CHAPTER-IV

Mahâbhârata and the idea of ‘One Country One People’

In the recognised reading of the Mahâbhârata, three introductory Vindus (drops) are mentioned. Of course, there is no cause for considering them as the introductory drops of ‘Jaya’, ‘Bhârata’ and ‘Mahâbhârata’. But from the use of the term ‘Jaya’ in the verse, we can presume about it and there is a reference to the length of the portion of ‘Bhârata’ where it is stated that it consists of 24,000 verses. On the other hand, it is called Mahâbhârata or Šatasâ hasripaM hitâ which consists of 1,00,000 of verses. Some scholars are of the opinion that since such a voluminous book was difficult to recall and hence its two readings styled ‘Bhârata’ and ‘Mahâbhârata’ were made. Again, another small reading consisting of 150 verses only is met with. But this is nothing but a preface to the new critical edition of the Mahâbhârata published by the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute located in Pune. It is very difficult to determine definitely the exact date of these three readings. According to Winternitz, the Mahâbhârata took the present shape having 82,000 verses within the fourth century AD and attained popularity by the title Šatasâ hasripaM hitâ. Some addition or alteration might also be made after the fourth century AD
which can be surmised by comparative studies of the Northern and Southern recensions.¹

The Subject Matter:

The main portion of the Mahābhārata deals with the account of the battle that occurred between the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas – the two lineages of the ‘Bhārata-race’. Of course, if we consider this in an epic form, it should not be extensive of more than 10,000 verses. In the later phase, we find its larger portion when it developed for the inclusion of new accounts for the sake of glorifying other families. It extended in form for the delineation of the personality like Bhīma, for the narration of the birth-accounts of the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas and for the detailed description of their schooling in the science of weapons. It also extended in form for the necessity of dignifying one Kṣatriya race from the other and for the narration of devices adopted by the Kauravas with a view to driving out the Pāṇḍavas in order to obtain the inheritance of the kingdom. Besides, it developed in shape for incorporating the lengthy description of ill-treatments of Pāṇḍavas at the hands of Kauravas and for the delineation of Pāṇḍavas' exile in forest and their staying incognito in the palace of King Virāṭa. It also augmented in form for the inclusion of the Śrīmadbhagavadgītā comprising eighteen chapters teeming with Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s discourses on dharma, atmatattva and mokṣatattva. The size of the treatise also grew for furnishing the prolonged description of Kurukṣetra-war, extending for eighteen days and finally for presenting
the account of Pāṇḍavas triumph in the war – all these narrations constitute
the enlarged form of the portion called ‘Bhārata’. The portion Bhārata
attained the dignity like that of the Vedas. In fact, it is called the fifth
Veda as well. When the recitation of the Vedas was prohibited for the
womenfolk and for the Śūdras, the Bhārata appeared to them as the main
source of acquiring knowledge. In the passage of time many new topics
were also included for which it became the storehouse of knowledge for
the common run of people. The causes for the present voluminous form
of this great epic are the delineations of the origin of various royal families
and the facts related to their genealogies as met with in the Adiparvan. In
places such topics were introduced of which every one could be treated
as an independent epic. For instances, we get ‘Dusṣyanta-Śakuntalā
episode’, ‘Yayāti-episode’, ‘Nala-Damayantī-episode’, ‘Rāma-Sītā
episode’, ‘Śāvitrī-Satyavān episode’ and many other small and big
episodes. If we measure the narratives of all these episodes, we find that
these occupy the one-fourth portion of the main epic.2 Besides, another
cause of its voluminous form is the monotonous prolonged narration of
the war. It covers twenty percent portion of the epic. Apart from this,
Śrīmadbhagavatagītā as depicted in the Bhāmaparvan, as well as the
discussions on topics like Rājadharma, Āpaddhāma and Mukādhāma
of the Śaṅtiparvan are responsible for the augmentation of this great epic.
In the Anuśāsanaparvan also such narratives are met with. All these
descriptions, combined together, occupy thirty per-cent portion of this
epic and the main chronicle remains only of 10,000 verses.3
There is also a supplementary called Harivamṣa of this great epic. This treatise is of three minor parvans, such as Harivamṣa parvan, Viṣṇuparvan and Bhaviṣya parvan. The book consists of 16,000 verses and the number of chapters is 317. The first upaparvan (minor parvan) is itself a purāṇa dealing with numerous hearsays alongwith various genealogies. In the second upaparvan we meet with the life-history of Śrīkṛṣṇa while the third one predicts the future events. It appears that the theme of the Harivamṣa is based mostly on the subject matters of the Viṣṇupurāṇa, Bhāgavatapurāṇa, Bhaviṣyapurāṇa and others. In many places of the Mahābhārata, the magnanimity of Śrīkṛṣṇa is pompously displayed. The Harivamṣa is written much later than the period of the composition of Mahābhārata.

**Division of Parvans:**

We have no accurate information to pin down exactly when the Mahābhārata is divided into eighteen parvans. In accordance with the Pune Critical Edition of the Mahābhārata, the genuine epic was of 10,000 verses. We can presume that the division of parvans was made in much later periods. The Mahābhārata contains eighteen parvans. The longest Śāntiparvan consists of 14,525 verses and the Śāntiparvan and the Anuśāsanaparvan unitedly have 21,000 verses i.e., almost one-fourth of the whole Mahābhārata. As discussed earlier, the Mahābhārata attained the present form by a lengthy process of additions and alterations and

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finally by means of this process of division of numerous parvans or books, its various portions were included into the eighteen parvans.

**The Excellence of the Mahâbhârata:**

While describing the excellence of an epic, Matthew Arnold states that the characters of the story, their languages and the metres should be taken into consideration. There should be lively conversation in it and occasionally it should be interpreted with dramatic scenes. Besides, its aim should be pure and noble.\(^5\) In the light of this statement we are of the opinion that the Mahâbhârata is the most excellent epic. The story of this epic deals mainly with the scions of king Bharata. It is composed mostly in simple Anuṣṭup and Triṣṭup metres and its language is very nice, pure, lucid and chaste. Apart from these, numerous dramatic conversations coupled with playlets are met with in it. The main moral aphorism of this epic is ideal human life, which consists of four pursuits of life viz. piety, prosperity, pleasure and salvation. Among these, the piety is an invaluable treasure. In fact, the righteous principle dominates the entire epic. Since teachings on righteousness is the main theme of this epic, it is, therefore, called a Dharmaśāstra and the Fifth Veda.\(^6\)

**Other Features of the Mahâbhârata:**

The Mahâbhârata is not only a history, legend and purâṇa, it is also an epic, religious scripture, a work on economics, erotic science, moral
science and a science of emancipation as well. In its encyclopedic form other excellent features are also met with. Legend, history and purâṇa are mutually interdependent to one another. It signifies mainly the past history and the accounts of ancient historical figures. But in some respects, it signifies other meanings also. By the term Ākhyāna (legend), it signifies pauranic legends, ballads, songs and specific accounts. On the other hand, purâṇa means ancient ethical stories, past legends, particularly accounts of mysterious creation and accounts related to the principle of creation. The pauranik Mahâbhârata is not only an account of the principle of creation or an account relating to the principle of the mystery of creation but alongwith it we find the serial geographical list, folklores, accounts of Viṣṇu and Śiva and so on.

There is no doubt that in the Mahâbhârata there is conglomeration of the distinctive features of an epic. There are also reasons to designate the Mahâbhârata a religious scripture, economics and the science of eroticism. These additional features do not in any way transform the main characteristics of the Mahâbhârata since the treatises of ethics, emancipation, religion, economics, eroticism etc. are replete with their own divergent features. The Mahâbhârata is really an excellent religious scripture endowed with moral science. The dharma is not only the source of all the topics of the Mahâbhârata but it is factual in major part.

As a religious scripture or code of laws (Śmṛti) the nature of the Mahâbhârata is three-fold viz. (i) VarṇâŚ ramadharma (duties of four stages of life or conducts), (ii) Śrâddha – offerings to the manes, (iii) Dâyabhâga
– inheritance of the property, Vyâ vahâra (jurisprudence) or sacrament of penance (expiation) etc.

The revelation of dharma is mainly found in the Śântiparvan and Anuśâsanaparvan. For instance – (i) Râjadharma or the duties of a king as the head of the state and the administration under the prevailing social and political background, (ii) Āpaddharma or the code of conduct to be followed at the time of severe adversity specially when the traditional way of life or conduct is impossible for the upper two classes of the society, (iii) Mokṣadharma – liberation from the cycle of birth and death which is regarded as the supreme pursuit of life in accordance with the Indian philosophy. (iv) Dânadharma means liberalism or mental attitude to bestow land, treasure, gold etc., profusely and performing accordingly.

The subject-matter of Economics is, in fact, related to the duties of a king. It means the practical aspects of the administration and also politics; for instances, the dignity of a king, democracy, council of ministers, administrative departments, treasury, system of taxation, four-fold policy, army, internal and foreign policy etc. In the Mahâbhârata we come across such ethical codes accompanied with proper interpretations, which show the mankind the right paths to pursue.

The Bhagavadgîtâ, the Sanatsujâtiya and the Anugîtâ etc., included in the Mahâbhârata, are corroborative of the philosophical principle that focuses on the path of salvation. In the Mahâbhârata, the principle of Bhaktiyoga, Karmayoga and Jñânayoga are also illustrated. Besides, the
doctrines of the Śāmkhya, Yoga, Vedānta, Vaishnavism, Saivism and Śākta Cult etc., and the reflection of the spiritual ideas are also met with in the Mahābhārata. Going through the Mahābhārata, we are acquainted with the codes and modes of the ancient Indian way of life, political situation, cultural environment and values of life. To the poets, architects and moralists this epic is a source of inspiration. This epic remains alive to the common run of people for thousands of years transgressing the limits of space and time. Since diverse topics, truths and valuable narration of eternal information are amalgamated in this great epic, there is an adage that the great poet Vyāsa has touched all the subjects of the earth, illuminated by the sun-rays. Besides, it can also be said that the Mahābhārata has revealed the meanings of the four Vedas to the general public and it prays for the well-being of people irrespective of caste, creed, race, language and sex. Moreover, it is the ideal of the Mahābhārata to establish dharma or universal moral principles, honesty and prosperity in India. That is why, the Mahābhārata is so popular to the common run of people. Right from the sixth century AD, the Mahābhārata is studied in the temples of even the far-off country like Cambodia. In the later centuries, Turkies of Mongalia were acquainted in their own language with the thrilling episode like the assassination of Hiḍimba. During the last several centuries, the people of different Asian and European countries became acquainted with the stories and moral lessons as contained in the Mahābhārata. The epic particularly influenced the art and culture of South-East Asian countries.
It may be presumed that at the earlier stage of composition of this epic, there was the existence of powerful kingdoms like Kuru, Pāñcāla, Magadha, Mathurā etc., lying on the Gaṅgā-Yamunā valley. The major portions of these kingdoms were forest lands. Among these, mention may be made of Khāṇḍava-vana, Kāmyaka-vana etc and their descriptions are recorded in the Mahābhārata. These forest-lands again were situated on the banks of the rivers like Sarasvatī, Dṛḍadvatā and Mālinī where dwelled the great learned sages skilled in foretelling. It may be inferred that even before the composition of this epic, this vast land, called Bhārata, extended to ocean at the one end and the Himālayas at the other. To the north of this vast country stood the hut of Nara-nārāyaṇa at Vadrāṇātha and to the South Kanyākumārā. Again this vast land extended from Dvāravatīn the west to Prāgjyotihāpurā on the bank of the river Brahmaputra in the east. The main centre of political activities was the central India (Madhyadesha) lying on the banks of the rivers Gaṅgā and Yamunā — the track of which comprises modern Punjāb, Haryāṇā, Delhi, Hīmāchal, Uttarākhand and Uttarpradesh; although Magadha or Southern Bihar was also a principal centre of political influence.

**King and the People:**

The great emperors as depicted in this epic were good administrators. The majority of them governed the kingdom hereditarily. But none was elected administrator. Nevertheless, in the Puruvaṁ śānuktana of the Adiparvan, it is stated that there were a few dominions wherein all
collectively selected a noble individual as a king. It merits mention here that in some places of the Mahābhārata, it is mentioned that there were kingdoms having no king.⁷ In those kingdoms, the selected self-governments called ‘garas’ governed; in some states, among the warrior classes there was a titular head only. There the prominent citizens called ‘Sāṅghamukhya’ ruled the state. The kings were all powerful administrators; but on every occasion they invited their council of ministers and sought their suggestions. Their council of ministers consisted of a soldier, a distinguished old member of a royal family, commander-in-chief and other dignitaries; or occasionally the king sought the advice of his priest and also his well-wishers. The king also accepted the instructions of the representatives of the lower classes of people.

During the days of the Mahābhārata, the priests and preceptors did not hesitate to rebuke the king while showing his omissions and mistakes for the sake of the welfare of the kingdom. The king also differed sometimes from his council of ministers or from his councillors. The king did not forget to comply with the principle viz. when both the kings and his advisers act in concert, full prosperity ever favours the country. In this context Bhāravi in his Kirātārjuniyam, which is based on the Vānaparvan of the Mahābhārata, writes —

सदानुकुलेषु हि कृतते रति

नृपेष्वमालेषु च सर्वसम्पद:। ⁸

There was a well-defined system of taxation in the state. The king
had to study the Vedas and other lores in order to enable himelf to discharge his duties properly and to run a good administration. Besides, he was expected to always remain self controlled.

**Influence of the Mahābhārata on Classical Sanskrit Works:**

Right from the early part of the Christian era many court-epics, lyrics and dramas were written in classical Sanskrit, basing some portions or the whole Mahābhārata. Among these mention may be made of Bhāravi’s Kirātārjuniyam, consisting of 18 cantos and written in the sixth century AD. The theme of this epic is Arjuna’s begetting divine weapon styled Pāsupata by the blessing of Lord Śīva. In the last part of the seventh century AD, poet Māgha composed his Śīvapālavadham. The source of this epic is a small incident of the Mahābhārata. The theme of this epic is the assassination of Śīvapāla, the king of Cedi by Śrīkrṣṇa. Kṛṣṇendra, the Kasmirian poet, wrote his ‘Mahābhāratamañjarī’ in 1037 AD. The ‘Bhārata-campā’ of twelve chapters was composed by Anantabhaṭṭa supporting the Mahābhārata. Vāsudeva, the author of Nalodaya, composed a Yamakakāvy ‘Yudhiṣṭhiravijaya’ by name on the basis of the Mahābhārata. At the beginning it deals with Pāṇḍu’s hunting expedition and then ends with the coronation ceremony of Yudhiṣṭhir. In the early part of the thirteenth century, Amaracandra Suri wrote his ‘Bālabhārata’ consisting of 19 cantos on the basis of the Mahābhārata. Nātivarman
composed a Yamakakāvyya named ‘Kṛ̥cakavadha’ in the light of the slaying of Kṛ̥caka by Bhīma. Vāstupāla, a minister of king Vṛadhavala of Dholka wrote his ‘Naranārāyaṇananda’ consisting of 16 cantos. The subject-matter of this are the friendship between Kṛ̥ṣṇa and Arjuna and also the wedding ceremony of Subhadrā. The source of Kālidāsa’s Kumārasambhavam is not yet definitely determined since its story is related to both the epics – the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata.

The Mahābhārata is the shining gem in Sanskriti literature and in some places it is replete with pathos. In the later years, numerous kāvyas, dramas and Campūkāvyas were written dealing with ‘Nala-Damayantī episode’ of this great epic. Śrīharṣa, a minister of Vijayacandra and Jayacandra of Kanauj composed his famous court-epic styled ‘Naiṣadhatarkīrti’ of 22 cantos in the last part of the twelfth century. As many as five epics were composed in Sanskrit literature on the basis of the ‘Nala-Damayantī episode’. A certain king named Mahāpātra Kṛ̥ṣṇananda of Puri wrote an epic called ‘Sahāyananda’ of 15 cantos dealing with the entire Nala account before the fourteenth century. In the last part of the fourteenth century and the first part of the fifteenth century, Vāmanabhaṭṭa Bāma composed his ‘Nalabhuyadayakāvyya’. Vāsudeva, a Keralian poet, who was a contemporary of Kulaśekhara narrated the Nala-story in a Yamaka Kāvyya entitled ‘Nalodaya’. In the twelfth century, Trivikramabhaṭṭa composed his Nalacampū otherwise called ‘Damayantīkathā’ containing seven Ucchvāsas. But in it only a portion of ‘Nala-episode’ is depicted. In the twelfth century, Rāma, a disciple of
Hemacandra composed a drama styled ‘Nalavilāsa’ consisting of seven acts. There are also other works relating to Nala story, such as, Nalacarita, a drama by Nākanṭha Dāksita, ‘Nala-bhūmipāla-rūpaka’ and ‘Nala-Yādava-Rāghava-Pāṇḍavya’. In the latter work, four stories are narrated side by side. ‘Nala-Varnana-Kāvyā’ by Lakṣmīhara, ‘Nalānanda’ by Jñavibudha and ‘Rāghava-Naiṣadhya’ by Haridatta Sūri are also worth-mentioning. The drama ‘Naiṣadhānanda’ of seven acts by Kṣemāvara, the author of ‘Caṇḍrakāşīka’, is also composed on the basis of Nala story.

On the basis of the Mahābhārata or some part of it, numerous dramas were written in Sanskrit. Among these works, Bhāsa’s six dramas are most probably ancient. The ‘Madhyamavyāyoga’ depicts the re-union of Bhāma with Hīḍimbā in a peculiar situation. In the drama called ‘Dūtagahaṭotkaca’, Bhāma’s son Ghaṭotkaca appeared as a messenger in the court of the Kauravas to convey the message that bereaved Arjuna would avenge the death of his son Abhimanyu on the next day of war. The theme of ‘Pañcarātra’ is the stealing of king Virāţa’s cows by the Kaurava soldiers. But, many deviations from the Mahābhārata are noticed in it. In the Dūtavākya, Kṛṣṇa appears as an envoy before Duryodhana claiming half of the kingdom for the Pāṇḍavas. In the Urubhanga, the mace-fighting between Bhāma and Duryodhana followed by the fracturing of the latter’s thigh-bone by the former, is depicted. The theme of the drama called ‘Karnaḥbhāra’ is the carrying off Karṇa’s inborn amulet and ear-ring by Indra in the guise of a Brahmin. The playwright Bhāsa shows his superb
talent of innovations in his dramas. Kālidāsa, through a deft use of his splendiferous creative genius wrote his celebrated drama entitled ‘Abhijñānaśākuntalam’ on the basis of the comparatively dry Sakuntalā episode as described in the Mahābhārata. This play is recognised as the luminous gem in the history of the world literature.

Bhaṭṭānārāyaṇa wrote ‘Venaṃ hāra’ before the eighth century A.D. The central theme of it is tying up the hair of Draupadī by Bhīma after besmearing his hand with Duhṣasana’s blood. In the tenth century, Rājaśekhara produced ‘Bāla-bhārata’ otherwise called ‘Pracāṇḍa-pāṇḍava’. It is an incomplete play since it relates up to the episode of dice-play and Draupadīs insult in Kauravas’ court. Kṛṣṇendrā’s ‘Citrabhārata’ is lost to the world. Kulaśekharavarman, a king of Kerala, produced two plays styled ‘Subhadrā-dhanañjaya’ and ‘TapaśSamvaraṇa’ in the light of the Mahābhārata. Prahlādanadeva in the twelfth century A.D., wrote a play called ‘Pārtha-parākrama’. The central theme of this play is the carrying off king Virāta’s cows by the Kaurava-soldiers and the victory of Pārtha (Arjuna) over those soldiers. Kāñcanapāṇḍita, resorting to the same topic, produced a drama styled ‘Dhanañjaya-vijaya’. But the date of this work is not yet fixed. This drama ends with the narrative of Abhimanyu’s marriage with the princess Uttarā, the daughter of king Virāṭa. Vatsarāja, a minister of Paramardideva of Kālañjara produced a drama named ‘Samudramanathana’ consisting of three acts on the basis of churning the ocean by gods and demons. Hastimalla composed ‘Vikrānta-Kaurava’ of six acts in the twelfth century. Vijayapāla, a certain courtier of Cālukya
king Kumârapâla, wrote ‘DraupadâSvayamvara’ in two acts. In two other plays, Bhûma’s boldness is narrated. In the play styled ‘Nirbhayabhûma’, Rama (12th century A.D.) depicts Bhûma’s slaying of Vakarâkâsa and in the ‘Bhûmavikramavyâyoga’, Mokâditya describes many events of Bhûma’s prowess and boldness.

Viśvanâtha, a courtier of king Pratâparudra, wrote an one-act play Saugandhikaharana by name on the basis of the Mahâbhârata. Nâlakantha, a Keralian poet, composed ‘Kalyâna-Saugandhika’ in the seventeenth century. The central theme of this play is the combat between Bhûma and Hanumat while the former went to collect perfumes for Draupadî from Kuvera’s lake. In the Haridâta, a play of unknown origin and date, Śrikrûna’s envoyship for the sake of making peace between the Kauravas and PâñÐavâs is delineated. Vyâsaśrâmadeva again composed ‘PâñÐavâbhûtyadaya’. His other play is ‘Subhadrâpariñaya’ wherein Arjuna’s marriage with Subhadrâ is the central theme. On the same topic, poet Mâdhava produced his drama ‘Subhadrâharaña’. Saikaralâla, a son of Mahesvara composed a drama styled Sâvitricarita in 1882. Besides, following the story of the Mahâbhârata, two other dramas named ‘Mukuṭa-tââtikâ’ and ‘Cañḍapâla’ were written. But these two dramas remain undiscovered even today.

**Influence on Indian Life and Culture:**

From the above discussion, we find that the poets and dramatists of
later period copiously adopted the themes for their treatises from the Mahābhārata. The influence of this great epic is immense also on the art, culture and social life of the Indians. Havell opines that, "as much the common property of all Hinduism as the English Bible and Shakespeare belong to all English-speaking people. The Indian epics contain a portrait gallery of ideal types of men and women which afford to every good Hindu the highest examplars of moral conduct, and every Hindu artist an inexhaustible mine of subject matter."9

On the stone-pillars of the Gupta period, the episode of the Kirātārjunīyam was portrayed. In numerous sculptures of the Gupta period different stories of the Mahābhārata were reflected. On the stone pillars of Māmallapuram, various postures of Arjuna’s severe penance were artistically engraved. These postures were inscribed on a big stone, measuring 96 feet length and 43 feet breadth. Those and other engraved pictures are the best testimonials of the art and sculpture of the Pallava period. Among the Indian sculptures, the churning of ocean by the gods and demons, which is rather the symbol of war between good and evil, is very popular.

In the mediaeval period many Indian artisans created artistry on Arjuna’s boldness, ‘Nala-Damayantīepisode’ and on the accounts of the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata. Among the modern artists, we may mention the names of Ravi Barma, Avanindranath Tagore, Nandalal Basu and others who drew many pictures on various scenes of the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata. Just as the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata focus
on the image of ideal man and woman, even so these two epics propagate the Indian ideal of dharma. The Rāmāyaṇa portrays the model society and the life of an ideal nation and family. The Mahābhārata teaches us that hatred begets hatred and malice leads one to one’s doom. Yudhīśhṭhira is the symbol of highest ethical virtue, Bhṛma and Arjuna are model heroic persons. The elderly persons even now cite many incidents and characters of the epics while teaching moral science or ethical lessons to the younger generation for the sake of moulding their characters. The incidents of the epics give pleasure instantaneously. The teachings of the epics, comprehended through listening to daily recitation in a temple or in a social function, strike the mind of every Indian, in whatever stage of life he or she may belong. These immortal epics have cast an abiding impact on the culture, civilization, society, state and mind of a vast number of people transgressing the limits of time and space and therefore, it will be insufficient to designate it simply an epic. In reality, the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata are the true history of India. These are not only amalgamations of events; these, in fact, present the picture of the eternal and sublim Indian thoughts and the quest for higher aspiration. These two epics establish concord between Indians’ national soul and individual soul mingling together with our every exhalation. Without ascertaining intellectually the significance of the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata, the effort to realise the true nature of the passing life of Indians is meaningless. These two epics focus on the images of the two streams – moral and intellectual aspects of the Aryan civilization. The influence of these two
epics on the life, civilization, language, literature, nationality, religion and the like of the Indians is tremendous. These two epics have influenced the life-style of the Indians for long three thousand years in continuity. In this way, these two epics lead us to the depth of the moral teachings of our forefathers from which we and our society, race and country find out the lasting vital strength of our practical, cultural and moral life as well.

The great poets like Vâlmîki and Vyâsâ passed away in the stream of passing time, but their sayings even today give us strength, tranquility and amity in thousand flows. Their speeches continually make the soul of India vivacious and vigorous even now.

The National Thoughts in the Mahâbhârata:

In the Mahâbhârata, we get the detailed information of the glorious history of ancient India. The subject-matter of this voluminous epic mainly deals with the dharma-yuddha (war for the establishment of dharma or universal moral principles) fought between the Kauravas and the Pâṇḍavas. Europeans designate it as an epic. All the aspects of human life, yearning for the fulfilment of the four-fold ends of human existence viz. piety, prosperity, pleasure and salvation, are depicted in this work. The Mahâbhârata shows the path for obtaining eternal peace in the midst of troublesome life. The national feeling is conspicuously reflected in the texts and events of the Mahâbhârata. It is seen that the kings used to take various measures for the security, as well as well-being of the subjects. Special importance is also given on the duties of a king in the form of
ensuring the protection and stability of the kingdom. It is seen that the
kings, who remained constantly vigilant for bringing about all-round
development of their kingdoms, were specially eulogised in this epic.
The epic poet presents a vivid description of an ideal and prosperous
nation attaching due importance on the material, moral and spiritual
development of the people. These descriptions definitely inspire the people
to work for the establishment of a welfare state and an enriched
national life.

After the birth of three princes viz. Dhrtarashtra, Pndu and Vidura,
the three principalities named as Kurujani gala, Kuru and Kuruksetra
immensely flourished. During this period the soil smiled with abundant
crops; the cloud showered profusely in due time and the trees produced
sufficient clusters of flowers and fruits. Animals used for riding e.g.,
elephants, horses etc. as well as other beasts and birds were found
delightful; flowers were full of fragrances and fruits were delicious.
The cities were replete with merchants and artisans and almost all people were
heroic, skilful, noble and cheerful. There was no thief anywhere in the
country and the mind of the people did not go astray or did not get involved
in sinful activities. For all these reasons, it was felt that as though the
Golden Age (Satayuga) was prevalent then.

During the age of the Mahabharata the people were not arrogant or
greedy and they honoured one another. Righteousness was their natural
associate. At that time the capital Hastinapura, which was as beautiful
as Amaravatii (paradise), shone like a great ocean as it was full of numerous
edifices, beautified with befitting huge doors and gates and inhabited by innumerable human beings. The citizens rambled cheerfully in the rivers, oceans, forests, ponds, lakes and on the plane tracks. The people, living in the Southern Kuru, considered themselves as dignified as the siddhas (semi divine beings endowed with purity and holiness), sages and celestial bards of the Uttara Kuru region. In that beautiful land, reared and nurtured by kings of Kuru dynasty, there was no man niggardly and no woman widowed. So in the Adiparvana of the Mahâbhârata, it has been said –

नापवत् कृपणः कविचनाभवन् विषयवः खियः।

tasmâm jñaptavâ rathye kuruvarâihilâkte ||

Peace and Prosperity of the People:

During that period the Kuru-land became prosperous and hence festivities were constantly celebrated everywhere in the state. The Kuru-land became secured and enlarged through subjugating the neighbouring territories under the direct supervision of Bhûma. Religious rites were always performed in the state in accordance with Bhûma’s guidance. When the sacraments of the princes like Dhîtarâstra and others were over, the citizens and denizens of the country were all cheerful.

In this manner after narrating the peace, pleasure and prosperity of the people as they lived under the good administration of the rulers, Vyâsa emphasized the importance of tireless and sincere endeavours for the
welfare of the nation – which bespeaks national feelings of the people residing in the country. Witnessing the sacrament ceremonies of the princes, the people derived immense pleasure and this indicates that the people earnestly aspired for the all-round welfare of the state.

When the sacrament ceremonies like investiture with sacred thread of the princes Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Pāṇḍu, Vidura and others were over, they gradually became skilful in archery, fighting on horse-back, mace-fighting, sword-fighting and also in fighting on elephant-back. They studied thoroughly moral science, history, purāṇas and other lores. They also learnt the Vedas and Vedāṅgas.24 Pāṇḍu was more powerful in righteous war; Dhṛtarāṣṭra was physically strong while Vidura was religious-minded and law-abiding in the three worlds.25 Seeing the almost defunct Śāntanu’s race rejuvenated, all became highly astounded and praised the progenies of Śāntanu.26 At that time amongst the womenfolk, giving birth to heroes, Ambikā, and Ambālikā, the daughters of the king of Kāsi, were renowned. Amongst the countries, Kurujāṅgala, amongst righteous personages Bhṛmna and amongst the cities, Hastināpura were pre-eminent.27

The scions (progenies) of this well-known family, surpassing others became the emperors of a vast kingdom and since the magnanimous and religious-minded kings were ruling the earth continually, this dynasty did not perish in any time.

रक्षितं राजभि: पूर्वं धर्मचिन्द्रमहाकामभि:।

नौतसद्यममचेरं कदाचिदिवह न: कुलम्।। 28

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It is stated in the Śāntiparvan of the Mahābhārata that the king is the real body of the subjects and hence there cannot be a state without a king and again without a state there is no entity of a king. The king is the real heart, means, refuge and the cause of happiness. Therefore, through the king, the subjects get wealth in this life and attain heaven in the other world. It is also stated in the Smṛti literature that the prime duty of a king is to safeguard the state and to gratify the subjects or in other words, the main function of a king is to satisfy the subjects by means of good administration so that they may derive happiness, peace, prosperity and above all feel security in their life.

Security of the State and Subjects:

Now a question may be raised as to how a king will safeguard a state? In reply to this query, it is said that a king should control himself first i.e., he should control his five sense-organs since only a self-controlled king can be able to subjugate his enemies. A king should array his armed forces in forts, frontiers, gardens of the capital, places near the city-guards, other cities and palaces of the kingdom, places in the vicinity of the harem and also in the places near the theatre-hall. A king should appoint secret agents who are intelligent, truthful, faithful and loyal and who can tolerate hunger, thirst and toils and can pretend to be deaf, blind and dullard. Besides, when the king considers himself inferior to his opponent in strength, he should make peace after due consultation with his council of ministers. In this manner engaging
himself in rendering welfare of his subjects, a king should take befitting steps for the security of his state. This is clearly laid down in the Mahâbхârata. In such thoughts on welfare and security measures of a state, national feeling is hinted at.

In the Sabhâparvan of the Mahâbхârata also it is stated that a king should remain always alert so that no turmoil or unrest occurs in the state. It is also instructed in this epic that a king should be keen enough on safeguarding the state. That is why, it is seen in the Sabhâparvan that Yudhíśhîra, appropriately dividing the time for performing various duties, enjoyed the human pursuits of life like piety, prosperity and pleasure in due time equally.\textsuperscript{36} Therefore, being himself endowed with six-fold royal merits, he ruled the kingdom after properly considering the seven-fold means of success and testing fourteen royal vices.\textsuperscript{37} He made treaty with his enemies by means of conciliation, gift, punishment and sowing dissention while he considered himself inferior and the opponent more powerful.\textsuperscript{38} For the security of the state Yudhíśhîra appointed seven chiefs viz., fort-guard, commander, judge, general-in-chief, priest, physician and soothsayer after considering their qualities; they were noble, not addicted to vices and loyal.\textsuperscript{39} After acquainting himself fully regarding the activities of his friends, enemies and of indifferent parties through secret spies, he used to make treaty in due time, if it was considered beneficial for the state.\textsuperscript{40} The ministers, well versed in the scriptures, did not divulge secret counsels and remained duty-bound in safeguarding the state, and therefore,
the enemies could not snatch away the state –

कच्चवतः संजूनमन्वायेतरायेः: शाष्ककोविदः।

रायं सुरक्षितं ततः! राजभिन्न विलुप्ते॥ ४१

Yudhiṣṭhira used to purchase a learned man in exchange of thousand fools, since in emergent situation only a wise man could be able to render well being.⁴² For the security of the state, all the forts were filled up with riches, paddy, weapons, waters, machines, artisans and warriors.⁴³ The king Yudhiṣṭhira used to employ the ministers, who were not deceitful, hereditarily employed, of noble characters, born in high families and accustomed to work in responsible positions.⁴⁴ He also used to bestow sufficient favours on the persons, who were wise and learned.⁴⁵ Just as the parents used to rear and nurture their offsprings treating them equally, even so Yudhiṣṭhira, behaving equally with his subjects, became their venerable and dependable person.⁴⁶

**Royal Policies and People's Welfare :**

Yudhiṣṭhira also used to favour his kith and kin, preceptors, aged persons, merchants, artisans and poor men by bestowing them wealth and treasures profusely for the sake of the prosperity of the state.⁴⁷ He made the villages like the cities and out-skirts of the villages like the villages thereby making the state prosperous.⁴⁸ The guards, accompanied by soldiers, used to roam in all secured and troublesome places including villages and towns.⁴⁹ Yudhiṣṭhira, not being greedy or infatuated or having
blind faith in others’ sayings did not disturb the livelihood of his dependents.\textsuperscript{50} Yudhishthira, like his forefathers, always engaged himself in righteous duties sanctioned by the Vedas.\textsuperscript{51} He offered sufficient presents or gifts at the end of sacrifices to the meritorious Brahmins and fed them delicious food with a desire for the welfare of the state.\textsuperscript{52} He also used to salute elderly relatives, preceptors, aged men and also bow down before the deities, sages and Brahmins.\textsuperscript{53} He used to even bow down before the trees of the temples. He did not rouse anybody’s wrath or sorrow. He was always guided by his intellect and code of conduct conducive to piety, prosperity and pleasure.\textsuperscript{54} It is said that the Kingdom of a person, who leads his life in this manner, is never destroyed; rather, conquering the earth, he attains great success at ease.\textsuperscript{55}

Infidelity, untruthfulness, wrath, carelessness, dilatoriness, not having learned association, idleness, restlessness, worry about money, consulting with inexperienced persons, not commencing definite task, divulging secret counsel, administering poison to enemy and excessive addiction to worldly affairs – these are the fourteen vices of the kings. But, Yudhishthira was free from such vices and therefore, his kingdom flourished. King Yudhishthira used to take care of the blind, mute, lame, crippled, helpless and wandering celibates like a father. Besides, for the sake of the welfare of his state, he conquered the six-fold vices viz. sleeping in day-time, idleness, fear, wrath, leniency and dilatoriness.\textsuperscript{56}

Since he conducted all the tasks of his state in accordance with the instructions of Nârada, he was able to govern the earth, encircled by the

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oceans. It is said that the king, who runs the administration of the state according to the rules laid down in śāstras, is compared with Indra. 

From the detailed description of the administrative policies of Yudhiṣṭhira, we can deduce the national feelings prevalent during the age of the Mahābhārata. If we analyse the above descriptions, we find that the main aim of the administrative policy is to safeguard the state, maintain internal peace and harmony and to gratify the subjects by giving them security in their lives and professions. This description of maintaining social peace and national security in the age of the Mahābhārata reflects the true nature of the feeling of national welfare. It is stated in the Mahābhārata that a king should be watchful on his own state and also on the other states and should always remain alert and careful. It is also clearly mentioned in the Mahābhārata that a king, after properly considering his own strength and that of others, declare war or make peace with the enemy. In this context, Manu in the seventh chapter of his Manusāṁhitā, writes –

कार्य सोज्जेत्य शक्तिभुन देशकाली च तत्त्वः।
कुले धर्मसिद्धवर्ष विश्वरूप पुन: पुनः॥

i.e., considering the necessity, strength, time and place, a king assumes different forms for due accomplishment of his royal duties. With a view to illustrating this point, many instances are given in the Mahābhārata itself.

During the period of their living incognito, the Pāṇḍavas stayed in the capital of King Virāṭa in disguise and served the king while adopting
different feigned names; e.g., Yudhisthira was known as Kańka, Arjuna as eunuch Bṛhannalā (the dance master of princes Uttarā) and so on.⁶⁰ On the last day of Pāṇḍavas, living incognito, Suśarmā, the king of Trigartta drove away the cows of king Virāṭa by force and a certain cowherd conveyed this message to the king.⁶¹ Arjuna, in the guise of eunuch Bṛhannalā, restored the cows by fighting terribly with the Kaurava-soldiers. We gather this information from the Vīrāṭaparvan of the Mahābhārata.

We find in the Bhīṣmaparvan of the Mahābhārata that Bhīṣma, while lying on the bed of arrows advised Yudhiṣṭhira specially about the importance and utility of a state and the relation of a king and the state. Besides, while narrating the causes of the rise or fall of a state, Bhīṣma instructed Yudhiṣṭhira to constantly take necessary steps for maintaining the glory and prosperity of the state. He also advised how a king could conquer the enemies in battle. A king should protect the state by all means and the state a king by turn.⁶²

It is seen in this epic that the states were named after the kings, who achieved great success in administration. To elucidate this point, we may cite the instance of Bharata, who achieved great reputation in running the administration and that is why, the country is named Bhārata after him.

**Pan-Indian Outlook :**

During those days, Duryodhana, Jarāsandha, Jayadratha, Śiśupāla, Narakāsura and others, keeping aside the interests of the people, were
engaged in conspiracies and skirmishes with a view to dominating other monarchs, who were virtuous and peace-loving. Those wicked kings like Duryodhana, Jarâsandha etc. wished to establish despotism in the state. After the death of Jarâsandha and Narakâsura, their successors also followed the same path. Under the circumstances, KṚṢṇa’s main aim was to establish the rule of virtuous monarchs in India under the leadership of benevolent and high-souled Yudhiṣṭhira. Before the commencement of Kurukṣetra war, KṚṢṇa tried his level best to restore human values peacefully by avoiding undesirable destruction and deaths; but his efforts were frustrated. As a result, the Kurukṣetra war became inevitable. This momentous war was fought in the field of Kurukṣetra; all the kings of the then India participated in either side. This Kurukṣetra war settled the future of India for several succeeding centuries.

Though the erstwhile India was divided into numerous states, nevertheless, the people of India were mentally and culturally united with a common bond in the form of eternal values of life. In order to strengthen this bond, Arjuna travelled throughout the north-east India during his exile and KṚṢṇa released the common men from the clutches of tyrannical ruler by assassinating Narakâsura, the king of Kâmarupa. Though the people of India were living in different states from the administrative point of view, nevertheless, human and cultural values made them united socially, economically, religiously, philosophically and culturally. The thought of united India under the social and cultural point of view, dominated the thoughts of intellectual elite right from the Vedic period and this
pan-Indian outlook in socio-cultural context became stronger during the pauranic and epic periods and the people of different states began to consider the entire Bhâratavarśa as one country and adore the land as a mother deity.

Therefore, Kṛṣṇa’s plan and action for establishing value-based administration, run on the basis of dharma (universal moral principles or eternal code of duty), was not confined to one or two states only. On the other hand, while Kṛṣṇa conceived the theme of ‘dharmacājya’, he virtually upheld the principle – ‘One country one people’ inspite of the existence of great number of kingdoms in the then India.

From the above discussion, it becomes clear that the throne of Hastināpura was not the real issue. The issue was the establishment of the rule of law (dharma)cājya) and pre-eminence of ethical values in matters relating to statecraft as well as social behaviour in the entire land extended from the Himālayas to the sea-shores and known as Bhârata. So, the war was fought at one place, i.e., the battle-field of Kuruksetra but the course of future political system and the status of social ethics of the then entire India for several succeeding centuries were determined.

**Descriptions of Rivers and Holy Places:**

In the Mahâbhârata, we also find a beautiful description of different rivers and country-sides of India which stirs the heart of every reader and becomes instrumental in impressing on the minds of readers the idea of a
common nationality based on the belief in the holiness of the land characterised by marvellous natural features. The names of the different Indian rivers, mountains, regions, forests and other elements of the extensive land called Bhāratavarṣa and also the measurement of the earth are met with in the Bhāmaparvan. First of all, Sudarśadvīpa otherwise called Jambudvīpa is described.

This island is described as being circular in shape like a wheel and replete with rivers, dark hills, numerous cities and beautiful countries. The trees of this island are full of flowers and fruits. In other words, this island is prosperous and encircled by the salty ocean. There are two vast countries named Pippalā and Śaśa on two sides of this island.63 There are six great mountains, (mythically called Varṣa-parvata) extended from the east to west, such as, the Himalayas, Hemakūta, Niśadha, Nīla, enriched with cat’s eye jewels, Śvetā, resembling the moon and Śṛṅgavān, variegated with, different kinds of minerals. The countries lying between these mountains are said to be very large and mythically called Varsas. Bhāratavarṣa is situated on the southern part of the Himālayas.64

In the Bhāmaparvan it is said that Bhāratavarṣa is very favourite to Indra. Besides, Vaivāvatamanu, Prithu, the son of Vena, high-souled Ikṣaku, Yayāti, Nahuṣa, Raśba, Gādhi the great, Dilīpa and other Kṣatriya kings are fond of Bhāratavarṣa.65 There are also seven huge mountains viz. Mahendra, Malaya, Sahya, Bhaktimān, Rkṣavān, Vindhya and Pāripātra.66 Apart from these, there are also many small hills where the
Mlecchas dwell. The names of some of the rivers, the waters of which are
drunk both by the Āryas and Mlecchas are also mentioned. Some of these
are the Gaṅges, Sindhu, Sarasvatī, Godāvari, Śatadru, Ikṣūla, Cītravāḥa, Hastisomā, Śaravatī, Punyavatī Anuṣṭāna, Surasā, Mahānadi, Pañcami, Maṇjulā, Rākṣalya etc. There are also mother-like rivers containing holy
waters.67 There are also other hundreds and thousands of rivers which
were not so renowned. Thus, narrating the glory of hills and rivers, the
great sage Vyāsa strengthened the feelings that all the hills and rivers of
Bhārata are sacred for the Indians.

In the Bhāgavaparvan the names of the different tracks of India are
also mentioned. These are Kurupāṅcāla, Śālva, Mādreya, Jāṅgala, Cedi,
Kuśālya, Matsya, Bhoja, Sindhu, Pulinda, Madra, Kalirīga, Kāśī Asmaka,
Pāṇḍurāgra, Goparāgra, Saka, Magadha, Anīga, Vaṅga, Malla, Ābhira,
Kundaka, Kāśmīra, Sauvira, Gāndhāra, Darśaka, Nīśadha, Masura,
Varvara, Odra etc.68 The countries lying in the southern part of India are
enumerated as Drāvida, Kerala, Prācyya, Bhusīka, Karnātaka,
Nabhakānana, Cola, Mālava, Trigartta, Tanavāla. Śivāta, Kâka, Taṅganā
and Parataṅgana etc.69 The countries inhabited by the Mlecchas, Vaiśyas
and Sūdras and lying on the north of India as mentioned in the
Bhāgavaparvan are Yavana, Cṇa, Kamvoja, Huṇa, Pārasika and so on.
The Kīrātas lived in Kalirīga, Tomara, Pṛṣaka, Hanumān and
Karabhaṅjaka.70 Descriptions of many other territories situated in the
frontier regions of eastern and northern directions are found in the epic.
The heroic and mighty kings, judicious in religion and wealth, aspired
these lands.71
While describing the duties of people, belonging to four grades (Varṇa) of the society, it is said that a Kṣatriya must protect his subjects under all circumstances. Bhīṣma advised that a Kṣatriya must maintain his subjects, put up resistance against the thieves and robbers and exterminate them and show his might against the enemies in war.72 Amongst the Kṣatriyas those who perform oblation, who are well conversant with the scriptures and trounce the enemies in war, become entitled to attain the heavenly abode.73 The fugitive Kṣatriya, who flees away from the battle-ground without sustaining any injuries, is rebuked all around. The king, who looks after his subjects properly, is called the supreme.74

While imparting lessons to Yudhiṣṭhira about the duties of persons in four different stages of life, Bhīṣma describes the duties of a grāhastha which seem to be conducive to the peace, order and progress of the society and nation. It is spoken about grāhasthya Āśrama that the man, who belongs to this stage of life, provides selfless services, speaks a truth, leads simple life, engages himself in hospitality, earns money in honest way and cohabits with wife peacefully, attains perennial peace after breathing his last.75 Even after passing away, all his desired objects remain imperishable and intact.

Similarly, a sufficiently relishable and inspiring discussion is met with regarding the duties of the four stages of life viz., life of celibacy, domestic life, spiritual life in forest and ascetic life. This account is said to be the indicative of holy Indianness and glorious Indian nationality through the ‘Nārada-Yudhiṣṭhira episode’, ‘Pulastya-Bhīṣma episode’ and
‘Dhaumya-Yudhiṣṭhira episode’. These descriptions indicate the true nature of Indian spirit of devotion to the motherland, because there are elaborate discussions on the greatness of the holy places and the merits derived from pilgrimage to those places. The great sage thus seems to inspire the people to visit such places enthusiastically. These descriptions are definitely conducive to developing a pan-Indian outlook and also arousing consciousness regarding the unity and integrity of the nation, having a common feeling of respect and devotion to all the regions of this great country and this is the replica of the modern national feeling.

Also, in the Vanaparvan of the Mahābhārata, the sublimity of the holy places is described. The sages believe that Prayāga is the hip and loins of the earth, as well as the womb and a great holy place and Bhogavati is the alter of Brahmā, the creator, where the Vedas and the sacrifices being embodied worship Brahmā; the ascetics, gods and the kings, the protectors of the people, use to perform sacrifices at that holy place. Hence the wise persons say that Prayāga is the holiest place in the three worlds.76 It is said that the man who takes holy ablution in the celebrated confluence of the Gaṅges and the Yamunā, attains piety which is comparable to the fruits of Rājasūya sacrifice or Aśvamedha sacrifice.77 There also stands Vāsuki’s holy place Bhogavatī by name; whereas in the Gaṅges near Prayāga there stand two holy places called ‘Haṁ saprapatana’ and ‘Daśāśvamedhika’.78 Everywhere the Gaṅges is as sacred as Kurukṣetra; the Gaṅges is particularly holy at Kaṇakhala but at Prayāga the Gaṅges is the holiest. In the Satyayuga, all the sacred places are holy;

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in Tretā, Puṣkaratītha, in Dvāpara, Kurukṣetra while in Kali, the Gaṅges is specially holy. 79 By taking holy ablution at Puṣkara, Kurukṣetra, the Gaṅges and Prayāga etc. people emancipate the souls of the forefathers of seven generations upwards and seven generations downwards. That is why, Brahmā Himself says –

न गढ़ासुद्रां तीर्थं न देव: केशवात् पर:।

(there is no holy place, equal to the Gaṅges, no god, greater than Narāyaṇa and no castle, superior to Brahmin.)

Such narrations of the Sublimity of the holy places, situated in different regions of India, develope Pan-Indian outlook and strengthen national feelings of the people of India through inculcating in them firm belief in the holiness of all the parts of this great motherland and inspiring them to take firm resolve not to part with any part of this great motherland. Through presenting these descriptions, the great poet Vyāsa virtually inspires the Indian people to visit the holy places. This large territory Bhāratavarṣa is considered an indivisible entity and the holy rivers flowing through different regions and the sublime holy places sanctify our land of origin, our motherland. Consequently the impression about the sanctity of all the limbs of Mother India becoming deep-rooted in the minds of the Indians rouses the feeling of integral nationalism. Even today, the people of India aspire to be releaved of sins by taking holy ablution in the rivers, believed to be most sacred, and aspire to be blessed with piety by visiting various holy places, spread throughout the length and breadth of this great

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country. The basis of this national feeling is the belief that every part of
our motherland is very holy, deliverer of piety and emancipation. This
type of attractive descriptions as found in the Mahâbhârata serves an
important role in making the feeling of nationalism intensive and forceful.
This feeling is still prevalent among the mass people of India.

In the context of the national feeling, the sublimity or sanctity of
cows is nicely examplified. The greatness and sublimity of the cows are
so delineated in this epic that it excites in the minds of the readers deep
reverence to and faith in the divine qualities of cows. In this context, the
episode of the sage Cyavana and of king Nahuṣa are worth-mentioning.

In the Anuṣâsanaparvan of the Mahâbhârata, the offering of cows
is said to be the best gift. Besides, feeding and tending of cows are regarded
as the cause of happiness and prosperity. The sublimity or sanctity of the
cows is narrated with reasons. Apart from this, the piety which one derives
from showing respects to a cow, or tending a cow, or presenting a cow or
rearing a cow is also regarded as a symbol of Indianness. It is said that all
the deeds of a man become auspicious if he is devoted to cows; since a
cow is regarded as a refuge of the earth, mother of gods and immeasurable
in sublimity.81 If any person donates a cow having a calf or a copper-
coloured milch cow he can roam fearlessly even in the assembly of Yama,
the god of death. By means of donation of a cow, a son can emancipate
the souls of his forefathers ten generations upwards and ten generation
downwards. Not only that, a man can purify his own family too.82 A donor
of cows stays in heaven as many years as the number of hairs on the cow’s

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body. That is why, it is said in the Mahābhārata, that there is no other peity
greater than the merits derived from the donation of a cow and also there
is no other living creature in the three worlds, superior to cows.  

The great sage Veda vyāsa praised the kings for the protection of the
ows even at the cost of their lives, keeping aside their other important
and profitable business. In the epic, the restoration of the cows taken
forcibly by Suśarmā, the king of Trigartta and also the striking episode of
rescuing the cows of king Virāṭa by Arjuna in the guise of Bṛḥannalā by
vanquishing the soldiers of Kauravas are met with.

Federal Type of Political Unity – the Endeavours :

Besides, Veda vyāsa also narrated in detail the account of
Yudhīṣṭhira’s begetting the covetable position of an emperor by performing
the Rājasyā sacrifice after receiving the counsel of Lord Śrīkṛṣṇa. In
other words, in that very sacrificial spot, there appears simultaneously in
the mind of Yudhīṣṭhira a desire to enjoy the pleasure of the abode of
Indra (heaven) and an intention of attaining the most celebrated position
of an emperor on earth. This aspiration of Yudhīṣṭhira may be said to be
a replica of national feeling, because, through establishing suzerainty over
the entire country called Bhārata and even beyond the boundaries of
Bharata, there was an endeavour to establish a federal type of political
unity, which was definitely instrumental in further strengthening the bond
of cultural unity that remained pre-dominant in the minds of the people

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for preceding thousands of years. It may be deduced that the sagacious Yudhiṣṭhira was inspired by the vision of establishing a political unity throughout the great country while he thought of performing the Rājasūya Sacrifice.

In order to fulfil the desire of the king, Śrīkṛṣṇa, Bhīma, Aujuna, Sahadeva, Nakula and others helped the king according to their capacities and after conquering the earth they assisted in the performance of Rājasūya sacrifice and thereby glorified the country. In Rājasūya sacrifice, many vanquished king of China, Laṅkā and Yavana territories assembled to acknowledge their loyalties to Emperor Yudhiṣṭhira. Prior to the commencement of Rājasūya sacrifice Śrīkṛṣṇa, Bhīma and Arjuna went to the capital of Magadha with a view to assassinating Jarāsandha since he kept many captive kings of different territories in his prison. It was most improbable that the mighty Jarāsandha would recognise Yudhiṣṭhira, the friend of Śrīkṛṣṇa, as an emperor in sovereign. Hence, pursuant to pre-planned strategies, Bhīma, the second Pāṇḍava, killed Jarāsandha in duel-fighting (wrestling). The captive kings were all released from jail and Kṛṣṇa, Bhīma and Arjuna came out from the city of Girivraja and approaching Yudhiṣṭhira related to him the death of Jarāsandha. Thus, there was no other impediment on the way of the performance of Rājasūya sacrifice. Therefore, the Rājasūya sacrifice of Yudhiṣṭhira commenced on earth just like the sacrifice of Indra in heaven.

Hearing the news of the performance of sacrifice, hundreds of great kings and other dignitaries, well versed in performing sacrifice gathered
in the court of Yudhiṣṭhira. All the Kṛṣṇaṇīyas from different directions with valuable jewels arrived at Indraprastha. Bhāma, Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Vidura and the hundred Kaurava brothers, headed by Duryodhana, came to behold the performance of sacrifice. Suvala, the king of Gândhâra, Mahâvala, Śakuni, Acala, Vaśaka, Karna and other monarchs arrived at Indraprastha. Dronâcârya, Kṛpâcârya, Aśvatthâmâ, the king of Sindhu, the king of SiM hala, the king of Virâṭa, the king of Kuntibhoja – in other words almost all the kings of the then India assembled in the Râjasûya sacrifice. Herein also we find the reflection of the concept of ‘one country, one people’.

But, being moved by immense degree of malice (after beholding the prosperity and power of the Pâṇḍavas), Duryodhana hatched a conspiracy for dislodging Yudhiṣṭhira from the kingdom of Indrapratha and invited them to a game of dice. As result of dirty tricks adopted by Śakuni, Yudhiṣṭhira was defeated in the game and in compliance with the pre-determined conditions of the game, was compelled to go to exile in forest for twelve years and incognito for one year. Even, after the expiry of the period of exile, Duryodhana refused to part with Indraprastha or any part of the ancestral kingdom. He was instigated to resort to the path of confrontation by malevolent Śakuni, Karna and other wicked kings. This was the background of the great war of Kurukṣetra.

The Pâṇḍavas became victorious by defeating the Kauravas in the war. Then according to the advice of Vyāsa, Yudhiṣṭhira made preparations for the Aśvamedha sacrifice and Arjuna went with a vast army for the
sake of guarding the sacrificial horse. Again, subjugating all the kings and emperors of entire India, Arjuna established the supremacy of Yudhishthira and strengthened the empire. Regarding this, the saying of Vedavyāsa is very significant. He said that the king Yudhishthira himself governed the entire India, which he considered his own (motherland), just as Indra, the king of gods, ruled in the heaven.

एवं भारतवर्ष स्वर्ग राज्य स्वर्ग सुरेन्द्रवत्।
शस्सस सिष्यं ग्राम गोपालं गण्डवधवनना॥ ॥

By the term ‘Sva’, used in this verse as an adjective of Bhāratavarṣa, the epic poet clearly signifies the feelings of love and devotion, cherished by Yudhishthira, towards Bhāratavarṣa, his own motherland, just as a son adores and loves his own mother.

Yudhishthira, like other people (inhabiting Bhārata), irrespective of caste, creed, region, language and social and financial status, developed an emotional relationship (akin to the organic relationship existing between a mother and son/daughter) with the motherland – Bhāratavarṣa. Therefore, the emperor Yudhishthira considered this country as 'Sva' and had a feeling of utmost devotion and allegiance to and also a sense of belonging to this motherland.

From the above discussion, made in the preceding pages of the present chapter, it becomes clear that a feeling of unity on the emotional and cultural plane, coupled with the desire for an all-round welfare of the subjects living in different states or administrative units within the geographical boundaries of Bhāratavarṣa, have been highlighted in the
texts of the Mahābhārata. The aspirations of Kṛṣṇa and the five Pāṇḍavas and also other allied benevolent monarchs as well as virtuous hermits and sages of the then Bhārata for establishing value-based administrative system, styled 'dharmarājya' in the entire country – deemed as one geo-cultural unit – gives credence to the opinion that the concept of ‘One country, one people’ was prevalent during the Mahābhārata days.
Notes and References:

4. Ibid. p-55.
5. Ibid. p-55.
6. Ibid. p-56.
7. नैव राज्य न राजासिन च दण्डो न दाण्डक:।
   धर्ममेत्र प्रजा: सत्वार स्थानि स्म परस्परः।। Mbh. 12. 58. 14.
8. Kirat. 1. 5.
10. Mbh. 1. 103. 1.
11. Ibid. 1. 103. 2.
12. वाहनानि प्रहस्यनि मुदिता यूगपक्षण:।
    गन्धर्वनि च माल्यानि रसवनि फलानि च।। Mbh. 1. 103. 3.
13. Mbh. 1. 103. 4.
14. नाभवन् दस्यव: केचिन्नाधर्म्महच्यो जना:।
    प्रदेशेष्य्यि राज्यानि कृतं युगमवर्तत।। Mbh. 1. 103. 5.
15. Mbh. 1. 103. 7.
16. Ibid. 1. 103. 8.
17. Ibid. 1. 103. 9.
18. Ibid. 1. 103. 10.
19. Ibid. 1. 103. 11.
20. Ibid. 1. 103. 12.
21. Ibid. 1. 103. 13.
22. Ibid. 1. 103. 14.
23. Ibid. 1. 103. 15.
24. Ibid. 1. 103. 18-20.
25. Ibid. 1. 103. 21-22.
26. प्रनष्टं शान्तमेवं संमीक्ष्य पुनरहिथतम।
   ततो निन्वचनं लोके सत्वरागर्त्यवर्तत॥ Mbh. 1. 103. 23.
27. Mbh. 1. 103. 24.
28. Ibid. 1. 104. 2.
29. राजा प्रजानं प्रथं शरीरम् प्रजाश्च राजोप्रतिमं शरीरम्।
   राजा विहिनं न भवन्ति देशा देशविहिनं न गृहा भवन्ति॥ Mbh. 12. 66. 59.
30. Mbh. 12. 66. 60.
31. Ibid. 12. 67. 4.
32. Ibid. 12. 67. 5.
33. Ibid. 12. 67. 6-7.
34. Ibid. 12. 67. 8.
36. Ibid. 2. 5. 20.
37. Ibid. 2. 5. 21.
38. Ibid. 2. 5. 22.
39. Ibid. 2. 5. 23.
40. Ibid. 2. 5. 25.
41. Ibid. 2. 5. 28.
42. Ibid. 2. 5. 35.
43. Ibid. 2. 5. 36.
44. Ibid. 2. 5. 44.
45. Ibid. 2. 5. 54.
46. कल्पितमेव सर्वस्या: पुराविज्ञा: पुराविवीपते।
समरहानविभिक्षणस्य यथा माता यथा पिता।। Mbh. 2. 5. 57.
47. Mbh. 2. 5. 72.
48. Ibid. 2. 5. 82.
49. Ibid. 2. 5. 83.
50. Ibid. 2. 5. 93.
51. Ibid. 2. 5. 98.
52. Ibid. 2. 5. 99.
53. Ibid. 2. 5. 101.
54. Ibid. 2. 5. 103.
55. एतया प्रत्मानस्य वुध्व्या राघवो न सीदहः।
विजित्य च महां राजा सोज्यन्ते सुखमेधपते।। Mbh. 2. 5. 104.
56. Mbh. 2. 5. 108-110.
57. Ibid. 2. 5. 128.
58. Ibid. 2. 5. 129.
59. M.S. 7-10.
60. Mbh. 4. 29. 1-2.
61. Ibid. 4. 29. 4-7.
62. Ibid. 6. 17. 6.
63. Ibid. 6. 6. 2.
64. वस्तिन्ते तेषु सच्चानि नानाजातिनि सर्वोऽ॥
इदं तु भारतं वर्षं ततो हिमवतं: परस्॥ Mbh. 6. 6. 7.

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65. Mbh. 6. 9. 5-9.
66. Ibid. 6. 9. 11.
67. Ibid. 6. 9. 33-37.
68. Ibid. 6. 9. 39-57.
69. Ibid. 6. 9. 58-64.
70. Ibid. 6. 9. 65-69.
71. Ibid. 6. 9. 72.
72. नाथ्याप्रदेशीयोत प्रजाक्षर परिपत्तेन।

निषोद्धुको दस्युक्त रणे कुर्पत्त पराक्रमम्। Mbh. 12. 59. 16.
73. Mbh. 12. 59. 17.
74. Ibid. 12. 59. 22.
75. Ibid. 12. 60. 14.
76. Ibid. 3. 70. 79.
77. Ibid. 3. 70. 81.
78. तत्र हंसप्रपतन्त तीर्थ शैल्योक्ष्यविद्युतम्।

दशस्थवर्गब्रह्मण गहनां कुरुन्दन। Mbh. 3. 70. 87.
79. Mbh. 3. 70. 90.
80. Ibid. 3. 70. 96.
81. पुष्येय यवस्मायायुण्य तथा स्वस्त्ययुणां महत्।

क्रीतिविचारता कर्को यथा यो गोपु भविष्यमान। Mbh. 13. 67. 4.
82. Mbh. 13. 65. 8.
83. नात: पुष्यवर्त्तां दानां नात: पुष्यवर्तेण फलम्।

नातो विपश्ये लोकेषु भूतं भवितुमहित। Mbh. 13. 65. 13.

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