in 497 BCE. that Confucius left Lu, not to return until thirteen years later. Confucius first went to Wei, and during the next few years visited a number of other states, offering advice to the feudal lords, and, meeting with no success, returned to Wei in 489 BCE. It is not possible to determine how long Confucius stayed in each state as what little evidence there is tends to be conflicting. Confucius finally returned to Lu in 484 BCE. when he was sixty-eight. At last realizing that there was no hope of putting his ideas into practice, he devoted the rest of his life to teaching. His last years were saddened by the death of his son and then of his favourite disciple, Yen Hui, at an early age. In the year of 479 BCE., Confucius, the great scholar and sage died leaving behind a legacy that influenced the life and thinking of the later generations.

The wisdom and the advice of the Chinese master Confucius had been compiled by his disciples to form the Analects which are still considered to be a source of inspiration by the Chinese and East Asian community.

iii) Topics of the Analects

In the Analects of Confucius, various topics have been discussed. Topics like virtue, benevolence, way (dao), learning, music, political wisdom, ritual, relationships, rituals and rites, trust, filial piety, a man of complete virtue or gentleman, good and small man, sage, ideal kings and ideal subjects etc.
form the content of this great book. The main thrust of the book is on encouraging and guiding man to refine himself and to progress into a righteous and benevolent and wise human being who will follow the ‘dao’ and work in accordance with ‘haven’s decree’ and bring peace to people.

In the Analects maximum chapters dwell on explaining what is the ideal moral character in the eyes of Confucius and who would be considered as the a man of complete virtue (君子; jūn zǐ). The terms Gentleman and Smallman (小人; xiǎo rén) are correlative and used as contrasted terms. The Gentleman is the man with a cultivated moral character, while the Smallman is the opposite.

As the gentleman is the ideal moral character, it is expected that one must put in a great deal of hard work or cultivation to become a gentleman. There are a considerable number of virtues a gentleman is supposed to have and the essence of these virtues is often summed up in a precept. In order to have a full understanding of the complete moral character of the gentleman, we have to take a detailed look at the various virtues he is supposed to possess.

Another a central concept, ‘the benevolence (仁; rén)’ is the most important moral quality a man can possess. Although the use of this term was not an innovation on the part of Confucius, it is almost certain that the complexity of its content and the pre-eminence it attained amongst moral qualities were due to Confucius. That it is the moral quality a gentleman must possess. In some contexts ‘the gentleman’ and ‘the benevolent man’ are almost interchangeable terms.

Confucius had a profound admiration for the Duke of Zhōu (周) who, as regent in the early part of the reign of his young nephew, King Ch’eng, was the architect of the Chou feudal system some five hundred years before Confucius’ time. It is beyond the scope of this introduction to discuss in detail the influence of the Duke on Chinese society and the Chinese political system. It is sufficient simply to single out for mention his most important contribution, the clan inheritance system known as ‘tsung fa’. Under this system, succession passes to the eldest son by the principal wife. Younger sons or sons by concubines become founders of their own noble houses. Thus the feudal lord stands to the king in a double relationship. In terms of political relationship he is a vassal while in terms of blood ties he is the head of a cadet branch of the royal clan. Political allegiance has as its foundation
family allegiance. This social system founded by the Duke of Zhōu proved its soundness by durability of the Zhōu Dynasty.

Following the footsteps of the Duke of Zhōu, Confucius made the natural love and obligations obtaining between members of the family the basis of a general morality. The two most important relationships within the family are those between father and son and between elder and younger brother. If a man is a good son and a good younger brother at home, he can be counted on to behave correctly in society.

For Confucius, observances of the rites are equally important. The rites (禮; lǐ) were a body of rules governing action in every aspect of life and they were the repository of past insights into morality. It is, therefore, important that one should, unless there are strong reasons to the contrary, observe them. It is enough to say that Confucius had great respect for the body of rules which went under the name of lǐ (rite).

The ultimate purpose of government is the welfare of the common people. This is the most basic principle in Confucianism and has remained unchanged throughout the ages. The promotion of the welfare of the common people begins with satisfying their material needs. But besides the necessities of life, the common people must also be provided with sufficient arms. However, before they can be sent to war, they must also be given adequate training. However, food and arms are not the most important things the people should have. Above all, they must have trust in the ruler and must look up to him. When Confucius was asked which of the three should be given up first, his answer was, ‘Give up arms.’ This is no surprise given Confucius’ attitude towards the use of force in war, but his next answer is surprising. When pressed to say which of the remaining two should be given up first, his answer was, ‘Give up food.’ He then went on to explain, ‘Death has always been with us since the beginning of time, but when there is no trust the common people will have nothing to stand on’. This emphasis on the moral basis of government is fundamental to Confucius’ teaching.

Confucius was both a great thinker and a great human being. As a thinker he held up an ideal for all men. This consisted of perfecting one’s own moral character. Realizing this ideal involves not only being benevolent to other individuals but also working unstintingly for the welfare of the common people. Confucius was modest about his own achievement. In spite of his
modesty, he must have realized his own ideal to a great extent. Otherwise, it would be impossible to account for the reverence and affection shown him by his disciples who were widely different in talent and temperament.

Confucius never claimed to be either superior in intelligence or in moral qualities. All he would claim was his eagerness to learn. This was matched only by his eagerness to teach. As a teacher he was capable of both criticizing his disciples with firmness as well as speaking to them in jest.

The predominant impression one gets of Confucius from the Analects is a man whose life was content as he could pursue his goal (gaining knowledge and virtue) undeterred. Once Zǐ Lù’s disciple of Confucius was asked by the duke of She to describe his master, but Zǐ Lù did not respond. On hearing this, Confucius’ comment was,

‘The Master said, why did you not say to him, - He is simply a man, who in his eager pursuit [of knowledge] forgets his food, who in the joy of [its attainment] forgets his sorrow, and who does not perceive that old age is coming on?’ (A.C., 7.18)

When after a lifetime of moral cultivation Confucius found that what he desired naturally coincided with what was moral and virtuous he felt contented and satiated with the life he had led. And this feat makes his advice more meaningful and relevant.

3. Ethics and Dharma

Ethics is the branch of study dealing with what is the proper course of action for man. It tells man which endeavour is right and which wrong in the social context. One may also say that ethics evolved in response to man’s question, “What do I do?” Basically ethics is a method by which man classifies his values and engages in them, because, as Bertrand Russell proverbially said: “Man is not yet, he will be”. The great Indian epics Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata too are deeply concerned with ethics and ethical values. In them clear guidelines and principles that are ethical have been laid down. These should be pursued by man for earning merit that in

7 AC.[JL]., p.201.
turn will make existence in this material world meaningful and worthwhile and win him a better rebirth and also pave the way for salvation. An ethical man is a righteous man and the world belongs to the righteous. Only the righteous can perform deeds that are free from self-cherishing principles. The righteous acts based on the principles of discharging their duties without self-interest and self-gain, and with integrity and sincerity, lead them to earn greater merit which helps them to gain wisdom and realize the Ultimate truth, and ultimately paves the path for them to free themselves from the bondage of birth, death and rebirth.

‘The wise who have united their intelligence (with the Divine) renouncing the fruits which their action yields and freed from the bonds of birth reach the sorrow less state’. (BhG. 2.51)\(^8\)

Like all ancient epics Indian epics the Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata too uphold the importance of Ethics. It is considered to be an essential requirement for human life to be purposeful and good. Without it, our actions would be random and aimless.

Ethics may be regarded as a standard that exalts our actions and earns for them universality, or at least, for the believers of the same faith unquestioning acceptance. In Indian epics ethical principles have been set through the unambiguous presentation of what “Dharma” and “Adharma” are. In the Rāmāyaṇa, the core message is adherence to “Dharma”, a Sanskrit term that may be loosely translated into English by Ethics.

Dharma and Karma are the underlying principles of morality and ethics in the Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata. These principles are fundamental to the ancient Indian conceptions of moral thought and action.

Dharma is one of the most complex and all-encompassing idea. It can mean ‘religion, law, duty, order, proper conduct, morality, righteousness, justice, and norm’. Dharma puts things in their proper place, creates and maintains order and balance. In the vast compendium of literature known as the Dharmasāstra, Dharma is examined from virtually every imaginable angle, from the proper performance of sacrifice, kingly duties, cultural norms, sexual relations, and everyday social rules such as manners.

Our very limitation is guided under a universal understanding, that of Dharma. The Atharva-veda, the last of the four Vedic Saṃhitās, utilizes

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8 karmajam buddhi-yuktāṁ hi phalaṁ tyaktvā maniśiṇah| janma-bandha-vinirmuktāḥ padaṁ gacchanty anāmayam||
symbolisms to describe the role of Dharma. That we are bound by the laws of time, space and causation is only a finite reality, a limitation imposed by the self-projection of the infinite Brahman as the cosmos. Dharma is the foundation of this causal existence, one step below the infinite. Indeed, Dharma is the projection of divine order from Brahman, and as such:

\[ dhruvāṁ bhūmiṁ prthivīṁ dharmanā dhrtāṁ \] (Śaunaka-samhitā of Atharva Veda 12.1.17b, also at PS 17.2.8b, with negligible variants: references kindly supplied by Dipak Bhattacharya of Santiniketan, W. Bengal), which can tentatively be rendered, following Whitney: 664 but also differing somewhat from him, as: ‘the fixed earth, the planet sustained by ethicality or cosmos’.

The Upaniṣads considered Dharma to be the universal principle of law, order and harmony, the truth (satya-), or better the cosmos (ṛta-), that sprang first from Brahman. It acts as the regulatory moral principle of the universe. It is sat, ‘truth’, a major tenet of Hinduism.

The nucleus of this very conception, nay the germ of Monism (which later on culminated in the idea of the Upaniṣadic Brahman) as against Pluralism, is to be found as early as i.a. at RV 1.164.46:

‘indraṁ mitrāṁ vāruṇaṁ agnim āhur/ átho divyāḥ så suparnó garūtmān|
ēkam sād[,] víprā bahudhā vadanty/ agnim āhur mātariśvānam āhuḥ|’

I’m giving the very precisely splendid translation of Geldner: 1.236 in his inimitable German:

‘Sie nennen (es) Indra, Mitra, Varuṇa, Agni, und es ist der himmlische Vogel Garutmat. Was nur das E ine (stress present researcher’s) ist, benennen die Redekundigen vielfach. Sie nennen es Agni, Yama, Mātariśvan’.

but understanding the syntax of the mantra a little differently than it was by Geldner:

The Ultimate (śāt) is one (ēkam), sages name [It] differently: [they] call [It] Agni, Yama [and] Mātariśvan’.
Dharma imbibes the highest principles not only of Truth (satya-) but of Cosmos (ṛta-) too, and as such is the central guiding principle in the Hindu conception of existence. “Dharma” can not be rendered by English religion, which is much less connotative and comprehensive than Sanskrit dharma- is (else Hinduism would not at all be a “religion” as such). “Dharma” implies the ideas of law, harmony, nay, the pure Reality, cf. what Brhadāraṇyakopaniṣad 1.4.14 has to convey:

‘Now, Dharma is nothing but the Truth. So, when one utters the truth, people say that he speaks the dharma, and when one speaks the dharma, people say that he utters the truth. They are indeed the same thing’.

In the epics too, Dharma remains the underlying theme and the guiding principle. What is “dhrarmically” acceptable, and what is “adhārmic” and hence to be avoided, are presented through a depiction of the life of Lord Rāma. He is considered to be one of the rather lately promulgated the ten Avatāras ‘incarnations’ in the Hindu mythology. Because, the idea of the ten Avatāras perhaps first occurred in Jayadeva’s Gītā-govinda (1.5-14), and was further later ”advertised” by the vociferous Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇaites – who would even go to the length of declaring that kṛṣṇas tu bhagavān svayam ‘And Kṛṣṇa is God himself’ – to be actually the incarnations of Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa himself. It is they who “stamped” Rāma as the Divine Being Viṣṇu in human form. Rāma’s struggle with the revengeful Rāvaṇa (who in spite of being a learned [“Dravidian”!] Brāhmaṇa chose to avenge his sister’s humiliation by Lakṣmaṇa through the heinous path of abducting another’s, viz. Rāma’s, wife) stresses that rāmādivad pravartitavyam, na rāvanādivat ‘Behave like that of Rāma, not that of Rāvaṇa’, or in other words, as has been said supra, what is dharmic should be practised, what is adhārmic, avoided. The Bhagavad-gītā, Vidura-nīti and the Anuśāsana-parvan of the Mahābhārata too stress on following the path of Dharma and shunning that of Adharma.

Each individual depending on his/her caste, position or status and gender must follow the path of Dharma, stipulated in the Dharma-śāstras and the Bhagavad-gītā. At times the heroic and divine characters in the epics,

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9 Cf. Olivelle Patrick, pp.48-50.
10 The same idea resounds also in the saying about the author but actually at the most the editor of the 18 Mahā-purāṇas, viz. Vyāsa, also regarded as the writer of the Mahā-bhārata: aṣṭādaśa-purāṇeṣu vyāsasya vacana-dvayaṁ | paropakāraḥ puruṣāya pāpaṁ para-pidānam||, i.e., ‘In the eighteen Purāṇas Vyāsa conveys [only] two [things]; [Doing] good to others [goes] for merit, oppressing others for sin’.
however, appear to engage in actions that raise controversies as to what is ethically right and what is not. In the Rāmāyana, the manner of Lord Rāma’s killing the monkey-king Sugrīva’s elder brother Vālī is one such instance. In the Mahābhārata, too, we find many actions committed by the otherwise known as noble and “Dharmic” characters that contradict the then contemporary ethical values. One may recall for an example how a widely respected elderly person like Bhīṣma(-pitāmaha, at that) kept mum during Draupadi’s humiliation at the hands of Duḥśāsana, advancing just the excuse that arthasya pururoṣo dāso na dāsas tv arthaḥ kasyacit, i.e., without going into the controversy whether artha- means here ‘money’ or ‘destiny’, ‘Man is the servant of salary/fate, and not wealth of anyone whatsoever’. These questions arise naturally in the minds of those who are not quite knowledgeable about the concepts deeply imbedded in the psyche of every Indian who has implicit faith in the thoughts and truths propounded by Kṛṣṇa in Bhagavad-gītā, surely following the epic tradition. These questions I shall try in my own humble way to tackle with in a later part of this chapter.

According to Sushim Dubey11 “To understand any culture, we first look for its value system. The value system signifies the motives and ends of the culture, which have been described and conceived as ultimate and paramount by their wisest men. Thus, the highest principles and wisdom of any culture happens to be preserved in the form of its value system. From the very ancient times in India, Dharma, Artha, Kāma and Mokṣa have been considered as values, and formed its essential value system. These concepts, later considered, under the notion of Puruṣārtha, and various philosophical systems, placed them in their foremost inquiry”.

Among the Puruṣārthas the highest goal is that of seeking liberation or Mokṣa. And actions or karmas, positive or negative, whenever performed only keep the soul bound to the chain of cyclic existence.

‘He [i.e. the Soul] is never born, nor does he die at any time, nor having [once] come to be will he again cease to be. He is unborn, eternal, permanent and primeval. He is not slain when the body is slain.’ (BhG. 2.20)12

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11 http://www.mantra.org.in/allmantra/Indian_Value_System.htm
12 BhG.[RK], p. 107.
Thus Ultimate Truth or act of intrinsic Goodness is attainment of Mokṣa or liberation from this world and that is the stage that can only be earned by surrendering wholly to the Divine will and Godhead.

‘Fix thy mind on Me; be devoted to Me; sacrifice to Me; prostate thyself before Me; so shalt thou come to Me. I promise thee truly, for thou art dear to Me.’ (BhG. 18.65)\textsuperscript{13}

The Sundara-kāṇḍa of Rāmāyaṇa is of immense importance as it eulogises Hanūmant, the Ultimate Rāma Bhakta (devotee par excellence to Lord Rāma). This Kanda is the story of the determination of Hanūmant in achieving the task he set out as stated in the opening stanza thereof. The story built up in Sundara-kāṇḍa can be briefly stated as follows.

Hanūmant flies across the ocean overcoming several obstacles, enters Laṅkā, after intensive search finds Sītā, identifies himself as the messenger of Rāma, takes her message and a token cūḍāmaṇī (gem from her hair-top) from her as an identification, then announces himself as the servant and messenger of Rāma, destroys the palace garden of Rāvana, gains audience with Rāvana and conveys his own message to the latter saying, “Return Sītā or face annihilation”. When his message of conciliation was rejected and his tail was set on fire, he uses that to burn down the city of Laṅkā, returns triumphantly to Kiṣkindhā and conveys to Rāma that Sītā is safe but in the custody of the Rākṣasa-king Rāvana in Laṅkā, continuously pining for Rāma and awaiting action by Rāma to get her released.

When Rāvana’s son Indrajit had killed Rāma’s monkeys in hordes and Jāmbavant (v.l. Jāmbūvant, commander of the monkey army) arrived at the scene to survey the damage, the first thing the latter said was, "Is Hanūmant alive?"

‘Does he through whom Aṅjanā as well as Mātariśvan (the wind god) are blessed with fair offspring, does that prince of monkeys, Hanūmant, live?’

‘Hearing Jāmbavant’s words, Vibhīṣaṇa said, “Why bypassing the son of the high and mighty did you enquire after (Hanūmant), the wind-god’s offspring?”’ (Yudha-kāṇḍa 74.18f.)\textsuperscript{14}

‘Hearing Vibhīṣaṇa’s words, Jāmbavant said, “Hear, O foremost of Rākṣasas, why I enquire after the wind-god’s son’.

\textsuperscript{13} BhG.[RK], p. 377.
\textsuperscript{14} R.M., vol. 3, p. 224.
‘While this hero is alive, this force, albeit destroyed, live; but if Hanūmant is raft of life, although living, we are destroyed’. (Yudha-kāṇḍa 74.21f.)

Hanūmant subsequently arrived at the scene and Jāmbavant was glad to see him alive and safe.

Why was he relieved to see Hanūmant alive?

Hanūmant symbolises devotion, sacrifice and determination. These qualities are absolutely necessary to accomplish any difficult and strenuous task. If we are weak in every other way, devotion, sacrifice and determination can still carry us to success in seemingly impossible tasks. Whereas if we possess every other skill and talent, it is not good enough if we are lacking in the qualities that Hanūmant represents.

Similarly in Bhagavad-gītā, Arjuna’s complete surrender to the God-head Kṛṣṇa is essential for ultimate truth and goodness to prevail. It is the one who has no ego and is ready to be a vessel or an instrument for the Divine to act through him is truly a Dharmic person. For the Divine will transcends all mortal rules and restrictions and ethics. This concept is not easy for one alien to the Vedic or Hindu religio-philosophical faith to comprehend, let alone appreciate.

The epics under scrutiny reveals the underlying principle that good or dharma is following the dictum of the Divine, keeping oneself tuned to the wishes of the Divine and acting in accordance with the Lord’s wishes. And whenever every great character, however heroic or noble, has opposed the Divine dictum has earned doom and destruction for himself and all around him. For example, Karna, as he had hid his true identity and became a disciple of Paraśurāma, earned his guru’s wrath on his identity being discovered. Paraśurāma cursed him, saying that at the time of real need he will fail to use his knowledge of weaponry.

In spite of being the great “Dāna-vīra” or the great donor and a loyal friend, the mighty Karna is destroyed by his half-brother Arjuna, mainly because he sided with the “adharmic”, the disbeliever, the self-cherishing Duryodhana.

15 Loc. cit., p. 225.
Arjuna on the other hand totally surrendered to the Divine will and, on realizing he is an instrument only, fights unflinchingly and wins over the vast and mighty Kaurava army as Lord is on his side.

‘Therefore arise thou and gain glory. Conquering thy foes, enjoy a prosperous kingdom. By Me alone are they slain already. Be thou merely the instrument, O Savyasācin (Arjuna).’ (BhG. 11.33)\(^{16}\)

In the Rāmāyaṇa there is a great controversy over the role played by Rāvana’s brother Vibhīṣaṇa. In the eyes of Rāvana he is a traitor but to the devotees of Lord Rāma he is an exemplary devotee of the Lord. Vibhīṣaṇa, too, like Arjuna had surrendered to the Divine will and even risking the blame of being branded a traitor to his nation and brother, he opted to do the right thing.

‘And beholding Sugrīva and all others stationed near him, the highly intelligent Vibhīṣaṇa accosted them, at the highest pitch of his voice, saying:
‘There lives a Rākṣasa, named Rāvana, the lord of demons, and perpetrator of many iniquitous deeds. I am his younger brother known as Vibhīṣaṇa.
‘By him, by slaying the vulture Jaṭāyu, was carried away Sitā from Janasthāna. She is imprisoned, brought under his sway, poorly, and being well guarded by the Rakṣases.
‘With various well-meaning words and reasoning, I pointed out to him the necessity of rendering back Sitā to Rāma.
‘And Rāvana, possessed by Death, paid no heed to my well-meaning words, like to one, lying on the brink of death, neglecting the administration of medicine.
‘Being reviled by him and treated harshly like a menial, I have come to seek Rāghava’s shelter, renouncing my children and wives.’ (Yuddha-kāṇḍa 17.11-16)\(^{17}\)

What my contention is that though at times in the epics socio-ethical values seem to contradict what the Divine ordains; these contradictions are only on the surface. Essentially there is no fundamental paradox. If one is a true devotee and realizes his/her duty, status, propensity or Dharma and acts accordingly, his/her acts will all be ethical and good. But if one performs acts based on his ego and selfish motivations, those will only be harmful, and till the individual realizes that only through unconditional, absolute

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\(^{16}\) BhG.[RK]., p. 280.
\(^{17}\) R.M., vol. 3, p. 35.
surrender to the Divine one can earn Mokṣa. Else, there will be no respite for him/her.

‘Abandoning all duties, come to Me alone for shelter. Be not grieved, for I shall release thee from all evils.’ (BhG. 18.66)\textsuperscript{18}

In the Mahaprasthānīka-parvan of the Mahābhārata, the Pāṇḍavas, after winning the war, are disenchanted with the worldly affairs and renunciate all to aspire for the ultimate reality. When this stage is reached one should enter the stage of renunciation (Sannyāsāśrama), whose ultimate and fundamental aim is Mokṣa, the greatest of the Puruṣārthas. After the death of Kṛṣṇa and the inundation of Dwārakā, the Pāṇḍavas decided it was time to retire from the material world and pursue the path of renunciation.

‘He then made up his mind he leave the world. His brothers also formed the same resolution. Then Dharma’s son Yudhīṣṭhira, the king of the Kurus, renouncing his ornaments, wore barks of trees. Bhīma and Arjuna and the twins, and the illustrious Draupadī similarly clad themselves in barks of trees, O sir. Having caused the preliminary rites of religion, O chief of Bharata’s race, which were to bless them in the accomplishment of their design, those foremost of men renounced their sacred fires to the water. Seeing the preaches in that guise, the ladies wept aloud.’ (Mahāprasthānīka-parvan 1.19-22)\textsuperscript{19}

In the two epics all the main protagonists, that is the Pāṇḍavas in the Mahābhārata and Lord Rāma and his three brothers in the Rāmāyaṇa, meticulously followed the principles advocated by the Caturāśāramas (four stages of life) and the Varṇāśrama (four caste system). They experienced all the four stages of worldly existence – from Brahmacarya to Sannyāsa and lived by the Kṣatriya (their own caste) principles and remain as the illustrious examples of ethical values that till date are glorified and emulated by Indians who believe in these ethical principles.

\textsuperscript{18} BhG.[RK]., p.378.
\textsuperscript{19} M.B., vol. 9, p. 991.