Republics in Epics
6. Republics in Epics

Ramayana and Mahabharata are main source during epic age. In some instances, the 'Gana' has been used in the sense of corporate organization. The word has been used in the Ramayana. In Kiskinada Kand of Ramayana term republics is not used; it is only as a corporate organization. The form of government prevalent in these countries is not allowed to some of these might have been republics. Here the Malavas are mentioned in the east, Dasanas and Rishikas in the south Saurasthuras and Bhillikas in the west and Pulindas, Kuru, Madras, Kambojas and Daradas in the north. Uttra- Kurus appears as a mythical people on the bank of river Shailoda (beyond the Himalayas). The Mahabharata clearly associated all the paraphernalia of sovereignty with the Gama which leaves no doubt as it republican character. The Subha Parava describes the Rajasuya of Yudhisthira. All the four brother of his proceed in four different directions for conquest and subjugation of different states. Arjuna proceeds in the northern direction. After having vanquished many monarchial states he come across and defeats seven Dasyu Ganrajya and the Utsavasanketas. They were hill people & have been located near Kashmir go in the immediately following verse, Arjuna is said to vanquish the Kshatriyas of Kashmir. While describing the monarchial states Mahabharata never fails to mention the name of the king. It is clear that Kashmir was republics at that time. They Arjuna defeated Lohita, who was the head of a Mandala (Samgha?) of the states. Here, the researcher thinks that Lohita was the title of royalty. He might have been the chief of republican confederacy of the republics. Next, he defeated the mountains tribes. Viz. Trigartas, Darvas and Kakanads were defeated by Arjuna.
The names of people (tribes) are not given. They might have been republics. After that Arjuna defeat the Suyhas the Cholas, the Vahalikas, the Daradas, the Kambojas, the Lohas, the Parama and the Uttra-Rishikas. They were republican in character. In Bhisma Parva of Mahabharata Kamboja king Sudakshina is mentioned as a monarchial state.

The youngest Pandava, Nakula proceed and subjugate all the states lying in west including desert (Marubhum). Penetrating further, he comes across several republics and defeats them. They were Dasarnas, Sivis, Trigartas, Ambhasthas, Malavas, Panch-Karpatas, Madhyamakeyas and Vatathamas. The last viz. Madhyamakeyas & Vatadhanas were under the Brahmanas. The Kshatriyas of Pushkara are defeated next along with the republic of Utsavasanketas. Next, he defeated the powerful city-states on the bank of river Indus; he vanquished the republics of Sudras, Abhiras, matsbyas and other mountain people of Sharasvati River. As the result he defeated Daradas, Vahlida, Kashmiras, Kundamanas, Pocurakas, Hansakayanas, Sivis, Trigrata, Yaudheyas, and republican tribes paid homage to Yudhisthira.

In Bhisma Parava, four ideal republics of Maga, Masaka, Manasa and Mandega, inhabited by Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas, & Sudras, respectively described. Here, there was no king, no conclusive sanction nor the people with coercion.

In south there was less important republics, the great Andhak-Vrishnis Samgha of five viz. the Yadavas, the Kukuras, the Bhojas, the Andhaka and the Vrishnis, is prominently mentioned. At first they ruled in the region of Mathura. The tyrant kamsa, like Peisistratus and other Greek history, seized the power from Yadavas. Then Krishna-Vasudeva, a scion of Vrishnis sees him. It is mentioned in Mahabharata, Gatha Jataka & Puranas. The Mahabharata &
Puranas also refer to the great exodus of Yadava from Mathura under the pressure of Magadhan king Jarasanda.

They migrated to Dvaraka near the western sea-coast. According to Puranas, the Yadava were divided into several steps namely Vitihotras, Satvat etc.\(^{17}\), and Satvatas themselves were subdivided in to several branches viz. Daivavridhas, Andhakas, Mahaboja & Vrishni.\(^{18}\) The Yadavas may have been connected with Yadu of Vrishni.\(^{19}\) According to Aitareya Brahmana the Bhauijyan type of constitution was prevalent in Satvat. It places in south direction.\(^{20}\) According to \textit{Satpata Brahmana} they were defeated by Bharata.\(^{21}\) At one time Krishna & Ugrasena were their presidents. Krishna & Balrama, Kritavarman & Satyaki sided with Pandava; Kritivarman & some Bhojas associated with Duryodhana. Panini. Too mentions the Andhaka-Vrishnis Samgha\(^{22}\) which according to Kautilya, come to grief by offending Dvaipayana in other days.\(^{23}\) The Mahabharata also confirms that the Andhak- Vrishnis Samgha cursed by the sages, because of their indecent behavior towards the Rishis.\(^{24}\) They are mentioned in the Divyavadam & Saundranand-Kavyam.\(^{25}\)

Only one specimen of their coin has been found so far. The legend on it was first read by Cummingham as Vrishnis Raja-Jnaganasya Bhubhasya.\(^{26}\) These coins can be ascribed to the first & II\(^{\text{nd}}\) cent. B.C. on paleographic ground. The legend is in Brahmi & Kharosthi script. The symbol of ‘Chakra’ was Vrishnis people also occurs in ‘\textit{Harschcharita}’.  

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63
Existence & Evidence

Turing towards epics we find no evidence of Republics in Ramayana, although in term 'Gana' occurs in it, but it refers as corporate bodies. In last section of Mahabharata republics was found. As regards, the constitutional bodies the evidence debt with in the last section-

a-General, i.e. a discussion of wear and strong points of a Samgha.

b-The constitutional features of great Andhak- Vrishnis Samgha.

In the Santi Parava of Mahabharata the weak & strong points were discussed of Gana or Republican constitution in chapter 108. The passage is of immense importance.

The summary of whole passage is that Yudhisthira enquires of Bhishma, the sagacious and learned political thinker of the age, about the secret of unity of the republics, the method adopted by them to guards the secrecy of counsel, the method to avoid the consequences of the policy of discussion (Bheda) applied by the enemy. Bhishma in his reply singles out these causes of disunion and dissension viz. Greed, jealously avarice and mutual bitterness & exploits the situation through spies. "Thus divided the gana would surely perish, separated they fall an easy prey to the foe. Gana therefore, would always exert them through the system of confederacy. Material prosperity is won by the process of the confederate army; Outsiders also seek the alliance of confederates of entities." Thus according to him the greatest safeguard for the Ganas is confederacy.
Then he points out another good feature of republican system, viz. The elders of the republics provided education & imparted discipline to the younger generation & thus prepared them for future responsibilities. Moreover, gana prospered because their established a sound legal system.

He also points to the efficient administration of the good republics in all the branches i.e. espionage, executive, revenue & military. They rewarded good, honest and efficient officers extended all the charitable help to the decrepit, affiliated and poor people.

Then he draws the weakest point of Gana polity, viz. dissension born of mutual suspicion, oppression, hatred and jealousy. To avoid the consequences of the above frailties, he suggests that the leader of gana (gana-mukhyas) should obey the president. The president should personally look in to the working of the espionage department. The president should also formulate the policy and secret resolution in consolation with a select body of Gana-Mukhyas. All the members of the gana need not secret resolutions. The president should administrator of criminal justice in consolation with the learned a sagacious men.

He asserts with singular emphasis that the internal danger was for more serious than the external one, as it struck at the very root. Therefore, dissension was to be avoided & guarded against at all coasts.

At the end, he points out the Gana that all the members of the Gana (the ruling aristocracy & not the entire populace) were equal by birth and family (Kula). The Gana was invulnerable to the policy of process (Udoyga), cleverness (Buddhi) and temptation
(Rupadravya). They were only vulnerable and susceptible to the policy of division (bheda). Thus the only safeguard against dissensions was confederacy.

Here, the good point in the Gana constitution are the observance of the laws of equality by birth & caste, the constitutional education and training given to the young of the community, sound legal procedure, mutual respect, good officers etc. & sound administration.

The weakest points in the Gana constitution is vulnerability to the policy of division (bheda) applied by the enemy, who takes advantage of their mutual animosity, jealousy, hearted and greed etc. Another weak point is the difficulty in guarding the secret of state. Consequently, internal danger become for giver than the external one.

Now, Bhisma advices the confederacy of Gana to avoid destruction resulting from the pursuance of the policy of divide and rule by the enemy and he wants the president to keep the state, secret.28 Dr. Jayaswal believes that the inference goes back to the period before the rise of Empire.29 But Dr. R.C. Majumdar believes that the evidence is posterary to that of the Arthasastra. Therefore, he opines that the liberal views expressed here are a reaction against the Machiavellian policy of Kautilya & new school possesses genuine sympathy for republics.30

In Mahabharata some non-monarchical communities viz. the Daradas, the Amdumbaras, the Balhikas, the Sivis, Malavas, the Pandaras, the Angas, and Vangas.31 They are called Srenimanta and Sastradharin (cf. Kshatriya Sreni of Kautilya and the Ayudhajivi
Samgha of Panini). It is said that 'Balhika heroes were all Rajas. (cf. Rajasabdopjivi of Kautilya).

Now, let us come to the constitutional features of great Andhak Vrishnis Samgha. The Yadavas were crushed to the effect that they could not have consecrated kings and Dasarnas (Andhak-Vrishnis) are expressly called kingless. They are considered to be identical with the ancient Satvatas mentioned in the Aitareya Brahmana. Bhaujyan type of constitution was prevalent among them in the days of Aitareya Brahmana.

In Mahabharata the Bhojas were a subdivision or one of the constituent people of Andhak-Vrishnis Samgha. The Samgha consisted of 18 kulas and 18000 brethren (adult member). Reference is also made to the elders of the Samgha (Bhoja-Rajanya-Vridhaih). This probably refers to the council of elders.

In Adi Paravan of Mahabharata Ugrasena is described as a Raja of the Vrishnis. In the Van Parava Vrishnis are described as protected by Ugrasena and Uadhava etc. Here, Ahuka is described as the Raja. In the Bhishma Parva Krishna is called the lord of Andhak Vrishni. When Arjuna elope Subhadra, her attendants went to the officer called Sabhapals. Who blew his trumpet loudly? All the Bhojas, Vrishnis and Andhakas were assembled in the Sabha called Sudharman. Balrama give lecture to appose Arjuna; But Krishna kept silence when asked to give his opinion he gave a logical cool headed & calm speech justifying the action of Arjuna and pleaded that he brought back and married to Arjuna & Subhadra with Vedic rites. At this meeting Ugrasena is conspicuous by his absence and it is Krishna who carries the house (Sabha) with him. Sudharman-hall is described as a
Sabra with thousands thrones. Father, son and brothers (Krishna, Pradyumna, Balrama, & Gada) took part in assembly proceedings together.

In Santi Parva of Mahabharata (ch. 82) a discussion on the affairs of the Andheka-Vrishni Samgha is recorded. It is called ‘an ancient history’ but is put in the mouth of Bhishma a contemporary of Krishna. Here, Krishna put his difficulties as a leader of Samgha to Narada and seeks his advice; the letter counsels him with sagacity, maturity and Insight.

Krishna tells Narada that ruler ship (Aisvarya) is a republic actually means the slavery of relatives. He pleads that although he is entitled to half of the rulership. Yet he only gets acrimonious and sarcastic speeches in return for his good deeds. He throws light on the Andhak-Vrishnis Samghas on the group-politics and a lot of nuisance value was a constant source of trouble to him. Krishna is too perturbed and anguished on account of all these and seeks the advice of Narada.

Narada forcefully explains to Krishna that the internal danger is for more serious and grave them the external one for republics. His analysis the various group intrigues & concludes that the Krishna should not have given political power from the hands of Babhrum-Ugrasena. In such an embittered backgrounds, he counsels Krishna to remain mild, soft-spoken & tolerant.

Narada advice Krishna to tolerance for bearance & magnanimity could only be expected from a great man & Krishna was one. These qualities were indispensable for Republican leader; only a great man, gifted with these qualities could serve the best interest
of republics. Narada asks Krishna to sacrifice his personal likes & dislikes for the Saka of greater good of the entire confederacy. In the end, Narada expresses his confidence in Krishna as he was endowed with all these noble qualities of head & heart.

Here, Krishna described himself as entitled to half of the executive power, but Narada calls himself leader of Andhak-Vrishnis Samgha revered by all sections (viz. Yadava, Kukuras, Bhojas, Andhaka & Vrishnis). Another Vrishnis leader entitled to the remaining half of the political power described as Babhru-Ugrasena. As, Yadavas did not have kings both of them were Samgha-Mukhyas. As we seen earlier, Uadhava & Ahuka are also described as Rajas but Ugrasena is mentioned as their Raja right from Adi Parva and so is Krishna. Therefore, the connection of few scholars that the Andhak-Vrishnis leadership rotated amongst members is untenable.

Like Bhisma, Narada two cautions Krishna against internal danger viz. disunion born of mutual bickering, jealousies etc. Narada asks Krishna to rise to the occasion and appease all the sections of the confederacy by tact, sweet speech, recognition of merit, honour, entertainment etc. & rising above his own personal likes and dislikes.

The weakest point of Samghas polity, disunion, dissension and internal strife. It is also evident that only a great man could be a successful president of the republics.

According to Panini there were two Rajanya leaders among the Andhak-Vrishini. He gives a special rule. How to mention them?52 Only the descendents of Svapalaka, Chitraka. Sivi and Vasudeva could be called Rajanyas and other like the Daipayas & Himanayas etc.; were calls Rajans only, although they too, belonged to that
The Kasika defines Rajaya as Abhishikta Vamsya, Kshatriyas i.e. leaders of families consecrated to rulership. The interference is that only the members of foundation families had privilege of political power to themselves. With the growth of population of Janpada the other Kashatriyas families might have migrated to those republics, but the center of political power was not altered. The other inhabitants had their allegiance and loyalty to the republics (Bhakti). Patanjali\(^{44}\) mentions the party (Varga) of Akhura & Vasudeva. This corroborates the Mahabharata evidence, where these fighting groups are described viz. that of Ahuka & Akhura. Jain *Antagadadasao* refers to the ten principal Dasarnas headed by Samudravijaya and five Mahavira’s with Baladev as their leader.\(^{45}\)

Dr. Jayaswal opines that the Andhaka-Vrishini league had a joint federal constitution, where executive power was vested in the Rajanyas, with the reference Vargas representing each division.\(^{46}\)

We think that there were two Samgha-mukhyas and not two Rajanyas, as all the descendants of Suapalaka. Chaitraka Sini and Vasudeva could call themselves Rajanyas.

The legend on the Vrishini coin was read as “*Vrishini-Raja-Janaganasya bhubharasya*” by Cunningham.\(^{47}\) But Bergny read the legend as “*Vrishini -a- Jajimaganasyatra -a- Tarasya*”. Rapson accept this.\(^{48}\) Mostly in all other republican coins, the name of the tribe (republics) & the republican chief is occurs together or separately but here the name of their chief is absent. This corroborates the evidence of Panini and Kasika i.e. the Rajayas were the ruling class among them. The Harshcharita refers to the Vrishini as a tribe indicating the decline and degeneration of the republican constitution.
Notes & References

1. गण्डबल्लमान (अयोध्या कातिल सर्ग 81, श्लोक 12) गणेश
   (युध्घर  कातिल सर्ग 127 श्लोक 4)

2- Ramayana, Kishkinda Kand 40, page, 22-23.

3- Ibid 41, page, 9-10

4- Ibid 42, page, 6-8

5- Ibid 43, page, 11-12

6- Ibid 43, page, 38-52

7- Mahabharata Shanti Paravan ch. 108

8- Ibid; Sabha Paravan page, 23, 4.

9- Mahabharata, Shanti Paravan Page, 24, 15.

10- Mahabharata Shabha Paravan Page, 24, 16.

11- Ibid 24, 17

13- Mahabharata- Sabha Paravan 28, 5-7.

14- Ibid,


16- Mahabharata Shanti Paravan, page, 82, 29.


18- Vishnu Puran, page, 4, 13, 1; Vayu Puranas 96, 1, 2.


20- Sat. Br. XIII 5.4.21.

21- Buddhachareta II-31.

22- Panini VI 2, 34.

23- Arthasastra, I 6, 3 pages, 11-12.

24- Divyavad 475, page, 9-10.

25- Sundarananda- Kavyan; page, 8, 45.

26- Cunningham, C.A.I. page, 70 P. IV.


28- The translation of Sri P.C. Roy (Mahabharata Shanti
The word "gana" applies to the republic here.


31. Mahabharata Sabha Pravan page, 48, 12-17.

32. Mahabharata Sabha Pravan XXXIV, 5.

33. Ait Br. VIII, 14.

34. Mahabharata Sabha P. XIII, Santi LXXXII, etc.

35. Mahabharata Sabha Parvan XIII, 54-56.


37. Mahabharata Adi Parva page, 211, 8.

38. Mahabharata, Aranyaka Parva page, 16, 12.

39. Ibid page, 16, 23.

40. Mahabharata, Adi. Page, 212, 14

41. Panini, VI, page, 2.34

42. अन्तःकृत्याय: एते लु राजाः: | पाणिनी
43- On Panini, IV page, 2,104, 11.

44- Antaquadadasao, page 4 (P.C. Vaidya edition)


46- C.A.I., P. 70 Pt IV, on paleographic grounds, the coin is referred to 1st & 2nd cent. B.C. J.A.R.S. 1900, Page, 416-420.

48- Rapson,