Chapter VI - Patriarchal basis of metronymics of the epic tradition
Section I = Metronymics in the royal families of the epics:

The epics provide us with instances of social recognition of persons of royal families by means of metronymics. A reference to one's metronymic seems to be in harmony with the requirement of the social environment as depicted in the stories of the epics. It is most probably accountable by facts of polygamy. If a king be permitted to obtain a number of wives, the sons begotten by them may be distinguished from one another by the use of metronymics. The paternal name does not suffice and the maternal designation is out of necessity added to it.

In the episode of Chitrāṅgadā, Arjuna is found to state the names of his father as well as his mother before the king of Manipura. In reply to the latter's query about his birth he speaks of himself as Pāṇḍava, i.e., a son of Pāṇḍu, and Kuntī-putra, i.e., a son of Kuntī. A paternal-cum-maternal reference makes his recognition complete. In cases of conversational address or indirect narration of events concerning him, he is described as Kaunteya or Pārtha, i.e., a son of Kuntī or Prithā. Similarly, Bhima is called a Kaunteya and Yudhiṣṭhira a Kuntī-putra. Nakula is known as a Mādri-suta, i.e.,

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2 - Vide Mbh II. 27. 9. 18.
3 - Ibid VI. 90. 7.
4 - Ibid II. 29. 9.
5 - Ibid II. 33. 43.
6 - Ibid II. 32. 19.
a son of Madri, and Sahadeva as a Madreyas; their metronymic serves the purpose of differentiating them from the sons of Kunti.

The note-worthy feature of a metronymic is that it differentiates one from the step-brothers. As Gangeya, i.e., the son of Gangâ, Bhishma has his mark of difference from Vichitravirya. As Amvikâ-suta, i.e., the son of Amvikâ, Dhritarâstra is set apart from Pându. Similarly, the metronymic 'Sauvadra' serves to mark off the son of Suvâdra from his step-brothers, the Draupadeyas, who are the sons of Draupâdi.

In the Râmâyana, Bharata as Kaikeyi-suta, i.e., the son of Kaikeyî, is distinguished from Laksmana who is a Saumitri, i.e., a son of Sumitrâ. It is to be noted that they are born of the same father, but of different mothers.

These instances of maternal designation are really remarkable as clear evidence of the prevalence of polygamy in royal families and the existence of step-mothers of princes may well account for the system of pointing out the sonship in relation to the mother.

1 - Ibid II. 31. 51.
2 - Ibid I. 113. 15.
3 - Ibid VIII. 4. 1.
4 - Ibid VIII. 5. 13.
5 - Ibid VIII. 5. 14.
6 - Vide Râm I. 18. 21.
7 - Ibid I. 18. 22.
Section II - The method of identification by a metronymic:

The system of identification by the mother's name is a regular feature of the aristocratic society as delineated in the epics and may be due to the influence of non-Aryan matriarchy. The contact of the Aryans with the indigenous inhabitants may have resulted in the introduction of matriarchal naming in Aryan social life, so that the mother's name is deemed as necessary in the affair of identifying a person. The mention of the metronymic by the side of the patronymic is necessitated by the conditions created by the practice of having more than one wife at a time. The sons of the co-wives can be distinguished from one another by referring to the mother's name and not merely to the father's name. While polygyny seems to be the real basis of metronymics, the system of such identification may have been borrowed from the matriarchal neighbours.