INTRODUCTION:

A) THE MAHAVARATA: The Mahabharata is, next to the Rigveda Samhita, perhaps the most remarkable work in Sanskrit literature. It is considered the greatest epic poem of the Hindus. It had been divided into eighteen parvas and it contains approximately 2,30,000 lines comprising 1,00,000 slokas. Thus the Mahabharata is about eight times the size of the 'ILIAD and ODYSSEY' put together. The gradual absorption of numerous upakhyanas or secondary tales has developed it into the present stage of nearly one lakh slokas from twenty-four thousand slokas of one stage. Most of the scholars believe that the completion of the writing of the Mahabharata was done in the fifth century A.C. Many of its legends and stories are of vedic character and of great entity which entitled it to the titles of the FIFTH VEDA. These legends or stories were in a scattered state and were finally arranged and reduced to writing by a Brahman or Brahmanas. There is a good deal of mystery about this, for the poem is attributed to a divine source. The reputed author was Krsna Dvaipayana, the arranger of the Vedas.

'The great war of the Bharatas' appears as in an encyclopaedic form. There is a popular belief that 'what cannot be found in the Bhārata is not to be found anywhere'. It actually represents a whole literature rather than a single homogeneous work, a veritable treasure house of Indian lore - both secular and religious.

* pp 183, Hindu Classical Dictionary - by John Dowson.
it attracts every Indian heart. 'The song of Victory' invariably depicts the deeds of heroism in a war to avenge insults to womanhood, and it maintains the superiority of just rights of a dynasty. It is a 'Purāṇa-Sāmbhita' or collection of old tales containing diverse stories of seers and sages, of beautiful maids and dutiful wives, of valiant warriors and kings. It is also a magnificent Kāvya or poem describing in inimitable language the fury of the battle-field, the stillness of the forest hermitage, the majesty of the roaring sea dancing with billows and laughing with foams, the just indignation of the true daughter of a warrior line and the lament of the aged mother of dead heroes'. This Bhārata shows us also the manual law and morality and socio-political philosophy. All moral and religious doctrines like 'Dharma', 'Artha', and 'Kāma' specially are laid down in a simple language which helps everyone to learn this 'śāstra' or sacred treatise. It deals not only with the religious philosophy of India including reverence to Narāyan, the Supreme spirit, the goddess Saraswati from whom flows the learning and arts, and Mara, the superman, the ideal fighter and seer, the close associate of God, but also for mankind in general. 'This is the holy mystery', declares the Śanti Parva of the great epic, "there is nothing nobler than humanity."

"The Mahābhārata is an authority teaching the rewards of pious donors and the punishments of impious despoilers. This shows that in the middle of the fifth century, it already possessed the same character as at present, that of a Smṛti or Dharmaśāstra'. According to the 'Chandogya Upanishad', the epic is called a Dharmaśāstra which is also 'Itihāsa Purāṇa' of the title 'FIFTH VEDA'. Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana took almost three years to complete the whole work. Different views are advanced as to the genuineness of one author Veda Vyasa as there are many spurious things. Still the
Mahābhārata claims its position as a Dharmasastra in the minds of the people than a record of events or history.

The uniformity of the language is sometimes disturbed and so the great epic has lost original character as a faithful history of different times. Nevertheless, it maintains the standard of the chivalry of the age and ably portrays the moral instruction manual to the war history. On the other hand, it is considered as the link of incomparable nature in the growth of the traditional literature between the Vedas on the one side and other literature of post-Vedic character on the other to be epitheted as the 'Itiḥāsa'. Again, this greater Bhārata has been esteemed as an Veda by itself — "a Veda which encompasses all the knowledge of the earlier four, and includes something more which the divine author, by virtue of his unbounded wisdom, added to the stock. The Upanishad speaking of the Mahābhārata as वेदाणि तत्त् recognises it not only as the fifth but something more than the four". Moreover, at the time when the Bhārata had its origin, the Vedas were not simply an expression of the fancies of the early man, nor his simple history. But they were more or less a treasury of thoughts of the highly philosophical man which he must have become. Clearly he appears to have perceived the conditions of the life, of a settled life in a society of a very complex character. If the Bhārata should now become something better than the Vedas, it must have made a truer and more definite expression of that development. Vyāsa himself remarks that things found in other treatises are well explained and illustrated in the Bhārata. The poise of the Bhārata is also found in "Markandeya Purāṇa". Just as Vyāsa is the foremost of all the deities, the Brāhmaṇa of all the
bipods, the vajra of all the weapons and Jaya of all the vegetables, so is the Bhârata the foremost of all the śāstras."

"The author himself tells us that the Bhārata bears a triple interpretation. Some take it as referring to "Manwadi" others as "Aṣṭikādī and some others as "Uparicharādī". This statement however gives occasion in the light of a strange training for a seemingly correct interpretation. The stories of "Mans", "Aṣṭikā" and "Uparicharā" occur at particular stages, and we are asked to suppose that the book was written or rather edited and improved by three different authors at different times, one having begun with Mans, another with Aṣṭikā and the third with Uparicharā. The traditional explanation of the three terms is as follows:

"The meaning of the Bhārata, in so far as it is a relation of the facts and events with which Sri Kṛṣṇa and the Pāṇḍavas are connected, is called 'Aṣṭikādī'(Historical). That interpretation by which we find lessons on Dharma, Bhakti and other ten qualities, 'arusa'(sacred study) and righteous practice, character and training on Dharma and the other gods, is called Manwadi(Religious and moral). Thirdly, the interpretation by which every sentence, word and syllable is shown to be significant name or to be declaration of the glories of the Almighty Ruler of the Universe, is called 'Uparicharādī'(transcendental). Bhakti(devotion), Jñāna(knowledge), Vairāgya(renunciation), Prājnā(intelligence), Medha(memory), Dhriti(earnestness), Sthiti(firmness), Yoga(pious), Prāṇa(energy), Bala(strength), all these ten constitute Bhāma and hence is Vāyu, of whom the Vedas declare these qualities. All branches of knowledge constitute Draupadī and so she is identified with Saraswatī. Duryodhana is Kali, the embodiment of Ajña(nescience) and all the evil qualities. Dumbāsana is misconception. The agnostic or the atheistic spirit is Sakuni, and similarly all the qualities. 'Aham-kaśā' is Drona's son; Drona and other chief leaders are the several senses and organs, and all the soldiery is representative of all sin.
The sons of Pandu on the other hand are righteous actions and Vishnu is the guide and the ruler. Thus the whole Bhirata bears an ethical interpretation whether in its historical aspect or any other; and appears essentially intended to glorify Vishnu. Such are the observations made by Vyasa himself.

The Mahabharata is sometimes called 'Jaya Kavya' mainly because of the wars between the Kuru-Panchalas or Kurupandavas and shows the glory of the victorious party or defeated parties who were none but the descendants of the Bharata race. It cannot be, of course, ascertained whether the Bharata is a pro-Pandavite or pro-Kauravite epic poem. It is one-fourth of the present Mahabharata. Some akhyanas are inseparable from the original Bharata though their insertions were doubtful.

The Mahabharata recited by Suta cannot but be a Parana; what Vaisampayana described is a narration; Narada Samhita, Vyasa and Vaisampayana sastra upanishad; Sanjaya Kavya; Yajnavalkya, philosophy of Yoga; and the current Mahabharata, a drama, was the product of rhapsodists and story-tellers who tried to hold their audience enthralled with new tales built up around the main story to create new interest everyday thoroughly heroic religious satirical and comical as fitting entertainment for different men and the stranger alike.

The present day Mahabharata undergoes many changes from the first writing of Vyasa. It is rather a strange thing that Vyasa himself admits some facts about changes. The Mahabharata is made vaisnavite in character. Whether this type of nature is traced in the original Bharata or not, the later editors seemed to be very much influenced by the divine superiority of Vyasa and the whole work of Mahabharata including the Harivamsa and the Gita is attributed to Veia Vyasa. Two things are prevalent strongly in the Bharata i.e., (1) the Bharata has been a work of the reputed extent and character and (2) that Sri Krishna is an avatar.

* Mahabharata Tatpar Jya Nirnaya, vide article by Subba Row.
* P.N. Mallick: The Mahabharata: A critical study.
of the Almighty God. Even Vyāsa praises Narayana in the beginning and the end by saying ' Nāsti Narayana samam na bhistam na bhavisyati - Etena satya vākyena sarvatam sādhyamham '.

Its origin :-

It is very difficult to trace the origin and date of the Mahābhārata. The evidence found in some shape or other in the Asvalayana Grhyasutra in which the Bhārata and the Mahābhārata have been pointed out, is near the fifth century B.C. It is generally considered to be about a century later than the Rāmāyana though the story and the scenes of the poem are anterior to the period mentioned. The Mahābhārata is mainly related to the Northern whereas the Rāmāyana to the Southern India and Ceylon. Weber to show that the Mahābhārata was known to Dion Chrysostom in the second half of the first century A.D. The professor believes that ' the earliest or the pre-brahmanical composition of both the epics took place, at a period not later than the fifth century B.C., but the first orderly completion of the two poems in their Brahmanised form may have taken place in the case of Rāmāyana about the beginning of the third century B.C., and in the case of Mahābhārata still later. Though Megasthenese did not mention the name of the Mahābhārata in about 315 B.C., yet he mentioned some names which may be interpreted as those of the epic. He mentioned the name of Heracles and his daughter Pāndī, has reference to Krishna and his sister Subhadrā, the wife of Arjuna.

Not a dissenting voice is heard against the author Vyāsa and the work is attributed to this holy sage Krishna Dwaipayana Vyāsa. It is gathered that the work was completed in three years. Still there are some evidences to show that the epic has been amended from time to time, that is to say, it passed through several stages of development in a slow and gradual process. " For the beginning of the epic poetry we must turn to the vedic texts the " ākhyānas " and the " itihāsas " embedded in Brahmanas and connected treatises and often recited at great sacrifices like the " rājasūya " and the " aśvamedha "
As well as hero-lauds sung praises in praise of mighty princes and warriors to the accompaniment of a musical instrument which in the Mahabharata is mentioned as 'sapta-tamtri-vina' i.e. seven-stringed lyre. (III.13.1) of the stories, songs and lauds referred to above, not a few proclaimed in sanctity of Kuruksetra the intrepidity of the 'inviolate' Arjuna and the glory and fame of Bharata, of Pratipa, of Santanu, of Dhritarastra, Vaichitravirja, of Parikshit, of Janmejaya and others of the Bharata or Kuru race and spoke of the feuds between the Kurus and 'Srinjayas' and the calamity that overtook the former. It is such legends and lays that formed the nucleus of an epic that assumed coherent shape some time before 'Asvalayana' had Panini who probably flourished in the fifth century B.C."

Originally, a heroic poem 'song of victory' is identified in Bharata (XVIII.5.49) and 'Bharata Katha' (I.61.3) which takes the victory of Arjuna and Krishna Devakiputra of Bharata race. Arjuna and Sri Krishna are identified also as Mara and Narayana in the sutas recited in the forests of Taxila, Naimisaranya and other places. The whole epic forgot nothing and absorbed everything.

Krishna Dwaipayana appeared as the son of sage Parasara in the island of Yamuna, long long before Dhritarastra of the Mahabharata was born. There is a belief that Vyasa at once composed the whole Bharata after being born and taught it to heavenly sage Narada and the gods. The people believed him to be an incarnation of Vishnu and Vyasa composed the epic in anticipation of the Kuru-Pandu story which well fitted to the work. But the acceptable view is that the original work must have been written, if not at the same time, at least at a time not very far from the date of the stirring events. In respect of this
question, we may for the present take as sound and valuable the arguments and conclusion of Rao Bahadur C.W. Vaidya, who fixes it about 3102 B.C.

Some others have, in a scholarly manner tried to make out the dates of the composition and compilation as ranging from B.C. 1700 to A.D. 200 or 300. In doing so, they have been obliged to explain the advent of Kali Yuga in two ways. They suppose that the astronomers' Kali Yuga has only an imaginary beginning, which is fixed at 3102 B.C., and that the advent of Kali spoken of in the Bharata is quite another. We are, however, disposed to think that the astronomers' calculation of Kali Yuga cannot be arbitrary, having no reference to some great event on this planet. The Kali era must as any other era be explained explicable only from some remarkable circumstances or events which was necessarily associated with astronomical positions."

"It is true that Jaimanjaya, the son of Parikshit and Bharata, the son of Dusmanta and Sakuntalā, already appeared in the Brāhmaṇas, and already in Kubapa song of the Atharvaveda. Parikshit is praised as a peace loving king under whose rule the land of the Kurus prospered. In the works belonging to the Yajurveda, there is frequent mention of Kurus and Panchalas or Kuru-Panchalas and in connection with a sacrificial feast of the Kuru-Panchalas, an anecdote is told in the R̥ṣiāpana, the son of Vichitravirya. On the other hand, nowhere in the whole Veda is the names of Pandu or of his sons, the Pāṇḍavas to be found, nowhere do such names as Duryodhana, Duḥśasana, Karna etc. appear. The name Arjuna does, it is true, occur in a Brāhmaṇa, but as a secret name of God Indra. The Sankhyana Sārastasutra (v.16) is the first place where we find mention of a war in Kuruksetra which was disastrous for the Kuravas.

In the Aśvalāyana Gṛhyasutra, Bharata and Mahābhārata are mentioned in the list of teachers and sacred books which are honoured by libations at the end of the study of the Veda. Panini teaches the formation of the name 'Yudhishthira', Bima and Vidura and the accent of the compound..."
word 'Mahābhārata'. Patanjali, however, is the first to make definite allusions to the story of the battle between the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas. §

It has already been said that it is very difficult to trace the origin of the Mahābhārata and its author. Though the epic as well as the Purāṇas and Ṛg- and Ṛg-Parāṇas are mentioned, the name of Vyāsa, according to Dr. Monier Williams in 'Indian Wisdom', is a mere epithet deriving from the Sanskrit verb 'Vy-as' meaning 'to dispose in regular sequence'. So, the name of Vyāsa may be applied to any compiler of later age. Again, Professor Lassen expresses his views in "Indische Alterthumskunde" (11.499 new edn.), that there were at least three consecutive workings up (bearbeitung) of that poem by different authors. The oldest version was simply called Bhārata which contained only 24,000 verses and gave the History of Manu, the progenitor of Kshatriya or military class (Adi Parvan, 3126). Vyāsa appeared in the snake sacrifice and commissioned his disciple Vaiśampāyana to recite the Kuru-Pāṇḍavas war at the request of the king Janmejaya. This can be found in the original Bhārata (oldest). Saunaka's horse sacrifice took place at about 400 B.C. and the second edition of the reconstructed form is found to be identical with Itiḥāsa mentioned in the Grhyasutras. The first history of the 'Itiḥāsas' began with the story of king Vasu and his daughter Satyavatī who was Vyāsa's mother and this section was called Paushya Parva. Professor Lassen views that, most probably, the third edition was reconstructed with the commencement of Paulava Parva.

There is every possibility about the revision of the present Mahābhārata. Bhārata Samhita is taken to be the origin of the Mahābhārata. But the Kaurus and the Pāṇḍavas were not the heroes of the Bhārata Samhītā; though they were included afterwards in the Samhītā as well as in the discourse between Asita Devala and Jaighisava in the...
same parva, chapter ccxl. The sages Śuka and Devala are found as the reciters of the book in chapter I, verse 106. Vaisampāyana, his great nephew Jajñavalkya and Saunaka, are clearly mentioned as the revisers of the Mahābhārata (Śānti Parva, ch. cl. II, verse 12 & 13). Jajñavalkya's edition starts with Aśīka Parva and that of Saunaka from Paulama Parva which deals with the account of Bṛighu. Actually, the current Mahābhārata begins with Saunaka's twelve years sacrifice with Sauti reciting the Mahābhārata. It is therefore, somehow accepted that Sauti's edition is the current Mahābhārata.

About the origin of the Mahābhārata, "Mac Donell remarks that the length of the original poem of Vyāsa is mentioned as 8,800 shlokas. This, in our opinion, is not true, and for the remark, perhaps, a foot-note in Weber is responsible. This figure is given in the Mahābhārata, as the number of the Kūta or riddles, of which we shall have to speak here after not as the number of shlokas in the original Mahābhārata itself. It is mentioned in the Mahābhārata that the industrious Krishna-Dwaipayana or Vyāsa composed his poem in three years, working day and night. It would be natural to expect that Vyāsa would begin his work with an account of himself, and the idea that Bṛārata really begins with Upariṣhāra seems very justifiable indeed."

The Mahābhārata has four editions. The episodes are described briefly and also elaborately according to the nature of the volume. How the Mahābhārata comes into being will be apparent from the following sloka:

"Trīṇśa cēhatasahasraṁcha devāloke pratiṣṭhitam
Pitṛye pāñcādasa proctāṁ gandharvesu caturddāsa — 106
Ekāṁ satasahasrantu māṇuṣeṇu pratiṣṭhitam
Maṁchasravayaddvānasito Devalah pitṛn ———— 107"

2. Ashtau shloka sahasrañca ashtau shloka śatānica
   Aham Vedmi Shuka vetti vetti Sanjayo vetti vā na vā — Adi Parva, 81-3.
The thirty lakhs shlokas of the first edition were recited by the great sage Nārada to the 'devatas' of the 'devaloka'. The second edition was recited by the sages Devala and Asita to the fathers of the 'father-land'. This consisted of fifteen lakhs slokas. The Gandharva, Yakṣa and Rākṣasas heard the third edition from the mouth of Sukadeva who recited fourteen lakh of slokas. Lastly, Vaiśampāyana recited one lac of slokas to the king Jamnajaya in Manuśyaloka and to his disciples.

Vaiśampāyana recited the Mahābhārata by the order of Vyāsa in the 'snake sacrifice' of the king Jamnajaya and Sūta Ugraśravā heard the recitation of the Mahābhārata for the first time.

Next time, Sūta Ugraśravā recited the whole Mahābhārata in the 'twelfth year Yajna' of the king Samnaka in the Naimisāranya forest. The great sage Vyāsa completed the Mahābhārata in hundred parvās. But Sūta Ugraśravā narrated the whole Mahābhārata in eighteen parvās.

According to the views expressed by Mr. R.C. Dutta in his 'Ancient Hindu Civilisation' (pp 10) he opined that the second sub-division of the Mantra period might be called as the epic period. Some scholars believe that a period of four to five centuries were required for the great
social and political changes of the epoch. So, the period may be taken approximately from 1400 B.C. to 1000 B.C.

"But the present Mahābhārata is not without faint traces of the bulk and contents of the original poem or collection of poems. In the beginning chapter already referred to it, is said that the "Mahābhārata Samhitā" (as the book is therein called) as originally composed by Vyāsa consisted of 24,000 shlokas and that in the form it did not include the episodes. Vyāsa is then said to have added to the original poem so that it grew into sixty lakhs shlokas of which only one lakh exists on the earth. In the second chapter, called the "Parva Sangraha" the enumeration of parvas or chapters, the number of shlokas enumerated is 84,836. But the actual number found in the current recensions of the poem, including the supplementary portion called the "Hari Vamsa" is 1,07,390.

There is earliest mention of the Mahābhārata in the Asvalayana Gṛhyasutras III. 44. The poem as well as the compilers were mentioned in the course of an enumeration of teachers and their works. So, the first form may be traced back in the earlier part of the Sutra period. The Brāhmaṇas and Upanishads spoke of an "Itihāsā purāṇā literature" which gave the battle song of the Kuru-Pāanchala war.

"To the period of this original epic doubtless belong", says Professor Macdonell, the traces of the Mahābhārata has preserved unchanged of the heroic spirit and the customs of ancient times, so different from the latter state of things which the Mahābhārata as we know it reflects.

a whole reflects. To this period also belongs the figure of Brahma as the highest god. The evidence of Pali literature shows that Brahma already occupied that position in Buddha's time. We may then perhaps assume that the original form of our epic came into being about the fifth century B.C. The subject matters involved: - Krishna Dwaipayana Vyasa composed the Mahabharata in a lucid manner and he showed to world the benedictions, strength, reality etc. through the story of the war of the Bharata race.

The main actors involved in the mythological story were Santanu, Vichitravirya, Dhritarashtra, Yudhisthira, Duryodhana, Bhima, Arjuna and Vasudeva Sri Krishna. But, Vyasa was the progenitor from whom the chief actors sprang out except Krishna. Vyasa was born as a result of sage Parashar and a nymph named Satyavati. Still, she remained virgin and the king Santanu, the father of Bhima, the greatest warrior, married her. The two sons of Satyavati died without issue. So, according to the wish of his mother Satyavati, Vyasa agreed to produce two sons named Dhritarashtra and Pandu on the wives of Vichitravirya, the eldest son of Satyavati, by Santanu. The wives of Vichitravirya were so frightened at the ugly sight of Vyasa that Dhritarashtra was born blind and Pandu became pale physically. Pandu married Kunti and Madri and led the life of ascetics in the forest. Dhritarashtra, the eldest, took charge of the kingdom and married Gandhari, the daughter of the king of Gandhara. Gandhari gave birth to hundred sons and a daughter named Duhsala who was given in marriage to king Jayadratha of Sindh. Dur-yodhana, the eldest son of Dhritarashtra was very wicked since his birth. In the meantime, Kunti also gave birth to three sons—Yudhisthira begotten by Yama, Bhima by Vayu and Arjuna by Indra. The second wife of Pandu, Madri gave birth to the twin sons Nakula and Sahadeva begotten by Asvini Kumar, the twin-gods of medicine. In course of time, Pandu himself was cursed by a sage to embrace death if he made any intercourse with his wife. Pandu died actually when he was in contact with Madri and Madri followed her husband at his death. All the Pandavas were led to the capital by the rishis and
they left the place after introducing the Pandavas to the king Dhritarasra, Bhima and Vidura. Dhritarasra embraced them all and expressed his grief at the sad death of his brother Pandu. The funeral rites of Pandu and Madri were performed in the capital and all mourned for the departed souls.

Dhritarasra educated the sons of Pandu as of his own. Bhima, the councillor warrior of the Kauravas, employed Drona, a Brahmin archer, for the learning of different skills of the archery by the Pandavas and the Kauravas. The Pandavas were strong and they could show their mastery over archery, mace, sword and other weapons within a short period. Arjuna, the third of the Pandavas, became the favourite student of Drona. In mace, both Duryodhana and Bhima showed great skill and mastery. But, the humble behaviour and strength of the Pandavas irritated the envious Kauravas. Soon, they decided to take drastic action against the Pandavas. Specially, the bold, crafty, malicious Duryodhana tried his level best to kill the stout, strong Bhima by administering poison and throwing him into the water in a state of unconsciousness. But, the Pandavas were saved generally by gods. The serpents in the water had bitten Bhima. The reaction of this biting was unexpectedly a blessing in disguise, for it neutralised the poisonous effect on the person of Bhima who not only recovered his senses but gained more physical strength than before. He also succeeded to free himself from the clutches of the deadly serpents. All foul attempts at his life made by the Kauravas were thus foiled by the grace of gods.

In the competition of skill in weapons arranged by Drona, Arjuna showed his mastery over archery and received applause from the audience. He brought rain, storm, mountain etc., and made them vanish at the very nose of the spectators. Bhima combatted in mace with Duryodhana. Both of them fought like bulls. They were stopped and separated by Kripa, the brother-in-law of Drona, as the combat took a serious turn. When Arjuna was about to finish his last skill, a loud voice was heard coming from the gate of the arena. Everyone was alerted and felt as though an earth-quake
tremor shook the whole venue. Much to everybody’s surprise, Karṇa with his coat of mail and arms appeared in the scene carrying a bow and arrows on his back. He challenged and successfully demonstrated every trick Arjuna did perform. After that, Karṇa expressed his eagerness to fight a duel with Arjuna. Duryodhana was so impressed by his valour and charmed by the shining armour of Karṇa, that he at once proclaimed and made him the king of Anga. Karṇa, in return, promised all friendship to Duryodhana. The duel was arranged. As a prelude to the duel each Arjuna and Karṇa was obliged to declare his father’s name. Karṇa fought shy to do so as he knew his father was no other but a humble charioteer, Adhiratha. Adhiratha, on the other hand, was overjoyed and could hardly suppress his mirth. Karṇa embraced his father reluctantly and was thoroughly embarrassed because of his humble social position, being so exposed. Kunti, who gave birth to Karṇa in her maidenhood days, recognized her secretly abandoned son and painted. The duel, however, was averted; and all left the arena in peace.

As Yudhishthira was the seniormost in age, Dhritarāstra appointed him ‘yūba-rāja’ or heir-apparent. But, this added insult to the injury the Kauravas had already suffered in the hands of Arjuna and Bhima. Dhritarāstra sent the Pāṇḍavas to Vāraṇavata for the sake of his son Duryodhana. Duryodhana, in the meantime, sent one minister Purandara by name to Vāraṇavata and asked him to build a beautiful house of lac, fire, food and igniting other combustible substances for the Pāṇḍavas in a manner that the Pāṇḍavas would not be in a position to detect anything about the materials used for the purpose. Purandara accomplished the task as suggested and induced the Pāṇḍavas to live in that magnificent looking house. But, the Pāṇḍavas felt rat and intuitively became conscious of Duryodhana’s evil intentions. They were also forewarned by Vidura, the pious brother of Dhritarāstra as to the devilish design of Duryodhana to get rid of the Pāṇḍavas. The Pāṇḍavas escaped through a tunnel inside the house which was dug by one of Vidura’s men. Bhima lit the house in which Purandara was sleeping. On that night, a low caste family consisting of six members slept
thereafter they took their meal at Pándavas' place. The next morning, six charred bodies were discovered in the gutted house. The Kauravas at once jumped to the conclusion that the Pándavas must have been burnt. The people too believed that and blamed Dhritarāstra and Duryodhana for this heinous act of barbarism. The escaped Pándavas, however, had to wander from forest to forest in disguise and in great hardship. They encountered two demons of extraordinary physical prowess. They were Vidumbi and Baka. Both of them, however, lost their lives in the hands of the mighty Bhīma during this roaming period of the Pándavas.

When the Pándavas were undergoing banishment in the forest, they came to know about the 'svayambara' of Draupadi, the daughter of the king of Panchalas. They also heard about the proclamation that Draupadi, select her husband from among the war-like princes who would be able to pierce the eye of a fish hung overhead by merely looking at its reflection in the water of a vessel but direct below on the ground. The Pándavas went to the venue of the svayambara in the guise of Brāhmīns. All the prince suitors failed to perform the skill. At last, the king extended the challenge to all. Arjuna came forward and bent the mighty bow and hit the target. The princes present, disputed over Arjuna's success and doubted about the performance. This time, Arjuna brought down the fish and showed them exactly the nature of his hitting the eye of the fish. It left no room for any doubt of Arjuna's mastery. The kings assembled there were ashamed of their failure and attacked Arjuna from all sides for their vain prestige. Bhīma and Arjuna defeated them all and Draupadī was brought home. The five Pándavas married Draupadī being abided by the order of their mother Kunti who asked them to divide themselves the thing they announced they brought as alms. The mother's command could not be evaded and Vyāsa too confirmed her direction. Draupadī thus became the common wife of the five Pándavas brothers. It was arranged that she should dwell for two days in the house of each of the five brothers in succession. This marriage had been justified by a piece of special pleading, which contended that the five princes
were all portions of one deity, and therefore only one distinct person to whom a woman might lawfully be married,"

Dhritarastra, at the advice of Vidura, asked the Pandavas along with their mother Kunti and Draupadi to live in his country as before. This was done in order to save his skin. Again, these Pandavas were ordered by Dhritarastra to live in Indraprastha and thus the kingdom was divided equally between Duryodhana and Yudhisthira. In the performance of Rajasuya by Yudhisthira, all the kings were subdued and they paid their homage to Yudhisthira. The wealth and power of the Pandavas pinched the heart of Duryodhana and he secured permission from king Dhritarastra to play gamble of dice with Yudhisthira. Sakuni, Duryodhana’s uncle, was a great gambler and a cheat. Yudhisthira was obliged to respond to the challenge of gambling though he was quite convinced of its bad effect. He lost his wealth, palace, soldiers, brothers and even his dear wife Draupadi in gambling. Draupadi was dragged out by Duhsasana, the brother of Duryodhana, to the court from her house during her menstrual period. Not only that, Duhsasana had gone to the extent of making her naked by drawing Draupadi’s only garment in the presence of old councillors like Bhima, Drona and father-in-law Dhritarastra. Bhima was outraged and vowed to drink the blood of Duhsasana in the battle. Draupadi prayed to Lord Krishna who appeared invisible in the scene and saved Draupadi from shame. Duhsasana drew and drew the piece of garment she had worn but was unsuccessful in making her naked as heaps of clothes were coming out of that single piece of cloth. Dhritarastra was pleased at Draupadi’s entreaty and gave her two boons by which everything lost were restored to the Pandavas. Again, Duryodhana challenged Yudhisthira to play dice and the challenge was accepted. This time, too, he lost everything including Draupadi. The Pandavas, according to the terms, were to undergo twelve years of exile in the forest and one year of existence in incognito during the thirteenth year.

All felt sorry for the Pandavas. The people blamed Dhritarastra again as he helped indirectly in this act of cheating done by

His son Duryodhana.The Pândavas with their common wife Draupadī were forced to leave the kingdom for the forest in pensive mood.

In the thirteenth year they entered the service of the king of Virāta in disguise — Yudhiṣṭhira as a skilful Brāhmaṇa sagester; Bhīma as a cook; Arjuna as a sumptuous teacher of music and dancing; Nakula as a horse-trainer; and Sahadeva as a herdman. Draupadī also took service as attendant and needle-woman of the queen Śudeshnā. The five princes each assumed two names, one for use among themselves and the other for public. Yudhiṣṭhira as Jaya in private and Kanka in public; Bhīma as Jayanta and Dālava; Arjuna as Viṣṇu and Brijan-malā; Nakula as Jaya-senā and Granthikā; Sahadeva as Jayad-bala and Arishta-nemi.

During their stay in the kingdom of Virāta, the Pândavas helped the king in many respects. Even Bhīma rescued the king Virāta from the hands of Suśarmā, the king of Trigarta. Arjuna alone defeated all the Kauravas who forcibly carried away the cows of the king Virāta. They exposed themselves to the king at the end of their thirteenth year and Uttarā, the beautiful daughter of the king Virāta was married to Abhimanyu, Arjuna’s son.

After the expiry of the thirteenth year, the Pândavas asked for the recovery of their kingdom. Śrī Kṛṣṇa himself tried his best for the trace between the Kauravas and the Pândavas. Even the proposal of handing over of five villages for the Pândavas was turned down by wicked Duryodhana. Duryodhana uttered that he would not yield an inch of ground to the Pândavas without battle. So, the efforts and advice made by Kṛṣṇa, Draupadī, Bhīma, Vidura proved nothing.

Both the Pândavas and the Kauravas made preparations for the great battle of Kurukṣetra. Kṛṣṇa agreed to be the charioteer of Arjuna and Duryodhana gladly accepted the soldiers of Kṛṣṇa. Before the beginning of the actual battle, Arjuna was perplexed by the sight of his relatives.

* pp 387. Bowson’s ‘A classical mythological dictionary.’
great-father, guru, brothers and was reluctant to fight. But, Krishna induced him to fight by reciting Gita and showed the action of time. The 'Maya' or illusion which surrounded Arjuna, had vanished and Arjuna agreed to kill the Kauravas. The army of Duryodhana was commanded by Bhima, Drona, Karna, Salya. But, all were killed in the battle of eighteen days. The soldiers of both the parties were eighteen 'akshamhitis'. The survivors were Ksapa, Asvathamah and Krtavarna in Kauravas' side with Duryodhana who was too killed at last by Bhima in their last duel of mace. In the fight in which Duryodhana fell, Asvathamah with Ksapa and Krtavarna killed the Panchalas, the five sons of Draupadi and the rest of the soldiers of the Pandavas. Only the Pandavas with Satyaki and Krishna were alive.

Yudhiṣṭhira was perturbed at the killing of so many relatives and he repented much for his deeds. He performed Aswamedha sacrifice at the advice of Sri Krishna and his peace of mind was restored. But, Dhritarashtra could not forget the loss of his hundred sons and mourned bitterly. He reproached Bhima and smashed the iron Bhima by embracing the figure. Krishna consoled them all. Dhritarashtra with Gandhāri and Kunti left to the forest where they perished in the forest fire. "Deep sorrow and remorse seized upon the Pandavas, and after a while Yudhiṣṭhira abdicated his throne and departed with his brothers to the Himalayas in order to reach the heaven of Indra on Mount Meru. A dog followed them from Hastinapura. The story of this journey is full of grandeur and tenderness. Sins and moral defects now proved fatal to the pilgrims. First fell Draupadi—"too great was her love for Arjuna". Next Sahadeva "he esteemed none equal to himself". Then Nakula "ever was the thought in his heart that there was none equal in beauty to him". Arjuna's turn came next: "In one day I could destroy all my enemies"—"such was Arjuna's boast, and he falls for he fulfilled it not". When Bhima fell he enquired the reason of his fall, and he was told," when thou gazedest on thy foe, thou hast cursed him with thy breath; therefore thou fallest to-day."
Yudhisthira, by the power of virtue, went alone and the dog followed him. He was invited by Indra to enter heaven without the dog. Yudhisthira refused to leave the dog anyway. So, Yama, who took the shape of the dog, was pleased with Yudhisthira and Indra took him to the heaven. Yudhisthira could not see his brothers but saw the Kauravas. So, he went to Yama's place 'Naraka'. Yudhisthira's only fault was that he told a lie to Drona in the battle-field. At last, Yama was pleased again and Yudhisthira saw his brothers and friends dwell with Indra in full content of heart for ever.

"Duryodhana is a great tree-grown out of passion, Karna is its trunk; Sakuni is its branches, Duhśasana is its fruits and flowers and weak Dhritarāstra is its root. Yudhisthira is a great tree created out of virtue and religion; Arjuna is its trunk, Bhīma is its branches; two sons of Mādrī are its flowers and fruits; and Kṛṣṇa, Brahmā and Brahmāmanas are its roots". (Mahābhārata -103-109 verse.)

The cultural and religious ideals portrayed in particular vaisnavite elements: Certain cultures were prevalent in the period of great war of the Mahābhārata. Mostly, socio-religious cultures were portraying the innerness of the Kauravas and the Pāndavas were related to the kings, queens, councillors etc.

A virtuous man was elected as the king. But he should have at least the requisite qualifications for the kingship. In several passages, mention is also made of kingless people, of corporations (gana) that are autonomous and warrior clans having a titular raja but actually governed by elders styled "Sangha-mukhyas".

The head of the state in the epic was no autocrat. He carried on the affairs of his realm with the assistance of a sabha, which was either an assembly of all the warriors of the clan (I, 220) or a council of elders consisting of the members of the royal family, generals, sub-ordinate allies and other military chiefs (V, 47, 10).
The circle of advisers and councillors was sometimes enlarged by the ad-
mission of priests and even representatives of the lower orders of the peo-
ples as the following extracts from the Sānti Parva (xii.85.66) seem to
indicate: — "I shall tell you (the king) what kinds of ministers should
be appointed by you. Four Brahmanas learned in the Vedas and ready-witted,
who have completed the period of study and discipline and are of pure con-
duct, and eight kshatriyas, all of whom should have physical strength and
be capable of wielding weapons, one and twenty vaisyas, all of whom should
be rich, and three sviras, every one of whom should be humble and of pure
conduct and devoted to his daily duties, and one man of the Suta caste,
possessing the knowledge of the puranas and the eight principal virtues,
should be your ministers".

"The royal advisers in the epic did not hesitate to upbraid
or reprove the king when he went wrong. The king had also to defer to the
wishes of the Brahmanas, the Srinimukhayas—elders of corporations (TII.816
and the people, whose opinion could not always be ignore’ (TII.170). The
connection between the king and his people was based on a theory of mutual
advantage. The king was to protect the people and do what was pleasing to
them (XII.59.125) in return for the taxes that he received. For the effi-
cient discharge of his duties he had to learn the Vedas and the &astra (II.512
(I.124) and practice self-control (V.129.34).

For purposes of self-defence and defeat of his enemies that
the king had to maintain a standing army with a senapati at its head. The
army was sub-divided into regiments and battalions styled ‘anikini’, ‘chuhi,
pritana, vâhini’, etc. The fighting forces consisted not only of chariots,
elephants, horses and infantry but also, according to some passages of the
twelfth book (59.411) of a navy, labourers, spies and local guides. Standards
and flags bore an important part in battle. Among weapons the most inter-
esting are the Yatra or "machine" and śataghni or "hundred-killer" which were
often used as projectiles (III.283-30 ft). The laws of war were humane
though they were not always observed in practice when feelings ran high.
The army seems to have been recruited from all castes, though the khatriyas naturally formed the predominant element. We have references not only to Brahmans generals but also Vaisya and Sudra warriors along with those belonging to the Khatriya caste (VII.47.18), for the great battle destructive of life, body and sins, brought on religious merit heaven and fame for all the Khatriya, Vaisya and Sudra heroes engaged in it.

Women were given a high place of honour in the epic society. They were also given freedom to move in their childhood. "The misogynists of the age no doubt spoke of girls as a torment (I.159.11) and women as the root of all evil (XIII.38.1). But the better mind of the age had nothing but veneration for their fair sex." "Women shall always be honoured, for when they are honoured the deities rejoiced" (XII.46-5,9). "Three things do not become impure—women, gems and water" (XII.165.32). "Women should not be slain" (XII.135.14).

The epic women generally got their education at their father's place. The privacy of women was prevalent in that period. Of course, the bride had to appear before the kings and princes when there was swayambhara. Sometimes, the women also appeared publicly at great national festival or sorrow.

There was also a social custom like polyandry. This system was however found in case of Draupadi marrying five Pandavas. The five-fold nature of Draupadi was divulged by learned Vyasa and he convinced Draupadi about the five 'amsas' of Indra, and Draupadi was Laksmi. Of course, opinions vary about the genuineness of this polyandry.

"Marriage in ancient India was regarded as a religious duty and a purificatory rite, and it is held to be one of the most

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2 pp 101-102. The Mahabharata and some aspects of its culture by Homa Chaudhury in 'The Cultural Heritage of India.' Vol I.
The birth of children initiates man and woman into the true idea of unselfish love, devotion and sacrifice. They are the keys to open the gates of Heaven, and the ancient Hindus justly regarded that a son saved the parent from hell. The most important subject connected with property is the law of heritage (daya) treated of in the 7th in Manu.

"The eldest brother may take the paternal property, entirely into his own hands and the rest may live under his control exactly as they used to live in their father's time." (105 verse).

The religion that was followed in the Mahābhārata age was in the praise of vaisnavism in which Kṛṣṇa was connected. The great author Vyāsa showed his prayers in words to Kṛṣṇa; but sometimes he was found to express his own blunt views about the genuineness of the incarnation in Kṛṣṇa. "It was for this that the great author of the Mahābhārata put forward ideal patriarchs in Pīshma, Drupada, and Karna, who were not on the side of Kṛṣṇa, the great reformer and hero of the day, with whom the great kings Drupada, Virāṭa, Matsya and the Pāṇḍavas allied to use force wherever necessary to convert the wicked and curb the evil propensities than ran so high in those days. Mahāru, Yamuchi and Britta were killed by the two Rāmas, and Kṛṣṇa Śīśupāla, Jarāsandha and Duryodhana were killed by Kṛṣṇa and the Pāṇḍavas."

The great warrior, statesman and religious teacher Śri Kṛṣṇa was considered as a divine being and later was worshipped as an incarnation of the supreme being. Kṛṣṇa's worship was confined to a smaller area, i.e., Mathurā and some neighbouring regions when Megasthenes visited India in the 3rd century B.C.

"Admitting that the main effect is to show that evil and evil-doers must ultimately fall and virtue must triumph, one might say that the Pāṇḍavas bear likeness to the Paradise Lost or some other work of that kind."
..."Otherwise, we could not see any meaning in the intimate association of Sri Krsna with the pandas so constantly exhibited throughout the work and we should be at a loss to understand how the supplement Narivamasa became a desideratum. Even to a casual reader, the general tenor of the work is evidently the glorification of Vishnu, and as such the work must be explained only with reference to the spirit of the Rigveda Sambhita. The various literary works of later periods invariably recognise this tenor of the Bharata.

The repeated reference to Vyasa as an avatar of Vishnu and that he made the Bharata vaisnavite in spirit must have some intrinsic relation and background to support the view. To show that the same spirit pervaded all the literature would then be the effect, the author intended to produce. Whether forming genuine portions or interpolations, chapter dedicated to other deities have not have been understood as in any manner sub-ordinating the vaisnavite spirit pervading the whole work.

In the Santi Parva, verses 6,65,81 to 82, it is found that Vyasa himself told Yudhisthira about the religion of Narayana which was the aim and object of original Bharata Sambhita to which the Mahabharata owed its origin. But long before this Santi Parva, the praise and worship of Sri Krsna could be found in the Sabha Parva. When all the princes were subjugated under Yudhisthira, a problem was raised by Yudhisthira as to who deserved the first 'arghya' or 'puja' in the Rajasuya sacrifice. Bhima declared Sri Krsna as the most worthy of all that were present. Bhima gave the reason of choosing Sri Krsna as follows:—"We have offered unto him the first worship, in view of his fame, his heroism, his success. There is none here of tender years whom we have not taken into consideration. Passing over many persons that are foremost for their virtues, we have regarded Hari as a deserving of the first worship. Amongst Brahmanas he that is superior in strength, amongst Katriyas he that is superior in possessions and wealth, and amongst Sudras he that is superior in years, deserveth to be worshipped.

In the matter of worship offered unto Govinda, there are two reasons, viz: knowledge of the Vedas and their branches, and also excess of strength. Who else is there in the world of men, than Kesava, that is so distinguished? Indeed, liberality, cleverness, knowledge of the Vedas, bravery, modesty, achievements, excellent, intelligence, humility, beauty, firmness, contentment, and prosperity, all dwell for ever in Achyuta. Therefore, ye kings, it behoveth ye to approve of the worship that hath been offered unto Krishna who is of great accomplishments, who is preceptor, father, guru, worthy of the Arghya and deserving of (everybody's) worship. Krishikesa is sacrificial priest, guru, worthy of being solicited to accept one's daughter in marriage, snataka, king, friend; therefore hath Achyuta been worshipped by us. Krishna is the origin of the Universe and that in which the universe is to be dissolved. Indeed, this universe of mobile and immobile creatures hath spring into existence for Krishna only. He is the unmanifest primal matter (Avyakta Prakriti) the creator, the eternal, and beyond (the ken of) all creatures. Therefore doth he un-fading glory deserve the highest worship. The intellect, the seat of sensibility, the primal elements, air, heat, water, space, earth and the four kinds of life (oviparous, viviparous, born of filth and vegetables) are all established in Krishna. The sun, the moon, the constellations, the planets, the principal directions, the intermediate directions, are all established in Krishna. As the Agnihotra is the foremost among all Vedic sacrifices, as the Gayatri is the foremost among mantras, as the king is the foremost among men, as the ocean is the foremost among all rivers, as the moon is the foremost among all constellations, as the sun is the foremost among all luminous bodies, as the Meru is the foremost among all mountains, as Garuda is the foremost among all birds, so, as long as the upward, downward, and sideway course of the universe lasteth, Kesava is the foremost among all the worlds including the regions of the celestials.

* Sabha Parva, Section XXXVIII, P. Roy's English translation of Mahābhārata.
The Mahābhārata, by virtue of its proclamation of the Kṛṣṇa-cult makes its 'Kṛṣṇa Veda' or Kṛṣṇa Veda. Kṛṣṇa, here, is also identified with Nārāyana or Viṣṇu. Vyāsa expressed his views thus: "There is nothing equal to Nārāyana, nor was, nor will be. With the help of this true proposition I shall explain all facts." (Subba Row). The Sanskrit original verse at the beginning and at the ending of the Mahābhārata is:

"Nāṣti Nārāyana samāna bhūta na bhavisyati,
Anena satyabāḥyana sarbametat sādhayām"

Sri Kṛṣṇa, as a whole in the Bhārata, is viewed as—(i) his connection with the story, (ii) he is considered to be Supreme Being, whose glories were sung by himself or by Viṇḍu, Bhīṣma and other sages, all concluding with praises of his supremacy.

"In fact the sect of Vaiṣṇavism must have passed through many stages of evolution, and in one period of its development Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa must have figured first as independent deities and in a later period they must have been identified with one another. We may concede that all the time of the composition of the original epic, Viṣṇu was the prominent god of the Indian people and that Kṛṣṇa was already recognised as a great man; but neither the worship of Viṣṇu nor the deification of Kṛṣṇa seems to have actuated the illustrious author in writing this grand work. Besides, it appears to be chronologically impossible to assign the Mahābhārata of the first stage to a period when the sectarian worship of Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa or Śiva was prevalent."

The Mahābhārata is looked upon as a secular Hindu scripture and the people praise the gods and they consider Kṛṣṇa to be the Supreme Being. Further proofs of Vaiṣṇavism or the Kṛṣṇa-cult are found in the Śānti Parva where Bhīṣma praised Kṛṣṇa and revealed divinity of Kṛṣṇa to Yudhīshthi-

and other Pāṇḍavas and the rāis. The Vaiṣṇavite elements are constantly accumulating in the Mahābhārata of later editions where Kṛṣṇa is praised

(" pp 168. Bhagavadgītā and Modern Scholarship by S.C Roy."

1 pp 168. Bhagavadgītā and Modern Scholarship by S.C Roy."
wherever opportunity comes. In chapters 68 and 69 of the Bhāṣā Parva, we have the theory of incarnation as believed by the Vaiśnavas given by the mouth of Bhīṣma, who wishes to impress on Duryodhana's mind, perhaps unsuccessfully, the greatness of Śrī Krishna.

........ "Vaishampayana was probably a more pronounced follower of the vaiṣṇavite creed than Vyāsa. For his Bhārata is recognised by the Vaiśnavas to have along with the Pancharatras, a special work belonging to the sect, the same sanctity as the Vedas themselves. The inclusion of the Bhāgavata Gitā and Vishnu Sahasra nāma in the Bhārata is probably the chief reason why it is held in so much reverence by the Vaiśnavas. The Bhāgavata Gitā, undoubtedly the most precious book in non-Vedic Sanskrit literature, contains, in our opinion, the preaching of Śrī Krishna, though not in his own words, but in the words of Vyāsa. It may have been re-arranged and altered here and there by Vaishampayana and made more vaiṣṇavite in appearance. But it is pre-eminently the thought of Śrī Krishna clothed in the language of Vyāsa. The Vishnu Sahasra Nāma may be attributed to Vaishampayana being more antique than the rest of the poem as we can judge from the language."

Scholars doubt about the vaiśnavite religion in the Mahābhārata period. Though, Śrī Kṛṣṇa was praised at the first opportunity still Vyāsa did not take side of Śrī Kṛṣṇa always. He gave his impartial views about the divinity of Kṛṣṇa. It might be presumed that the worship of Kṛṣṇa was in infancy at the period of the Mahābhārata of Vyāsa.

The inclusion of the Gītā in the Mahābhārata is still a mystery to scholars. Many are of opinion that it was included later on by someone who wanted to show the superiority and supremacy of Kṛṣṇa. Sometimes, a question arises in the mind automatically as to why Kṛṣṇa choose that time before the war to preach the doctrines of the Gītā to Arjuna? Actually, Arjuna was considered to be the fittest man by Śrī Kṛṣṇa to receive knowledge

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of the Gitā. As a friend of the Supreme Being, Arjuna could grasp the truth very easily. It is but natural for a human being to be perturbed when he sees that the vast enemy consisted of relatives only. So, it was necessary to show the whole universe in Him (Sri Krṣna) in order to convince Arjuna that everything in this world is controlled by no-one else but by Śri Krṣna. Arjuna was convinced that Krṣna simply acted as a friend, philosopher and guide. It will be apparent from the following line of Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood in the preface of the Gitā. It runs like:—

"Arjuna knows this yet, by a merciful ignorance, he sometimes forgets. Indeed, it is Krishna who makes him forget, since no ordinary man could bear the strain of constant companionship with God."

B). The Versions of the Mahābhārata in different provincial languages in Eastern India:— Mostly, the Mahābhārata of the easternmost sides were the translations of Sanskrit original during the Vaiṣṇava periods. The poets of different regions did receive all kinds of help and patronage from their respective kings. It is clear from this that the kings of those days were very much interested to bring the veritable treasures of Sanskrit literatures into the regional languages of their own.

Occasional wars between two neighbouring countries sometimes marred the inspiration of the poets who engaged themselves in rendering the old scriptures and did yeoman's service for the cause of their respective regional literatures. Mention must be made of the court of king Nārāyana as the centre of learning in the 15th and 16th century. Influence of one neighbouring language over another was unavoidable; yet, every poet used his own language in translation to make the work understandable by the common man as far as practicable.

Other states of India too were not lagging behind in this respect. Each contributed something towards the improvement of this own language and literature mostly through translation works from the original Sanskrit. In Tamil, the Mahābhārata was translated in the 12th century and 15th century, in Kāññarese in the 10th century and 15th century, in Marāthis in the first quarter of the eighteenth century.
It was quite natural that the poets of India were mostly inspired by the Vaisnava movement and were drawn towards epics, Puranas and upakhyanas for materials which might fit well in the preaching of the Vaisnava religion. The translated works thus formed the banner headlines of a newspaper, so to speak.

Assamese: (Rama Sarawati and others)

The Assamese rendering of the Mahabharata was started from the 13th century A.D. So to say, the Vaisnava movement too began simultaneously with the translation of the original Sanskrit texts since the beginning of the 13th century. It has been evidenced from the fact that the Assamese poets were scrupulously careful in selecting episodes or upakhyanas relating to the life of Lord Krishna.

The ruling princes or the kings were the main patrons. The poets were patronised by the kings or the ruling princes of their time. Hari-Vara Vipra composed "Vabruvahanar Yudha" based on Ashwamedha Parva of the original Mahabharata in the 13th century, and he has referred to the King Durlabhanarayana of Kamata for his generosity. According to E.P. Gait, Durlabhanarayan flourished in the 13th century. Kaviratna Saraswati's "Jayadratha Vaiha" under "Drona Parva" during the reign of King Indraratharayana, son of Durlabhanarayana and Rudra Kamlai's "Satyaki Praves" in the reign of Tamradhvaja deserve special mention.

Strictly speaking, the regular translation of the Mahabharata into Assamese accelerated during the reign of the Koc king Varanarayana. The learned king gave royal patronage to Rama Sarawati. He also patronised other poets who were certified by Rama Sarawati. The king Varanarayana made available the original manuscripts with commentaries to the poets "loaded in bullock carts".

It is presumed that the translation of the entire Mahabharata into Assamese from the original Sanskrit text was completed as early as in the 15th century. The major part of the translation work was done by
Rāma Saraswati under different names viz. Aniruddha, Kavlicandra, Bhārat-bhusanān, Srināth Brāhman. It is known from the poet himself that he alone composed thirty thousand verses and the rest of the poets did only three thousand to make it a complete whole. The entire Ādi Parva was translated by him in 1993 padas. "Sabhā Parva was done in 1073 padas with the collaboration of his son Gopināth Pāthak. Vana Parva together with its various upa-parvas was entirely the work of Rāma Saraswati himself. The Assamese version of the Vana-Parva contains several sections, viz.; Ādi-Vanaparva (833 padas), Puṣpaharana Vana Parva (584 padas), Manicandra Chosa Parva (1085 padas), Viḍāya Parva (922 padas), Sesā Vana Parva (718 padas) and Sindhu-yātrā Vana Parva (1842 padas). The Assamese version further includes Kālacala Vadhā (1847 padas), Baghāsura Vadhā (4125 padas), Khatāsura Vadhā (182 padas), Kurmāvalī Vadhā (366 padas), Aswakarṇa Vadhā (611 padas), Janghāsura Vadhā (304 padas) and Bhojakota Vadhā (not included in the present edition). " Each of these sections styled as Vadhā-Kāvya is of stupendous length in the nature of independent by virtue of its conception and execution. These Vadhā-Kāvyas are mainly depictions of superhuman deeds and exploits of the Pāndavas coloured with various proportions of myths, legends, tales of demons, of deities, of sages and of kings of ancient times. They have, therefore, very little in common with the original (1160 padas) epic.

Besides, Rāma Saraswati translated Udyoga (1160 padas) and Karna Parva (533 padas). He, with another contemporary poet Vidyā Panchanān, rendered Bhīṣma Parva (1553 padas). Drona Parva was the joint production of Rāma Saraswati, his son Gopināth and Dāmodara. Virata Parva was completed in 1331 padas mainly by Kamsāri Kāyastha who in his rendering closely followed the original. Kamsāri was a great scholar and even Rāma Saraswati calls him a good poet and a seer (rṣi). Some sections of this Parva go under the name of Srimanta Gābhara Khān "who with great care composed the verses". Other poets who translated the remaining Parvas were Dāmodara Nās (Sālaya).
Apart from the Mahabharata of Rama Saraswati, it will, perhaps, not be out of place to discuss something about another Assamese Mahabharata written by Kavindra Patra. This Mahabharata was written at the command of Laskar Paragal Khan, the captain of Hussain Shah of Gaur in 15th century.

The royal family of Gauripur claims poet Kavindra as their forefather. They still have preserved a copy of the manuscript of Kavindra’s Mahabharata in their library. Perhaps, recital of that Mahabharata was popular among the people of Goalpara. Even today the Virata Parva of Kavindra’s Mahabharata is recited by a section of the people in the Khorgaon area of Goalpara district.

Darrane Raj-Vamsavali throws some light about this poet Kavindra. According to it, one Sarvabhatra of Mithila, was a minister of King Biswa Singha. Biswa Singha appointed another Maithili Pandit named Narahari as his minister at the recommendation of Sarvabhatra. Narahari was a Kayastha. He had a son named Payonidhi. Payonidhi had two sons of whom Baninath was the youngest. His elder brother received the title ‘Kavikarnapura’ from the king and Baninath became famous as ‘Kavindra’. In course of time, Kavindra became a minister of the king.

Baninath accompanied Malladew and Sukladhwaj to Benaras for studying. They were also educated earlier by a Maithili scholar, Sarvabhatra, who used to stay in Viswa Simha’s court. Thus he enjoyed all the

* pp 1 to ii, Forward by B.K. Barua in ‘Asamiyā Mahabharata’, 1st part edited by Harinarayana Dutta Barua.
As Kavindra was a minister of Viswa Simha, he was obviously much older than Rama Saraswatī. He might have written his Mahābhārata long before Aniruddha. Kavindra's Mahābhārata is not a word for word translation from Sanskrit but undoubtedly a dependable and faithful one containing all the eighteen Parvas of the original Mahābhārata in concise form. His language has striking resemblance with the present day Rai Bangshi dialect of the Goalpara district.

He might have written his Mahābhārata earlier and recited the same in the court of Parāgal Khan in Chattagram as is evidenced by the last line in each Parva as follows:

"Vaisampayana kahe Jarmelaye sune
Kavindra kahila tāk Parāgal sthane ".
(Vaisampayana told and Jammejaya listened and Kavindra told these in the place of Paragal).

Again, he said,

"Tahā ādes māthe Kavindra kahila tātē
Sabha Parve kailsa viracit ".
(Kavindra narrated his Mahābhārata in the place of Paragal who felt amused).

Again, one thing can be mentioned here. In Kavindra's Bharata, there is an episode of a demon named Khatās asura. The demon was killed by Draupadi just as is narrated in the Assamese Mahābhārata. Of course, the Assamese version of Rāma Saraswatī gives the name of the demon as Khatasura. It may be presumed, therefore, that Kavindra's Mahābhārata contains episodes strikingly similar to those prevalent in the old Kamarupa.

The Assamese Mahābhārata is not a literal translation of the original epic in Sanskrit. There are abridgements, omissions, alterations and introductions of various local colours and the Mahābhārata enjoys its

** pp 135, Dimbeswar Neog's "New Light on History of Assamīya Literature".
popularity among the masses. Rama Saraswati and other Assamese poet-translators left aside the extracts of the original on law, morality and abstruse philosophy. Even, the Gita part consisting of eighteen chapters in the original is not wholly rendered. Only the most important chapters are included in the Assamese Mahabharata.

The characteristic genius of poet Rama Saraswati is well exhibited in the description of the Vaiha-Kavyas. He has described the episodes of the Vana Parva in such a manner that even the original Vana Parva of the Sanskrit Mahabharata (so far printed) pales into insignificance in comparison with the Assamese version. The Pandavas in Sanskrit Mahabharata, were roaming in the forests mostly with the sages and hermits. But in the Vana Parva of Rama Saraswati, everyone is thrilled with excitement at the danger of the Pandavas caused by the demons, rāṣṭasas etc.

Rama Saraswati is, however, seen to have referred in regard to the sources of his upa-parvas to Dwaipayana's version which he has amalgamated purposefully with Yamala Samhita and Hamsa-kāki.

"It will be interesting to know the contents of the upa-parvas joined to the Vana Parva. The poet claims (as it has been stated above), that he had the source of these in Sanskrit works of Vyāsa, which had the commentaries with them. He got these from the court library of king Naranarāyana. The poet also says that he has inserted the inner truths behind the facts and incidents and the inner truths dwell in ecstasy on the glory of Lord Kṛṣṇa. He writes verse after verse in singing 'līlācarita' of Kṛṣṇa, the ways of the Vaisnavas, and the cult of Bhakti. He sings further the praises of Śankaradeva who established Vaisnavism in Assam including Kāmarūpa and Koc Bhērā. He also sings the glory and praises of Naranarāyana and Suklādhva for their reverence for Śankaradeva, and for patronising the cause of learning and the Bhāgavata religion."

The upa-parvas and stories of the Pāṇḍavas in the Vana Parvas have been described in detail in the second chapter of the thesis. Also, the detailed account of the Assamese Mahābhārata along with the identification of the poets is fully discussed in the 2nd chapter.

The Version of the Bengali Mahābhārata (Kāśi Rāma Dāsa and others).

It was quite natural that the poets of the Vaisnava period engaged themselves in translation works, the origin of which was generally Sanskrit. Some Bengali poets translated Sanskrit Mahābhārata into Bengali in the 15th century.

There were controversies about the first Mahābhārata poet. Mostly, the authors of the History of Bengali literature were not certain about one poet. They were confused with the issue. But, they mention Kavindrā Parameśvar as the first Mahābhārata poet. Whoever he might be, mere mentioning of his name without any concrete proof does not carry any conviction.

The authors are of opinion that this translation work was done in the 15th century at the command of one Parāgal Khan who was deputed by Hussain Shah of Gaur as the head of an army to Tripura. Parāgal settled in Chattagram along with his son and showed his eagerness to listen to Mahābhārata within a short time. So, Kavindrā complied with his request and he mentioned Parāgal's words in his work. Chutl Khan, the son of Parāgal Khān is also found in Kavindrā's Mahābhārata. We may presume that both father and the son expressed their enthusiasm in listening Bharata Kathā.

One Sri Karanandi also translated the Aśvamedha Parva from Jaimini's Bhārata at the command of Chuti Khan. According to some authors, this Aśvamedha Parva was deviated slightly from that of Kavindrā's. Kavindrā generally tried to keep the spirit of the original Vyāsa's Sanskrit Mahābhārata. This led to the establishment of Sri Karanandi as another poet in the court of Parāgal Khān in the same period. Later on, Sri Karanandi was identified with Kavindrā.

So far as the 15th century is concerned, scholars like...
Dr. Wagen Vasu, Dr. Dinesh Sen, Dr. Sukumar Sen, Sri Mainindra Vasu, Dr. Sahidullah, Sri Basanta Chattopadhyaya forwarded the names of Sanjaya, Kavindra, Sri Karanamti and Vijaya. They could not come to a conclusion. Most of them opined that Sri Karanamti and Kavindra was the same person. Dr. Sukumar Sen wanted to support Kavindra, Sri Karanamti and Sanjaya as individual poets. Majority believed Sanjaya and Kavindra as one poet. In Basanta Chattopadhyaya’s language—Sanjaya’s Mahabhārata and Paragali Mahabhārata is the same.* The arguments and counter-arguments have spoilt the whole issue for the existence of one poet in the 15th century. So, the authors of History of Bengali Literature have avoided to draw any conclusion and have left the verdict open to the reader-scholars.

The only dependable Bengali Mahabhārata poet is Kāsirām Das whose contribution in this field of Bengali literature is acknowledged by all.

Kāsirām Das: He flourished in the 17th century. He was born in the village ‘Singi’ in Indrani Paraganā in the district of Burdwan. The village was situated on the bank of the river Brāhmanī. His father’s name was Kama-lākanta and the name of his grand-father was Sudhakara. Of the three brothers of the poet including himself, he was the middle. Krishnadas was the eldest and the youngest was Gaiādhara. They were Kayastha by birth and were followers of the Vaisnava cult. All the three brothers engaged themselves in writing. It is stated that Kāsirām was a teacher in the house of the king of Mīnapore.

Kāsirām had to depend more on his memory for the story of the Mahābhārata. Though he is said to have been fairly educated in Sanskrit, we miss any symptom of his profound knowledge in his writings. Nevertheless, the poetic diction and description are invariably there, besides occasional use of metaphorical languages.

He could not complete all the eighteen Parvas of Mahābhārata

* pp 68. Bānālā Sahityer Itivṛtta by Asit Bandopadhyaya.
during his life time. It would be clear from the following:

"Adi Sabha Vana Virata katadur
Iha raei Kasiram gela svargapur".

(Kasiram left for heaven after writing the verses of Adi, Sabha, Vana and some portions of Virata Parva).

Kasiram, the son of his brother corroborated the above statement. Kasiram completed his Adi Parva in 1768 A.D. during the reign of Malvavaninatha Radha Ranodara Simha. According to some authors, he completed his Virata Parva in 1604-05 A.D.

Kasiram Das's version of the Mahabharata is still very popular in Bengal.

Ram Chandra Khan: This poet translated Jaimini's Aswamedha Parva into Bengali in the 16th century. His father's name was Madhusudan whose village was in Jangipura. He was a Brahmin. He adopted Vaisnavism like the famous poet Kasiram.

Raghunath: During the reign of king Mukundadeva of Utkal, he composed Aswamedha Parva in 1567-68 A.D. But, his Mahabharata shows a similarity with that of Kasiram Das.

Again, mention may be made of the names of Kali Prasanna Simha and Rajaekhar Vasu as writers of the Mahabharata. Kali Prasanna's Mahabharata is a prose translation of Sanskrit Mahabharata in toto whereas Vasu wrote a condensed version of the Sanskrit Mahabharata in Bengali.

The Version of Hindi Mahabharata: (Gopinath, Gokulanath and Manideva)

Truly speaking, the history of Hindi literature does not provide more information about the version of Hindi Mahabharata within the range of Vaisnava literature. But, a translation work was undertaken jointly by Manideva, Gokulanath and Gopinath in the 18th century. This rendering, however, could not get publicity and popularity due to certain drawbacks. The lack of popularity must have been a setback on the part of Hindi literature. However, Dr. Dasarath Cjha of Delhi University gives an information that an incomplete portion of the work of the Mahabharata is preserved in the library of the
Maharaja of Kashi at Ramnagar. Again, Subal Singh wrote a concise Hindi Mahabharata in the 19th century. A translation of Sanskrit Mahabharata in modern Hindi was published by Hanuman Poddar of Gorakhpur Gita press which is a literal translation in prose.

**The Version of Oriya Mahabharata:** (Sarala Das and others).

In Oriya, the Mahabharata was also translated into Oriya verse. But, the poets who voluntarily rendered it were not of high academic merit. Nevertheless, the most famous among the Mahabharata poets of Orissa is Sarala Das, a peasant. He composed Oriya Mahabharata in his own style depending mostly on his imagination and practical experience. He had no free access to the Sanskrit original due to lack of adequate education. A peasant as he was, he busied himself more in tilling his soil rather than devote himself in studies to earn his bread.

**Sarala Das:** He flourished in the 14th-15th century during the reign of Kapilendra Deva, the founder and the greatest ruler of Solar dynasty in Orissa. This king made his country prosperous and extended his empire up to Warangal in the Southernmost side. Sarala Das was born during the days of this political harmony, and as such, happy reflections of his days are to found abundantly in his Mahabharata.

A semi-educated poet of his calibre, he had shown admirable guts in accomplishing the task of writing the Mahabharata in a neglected tongue. Considering his educational qualification which was practically negligible, his Mahabharata has been a unique piece of literary work. Undoubtedly he was a born-genius who could give such happy combination of time and man.

Legends and his assertions show that his native village was in Jhankada in the present District of Cuttuck. His descendants are still there scattered in villages. His samadhi near Kanakapura village is regarded as a holy place. His elder brother Parasurama was a ferry-keeper on the bank of the river Chandrabhagā. His name is mentioned in many places in his Mahabharata. Perhaps, Parasurama looked after the family of the poet, we believe.
relieved him of his worries and induced him to compose the Mahābhārata under the banyan tree undisturbed.

His power of imagination as materialised in his writing has been attributed to goddess Saralā. As a devout worshipper of the goddess, he never talked of himself under any circumstances. About his inspiration and goddess Saralā, he says:

"It is through the grace of the goddess Saralā that I have been able to make the invisible visible. I make no claim to the authorship of these lines, as I write only what she dictates to me *(Drona Parva)*. **

He confessed that he did not receive proper education, nor celebrity, not versed in japas or mantras, he wrote because his thoughts pricked him to do so and at the same time, the influence of goddess Saralā could not be over-ruled.

The poet declares himself a Sūtra. The legend runs: The poet received direct command from goddess Sarala to write the story of the Mahābhārata. The poet could not collect his memories of the discourses of the epics and the purāṇas by the Brāhmaṇ priests in the evening hours.

Saralā Dās was perhaps a military man." From the overpowering zest with which Saralā Dāś describes battles, duels, military campaigns and wars, one is convinced that he personally participated in the many historic military campaigns of the contemporary Kapilendrā Deva in Southern India.

He described the wars, battles, duels of the Mahābhārata by keeping in mind the practical experiences he gathered in actual battle-field. He pointed out real life of average Indian man and women and attracted people to the world of the reality with the portraying of exact rural pictures. He had a good vision to imagine the characters through very eyes of an Indian. His heroes and heroines were very active in the garb of an Indian man and woman with the true sensitiveness, sentiments and weakness. The

**pp 53. History of Oriya Literature by Dr. Maya'har Ma' Singh.**

*pp 54. History of Oriya Literature by Dr. Maya'har Ma' Singh.*
variant facets of the diamond of a woman bespeak of his great ovation of powers and unusual daring creations in search of human hearts.

His knowledge of the eighteen parvas Mahâbhârata was limited. He described this according to his own imagination and adjustment. He discarded many episodes but at the same time, enriched his Mahâbhârata with some interesting episodes or stories. So far as the philosophical doctrines were concerned, he scrupulously deleted those from his Mahâbhârata. As a great literary craftsman, he did his job well. New things were introduced. He tried to establish the greatness of low caste people. This he had done by referring to an episode in which it was stated that the establishment of God Jagannath was possible only with the assistance of a person of low caste. He had also inserted in his Mahâbhârata that the Pândavas stayed for long seventy years in Orissa.

Whatsoever might be his contributions, there is no denying the fact that Saralâ Dâs elevated the position of Criya Literature through his Mahâbhârata. He was a man, to whom, the literature was life and not philosophy or ethics or religion. He ignored any kind of idealistic preaching.

He gained his popularity through his Mahâbhârata and occupied an honoured place in the hearts of the common-folk. His Mahâbhârata is still regarded as a symbol of sanctity and sanctifying power of a scripture. Some of the Criya people recite ceremoniously his Mahâbhârata in order to get a child. The popularity of his Mahâbhârata among the common-folk is due to his vigorous and dashing style. He would not talk of an army without mentioning them in terms of millions and billions.

"These exaggerations give vivacity to all his narrations of episodes and incidents and are most enjoyable to the common peasant folk."
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** pp 65. History of Criya Literature by Dr. Mayadhar Man Singh.
There are at least thirty well-known versions of Ramayana and four or five recognised versions of Mahābhārata in Orissa. Saralā's Mahābhārata is the best seller.

The other Mahābhārata poets also contributed something towards the development of Oriya literature. The names of Krishna Singha and Fakiramohana Senapati can be mentioned as Mahābhārata poets in Oriya language.

Krishna Singha was the Rāja of Dharakot, a principality in Ganjam district. His work also received popularity.

Fakiramohana Senapati, famous as Vyasa Kavi or Saraswati, flourished in the period of 19th century. He translated single-handed the whole of Sanskrit Mahābhārata into Oriya verse. In recognition of his literary contribution towards Oriya literature, the title of 'Saraswati' was conferred on him by the Durbar of Bamanda State.