EPILOGUE

India has a composite and cosmopolitan culture to which the people of all the regions of this ancient land have made their distinct contributions. Among the people who have thus enriched Indian cultural heritage and helped the cause of national Integration, the people of the Kurukṣetra region of North India have a place of honour. The cultural history of Kurukṣetra, is in fact truly representative of Indian culture. There are many basic similarities between the two. A study of the history and culture of the region of Kurukṣetra, is, therefore, of great importance.

An attempt has been made in the preceding chapters to present to the reader much a study from the material available in the Mahābhārata which was in all probability composed in this part of the country. Nevertheless, a brief concluding survey highlighting the dominant facts and impressions that emerge from the above study may be quite appropriate for a general understanding and evaluation of the sacred and holy place Kurukṣetra.
As Dr. R.C. Majumdar has observed Kurukṣetra played two dominant roles in the history and culture of India. In the first place it was the sight of the great battle which according to a very ancient tradition formed the dividing line between the Great Epochs in the history and culture of India and formed the central theme of the Great Epic Mahābhārata, the National Epic of ancient India and the most popular and the most highly revered treatise of the Hindus all over India. Secondly Kurukṣetra was regarded as the holiest tīrtha or the place of pilgrimage among the hundreds of them dotted all over India from the Himalayas to the Cape-Comorin. The Mahābhārata before being the national Epic of ancient India was the Epic of the tribe of the great tribe of the Bharatas and in a way also the Epic of Kurukṣetra which is the acknowledged home of the Bharatas. It is well known that the Kuru emerged as a result of amalgamation of the various clans of the Bharatas and the very name Kurukṣetra proves their long association with this region.

The present text of the Mahābhārata is generally dated with reasonable probability with the period of 400 B.C. and 500 A.D. The description of Kurukṣetra as reflected in the Great Epic and reproduced in the foregoing pages thus reflects the situation as it was during this period. It is, however, to see that the traditions preserved in the Mahābhārata
go back to very remote times and in many cases either fully support earlier works including the Vedic Samhitas or present a later stage in the gradual evolution of these traditions. It would be in order hear to go into this phenomenon in some detail.

To start with the geography of the land one is struck by the fact that the sacred rivers Sarasvatī, Drṣadvatī and Āpayā mentioned in the Ṛgveda have acquired even more holiness in the Epic. The Sarasvatī which is presented in the Ṛgveda as the river par excellence flowing in its great majesty from the mountains to the ocean is described even in the Mahābhārata as a perennial river although its other tributaries are termed as only a rainy season torrents. The status of the best of rivers, mothers and goddesses already won by the Sarasvatī in the Ṛgveda still remains in the text Mahābhārata. Whereas in the Ṛgveda these rivers are mentioned as the venue of sacrifices the Epic also describes their banks as dotted with the hermitages of sages and seers which were resounding in chanting of mantras. Indeed the religious activity in the valley of these holy rivers had increased tremendously by the age of the Epic and hundreds of tīrthas had sprung up along their banks.

The story of the great deluge first hinted in the Atharvaveda and later described in some detail in the
Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa also appears in the Mahābhārata. The hero of the story is Manu Vaivasvata as earlier although the name of the mountain where he is said to have tied his boat has gradually changed from Nāva-Prābhramaṇa in the Atharvaveda through Manoravasarpana in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa to Naubandhan in the Epic. The mountain called by these three names has been identified with the peak of Nahan which is obviously the corrupt form of the Naubandhana. The description of Kurukṣetra as a land of lotus lakes goes back to the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa which describes Pururavā searching for Urvaśī. Even the Rgveda couples the great lake of Mānuśa with its sacred rivers and places another great lake Śaryavāvata in its lower part. The Mahābhārata adds a number of other important lakes to this list which include Brāhmaṇas, Sannihātī, Rāmahṛada and Kapūla-Mocana, Ṛṇa-Mocana and the sthānu tīrtha among others. The Great forest of Naimiṣa which is associated traditionally with the recitation of most of the purāṇas and appears first of all in the brāhmaṇas retains its importance even in the Epic as the foremost site of religious activity.

Even the geographical limits of Kurukṣetra as described first in the Tattiriya Āraṇyaka remain unchanged till the emergence of the Epic. The land of Kurukṣetra still has the region of Turghana or Srughana as its northern half,
Khāndava or the country around Delhi as its southern part and the Marus or the desert of Rajasthan where about Vinaśana the Sarasaṃtī disappears in the west. The only change which is noticeable in the Epic is that by its time more urbanization had taken place and the cities of Khāḍa-Prastha and Srughana had emerged as the focal points of the two regions which were probably forest areas in earlier times.

Regarding the people also some evolution is easily traceable the Bharatas who kindled sacrificial fire in the Valley of the Sarasaṃtī, Drṣadvatī and the Āpayā are still there but in the form of the Great Kurus of the Pañca-Janas of the Rgveda we donot bear anymore. But the Nīśadas who are supposed to be one of them appear beyond the region of Vinaśana where Sarasaṃtī is said to have disappear out of fear that they might know her. The political canvas of the Mahābhārata is of course, very wide and a large number of tribes are paraded in the battle field of Kurukṣetra as allies of the two warring sides as we have already seen in an earlier chapter.

The association of a number of important political personalities first named in the Vedic literature finds affirmation in the Epic too. Among these are Manu, the legendary progenitor of the human race and most of the royal families of the countries, Prīthu, son of Vena,
Yayāti, son of Nahuśa apart from Śāntanu, Devāpi, Bahlīka. Even the Bhāgavata purāṇa locates the capital of Manu Svayambhūna at Bṛhishmatī on the bank of the Sarasvatī where as a later work called Awantisundrīkathā connect Manu Vaivasvata with Sthānaviśvara. Yayāti, son of Nahuśa appears in the Rgveda as well as the Mahābhārata received honey and milk from the sacred Sarasvatī and Prṛthu Vainya who appears as one of the Rṣis in the Rgveda lends his name to the great tīrtha Prṛthudaka in the Mahābhārata which is supposed to be the scene of creation. The ancient Vedic sages like Vaśiṣṭha, Viśvāmitra, Paraśurāma son of Jamadagnī and Dadhīcī still retain their association with Kurukṣetra in the Epic. Infact the description in case of the first three accurately pin points their places of residence Vaśiṣṭha is said to have lived near the Sthānu-tīrtha, Viśvāmitra at Prṛthudaka and Paraśurāma at Rāmahṛada.

According to Vedic Scholars the Vedic culture out of which modern Hinduism grew in successive stages was developed in the country of Kuru-Pāṇcālās and from this home land it gradually spread in all directions. The opening verse of the Bhagvada Gītā describes Kurukṣetra as Dharmaśetra or the land of piety. It is interesting to note that the Nāga cult or the worship of serpents supposed to be one of the most ancient religious beliefs in connected with the region of Kurukṣetra in as much as the most famous
of the Naga elcities or kings mentioned in early literature namely Takṣaka is said to have lived in this region and played a prominent role in various episodes in the Mahābhārata in connection with the Kuru kings, specially Parikṣit and his son Janamejaya. Even in the Saṃhitās, the emergence of Kurukṣetra as a place of religious importance can be easily seen but in the text of the Mahābhārata it is spoken of as the greatest of all the tīrthas in the three worlds as the following verse shows. "The Naimiśa is the tīrtha of the earth, Puṣkara of the Antrikṣa (Intermediate region) while Kurukṣetra is the tīrtha of the Trilokas (Three-worlds)"

Indeed the very sight of Kurukṣetra is stated to remove all sins and its very dust scattered by the winds gives salvation to the worst miscreants. It is worth noting that in naming the valley of the Sarasvatī and Drāḍvatī which is the heart of Kurukṣetra as Brahmāwarta and Brahmavedi tradition accords the highest honour to this land in view of the fact that Pitāmaha Brahmā is the creator of the world.

The religious pre-eminence of Kurukṣetra as reflected in the Mahābhārata had already travelled far and wide by the fifth century A.D. R.C. Majumdar has referred to an inscription at a place called Vat Luong Kau far away from India across the Bay of Bengal in Indo-China which records a
Mahātmya of Kurukṣetra in several verses. One of which has been directly taken from Ch. 81 of the Vana Parva of the Mahābhārata. The inscription like the Mahābhārata puts Kurukṣetra above all other holy places of pilgrimage and has been dated to the second half of the 5th century A.D.

There have been and probably and there will always be scholars who describe the Great Bharata War as a myth but the battle between the Kurus and the Pāṇḍavas fought on the holy land of Kurukṣetra is won of those great events which no Hindu as ever regarded without great interest and few without deep emotion. In any case the Great Epic consisting of about one hundred thousand verses coming down to us in its present form almost since the 4th century A.D. is a fact which no body can deny. The detailed account of Kurukṣetra as preserved in this great work does give us some idea of the great role that this ancient land has played in the political and cultural history of India in hoary antiquity.