AN OUTLINE OF POLITICAL HISTORY OF KURUKŞETRA

A critical examination of the Mahābhārata shows that it is far from being homogeneous as regards its composition. This is natural since as is well known, the work grew out of an older nucleus to which successive additions were made. In its present form, the Mahābhārata is an historical work as well as an encyclopedia of moral and political wisdom. As regards the historical value of the accounts in the Mahābhārata and of the age to which it refers, it is of great service to us inspite of the fact that certain chapters are very late and certain chapters show signs of subsequent handling and that the accounts in some of the chapters often contradict each other. All these take away indeed much of its value and bring in perplexities to the mind that ventures with its help to penetrate the mist of ages and to have a glimpse of a remote past of which everything else is lost. In spite of these defects, however, they present us with something tangible as regards the history of the past.
This account of Great War and the events preceding it are based on traditions. We must utilize these tradition which present us with the account of the political condition of Northern India for yielding materials for the reconstruction of the early history of Kurukṣetra as far as possible.

If we trace back the great names of the Mahābhārata we find them mentioned in works of the later Vedic period. In some cases they go earlier. Thus Devāpi and Śāntanu are names occurring in Ṛkhymns. Dhṛtarāśtra is an historical personage and his name is mentioned in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa. Kṛṣṇa Devakīputra, who plays so prominent a part in the Epic, is a name that occurs in the Chāndogya Upnīṣad, where he is described as a disciple of Ghora Angirasa. Arjuna, too is mentioned both in the Vājaṣaneyi Saṁhitā and the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa. Janamejaya Parīkṣitā finds place both in the 11th and 13th Kāndas of the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa in connection with his Aśvamedha to expriate for Brahmahatyā.

From all these we may infer that the account of the Mahābhārata refers to a portion of the later Vedic age. This view gets confirmation when we compare the social and political condition reflected in the Epic with that found in the later Vedic Hymns. In both we find the existence
of a comparatively archaic society. In both we find social customs which became obsolete in subsequent ages. In both we have pictures of simpler political institutions—the small city-state, the ruling tribe or state of moderate size—both speaking of the supremacy of the popular will. All appear to tally with this difference that the account of the Mahābhārata is a little more decorated with poetic imagination.

That such a traditional account of the Vedas existed in very early times is proved by subsequent evidence furnished by classical literature. The Āśvalāyana Gṛhya Sūtra mentions the Bhārata and Mahābhārata. Again the Sūtras of Pāṇini speak of Vāsudeva, Arjuna, Yuddhiṣṭhira and the Vṛṣnis, as also of Droṇa, Hashinapura and the word Mahābhārata though its connotation is disputed.

In the 4th century B.C. we find mention in the Arthasastra of all the principal personages and the heroes of the Great Epic. It also refers to the dice-play between Yuddhiṣṭhira and Duryādhana and also reminds one of Nala and his downfall caused by his addiction to the same. It accords it a high place and probably gives it the high position of a fifth Veda—the Itiḥāsa Veda.

It also refers to the downfall of the Vṛṣni-Saṅgha through the arrogance of the Yādavas towards Dvaipayana,
and mentions in the chapter on Indriya-jaya some more names which are found in the Great Epic.

From a consideration of the above facts we may come to the conclusion that a traditional account of the happenings on the eve of the Great War existed. These accounts underwent modifications at the hands of the later compilers. In spite of all this however, the state of political conditions or social condition depicted in it has not undergone any drastic modernisation and any one who carefully goes through the Mahābhārata is sure to find in it a picture of an archaic society. The Epic suggests that all the kings of the Kuru line from the father of Śāntanu to Janamejaya ascended the throne with approval of people. The people interfered in matters of succession, and we have in the Epic at least two instances of the people, one instance relates to a king being exiled by the citizens who approach another prince and wish to choose him. Also when a king handed over his regal authority to another it required the approval of the people and the kings feared to commit arbitrary acts lest the people brought them to book.

The original historical kernel of the great Epic gives us a detailed account of the Kuru rulers of that time and incidentally furnishes us with a contemporary
general account of Indian states and clans. The political condition of India about the time of the Great War was critical. The whole of Northern India was divided into a number of small states more or less independent as far as internal government was concerned but acknowledging the suzerainty of the paramount power of the day. The region around the Kuru country or Madhyadesa was regarded as intellectual and also the cultural centre of Aryans. In the land of the Kuru and Matsyas the rulers were princes in names only. In the Kuru country this popular sovereignty was so great that it is difficult to form easily an impression as to whether the government can be described as a true monarchy at all or not.

The Mahābhārata records the traditional history of the Kuru country. As to other states we only have some passing references or some details which we get in the description on the eve of the great war. Although the Mahābhārata mentions Manusvāyambhuva it does not give a detailed account of his dynasty which is supposed to be ante-Deluvian.14 In the Bhāgvata15, however, we learn that this Manu, who is said to be the son of Brahmā Svāyambhuva ruled a large kingdom of nine continents from his capital Brhishmatī on the sacred Sarasvatī. His genealogy is given in the purāṇas like Viṣṇu16, Vāyu17 and Bhāgvata.18 Although there are minor differences, the
first two sources contain twenty nine kings in this dynasty while the last mentions thirty-one.

Out of these kings Prthu Vainya was a great monarch. His association with Kurukṣetra is supported by the existence of the city of Prthudāka, identified with the present Pehowa at the confluence of the Sarasvatī and the Aruṇā rivers. According to the Mahābhārata Prthu made the country prosperous and during his time the earth yielded crops in sufficiency. Even the gods told him to observe righteousness and punish the wicked. He is said to have made the earth even and introduced agriculture. He created the bow and milked the earth for grains and protected it virtuously. The Epic describes his achievements at many places and agrees with the purāṇas in depicting him as a great king.

According to the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa the deluge took place in the time of Manu Vaivasvata who survived it. He is accorded the honour of being the progenitor of all the ruling dynasties of India and usually described as the first king. The genealogy of this line is given in the Mahābhārata, (Chapter 90 of Ādīparva) where forty two kings are named. The list is reproduced below:
Genology of Kings.

Dakṣa
Aditi
Vivasvan
Manu
Ilā
Pururava
Āyusa
Nahuṣa
Yāyāti
Puru
Jānamejaya
Prācinvata
Sāmyāti
Ahamyāti
Sārbarthauma
Jāyatsena
Avācīna
Māhāthauma
Ayutănāyin
Akrodhana
Dvātithi
Ārīha
Ṛksa
Mātināra
Tāmsu
Ilin
Dūṣyanta
Bharata
Bhumanyu
Jāya
Sūhotra
Hāstin
Genology of kings (contd...)

Vikunthana
Ajamitha
Samvarana
Kuru
Vidura
Aruqmat
Parikshit-I
BhimaSena
Pratipava
Pratipa
Santanu
VictravIrya
Pandu
Yudhishtira
Parikshit-II

Names of kings not directly connected with the purpose have been omitted from this list. Names of some kings are mentioned in some other chapters like Chapter-81 of the 'Adi Parva! For example following different names are given between the kings Puru and Matinara.

Puru
Pravira
Raudrasva
Rceyu
Matinara
Again the following names are mentioned between Kuru and Pratīpa.

Kuru
   Ásvavat
   Avikṣit
   Parikṣit
   Dhṛtarāśtra
   Pratīpa

Some of these kings are well known even to the Vedic literature and their connection with Kurukṣetra is easily established. Manu himself is associated with the town of Sthānaviśvara in the Avantiśundrikathā.\(^2^5\) Pururavā is supposed to have moved around the lotus lakes of Kurukṣetra in search of his beloved Urvasī.\(^2^6\) His capital Prātiśthāna and Ailadhāna have been identified with the towns of Patadan on the Ghagghar-Sarasvatī and Ludhiana on the Sutlej respectively.\(^2^7\) Yayāti, son of Nahuṣa is said to have been blessed with milk and honey by the sacred Sarasvatī which was most probably the region of his activity. The Mahābhārata accords considerable space to the story of Yayāti's marriage with Śarmiṣṭhā and Devayāni.\(^2^8\) One Janmejaya Parikṣit probably an ancestor of the pāṇḍavas is mentioned in the Brāhmaṇas in connection with the performance of Āsvamedha sacrifices at Āsandivata which has been identified with Asandh and Karoti near Nohar in Rajasthana.\(^2^9\)
Not much is known about most of the other names in this long list. It is, however, obvious that the Epic is primarily the history of Kurukṣetra. The kings immediately preceding the Kaurvas and Pāṇḍavas, therefore deserve special mention. In this light the traditional account of the reigns of the following five generations become particularly relevant.

Pratīpa

Devāpi Śāntanu Bahlika
(Inherited maternal Grandfather's dominion)

Bhiṣma Vicitravīrya and Chitrāngada

Dhrtrāstra Pāṇdu Vidura
(Paraśara)

Duryodhana Yajutra Yudhiṣṭhīra &
and his 99 brothers by Vaiśya the five brothers

Parikṣit

Janamejaya

Now from the account recorded in the great Epic
we find that in the reign of each of these kings we have some constitutional event of importance to record and from these we can form an idea as to the extent of popular sovereignty. A brief account can be reconstructed from the Epic on the following lines.

Pratīpa had three sons e.g. Devāpā, Bālhīka and Śāntanu. Devāpā suffered from some skin disease. When old the king thought of installing Devāpā on the throne and made preparations for his investiture. Thereupon the Brāhmaṇas, the old people, and the citizens prevented him. They approached him and said that though the young prince was worthy and otherwise agreeable, he suffered from skin disease and was not acceptable to the gods.

Dissuaded by the force of their argument and the weight of their opinion the king had to give way and abandon the idea of crowning Devāpā. This, however, made him unhappy and he retired to the forest. On his withdrawal the second son Bālhīka became king for some time, but he too abdicated in favour of his younger brother Śāntanu who was crowned king by the people and the magnates. Śāntanu's reign, otherwise uneventful, is marked towards its end by an event of constitutional importance. It was the voluntary abdication of his only legitimate son and heir to the throne— the celebrated
Bhiṣma. The king being smitten with love for the daughter of a fisherman, and yet not accepting her, on account of the hard terms proposed by the father's of the girl, who insisted on the stipulation that the son of his daughter by the king would be the heir to the throne to the exclusion of the virtuous Bhiṣma. The king was in a difficult position. The dutiful son to fulfil his father's desires boldly went to the fisherman, and asked him to give his daughter to the king and to remove all objections on his part, he voluntarily renounced his claim to the throne in a Sabhā in the presence of the members. Sāntanu by this marriage had two sons Chitrāṇāgada and Vicitravīrya. The elder succeeded as a king but soon he was killed in a war with the Gandhrvas while the faithful Bhiṣma acted as the real rules of the state, though he always acted as the servant of the younger brother and administered the state, according to the counsel of his step mother Satyavatī.

Bhiṣma distinguished himself by his noble and disinterested service to the state and very soon he singalised his devotion by acquiring three brides for his step-brother Vicitravīrya. One of these brides Ambālika was, however, sent back to her own kinsmen on account of her entreaties that she had chosen the king of Kāśī as her lord.
This however, proved a great misfortune for her. The king of Kālī rejected her since she was the victory prize of another according to the customs of those days. Rejected by both the parties she in revenge implored the assistance of Rāma Jamadagneya—The Great Champion of military Brāhmaṇism, who come to persuade Bhiṣma to take her for one of his brothers. This being refused, the two decided to appeal to the supreme arbitration of force and fought for several days. The combat ended in a draw.  

In the Udyoga parva (Chapter 129) we have an account of the history of the Kuru country recorded by Bhiṣma himself. From that we know that Vicitravīrya who succeeded Śāntanu was too fond of women and consequently fell a victim to Yaksha (Phthisis) and consumption and at the same time the Kuru country being invaded by the terrible Brāhmaṇa warrior Paraśurāma the king was banished by the citizens.

Next a pestilence broke out and carried away a large number of inhabitants and only a small portion of the population survived. There was no king, the government fell into disorder and the misery of the people knew no bounds. Thereupon the people headed by the elders approached Bhiṣma the rightful heir to the throne. They together with Kāli, the wife of Śāntanu (Step-mother of Bhiṣma) be sought the worthy prince to take up the reins of government and to save the country from destruction.
This however, Bhiṣma refused. He reminded them of his vow (which he had taken before the assembly) of celebacy and of renunciation, and persuaded the queen-mother to allow the widowed queens of the late sovereign to raise issue by the practice of Niyoga.

She got three sons. Of these the eldest Dhṛtarāśtra was not eligible for kingship as he was blind. Vidura too was excluded being born of a slave-girl. Pāṇḍu became king though for a time Bhiṣma acted as a real ruler of the country.

Pāṇḍu, however, soon forsook the world and with his wives spent his time in the forest, making over his kingdom to his blind brother. The blind Dhṛtarāśtra then came the next king. His claims thus rested on his brother's abdication and gift and popular sanction. Probably this popular support enabled him to rule, for there existed a section of elders, who never recognized him as king.

Thus it would appear from the Epic that Dhṛtarāśtra held the throne by virtue of his brother's abdication, and acceptance by the people. Some of the Kuru elders like Drona regarded Dhṛtarāśtra as a rightful king, though they never thought of this as constituting a bar to the succession of the Pāṇḍavas. Others like Bhiṣma regarded Dhṛtarāśtra
as a mere figure-head representing royalty and sought to further the cause of the young prince Yudhiṣṭhira, the son of Pāṇḍu to the exclusion of Dhrītarāṣṭra's sons.

The sons of Pāṇḍu grew up to manhood. Their virtues attracted the people to their side, and they now began to speak openly for the accession of the Pāṇḍu prince to the throne. This was galling to Duryodhana the eldest of Dhrītarāṣṭra's sons, and he relates to his father the whole story of the great popularity of the Pāṇḍavas. The people wanted the Pāṇḍavas to be their rulers in place of Dhrītarāṣṭra, Duryodhana thereupon asked his father to banish the five brothers to the city of Vārṇāvata thus removing them away from the eyes of the citizens. This, however, was a step which the old king did not disapprove. But he feared the consequences of the step which might lead to a revolution, in which the people were sure to take the side of virtuous Yudhiṣṭhira. The king feared for his own life and the lives of his sons, who were sure to fall victims to popular fury.

Events did not pass smoothly. The Kauravas did worst things against the Pāṇḍavas. They sent them to Vārṇāvata, where a house was made for them which could be burnt easily. But the Pāṇḍavas escaped from that house. Then the Kauravas invited them to a dice-play in which
the Pāṇḍavas lost everything and departed, consenting to live as hermits for 12 years with another year's life incognito. When at the end of this exile, they returned and claimed their inheritance, this was refused by their opponents and thereupon the partners had recourse to the arbitration of might. Both armed themselves with friendly kings and India was divided into two great camps. In the Great War which led to a horrible slaughter the Pandavas alone survived and Yudhiṣṭhira became the king. The old blind Dhṛtarāṣṭra retired to the forest. Weak, weary and wornout in body and mind, he craved pardon from his people for the sins of his sons. 59

On the retirement of the old king Yudhiṣṭhira, as the head of the Pāṇḍava brothers governed well. After his retirement along with his brothers, Parīkṣit, the grandson of Arjuna, was raised to the throne with the consent of people and on his death his son Janamejaya was crowned king by the citizens, the ministers and the Rāja Purohita 60.

In the Mahābhārata it is also stated that there were some states of tribal republics which retained their democratic constitution. 61 These as a rule flourished on the frontier regions to the west and north. These are described as gaṇas in the Epic. 62 These Gaṇas were outside the influence of the political forces, which operated
in the Madhyadesā. These were dominated by some tribe or members of one particular caste. Thus the Mālavas, Yaudheyas, Trigarta and some other gaṇas were mainly Kāśṭriyas. The Vātadhānas and the Madhyamākeyas were Brāhmaṇa gaṇas, which the Grāmiṇīyas of the Indus region and Ābhīras on the bank of the Sarasvatī were Sūdras by Caste.

In the Epic age, India was divided into many small and big states. For this very reason many kings joined either the Kaurvas or the Pāṇḍavas in the battle at Kurukṣetra as mentioned in the Mahābhārata. The states of which joined on the Pāṇḍavas side are as follows.

From Madhyadesā- Pāncāla, Matsya, Chedi, Karaṇa, Daśārṇa, Kāśī, Purvi, Kauśāla and Western Maγadh.

From West- Bhoja, Anhaka, Vṛṣṇi, Sātavata, Mādhava, Daśarha, Āhuka, Kukara and Yādava.

From North-west- Kaikeya and Abhisār.

From South- Pāṇḍaya chola, Kerala and Kānchī.

The States which sided with the Kaurvas are as follows:

From East- Eastern Maγadh, Videha, Pragjyotisā(Asama), Aṅga, Vaṅga, Kaliṅga, Puṇḍara, Andhara, Makala and Utkala.

From Madhyadesā- Śurasena, Vatsa and Kauśāla.
From West- Sindhu, Saūvīra, Śālva, Mālava, Kāudraka and Andhaka.

From West-North- Pañcanada, Gāndhara, Trigarta, Madra, Kamboja, Kaikeya, Bālhika, Ambaṣṭha, Śivi, Khaṣa, Kirāta, Pulinda and Hamsapada.

From Middle-India- Yādava, Avanti, Mahiśmaka, Vidarbha, Miśādha and Kuntala.

From South- Āndharak and Kukura.

There are many other provinces and tribes which joined either of the sides in the battle at Kurukṣetra. Prominant among them are Aśvātaka, Chichśila, Chūlika, Raichaka, Vikunja etc.etc. All these states had different types of political administration. Literary evidences sheds light on the existence of a number of states- monarchical and republican with their separate constitutions and political ideals. Administration in these states was not a uniform pattern. In the Kaikeya Janapada only, the kingdom came in favour of Kaurvas, while other five princes of Kaikeya had joined Pāṇḍavas. This shows the different form of administration in Kaikeya. The administration of the Andhaka Vṛṣṇi was Republican. This state was a confedracy of two tribes- Andhaka and Vṛṣṇi. This confedracy was devided in the battle between Kaurvas and Pāṇḍavas. Vṛṣṇis came to the Pāṇḍavas side and among
Andhakas some clans went to help the Kauravas and some sided with the Pāṇḍavas. 68

From the evidences summarized above, we may come to conclusion that in the Kuru country, popular elective royalty had been established. The kings if they could claim the right of succession by virtue of their being heirs of the past rulers, were at the same time entirely dependent on the people. The latter exercised their right of choice and election and without their support, the king could not think of carrying on government irresponsibly.

The two form of political set up may be dealt with in detail here.

**MONARCHIAL ADMINISTRATION**

During the Epic age, Kuru, Pāṇcāla, Magadha and Cedi had monarchial form of Government. In this age, King was the protector and custodian of welfare of his subjects. 69 In the Śānti Parva King Vainya is advised by ṛṣis to follow the fundamentals of kingship as follows:

The king without caring for his personal likings should treat his subjects equally. Disobeyance of religious fundamentals should be punished immediately by the king. King should treat land and his subjects as granted by God and while deciding anything regarding the both, he should
follow the path of religion. King should not act like an autocrat. He is not supposed to punish the twice-born and he is to protect the subjects from crisis and calamities. King should always seek brāhmaṇas in his council.\textsuperscript{70}

**ADVISORY COUNCIL**

The king should have an Advisory Council. The Advisory Council should consist of forty seven members, constituting four Brāhmaṇas, eighteen Kṣatriyas, twenty one Vaiśyas, three Śūdras and one Sūta. The Brāhmaṇas must be expert in medicine, should be learned and of high morals. The Kṣatriyas must be men of Physical power and should be armed. The Vaiśyas should be financially sound persons. The Śūdras should be humble polite, and obedient. The Sūta should be around fifty years impartial, learned far-sighted and intellectual. Thus the council should be representative of all the four Varnas.\textsuperscript{71} It was an institution which considers and takes decision about all important matters regarding the political administration. The decisions which are taken by these counsellors were presented before the Rāṣṭra and to solve these problems they were sent to Rāṣṭriya. Rāṣṭra consists of forty-seven members and it is also known as Paurjanapada institution. Rāṣṭriya is known as the head of that counsel i.e. the king.\textsuperscript{72}
The king could ill-afford to be an autocrat. He had to rule by right and morality and his wickedness could cause him his life and throne. The position of the king by virtue of the concept of divine right and his contractual obligation to rule in consonance with the principles of rule of Law, ethics and morality engaged the attention of many political thinkers and Smritikāras in ancient India. A desirable perfection in the character of the king ensured a high sense of responsibility and an equally high standard of morality in his people. The king's aim should be to seek first his people's happiness and then his own.

He was not only the protector of his subjects but also an embodiment of love and care. He presided over the administration and himself steered the ship of the state. He was expected to be an embodiment of virtue and grace, valour and heroism, equally at home in the state craft and in the direction of the armed forces on the battle front. Sometimes kings suffering from some vice were tolerated, provided such kings equally had other points, but physical deformity could stand in the way of the selection of the king. The succession to the throne was hereditary, normally going by the law of primogeniture. There were certain checks on his autocracy through the Mantri-Parishad.
and the Sabha according to the Mahābhārata. Everyday the king visited the council hall or the Mantragriha for consultation with his ministers individually or collectively.

An aristocracy comprising his allies and relations and the subject kings, military leaders and warriors (Suras) and priests, constituted the entourage of the king in all matters—civil and military. They were classed into seven groups. The Councillors known as mantrins, 2. Amātyas— a term applied for general officers, some of whom constituted his cabinet, 3. Sachivas (comitex)— who may have been officials of a particular cadre—helping the king in the discharge of his duties in different spheres more as executors of his orders rather than as councillors. The three Mantrins, amātyas and Sachivas— seem to have been enjoyed position in the descending order. Others forming part of the king's entourage included Parishadas or assembly men Sachivas the helpers of the king. Sahāya or helper is supposed to be a high minister, a real helper to the king. The term Mantrasahāyah is also mentioned in the Mahābhārata signifying helpers of the status of minister. The arthakārins, executive officers incharge of state business, who were generally five in number in the cabinet, and Dharmikas—meaning the judges or the interpreters of law. The different values attached to
these officers are difficult to determine in the absence of their defined functions which might be overlapping into each other's jurisdiction. Members of the royal household, the high-born and the rich and the warrior caste formed the aristocracy providing officers for the state. The priestly class could provide the Mantrins or Councillors, while this class alone constituted the panel of the officers of justice or judges, known as Dharmikas. Besides good family, moral requisites were demanded from all officers. A list is given of those not fit to be employed as Councillors—women, fools, greedy men and frivolous persons. The six doors of 'Council breaking' are enumerated: viz., drunkenness, sleep, indiscretion, changeableness, trust in bad manners or in ambassadors.

Besides the seven important offices mentioned above, the Mahābhārata and Rāmāyana mention eighteen other offices of the state known as tirthas. These are:

1. Mantri—The Chief Councillor
2. Purohita—The Chief priest
3. Yuvarāja—The Crown prince
4. Champupati—The Commander-in-Chief of the Army
5. Dvārapāla—Chamberlin
6. Antaravesīka—Overseer of the harem
7. Kārāgāradhikāri—Overseer of prisons
9. The Chief Executive Officer for determining the transaction of the public business. (Kritya Krityes|/u Chārtham Viniyojakeḥ).


11. Nagarādhyakṣa- The City prefect.


14. Sādhyaksha- The President of the Assembly.

15. Daṇḍapāla- The wielder of the rod or Chief-Criminal Judge.


17. Rāshrāntapālaka- The Warden of the Marches.

18. Atvipālaka- The Chief conservator of forests or Incharge of forests.

Thus we see on the whole a king without counsel could not administrate the state. He has to take help from the able ministers. In the administrative set up of this period we got some other important information in the Epic. Sānti Parva describes that every village should have a leader. Then select the leaders of ten, twenty hundred and thousand villages. The village as a unit under the Grāmaṇī or Grāmika or the village headman formed the lowest tier of the local administrative pattern, followed by the heads
of ten known as Daśika, then head of twenty villages is known as Viṃśādhīpa, head of hundred is named as Śatapāla or Śatagrāmi and the lord of thousand villages is known as Sahasrapati or Adhipati. The cities which are in a janapada or Rāṣṭra for them a Sarvārtha Chintaka was appointed. And these all administrative officers joined as a counsellors in the king's counsel. The duties of a Grāmika was to administrate a village and to remove difficulties of the villagers. He has to give information to Daśika regarding the happenings in villages Daśika then pass on to Viṃśādhīpa, and then he sends the information to Śatapāla. Śatapāla further gives it to Sahasrapati. Last of all Sahasrapati sends the news to the king of Rāṣṭra. The administrator of a city or capital took care of all the important issues of his own area or region.

**TAXES**

The Mahābhārata also gives an information on taxation and tax-collection. It seems to have been planned on a systematic basis. In an agricultural economy the fixation of revenue and its collection for the state by a set of officials were more important than anything else. The kind draws the tax from the public and it was known as Bali. This was fixed at 1/6 of the income according to
the Epic. The king was entitled to taxation by virtue of his protecting the people. The method of collection sometimes involved hardship to the payer, proof of this is available in many similar of the Mahābhārata and the Smṛtis. Like a bee taking honey from the flower without destroying it and like a calf which drinks the milk of the cow, the king was to take taxes without injuring his subjects. Before levying taxes on the merchants, the king should take into account the sale price, cost price, freight, expenses for food, also yoga i.e. acquisition of unacquired and Kṣema i.e. preservation of the acquired. In levying taxes on artisans the king should consider the following factors income, gifts and the nature of art. A king should see all the just taxes of various kinds. It is said in the Śānti Parva that doomed is the king whose subjects are always troubled by the burden of taxes. Taxes should be so levied that both the king and the persons concerned may enjoy the fruits of the work in question.

REPUBLICAN ADMINISTRATION

The Śānti parva of the Mahābhārata has referred to republican states popularly known as Gaṇas and Saṅghas. The Mahābhārata speaks of the republican form of government called Gaṇa- the sovereignty of the many and confederation of republics (Saṅghata-gaṇa), as for example, the five republican people, the Andhakas, Vṛṣṇis, Yādīyas, Kukuras
and Bhojas had formed themselves into a confederation (Sāṅgha) with Kṛṣṇa as Saṅgh-Mukhya—The federal Chief. The constituent states of the confederation had their own chief called lśvəra. It was the responsibility of the Saṅgh-mukhya to save the confederation from the internal dissention. (Ābhyantra Saṅghbheda) Gaṇas or individual states were governed by a council of leaders i.e. Gauamukhyas and its wisemen i.e. Jñāna-Vṛddhas who followed the Sāstras and established laws and customs i.e., Vyavaharas, avoiding favouritism in matters of recruitment to public services, except on the basis of merit i.e. Vinaya.

The role of the king in Republican states both in the Trans Indus region and also in the Gāṅgetic region calls for some attention. A section of the Sānti parva relates to the discussion on the relations between the king and the aristocracy who formed the back-bone of administration.

JUDICIAL ADMINISTRATION

The concept of dharma and the exercise of Danda, though known in earlier times took a more positive shape during this period. According to the Sānti Parva-Daṇḍaniti controls the four varṇas, so as to lead them on to the performance of their duties, and when it is employed by the ruler properly it makes them desist from adharma i.e. unrighteousness. Danda is so called
because it restrains and punishes. The Mahābhārata enjoins the king to punish the wicked, otherwise his righteous subjects live in fear like a person in a room where a snake has been concealed. Danda was not intended for self-aggrandizement; but was a part of king's duty who was expected to be acquainted with Dandaniti and the proper administration of Danda. In the exercise of justice, the king was assisted by the dharmikas-judges and Jurymen who are well versed in precepts and customs. It refers to Daṇḍapāla translated as 'the chief criminal judge' and the Pradesha, the chief judge.

The qualification and qualities desired in the judges are given in the Mahābhārata. They were expected to be familiar with the characteristics of particular families and the masses, and also of the people of different countries. Mild in speech, of middle age, they should be free from faults, rapacity, heedlessness, and ignorance. Restraining themselves, they should always uphold the paths of dharma and artha. Lapses were not wanting in the judicial personnel despite the stress on mental and moral virtues qualities and qualification.

Thus the above mentioned material describes the political history of the Kurukṣetra according to the Epic. It also throws light on the forms of governments which the Mahābhārata keeps.
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