The Mahābhārata is known as a sacred Dharmasastra in the Indian tradition. The basic theme of the Epic stands mainly on Dharma. Not only the subject matter of the Mahābhārata depends upon the Dharma or Adharma, even the characters of the Great Epic reflect religion in different forms. The Mahābhārata itself has become a great history as well as a religious Kāvya. Religion is the main aspect of the Epic. The different kinds of Dharmas and their hidden meaning is described clearly in the Epic.

The meaning of the word 'Dharma' is very vast. Only this word religion gives different meanings philologically and many scholars interpret it in different ways. The word Dharma is derived from the root \( \sqrt{\text{Dhr}} \) i.e. Dhṛ which means 'to sustain'. So a mode which sustains is Dharma or religion. The concept of Dharma depends upon various qualities and definitions and the adoption of these qualities is to be considered as religion. So if we keep something in mind in a stable manner it is known as Dharma.
Bhiṣma stated in the Śānti Parva that 'for the welfare of human beings Dharma is described and those who follow this path, follow the righteous path.' This is considered to be the fundamental step to lead the life.

The religions which the Mahābhārata inculcates has a two fold basis, the truth and the Vedas. But its religious ideas are not a mere replica of those prevailing in the Vedic period. Great changes had taken place in the conception of the gods and the problems of life. The aspect of the Mahābhārata 'as a projector of the cosmic background', deserves to be discussed widely. About the cosmic character of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the Epic itself is not in any doubt. He is Iśvara. He is the Puruṣa of the Śāṅkhayas, the 'Brāhman', the 'Ātman', the 'Paramātman' of the Vedantis. The men of knowledge affirm that Vāsudeva is all in all. Kṛṣṇa is an Avatāra or incarnation of Viṣṇu i.e. Nārāyaṇa. The five Pāṇḍavas are regarded as incarnation of various gods on a lower plane: Yudhiṣṭhira of Dharma, Bhīma of Vāyu, Arjuna of Indra, and the twins Nakul and Sahdeva of the Āśvins. Yudhiṣṭhira is known as Dharmarāja, the king who was Dharma incarnate. Yudhiṣṭhira also confronts himself in the shape of a Yakṣa. The Kaurvas were likewise-incarnations of Asuras or antigods. Duryodhana the eldest of the Kaurva brothers was Kāli himself (Kāli Puruṣah), the arch-fiend, evil incarnate. The helper of Kāli is
dvāpara which incarnate as 'Sakuni'. The blind king Dhṛtarāṣṭra was an incarnation of Haṁsa, a son of Ariṣṭa. The word Ariṣṭa means, among other things, evil, ill luck, calamity or a portentous phenomenon foreboding misfortune. The progeny of Ariṣṭa must therefore be the harbinger of calamity, as Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Duryodhana proved to be. The brothers of Duryodhana, Duḥśasana and others were Pulastya demons. And many other characters of the Mahābhārata incorporate other characteristics in them.

The other sects also make their appearance in the Epic, the most notable being the Pāśupatas who lay stress on devotion to Śiva-Pāśupati and the Sauras denoted to the Sun or Sūrya. The growth of these sects threatened to destroy the solidarity of the Aryan-community. Viṣṇu, the God of Bhāgavatas, is identical with Śiva, the duty of the Pāśupatas. This compromise prepared the ground for the doctrine of the Trimurti. In the form of Brahmā, the one god creates, in the form of Puruṣa (Viṣṇu), He preserves, and in the form of Rudra i.e., Śiva, He destroys the universe into eternal sleep.

RELIGIOUS CONDITIONS OF KURUKŞETRA

The region round about Kurukṣetra has been regarded as extremely sacred from the earliest times. It is the
land of the sacred rivers the Sarasvatī, the Drṇadvatī and the Āpayā where the Rgvedic people kindled the sacrificial fire and chanted the Vedic hymns. According to the Vedic literature, this region was very much dear to the gods who also liked to perform sacrifices here at Kurukṣetra. The Sānkhyāyana Śrauta Sūtra informs us that Vṛddhadyumna erred in a sacrifice when a Brāhmaṇa uttered a curse that error would result in the expulsion of the Kurus from Kurukṣetra, an event which actually came to pass.16

The Mahābhārata and the Purāṇas too regarded the region as equally holy in various aspects. In fact Kurukṣetra has continued to attract millions of people adhering to different creeds and philosophies even up to the present day. It was really a meeting ground of so many trends of thought, Brāhmaṇic, Buddhist as well as many incarnations and gods who flourished in Kurukṣetra with the passage of time.

Kurukṣetra is named after Brahmā called Brahmacārī or Brahmakṣetra. It is considered as birth place of Prajāpati Brahmā and the seat of creation. Sarasvatī is said to have assisted Brahmā in his creation by giving
the faculty of speech to living creatures.

Brahmā is Ātmabhū, Svayambhū, "Self existent" and is generally identified with Prajāpati or the Great father of the world, Pitāmaha and with the other personified abstractions Dhāṛ, Vidhāṛ and Viśvakarman or All maker. He is Lokapitamaha, imperishable ageless, eternal and unborn. These are the standing epithets for Brahmā. He is at once creator, preserver and destroyer. The Great Epic considers Him the Ådideva or original god. By his superiority Viṣṇu and Śiva are set aside with one exception. This exception indeed implies that the God is 'Lotus born' and so comes under the head of Viṣṇu's general superiority. Dḥāṛ Bhrahma is commissioned by Govinda to be 'overseer of all beings'. The old Vedic tradition that the creator was exhausted on completing the creative act finds a faint reflection in the Epic statement that when Brahmā had created, he rested under a certain 'Śālmali tree'. He 'created the words' at Prthudaka on the Sarasvati and though usually found in Brahmaloka, often wanders about to various holy resorts. Brahmā made sacrifices at the Mahendra hills, the Himavata and Puṣkara. At the Brahmasara lake, where he himself erected the sacrificial post. Brahmaloka is itself a no place for meditation. Menaka is the daughter of Brahmā. Brahmā lives at the tirthas and especially in Kurukṣetra, which is heaven
on earth. For once every month Brahma and the gods assemble there. He is a good advisor to creatures. He comforts 'men and gods' in time of trouble.

From his mouth came the priests as the utterers of truth. The gods sit round him and serve him as a courtiers do a king. Brahma advises Agni how to escape dyspepsia. He had a war chariot which he shared with other gods Indra, Varuna and Isana. He journeys on a vehicle drawn by geese, the gods and seers being his escort. He gives away weapons and even makes them himself. He is both creator and preserver as he commands Visvakarman to make Tilottama, to tempt Sunda and Upasunda to their ruin. As warrior god Brahma taught Arjuna how to use weapons.

He created death also so that world might be preserved, but he is also known as the god "whose anger burned the world". Brahma is also named as caturmukha, caturanāma and caturvakra not as having four faces and so four heads and as bearing a Veda on each head, but as being omniscient, seeing in all directions. He got the unmeasurable wisdom. More particularly he knows the past, the present and the future. He is Isa and Shambhu, aware of what will happen, the most venerable of gods, he commands Viṣṇu to be born on earth and Viṣṇu receives the command carried to him by Indra. Viṣṇu himself also is Prajāpati.
At First Brahmā is pure souled, being higher than all devas. Later he is described as form of Visnu. Brahmā says, "I was born from thy will; second from thy eyes; third from thy speech, fourth from thy ears; fifth from thy nose; sixth as egg from thy and this is my seventh birth from the lotus. Thus he created many generations and destroyed them with the passage of time. He is all in all on the earth.

VIŚNU WORSHIP

The region of Kurukṣetra was closely associated with Viśnu cult as early as the times of the Mahābhārata which refers to the various tīrthas called after Viśnu, the prominent deity of the Hindu Pantheon. The tīrthas are Viśnu, Varāha, Vāmana and Cakra etc. are associated with Lord Viśnu. The memory of these ancient places has been preserved to this day in the shape of the names of several places as Baraha-kalan which is 17 miles to the south-west of Safidon, a Varāha-temple is also situated here and Baraha Vana where many tanks and places associated with man-lion incarnation of Viśnu exist.

In Indian tradition importance of Viśnu is well known. He is the famous god amongst Indian deities. He is youngest son of Aditi and Kaśyapa. The Mahābhārata recognizes
him as Lord Kṛṣṇa, ruler of all and creator of all.

Viśnu is named as Devādeva, Lokasvāmin, Viśveśvara since these names are born by other gods he is also literally "god of gods" etc. Basically Viśnu appears to be named as a bird, Suparṇa or Sunship who goes on high, awakening earth and having a thousand rays or flames. The wife of Viśnu is Lāmxī or śrī, who rose from ocean dressed in white and for whom gods and demons contended.

The Avatāras of Viśnu assume a prominent place in the Epic and more so in the purāṇas. The first three Matsya (fish), Kūrma (tortoise) and Varāha (boar) have a cosmic character and are foreshadowed in the hymns of the Vedas. The fourth incarnation Nṛsiṁha (man-Lion) seems to belong to a later age, when the worship of Viśnu had become established. The fifth Vāmanā (dwarf) whose three strides deprived the Asuras of the domination of heaven and earth, is in character anterior to fourth avatāra and the three strides are attributed to Viśnu in the Vedic text as Urukrma. The sixth, seventh and eighth, Parāśurāma. Rāmchandra and Kṛṣṇa, are mortal heroes whose exploits are celebrated in these poems so frequently as to raise the heroes to the rank of gods. The ninth avatāra, the Buddha, is the deification of a great teacher. The tenth, Kalki, is yet to come; he resembles the manifestation referred to in the Biblical revelation.
Many Inscriptions support the popularity of Viṣṇu in Kurukṣetra region. The Pehowa inscription discovered from the Garibnath temple records that one of certain pious horse-dealers, who met at Prthudaka at the time of a horse-fair held there, had constructed, the temple of Yajña Varāha on the spot. The same epigraph informs us that this town was situated to the east of river Sarasvatī. Another inscription from the same locality is still more important for it opens with two benedictory verses in the praise of Viṣṇu- (i) "Om ! Adoration to Mahādeva! May that chief male (Puruṣa) Viṣṇu protect you, he who alone sleeps when the regent of night (i.e. noon) has disappeared, when the mountains have completely crumbled away, when the foil of darkness (i.e. sun) has been destroyed, when mankind has been annihilated and when the host of stars had tumbled down, when the circle of earth has fallen and thus the ocean have become one.

The above verse thus identifies Viṣṇu with supreme Brahmā in accordance with the Vaiṣṇava philosophy. It also refers to Viṣṇu during the period of destruction of the universe. Verse (ii) runs their- "May lovely Viṣṇu's beautiful eye that is pleasing through is quivering of the brow and charming with its resplendent-- Protect all the three worlds— (The eye) of whom who plunges into the ocean of nascent deep love (of him), whose lustre
The Sirsa (Hissar) Inscription of 9th century A.D. also shows that the cult of Viṣṇu was quite popular in the whole of ancient East Punjab. It presents that the Śiva temple was decorated even with the images of Kṛṣṇa united with Laxmī etc., thus testifying to the importance of the Vaiṣṇava cult even for the Śaivites. The Bhatinda stone Inscription of Rāja Satrughanadeva of about 10th century A.D. also invokes Viṣṇu and refers to the weapons held by him in his hands—"Hari (Viṣṇu), who with his hands holds a mace (gada) and the spotless Pancajañya (Conch) and supports the three worlds with ease, and who is endless".

We have other definite Epigraphic evidences of the popularity of Viṣṇu cult in this region as early as the times of the Guptas. The Tusham Rock Inscription belonging to about the end of the 4th or the beginning of the 5th century A.D. is definitely a Vaiṣṇava document which depicts Viṣṇu as a God.

The region of Kurukṣetra has yielded some very important sculptures which can also be regarded as fine pieces of Indian art.
The following sculptures from the Rājā-Karṇa-Kā-Kilā are to be noted with great interest.

(i) **Trivikrama Viṣṇu**: The Āyudhapuruṣas, on both the sides of the main figure of Sthānaka Viṣṇu, are holding a Cakra and a Śaṅkha, the ladies standing by their sides, appear to be Laxmi and Bhūmi while the Nāga and Nāgī are also visible standing at the extreme ends. On both the sides of Viṣṇu's head may well be recognized seated Brahmā, Maheśa and Indra riding the Elephant-his Vāhana. The relief at the top of the slab depicts seven sages sitting in a row in a uniform posture. This refers to the association of Viṣṇu's cult with that of Śūrya.  

The image of three faced Viṣṇu has got the additional faces of a boar and a lion; while the weapons held in the hands can be identified as the mace, the lotus, the conch and the wheel in the Pardaksinā order. The use of such images in India began in the Gupta period and they have been found in various parts of the country, specially in Gujrat, Rajputana, Kashmir etc.  

An image of two armed Sthānaka Viṣṇu, about 5'9" in height, has also been recovered from Daulara, situated 17 miles from Thānesar, but it is considered as a very late image, about 5 and 6 hundred years old.
SIVA WORSHIP

The region of Kurukṣetra was closely associated with Śiva worship in very ancient times. According to the Mahābhārata and Paurāṇic literature, the famous Sthānū tīrtha existed there and the place was called Sthāṇviśvara after Sthānū i.e. Śiva. Pilgrimage to the Sthānū-tīrtha had a great sanctifying effect.

This tradition of the region continued to be preserved for a considerable period. It was at the mound of the Rājā-Karṇa-Kā-Kīlā, that an early terracotta sealing, having a bull (Vāhana of Śiva) and a Khroṣṭhī legend on it, was discovered about thirty years ago. Reference may also be made to some later Gupta seals from Karnal, having the trisūla and the inscription as Kāśiśvara inscribed on them. Besides this D.B. Spooner refers to a stone slab from Amin, 5 miles from Thānesar depicting four armed Gaṇapati with Śiva and Pārvati. This sculpture has also been assigned to the later Gupta period. Yaudheyas were also devout worshippers of Skanda Kārttikeya. In fact a class of their coins represents six headed Kārttikeya holding a trident with a pea-cock on the obverse and a corresponding goddess with six heads on the reverse. Dr. V.S. Agarwal suggested that the goddess on the reverse here is Saṣṭhī or Devasena as the wife of Skanda. The brāhmaṇas designate her as
Saṣṭhī i.e. Laxmi personifying 'Auspicious hope'.

On the top of the Sonepat seal of Harṣavardhana has been carved a bull on the right side, a fact which bears testimony to the Šaiva learnings of the mighty emperor. The Harṣacarita also refers to "a seal having a bull as its emblem which was presented to Harṣa on the day before he launched on his victorious march for digvijya. Mr. Jackson thinks that the presentation of this seal "took place near a temple of the reeds erected not far from the royal capital of Thanesar and close to the bank of Sarasvatī".

The Harṣacarita informs us that when the condition of Prabhākarvardhana became serious, his courtiers and relatives began to offer oblations of their own flesh to ensure recovery of their lord. This led Dr. A.Ś. Altekar to suggest that "the Pāśupata religion in the Mathura region was preaching some of the extreme practices associated with it." At that time Śiva was used to be worshipped almost in every house. Bāṇabhatta has given an extremely vivid account of the Pāśupata sect and its popularity in the Kurukṣetra region.

The Chinese traveller Yuan Chawang during his visit to Thānesar noticed some 100 deva temples and sectarians of various kinds in great number in the locality of Kurukṣetra.
The popularity of Śiva cult is also described in the inscriptions. The Sīrṣa inscription of Bhoja in the 9th century throws considerable light on the prevalence of the Pāśupata sect. It records the qualities of this sect and the erection of a magnificent temple of Yogiśvara Śiva. This temple is said to have been as high as the sky and attained the height of the summit of the Kailāśa mountain. Śiva was also eulogized with the images of Viśṇu. This refers to harmonious relation between the followers of the Śaiva and the Vaiśnava creeds. The above epigraph besides referring to Śiva as Pināki and as Himaśailasatapati states that the way leading to Sankara is free from Mundane existence and by following this path one is free from the circle of rebirth.

The Sirmaur inscription of the 10th century A.D. also records the erection of a religious edifice and refers to Śiva the lord of Snakes. An inscription of the medieval period from Panjaur opens with a benedictory stanza in the praise of Gaṇapati. Several Śaiva sculptures have also been noticed as far as Kapāla-mocana.67

KRŚNA-CULT

Lord Kṛṣṇa is closely associated with the region of Kurukṣetra as the whole Epic eulogizes it very honourably. Kṛṣṇa is regarded as the incarnation of Viśṇu in different
ages and in the Mahābhārata. Kṛṣṇa is regarded as God himself. In the Mahābhārata, we don't get a single verse which refuses to accept Kṛṣṇa as God. The Epic opens with a eulogy of Śrī Kṛṣṇa as Nārāyaṇa. In several verses of the Mahābhārata Kṛṣṇa is regarded as Nārāyaṇa whereas Arjuna is named as Nara. Regarding the birth of Kṛṣṇa it is said in the Epic that he is the creator, preserver and destroyer. Kṛṣṇa with conch, discus and club in his hands, wears the Śrīvatsa, is clad in yellow silken raiment and is best of those versed in the use of weapons, and such a Kṛṣṇa protects Arjuna. Dhṛtarāṣṭra knows that Kṛṣṇa is Viṣṇu himself. Kuntī named him as the father of all creatures.

Draupadī in extreme distress prays to Lord Kṛṣṇa that the soul of universe, the creator of the world, to save her from the insults being inflicted by her enemies. In the great battle he acts as Arjuna's charioteer; but even there his identity with Viṣṇu is not forgotten. In the war when Arjuna hesitates to slay the helpless Karna, Kṛṣṇa prompt him to act as he did. Yudhīśṭhira asked Markandeya to tell the divinity of Kṛṣṇa. He said "The lotus-eyed deity whom I saw in the days of old is Janardana who has now become your relative-- Kṛṣṇa is that deity, the ancient supreme lord, the inconceivable Hari, the dharma and Vidhāta, the destroyer of all, the eternal, the Lord of all
creatures". Jayadratha after doing penance gets the gift from Śiva in Gaṅgādvāra and then he euologizes Kṛṣṇa. In Udyog Parva Sanjay also describes the importance of Kṛṣṇa to Dhṛtarāśtra.

Kṛṣṇa, however, is not the only incarnation of god mentioned in the Epic. Nārāyaṇa mentions that He takes various forms. Assuming the form of a boar I shall slay the proud Hiranyagarbha; then taking up the form of man-lion, I shall kill Hiranyakaśipu, the great destroyer of sacrifices. As the son of Aditi I shall slay Bāli, the foremost of the Dānavas, and in the Treta age, I shall take birth as Rāma in the line Bhṛgu. Towards the end of Treta- and the beginning of Dwāpara, I shall be born as Rāma, the son of Daśratha, and at the meeting point of Dwāpara and Kāli ages I shall again appear in the world in the city of Mathura for the purpose of killing Kamsa." This list of Viṣṇu's incarnations is amplified in the Purāṇas and in the final form mentions his twenty-two form, while the didactic epic as well as the Harivamsa do not go beyond ten.

So in the Mahābhārata Kṛṣṇa was regarded as superhuman or at least much more than the ordinary warrior prince. His quarrel with Śīśupāla in Sabhā Parva seems to be part of an old story, coming down to from a time when his spiritual greatness was not unchallenged. At the conclusion of Yudhiṣṭhira's Rājasūya sacrifice an arghya is presented
to Kṛṣṇa as a symbol of worship. Only Kṛṣṇa is the foremost of all wisemen, he is the lord of all universe. The arghya is meant to mark the superiority of Kṛṣṇa over the rest of the princes. Śiśupāla is furious at this, for he thinks Kṛṣṇa is no king at all and takes it to be an insult to all the kings assembled to place Kṛṣṇa above them. So the quarrel ends with Kṛṣṇa throwing his cakra (discus) at Śiśupāla and chopping off his head.

Thus in the Mahābhārata the character of Kṛṣṇa definitely no where glories his military valour. It is the intellectual powers that mark him out from other princes. In the Great War he appears not as a fighter but as a counsellor of the Pāṇḍavas, one to whose advice they were often indebted for their victories. Kṛṣṇa is a divine power which rules every one. So the worship of lord Kṛṣṇa in the Epic is the most important feature among people. We can't imagine the story of Mahābhārata without Lord Kṛṣṇa. The characteristics and qualities of Kṛṣṇa depicted in the Mahābhārata make him a man with superhuman powers as well as a divine power.

THE BHAGVAD-GĪTĀ

In the Mahābhārata, the Bhagvad-Gītā got the highest importance for its doctrines. In the various forms of
sectarian worship described above, the devotional theism of the Epic is seen in one religious setting or the other. But it is not complete until we come to the Bhagvad-Gītā which shows as a high and clear level of religious doctrine of devotion (Bhakti), set forth not only with a systematic philosophical background but also as the central and unifying principle of a vital, practical religion. With the Bhagvad-Gītā we pass into a clearer atmosphere of definite ideas, which are not longer merged in a floating mass of fanciful legends; and the intellectual seriousness and ethical nobility with which they are promulgated by a more or less personalised expounder give them the form of a deliberate historical religion.

The Bhagvad-Gītā purports to be a dialogue between the Pāṇḍava prince Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa, who was serving him as his charioteer, on the eve of the great battle at Kurukṣetra. In order to invent a leading motive for his teaching, the poet represents Arjuna as suddenly stricken with overwhelming remorse at the prospect of the fratricidal strife which he is about to begin. "I will not fight", he cries in anguish. Then Kṛṣṇa begins a long series of arguments to stimulate him for his coming battle. He points out, with quotations from the Upaniṣads, that killing men in battle does not destroy their souls; for the soul is indestructible, migrating from body to body according to
its own deserts. The Vedic ritualism, the Upaniṣadic gnosis of meditative idealism, the materialistic dualism of Proto-Saṃkhya and the disciplinary dualism of Proto-Yoga, the rigorous Karma-doctrine of rebirth and bondage—all these are strangely modified and combined in its peculiar devotional scheme, which centres round the conception of a vivid personal god.  

In the Gītā, the Bhagvat or Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa directly advances his claim of identity with the supreme God by calling upon Arjuna to meditate on him, to bow down to him, to love and worship him, and to take refuge in him as the final goal and the resting place. He describes all his divine powers and attributes to compel feelings of wonder and reverence, and gives an effective ocular demonstration of his awe-inspiring divinity by revealing his theophanic form to the faithful Arjuna. He also gives an exposition to Arjuna of the doctrine of Avatāra to explain his assumption of human form, adding that some people, deluded by his divine power of illusion (Daivi Maya) accept him as a human being and forget his divinity.

Although Kṛṣṇa nowhere explicitly claims to be the Brāhmaṇa, Arjuna addressed him as such and throughout the identity is implied.

Thus Gītā holds a liberal attitude regarding the faiths and practices. It rises above narrow sectarianism and exudes throughout the spirit of toleration.
SUN-WORSHIP

It is only in the Mahābhārata that we find references to the popularity of Sun-cult in the Kurukṣetra. It is believed that Aditi had given birth to Sūrya at Sūrya Kuṇḍa situated at Amin, about 5 miles from Thānesar. There still exists at this place a temple of Aditi and also the Sūrya-Kuṇḍa nearby. Kurukṣetra was of course considered a very sacred place carrying special merit during the eclipses of the sun and the moon. Millions of people used to assemble there in order to take bath in the holy tank on those particular occasions and still do.  

The Sonepat seal of Harṣa inform us that Harṣa ancestors, i.e. Rājyavardhana, Āditya-Vardhana and Praḥākara-Vardhana were ardent devotees of Sun. This shows that the princes of and the ruler of the house of Thānesar were traditional devotees of Sun upto the end of the 6th century A.D. The discovery of two early mediaval sculptures of Sūrya at Hansi (Hissar) is also of great importance.

NĀGA-CULT

We learn from the Mahābhārata that Takṣaka, the Nāgarāja formerly used to live in the Khaṇḍava forest but later on shifted to Kurukṣetra and had his abode there. This led to conjecture that the original home of the cult of Takṣaka was Indraprastha, from where it was carried
northward to Kurukṣetra. E.W. Hopkins also remarks that "the connection with the nāgas as treasure-hiders appears in the discription of the gatekeepers of the nāga tīrtha at Kurukṣetra. It is really notable that some of the holy places of the region like Nāgahṛada and Sarpadevī have been named after nāgas or sarpas, thus denoting the popularity of the nāga cult in the region. These ancient names have been preserved even to this day.

THE GODDESS IN HER VARIOUS FORMS

We get references from the literary sources that there was a Devī-Pīṭha at Kurukṣetra and also the abode of Bhvāni. There also existed the temple of Devamātā on the river Sarasvatī. The archeological finds too bear testimony to the worship of Śakti in Ambala division during the mediavel period. Reference to the goddess Saṣṭhī on the Yaudheya coins has already been made above. Some sculptures from various places too are important to be noted here e.g., a four armed goddess seated on a lion and having a sword, a shield and a bottle in her hands from Kapāla-moucna; image of Kāli from Kaithal, idols of Mahiṣāsuramardinī from Bohr near Rohtak and Hansi etc.

YAKṢA GUARDIAN

Yakṣa worship in ancient India can be traced back to very remote times. We learn from the Mahābhārata that the
Arantuka, Trantuka, Macakruka and Kapila were the Yakṣa gatekeepers as well as the holy places bounding the cakra of Kurukṣetra. The Mahāmayurī, a treatise dealing with the Yakṣa-guardians of various places, towns and countries, refer to following Yakṣas associated with ancient Kuru-realm and the region on its borders.

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<th>Names of the place or country</th>
<th>Names of Yakṣas</th>
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<td>1. Bāhuddhānyaka- Rohtak</td>
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The Jaina canonical literature refers to a garden named Pudhavivadinsaya in the city of Rohidiya i.e., Modern Rohtaka with a shrine of Dharaona yakṣa in it.

**YAKṢI OF KURUKṢETRA**

A yakṣi used to live near the Rāmahṛada at Kurukṣetra. The Yakṣi is addressed as Paisāci also. She is described as putting on the Ulukhala ornaments. The Mahāmayurī also states that the Yakṣi of Kurukṣetra as Mahāulukhala- mekhala. She is said to have warned the pilgrims not to stay therefor more than a day.
Dr. V.S. Agrawala feels that she was perhaps the tutelary deity of some primitive tribe and lived on non-vegetarian diet.

**BUDDHISM**

Buddhism was preached in the area of Kurukṣetra since very early times. It is not possible to ascertain how far Kurukṣetra region was influenced by the Buddhist creed. Yuan Chawang, of course, refers to the existence of the Buddhist stupas at Thanesar, Sugha etc. which were said to have been constructed by Asoka in the third century B.C.

The account of Thanesar as given by the Chinese pilgrim runs thus:

"To the north-west of the city, 4 or 6 li is stūpa about 300 ft. high, which was built by Aśoka-rāja. The bricks are all of a yellow-red colour, very bright and shining; within is a peck measure of the relics of Buddha. From the Stūpa is frequently emitted a brilliant light and many spiritual Prodigies exhibit themselves".

Yuan Chawang also states the existence of three Sangarāmas i.e. Buddhist monasteries where lived about 700 priests, all devoted to Hinayana creed of Buddhism. Fahien, who visited India in the Gupta period, two hundred years before Yuan Chaung, did not visit Kurukṣetra but
reached Mathura direct from the Bhida country. His reference to the existence of the Sangarāmas on both sides of the river Yamunā suggests that the region to the south and south-east of Kurukṣetra was sufficiently influenced by the Buddhist way of life in contemporary times.

The Sonepat Copper seal of Harṣavardhana (606-47 A.D.) the ruler of Thanesar states that his elder brother Mahārājādhiraja was an ardent devotee of Lord Buddha. During his explorations in this region Rodgers discovered the lower position of the image of a Standing Buddha lying on the bank of tank of Kurukṣetra. The description as given by Rodgers runs thus: 'On either side of the legs are 3 images. Below are two central nāgas with bands clasped in devotion.

Yuan Chauang further says that to the north-east of Kurukṣetra he reached Sulo-Kin-na i.e. ancient Srughana or modern Sugha which was once a centre of the Buddhist monastic life and gives a sufficiently detailed account of the religious conditions of the times speaking of the country he says, the people were sincere and truthful but honour the heretical teachings. They esteem the pursuits of learning principally religious one. Relics of Buddhism in this region are found in the form of stupas at various places.

The Budha delivered some profound and learned
discourses to the Kurus, e.g., the Mahānidāna and Mahāsatipatthāna Suttantas of the Dīgha Nikāya. Though the Buddha principally confined his ministering activity to North-East India, the Buddhist Pāli texts show that he travelled widely over the regions in Northern India, and the Kuru country too appears to have been favoured by his discourses. It is nearly in every case that the town of Kammāsadhamma is mentioned as the scene of the Buddha's discourses.

Thus in the Epic times the region of Kurukṣetra believes all religions. Mainly the people of Kurukṣetra have faith on Brahmanical trinity- Brahma, Viṣṇu and Śiva. Apart from them, Kṛṣṇa, Indra, Sun, Yakṣa-guardians, Nāga, Kārttikeya, Ganeśa, Soma, Āśvins and the various goddesses influenced the life and the culture of the people who inhabited this region.
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