CHAPTER VI.

Conclusion.

(A). The Mahābhārata like the Rāmāyana, both being repositories of Indian culture and ideals of religion have been profitably utilised by the Assamese vaisnava poets in preaching Bhāgavatī Bhakti cult.

The reflections of Indian culture and religious ideals can be observed in the epics. Both the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyana contribute to the same end. The whole story in each portray human nature in different spheres. These are both legends and religious scriptures. This is true for the Rāmāyana also. Though the origin is Sanskrit, the provincial versions differ in representing the themes. The editors or translators mostly deviate from the original angle. Needless to mention that whatever might be the new angle, it has to be based on the origin. But in some provincial versions, it is found that only the names of characters are mentioned while the whole theme is shaped differently. For instance, the Rāmāyana in Hindi by Tulsidas portrays the characters of Rāma, Sītā and Laksmana in a manner that has direct appeal to the hearts of the people. He also adds thoughts from the Vedanta and the Bhāgavata. The Māraṣṭhi version also excels in its own modifications and ramifications.

The Rāmāyana seems to be more popular than the Mahābhārata in certain parts of India. The characters are taken as ideals of human life. Nevertheless, the importance of the characters of the Mahābhārata in regard to the depiction of human life can hardly be ignored. The Assamese, however, are fond of both the epics.

The Assamese poets of the vaisnava period endeavoured to propagate the Bhāgavata creed through these epics besides the Bhāgavata itself. The local colours and the spirit of the Bhāgavata are the dominant factors in their works.

The people always adapt themselves to the environments.
The epics are thus made subservient to the preaching of the Bhagavati religion of the Lord Krsna by setting the examples of the Pandavas who by their retreat and attachment to Krsna crossed all dangers and difficulties. So far as the Mahabharata is concerned, the doctrines of the Bhagavata are generally introduced by the poets to show the true path of the religion. The characters are made to act according to the tune of the Bhagavata. That is to say, they believe in Bhagaban Krsna as the Supreme Lord and the only resort. It is apparent in the characters of Bhisma, Draupadi, Yudhisthira and all the Pandavas.

There are many instances of the exploitation of the Bhagavati religion in the case of Bhisma and the Pandavas. Whenever they had to face some troubles, they surrendered themselves to Hari who rescued them ultimately. In the Santi Parva, Bhisma uttered -

"Hari vine samsarat nahi ke taraanta
Harise janiha samsarar pitamata,
Hari nabhajya yatne bhaje anya deva,
Tat kari ahyana jan nahi kai keva.
Nena jani Krsnar cane karai sara
Apunyo cara karai purupa uddhara".

V.V. 473-476, Sānti Parva, Assa, Maha.

Nobody shall rescue you except Hari. Hari is the parent of the world. It is foolishness on the part of anyone to surrender to other gods in place of Hari. So, surrender at the feet of Hari and save thyself, and your forefathers."

Bhisma is shown to have indulged in preaching Bhagavati religion in the Santi Parva while reclining in the death-bed of arrows. Krsna helped Bhisma with vision and wisdom. Again, the distress faced by the Pandavas could not distract them from worshipping Krsna and they proved to be loyal vaisnavas.

The Rāmāyaṇa spirit too is somewhat akin to that of the
Mahābhārata. The relation and devotion between the father and the sons, love for the father and the mother, sanctity of women, sacrifice, renunciation are to be found in the Rāmāyana with a religious background.

The Rāmāyana poet Ananta Kandali of Assam tried to insert the episodes and the doctrines of the Bhāgavata. His sole interest was to give chance to the public to know the inner truth of religion. He gave his Rāmāyana a Bhāgavati look and that was his speciality apart from the Rāmāyana of Mādhava Kandali. Some of the passages of Ananta Kandali’s Rāmāyana are quite significant.

"Rāmāyana katha pade nivandhilo
Bhāgavata carccha kari,
Hari katha vine durghor kalit
Tarite keho napari”.

-Rāmāyana (Ananta Kandali).

(I compose the verses of the Rāmāyana in verse after proper understanding of Bhāgavata. Nobody can escape death in the tumultuous Kali Yuga without the name of Hari.)

Again, this poet mentions Hari in another verse of his Rāmāyana -

"Sunyok savasad Rāmāyana punyapad,
Bhāgavata kathaye misrīt,
Bhakatak parityag Isvarar dukh lage
Dekhi aka thir kara citta”.

-V. Ramayana (Ananta Kandali).

(Listen, O' courtiers to the sacred verses of the Rāmāyana mixed up with the truths of the Bhāgavata. God feels unhappy forsaking the devotees (Bhakata). So, fix your mind in Him by meditation.

The Vyāsāsram is included in the Assamese Mahābhārata as it deals with Bhāgavata. Here, Bhisma appears as a true vaisnava. So, this book Vyāsāsram is now occupying a place in the society of the...
sastras. Specially, the Vyāsāram is considered as the part and parcel of the Vana Parva of the Mahābhārata and it is read with much esteem like that of the Bhāgavata.

In Assam, renderings of the Rāmāyana and the Mahābhārata were taken up in the periods mentioned below: - Rāmāyana of Vaisnava period (14th, 15th, 16th and 18th century) and Mahābhārata in Vaisnava period (13th, 14th, 16th and 18th century). The first Assamese Rāmāyana was done by Mādhava Kandali in the 14th century under the patronage of king Barāhi Rāj Mahāmānīka. The first in 13th -14th century was a part of Avśamedha Parva i.e., Vāsuvāha Yuddha.

The speciality in Assam is that both the Rāmāyana and the Mahābhārata are inclusive of the Bhāgavata. Rāma is more none but Kṛṣṇa's incarnation; and his activities are depicted as those of Kṛṣṇa's in the form of Rāma. Here is seen the influence of the great Vaisnava saints Śrī Sāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva. The Rāmāyana poet Ananta Kandali, a follower of Śrī Sāṅkaradeva wrote the Rāmāyana in verse incorporating the truths of the Bhāgavatī bhakti cult as the basis of his Rāmāyana. Not only that, another Rāmāyana poet Ananta Thākur Ātā (alias) Kāyastha Kriśayānanda - wrote the Rāmāyana for daily readings in the Bhāgavatī Vaisnava sastras. This work was given as such the Bhāgavatī garb. Another saint Kṛṣṇadeva Mahānta wrote a condensed Rāmāyana in prose in the 18th century - when prose literature in Assamese was already taking its concrete virile shape. This work is also dominated by the Bhāgavatī spirit.

As to the utilisation of the Mahābhārata in the preaching of the Bhāgavatī bhakti cult in Assam, much has been discussed in chapter V.

In neither the Rāmāyana nor the Mahābhārata the beauty of the Kāvyā is lost in the teachings of religion.
The episodes in the additional sub-parvas in the Vana Parva of the Assamese Mahabharata said to have been from Sanskrit originals may suggest later interpolations:

The Assamese Vana Parva has abundant episodes which deal mostly with the adventurous lives of the Pandavas. Some scholars call these stories to be of spurious nature and nothing but mere interpolation made by other poets. Whatevewer, these are referred to be in original form in Sanskrit Mahabharata composed by Veda Vyasa.

Of course, we are scrutinising carefully the possibilities of interpolations in later age. The suggestion is based on the original slokas which points directly that in any case, the Mahabharata should not exceed one lakh slokas. It is not so as far as the Assamese Mahabharata is considered, though the Assamese Vana Parva contains very little of the Sanskrit Vana Parva. At the same time, Assamese Vana Parva has some fine stories which are conspicuously absent in Sanskrit so far published.

Rama Sarasvati always suggested the name of Vyasa as the originator of all matters of the Mahabharata. He and other poets are frequently found to have exploited the situations of the Mahabharata by rendering referring to some rare books like Namsa-kaki, Yamala, Sambhi, Siva Rahasya, Vamana Rahasya, Adi Yamala etc. Until the existence of the books are established, the books referred to by Rama Sarasvati may be taken for granted. Otherwise, there is every possibility that the reading public may ignore or pay less attention to the additional stories. But, so far as the names of the mountains, jungles and demons are concerned, we may have to presume that these local things were prevalent in Assam; and actually these stories were the indigenous creations of the Assamese poets of high calibre. It may also be suggested that these Assamese poets having profound knowledge of Sanskrit, invented these additional episodes with local colour to draw special attention of all
to the preaching of the Bhāgavatī religion. Some eminent poets like Rāma Sarasvatī took the task of translating by giving reference of Vyāsa who was no other than the compiler or the arranger.

We know that the poet Rāma Sarasvatī got the Sanskrit texts with commentaries from the Koc king Naranārayana. Evidently some books of original Sanskrit depicting the lives of the Pandavas in the forest were available in the court libraries of the kings, especially in the court of king Naranārayana, a great patron king of learning. Now, for reasons best known to the researchers, if not shrouded with mystery, the original Sanskrit books have become untraceable. Discovery of at least one manuscript of the Vana Parva would have been of much special value. No laudable venture has yet been made to make a thorough search either of the lost manuscripts or if those still extant scattered all over Assam in their original Sanskrit garb.

Leaving this question aside it must be admitted that the version of the Assamese Mahābhārata is indeed a marvellous work. In matters of facts, poetic excellence and narrative genius of the poet Rāma Sarasvatī, specially, with the Bhāgavatīka religious tenets incorporated into it, the Assamese Mahābhārata is a great contribution to the stock of Indian literature as a whole. A faithful rendering of the work would have been highly profitable in this respect.

Another point that deserves mention in this connection is that in no other provincial languages of India had the two great epics of Ramāyana and of Mahābhārata been equally embraced in the preaching of religion in the era of vāishāvīna revival. In Upper India, the Hindi Ramāyana of Tulsidas served greatly in the preaching not only of the Ramāyaṇa Rāma-bhakti cult but also in enlightening the people on the Vedantic truths and the Bhāgavatī bhakti cult. This great work has ever since been the source of religious inspiration to the people at large. The Mahābhārata do not seem to have had so much influence as the Ramāyaṇa.
of Tulsidas in Upper India. As a matter of fact, the condensed metrical Mahābhārata of 2400 verses of Subal Singh was written in 1670 A.D. and that of Raghunāth in 1745 A.D. Both of these works have become out of touch and untraceable in course of time. A further attempt at rendering the Mahābhārata into Hindi was made in the 19th century which again was lost in memory. In Bengal the most renowned Mahābhārata poet Kāśirām Dās wrote his Mahābhārata in the first quarter of the seventeenth century though it is claimed that the first attempt at the rendering the epic into Bengali was made as back as in the fourteenth century A.D. Even in Bengal, the two epics, the Rāmāyana and the Mahābhārata remained as epics and appealed to people as such and were not tinged with the spirit of religious enthusiasm connected with the Bhāgavati bhakti cult. Neither was there a literal translation of the whole Mahābhārata or the Rāmāyana. The Rāmāyana of Kṛttibās and the Mahābhārata of Kāśirām Dās are only condensed popular versions of the originals. The literal translation of the two epics appeared in the present century, like that of the Hindi version.

With all these data available at our command, we not only can claim the Assamese Mahābhārata and Rāmāyana to be the veritable sources of inspiration to the people of Assam of the 16th century down to the present day, so far as their faith in the Bhāgavati Bhakti cult is concerned; but also as great literatures in shaping the very fabric of their way of living in general and social behaviour in particular. Added to this we have Śrī Śāṅkaradeva and Śrī Mādhavadeva's 'Kirtana' and 'Nāma Ghoṣā' respectively preaching the 'Eksaraṇa Nāma Dharma' of the Bhāgavata intermixed with socio-religious institutions like the sattras shaping the minds of the people to believe in one Supreme Being—God or Kṛṣṇa of their conception.