Chapter II

The Representation of Past in the Pre-colonial Society of India

Thousands of traditions existed in the pre-colonial society of India as expressed through several genres of literature such as gatha, nārāśamanśi, ākhyāna, itihasa, purana, kavya and carita that transmitted knowledge of the past. On the basis of structure, content, character and socio-economic, ritual and political contexts these genres can be categorised into the Vedic, itihasic, puranic and non-puranic. The evolution of each of these categories and its features, character and perspectives are examined in this chapter. In the background of the socio-economic formations of its times. Certain genres like itihasa has multiple social formations of disparate periods.

In early India tradition was known as Sruta. Sruta denotes literally that which is heard, represents the oral tradition, which dates back to the first

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1 The richness of tradition in India and its significance as sources of information are generally recognised. Sruta is regarded by F.E. Pargiter as indicating the tradition in general, which consists of both the kshatryya and Brahminical traditions. The analysis of Purāṇas as a part of Indian tradition is a major theme in his work. Pargiter F.E., Ancient Indian Historical Tradition, Delhi, 1962, p.11. Tradition in India and the political and social contexts of formation are discussed by Romila Thapar. The emphasis is on the appropriation and transformation of Traditions, in the context of formation of state (Kingdoms) in India. The term Sruta is employed to designate the Indian tradition up to the age of the Guptas. Mythology, Genealogy, and historical narrative are regarded as the essential elements of tradition in any culture to which the Indian tradition forms no exception. For further details see Romila Thapar, Ancient Indian Social History: Some Interpretations New Delhi, 1990, pp. 270-283. Also see her, “The First Millennium B.C. in Northern India” in Romila Thapar (ed) Recent Perspectives of Early Indian History, Bombay, 1995, pp. 80-87. Following the essentialist methodology of Indologists the tendency among the Western writers on the history of India is to regard tradition (Sruta) as Brahminical tradition. They believe that it represents the ideas, beliefs, and rituals associated with the Brahmans in India. Among many, a few may be cited as examples. Tolboy Wheeler, India of Vedic Age with Reference To Mahabharata, Delhi, 1953 pp. 4-12. Ainslie T. Embree, Sources of Indian Tradition, Vol. II U.K., 1958 pp. 3-7. The studies by nationalist historians attempted to prove the existence of state and political institutions in India form very early ages. Sruta is regarded as tradition in general. For further details of this approach see Altekar, Political Institutions In Ancient India, Delhi, 1958.
millennium B.C. There are two varieties in the oral tradition - the intellectual scientific tradition, and the popular tradition.  

Sruti literally hearing and Smrti memorising are the methods of transmission of Sruta (tradition).

Traditions in the Vedic Age

Rig Veda, the earliest written evidence, incorporates several references to Sruti. Sruti represents the contents claimed to have been originally heard. Vac, the sound transformed into meaning, is the basic component in Sruti.

“Vac must have arisen out of the urge to communicate the cumulative experiences and rationalise the findings to satisfy the human eagerness to participate in the universal cosmic drama.”

The four samhitas, Brahmanas and Aranykas of the four Vedas which claimed powers born out of mantras and rituals are regarded as derived from sruti. Vac is regarded as feminine as she gives life to ideas and thoughts. Like Agni the concept of power and energy, R’ta the law of order in nature, vac (sound with meaning) is thought of as some thing which can not be fully explained. So it is regarded as a revelation in the Rig Veda. Thus Vac entails the function of passing the information, later identified with Jnana or knowledge, which is

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3 For the relevant discussion, see Romila Thapar, “The First Millennium B.C. in Northern India” in Romila Thapar (ed.), Recent Perspectives of Early Indian History, Bombay, 1995, p. 84.


5 Vannucci, Ecological Readings in the Veda, New Delhi, 1994, p. 89.


7 Later the notion of divine revelation was perpetuated to guard the intellectual tradition zealously. The basic scientific, speculations, observation, empiricism and experimentation are rendered in symbolic language. It is preserved as sacred. How the knowledge is acquired is kept as a secret purposefully. For further illustrations of this trend see Vannucci, Ecological Readings in the Veda, Bahri Publications, New Delhi, 1994, pp. 76-80. A new way of looking at the claims of divine revelation in the vedic texts is to be found in the phenomenological enquiry in to the vedas. For further details see Dayakrishna, Indian Philosophy a Counter perspective, New Delhi, 1991, pp. 48-52.

8 The conceptualisation of Jnana is visible only in the later mandalas of Rig Veda. Jnana here indicates the intuition that is necessary to fathom the authoritative-pramanya (sruti) C. Narayanan Nambuthiri, (trans) Rig Veda, Trichur, 1989, Vol X V6:43, Rig Veda Vol.X 1. V12.
invoked in *Rig Veda* as a divinity. The significance attached to *vac* in *Rig Veda* indicates the trust on oral tradition as “the art of writing was either unknown or not much in use in the Vedic period.” A notable feature is the great care taken to avoid mistakes as far as possible is evident in the closed structure of the Vedic literature (For the details of Vedic literature see Table 2.1). Symbolic language and abstraction are regarded as one of the essential features of closed structure. There is a detailed system of mnemonic devices to ensure precision, which is visible in the intellectual tradition in *Rig Veda*. The hymns of *Rig Veda* have mnemonic aids. The metres are short, and set to music. Hence they are very concise in expression.

Altekar, *Political Institutions in Ancient India*, New Delhi, 1958, p. 187. Mnemonic devices are employed to ensure proper memory of order in the transmission of oral traditions. They are attributed to the non-literate society. Colours, knots and objects are employed to ensure continuity in oral traditions in the societies of Africa, Inca and Peru. For further details see Jan Von Sina, *Oral Tradition, A Study in Historical Methodology*, London, 1961, pp. 35-36. In the Indian context the mnemonic devices are regarded as based on different patterns of memorizing the syllables of words as it is believed that even *Sabda* has its own power. This trend is visible even in literary tradition of the Vedas (Vedic *Samhitas*). Dependency of these mnemonic devices on literary form is recognised. Though mnemonic devices are assigned to the pre-literate society there is considerable ambiguity as to when they were converted into written forms and what were the circumstances of transition. For details of restructuring of oral tradition in written forms see, Romila Thapar, “Genealogies and the oral tradition” in the *Methodology of the Use of Oral Sources in History* Report of the First India Zimbabwe conference, Harare, 1989, pp. 13-15.

Metrical poetry and music are employed for the correct and easy transmission of ideas. They serve as captions and allusions to recall the oral teachings of the Guru. Knowledge is held as sacred and secret. The annual cycle of the sun, the possibility for forecasting a calendar is indicated but no details as to how the science developed are not given. See C. Narayanan Nambuthiri, (trans), *Rig Veda Vol. VI*, Trichur, 1989, 2V: 44. Scientific speculations, conclusions obtained by empiricism are imparted to only carefully selected sisyas. Hence esoteric language is employed and it could be understood only those well versed in it. There is a considerable accumulation of knowledge through the interaction with the locals (*Anaryata*) as revealed by the myth of the stolen cows hidden in a cave, which were liberated by Agni as *somapavanama* and by the valour of Indira. Op.cit V. 37, Trichur 1989. One of the features of the closed texts is that they express metaphorically characteristics of an object or objects. They also have sequential co-relation. The repetitions are not intended to reveal continuity, but to express the relation in multiplicity. The structure in intellectual tradition and the constitutive process of intellectual tradition are illustrated though the study of Holy Trinity in Christian theology by Abelard of 13th century. For further details see H.S. Gill, *Structures of Narrative in East and West*, New Delhi 1989 pp. 80-96. “Mental images of words form very convenient centres for thinking with. It has the quality of abstraction and generality so essential to reasoning. To reason is to operate with symbols in the head.” Gordon Childe, *What Happened in History?* London, 1942, p. 20. The motive behind the secrecy associated with knowledge is assigned to the hostile environment which the Aryans encountered. See Vannucci *Ecological Readings in the Vedas*, New Delhi, 1994, pp. 104-110. Confrontation with civilisational opposite is regarded as the basis of stimulus to thought. This is explained from the Greek situation though this can be regarded as part of the assertion, associated with the theory of conquest. See Madhuri Sondhi and Mary Walker, (ed) *Ecology Religion and Philosophy*, Delhi, 1988, p. 142.
The memory is more accurate than written manuscript. Most of the hymns express concepts and functions as represented by Gods. Thus *sruti* represents the integrated domain of knowledge and its mode of transmission which is oral. *Sruti* constitutes the intellectual tradition in the *Rig Veda*. In their migration from the steppes of Central Asia to the North western regions of India, the early groups of Indo Aryan speaking pastoralists came into contact with new environments and different materials. Predictions were necessary for seasonal migrations for pastoral activities and accumulation of knowledge of medicine, plants, rivers, seasons, rains and forests in the new environment was essential. This constituted the intellectual tradition in the *Rig Veda*. They existed in the form of unconnected compositions as revealed by the earlier sections of the *Rig Veda*. "They are preserved as sacred revelations of ancient wisdom by the different families of Aryans by way of oral tradition for centuries before the compilation into the *Vedas*. Ritualistic considerations are the prime motive behind the compilation of these traditions in to the *Vedas*. Rituals are one of the...

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13 The observation and rationalisation of Agni, its pragmatic value are represented in figurative language. The concept of power and energy that can be seen and formulated but cannot fully explained or understood gives birth to the First God Agni. The eagerness to understand Agni is expressed in the *Rig Veda* where Agni signifies truth or knowledge. For the discussion of the representation of Agni in the *Rig Veda* see Vannucci, *Ecological Readings in the Vedas*, New Delhi, 1994, pp. 62-76.

14 See the discussion in Rama Chandra Ghosh, *The Indo Aryans-Their History, Creed & Practice*, Calcutta, 1881, p. 82. Family traditions are recognised as one of the main streams in the oral tradition. Family traditions and their transformation into official tradition in the context of Greece are analysed by Rosalind Thomas. The social and political patterns implicit in the oral tradition are discussed. For further details see Rosalind Thomas, *Oral Tradition and Written Record in Classical Athens*, U.K., 1989, pp. 152-155.

15 Ritual Status is regarded as one of the essential features of distinction between the *Arya* and the *Anarya* in the lineage society. In the lineage society the affiliation of families to the *gotra* was strong. The Rituals varied from family to family. The compilation of Vedic hymns is regarded as indicating the tendency towards homogenization of groups of Aryans and hierarchical society and the beginnings of the notion of authority. For the details on Ritual Status see Romila Thapar, *From Lineage to State*, Delhi, 1990, pp. 21-23.
channels for redistribution in the lineage society. The hymns of the later mandalas of Rig Veda, especially of the Xth mandala represent the pitris as fathers of families “who have departed this life and passed in to a state of blessedness as objects of adoration to their descendants. There are hymns in the Rig Veda which are regarded as having been composed by the sons, fathers and ancestors. This indicates the existence of another mode of transmission namely smriti and the streams of popular oral tradition associated with it.

The redistributive system in territorial chiefdoms termed as acephalous communities and the affinity between the redistributive system and the religious system in Greece are discussed by Goody Jack. Booty is regarded as the source of wealth in acephalous communities. For the relevant discussion on this redistributive system. See Jack Goody, The Logic of writing and the organisation of society. U.K. 1986, pp. 22-29. In the Indian context the redistributive system is associated with Dana and Dakshina. For the detailed discussion on social, economic and religious functions of Dana and Dadhshina see Romila Thapar Ancient Indian Social History Some Interpretations, New Delhi, 1990, pp. 116-130.

The Rig Veda has many hymns known as Danastutis where mythological figures Indra, and Varuna are represented as the Chiefs who protect the subjects. See, Narayanun Nambuthiri, (trans). Rig Veda Vol. III 5: V:15 Vol IV 2:V2, 3:V14, 4:V 23, Trichur, 1989. Danastutis also speak of human figures (chiefs) like Sahadeva, Somaka, Vudath, Rina Sanjaya. The names are found in the fragments of descent lists which later became the model for genealogy. The Dana made in the form of cows & horses by kings are also indicated. These are described as Danas made over to the Brahmanas. Here the chief is known by the epithet vaJamana, Op cit. V:18, 5:V19, 2:V25, 2:V29.

The early memories of ancestors are later restructured and designated as the tradition of seven risis. They are Brigu, Bharadwaja, Jamadagni, Visvamitra, Vashista, Kashyapa and Atri. It has been pointed out that the later portions of Rig Veda abounds in mythologies of origin of different risis which signifies the status of the gotras. The popular tradition appropriates the seven risis as the purohitas of king Sudasa. With the rise of kingship in the Indo-Gangetic plain the tradition underwent further transformation and the risis became the purohitas in the Epics, the Puranas and the Upanishads. In them they are individualised and through them the Brahmanic hegemony is illustrated. Ancient Indian historical tradition regard them as real historical personages. For the relevant discussion see Rama Chandra Ghosha, The Indo-Aryans their History Creed and Practice, Calcutta 1881, pp. 52-67.
Smrti

Smrti, identified as the popular oral tradition is regarded as the source of the itihasa-purana traditions and sacred literature of the later ages.\textsuperscript{19} Smrti represent, the contents which are known and memorized.\textsuperscript{20} In smrti there are two varieties of tradition – the closed tradition and the popular tradition.

A. The closed Tradition

As part of the oral tradition smrtis are simple traditions of the small communities of Aryan language speaking groups. They are in the form of hymns that emphasise upon ritualistic order and practices. These were the binding forces of social groups.\textsuperscript{21} Smrti-s were written in the later ages. They retain the ethos of solidarity of the Aryan language speaking groups. In the Indian context the Smrti-s that exist in written form at a later age are prescriptive. Smrti-s are regarded as the literature of memories which “tells the Hindus how to live in this world.”\textsuperscript{22} Smrti-s speak of norms within the context of a highly symbolic world.

\textsuperscript{19} The popular tradition is termed as the ‘open oral tradition.’ They focus on the stories and the narratives. Romila Thapar, “Genealogies and oral tradition” in the Methodology of the Use of Oral Sources in History. Report of the First India Zimbabwe conference, Harare, 1989, p.21.

\textsuperscript{20} See the details in Romila Thapar, “Historical writing in Ancient India” in Romila Thapar (ed) Ancient Indian Social history: Some Interpretations, New Delhi, 1990, p. 113. Also see Pargiter F.E., Ancient Indian Historical Tradition, Delhi, 1962, p. 20.

\textsuperscript{21} The evidence of prayers as part of ritual is absent in the early mandalas of Rig Veda. The ritual status is a norm of later ages associated with the expansion of Aryan settlements. Ritual status is regarded as the basis of varna system. It is the chief mark of distinction between the Aryas and the Anaryas. For further details see Romila Thapar, From Lineage to State, Delhi, 1990, pp. 21-69. In oral societies there was close affinity between social systems and religions. But usually in a literate religion far from reflecting social system in fact influence the aspects of social system. The relations between Scriptures and social structures are termed by Jack Goody as ‘the Paradoxes of ascetism’. Jack Goody, The Logic of writing and The Organisation of Society. U.K., 1986, pp. 22-29. Rituals re regarded as capable of experiential rebirth as it involves body, senses, and mind.

It is supposed to exert a strong mental influence among the members of particular social group. For the psycho analytical discussions on rituals see Ariel Glucklich, The sense of Adharma, New York, 1994, pp. 28-34.

\textsuperscript{22} Op. cit. p. 12.
Symbolic imagination is an essential element to facilitate recollection. Like all other traditions in India the Smṛti-s too claim some kind of affiliation to the Vedas. As some of the Smṛti-s are regarded as composed by the great Aparajya the Smṛti-s are considered as part of 'Vedic Parsimony.' There are also traditions that narrate the individual memories of ancestors who lived before centuries. These family traditions preserved information quite independent of any relation with political power. They assume significance in the society in the transitory stage to the system of varna, "where customs required the sanction of authority though not political authority." They are memorized for the knowledge of gotra, which is essential in the lineage society, as the right to appropriate share in land and ritual status are determined by the lineage.

They also contain reminiscences of early ages, which could be termed as the

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23 The language of the myths in the Smṛti-s speak of wives as fields. They speak of milky trees which mark the boundaries. Similarly the words deer, water tank etc. are symbols to designate ideas. The analysis of symbols in Smṛti is the major theme discussed by Ariel Glucklich. *Op cit.* p. 246.

The relation between reality and myth is recognised by Roland Barthes. The language of myth is regarded as part of a complex semiological system. It is regarded as a message embedded in various associations. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, London, 1972, p. 32. Metaphor and analogy are regarded as the peculiar characteristics of myths. They are regarded as devices for the complex orderings of knowledge. For the psycho-analytical discussion on myths see Sudirkar. *The Analyst and the Mystic*, New Delhi, 1991, pp. 65-69.


25 This term is borrowed from Dayakrishna. He illustrates the contradictions and ambiguity in the discussions of scholars, as to the criterion of eligibility for the texts, to be incorporated in the corpus of Vedic literature. He urges that a new way of looking at the Vedic texts is essential. His phenomenological enquiry into the Veda, focus on how a Veda is formed as distinct from the usual enquiry of what is a Veda. For the relevant discussion on the positioning of Smṛti texts in the Vedic literature see Daya Krishna Indian *Philosophy Counter Perspective*, New Delhi, 1991, p. 125-138.

26 The popular belief among the Aryans was that there existed forty-nine gotras among the early Aryan settlers. Each member was bound to know the name of the ancestors and the gotra to which he belonged. These were invoked in the fire cult.


prehistoric survivals. How the family traditions underwent considerable restructuring and became the main traditions focusing on chiefdoms and kingship are to be discussed later. Timeless historical vacuum is one of the significant features of the family traditions.

B. The Popular Tradition

The Rigvedic Samhitas are noted for its heterogeneous nature of themes. They incorporated multiple streams of parallel traditions. "The Rig Veda contains several bucolic, and heroic elements." “The hymns were not composed in the same age, or by the same poet, or in the same locality, not even in the same cultural environment." They incorporated memories of pre-emigration. They had undergone "an amount of wear and tear." They survive as archaic traits, in the form of references and epithets. The old home is referred to as ‘Pratmakoas’ though the Geographical details of the region remain obscure. The reminiscences of the migratory route of different groups, conflicts and dangers are also indicated. "The migrating Aryan tribes were Pastoral groups. Migrations took many centuries. The settlements existed for shorter periods of a few years or longer periods of a few generations depending on the environment and accessibility to the best pasture. This might have led to conflicts."

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29 O.H. De A. Wijesekera illustrates how the Rig Veda refers to the evolution of society among the early Aryan groups. The allusions and epithets retain several archaic traits dating from the early ages of migration. These archaic traits are regarded as the prehistoric survivals which are handed down through the oral traditions. This can be studied only through what the author designates as socio-semantic methodology. For the discussion on the Prehistoric survivals in Rig Veda see O.H De A. Wijesekera, Buddhist and Vedic studies, Delhi, 1994, pp 285-291.
32 Ibid.
33 Romila Thapar, From Lineage to State, New Delhi, 1990, p. 25.
These collective memories of conflicts are to be found in the popular tradition, which were later represented through different forms of literature. There existed diverse forms of representation in the interface between the preliterate and the literate society of the Vedic Age. Each of these forms - gatha-s, (songs) narasamśi (eulogy of heroes) ākhyāna (dramatic narrative) vijaya, carita and tales etc. is treated as a separate genre, which had its own peculiar linguistic structure, style of composition and theme. The historical tradition of early India existed in these forms of literature. The original tradition was oral and it belonged to the tribal society of the Vedic Age. It is difficult to define when one form of representation ended or another started.

"Yet gatha regarded as of later origin is believed to have existed by the middle of the First millennium B.C. or possibly earlier."

**Gatha-s (Songs)**

*Gatha* is a genre which emerged out of parallel traditions in poetic form. The brevity of the songs was regarded as one of the common features associated with such songs in the traditional societies. They were for recital or for singing. The refrain formula in the *gatha*-s reveals this. The songs are famous for the expression of feelings. They were not intended for the descriptive representation of past. They focused on an important event of the past and more than that they used to glorify the heroes associated with them. The events were generally successful raids, or cattle raids, or victory over the enemy, or the destruction of

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32 Ibid

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the enemy. They were said to have occurred in the earliest age (pu\textit{ra}). The earliest of them might have belonged to early groups of \textit{Aryans} as raiders and the later as the nomadic pastoralists in the north western regions of India. The hostility of them to cities and the references to encounters indicated the conflicts between the two different groups. The simplicity of language reveal the origin of the \textit{gatha-s} from the humble ordinary folk. As the compilation of \textit{Rig Veda Samhita} took place only several centuries later, it was able to appropriate only vague memories of primitive Aryan raiders. Thus only fragments of \textit{gatha-s} are available in the \textit{Rigvedic Samhita}. Immortality was assigned to the ancestors who were placed in cosmogeny, where Indra and his attendants Maruts and later Agni were the key figures. The Indra songs in the form of \textit{stutis} which form a considerable portion of the Vedas illustrate this. The primitive profession of raiding is attributed to Indra and his attendants the Maruts. Indra is described as the leader of battles. He is described as having plundered booty from \textit{Vrtra (yo Vrtraya Sinam atra abharisyat).} He used to bear away all spoils (\textit{dhanabharate}). The later interpreter Savana regarded the term \textit{`dhana'} as spoil, or booty. The repeated occurrences of the term \textit{`bhara'} in the early sections of \textit{Rigveda Samhita} were regarded as related to the winning, or capturing of booty. Later the term \textit{`bhara'} was associated with warriors or fighters. It was employed to designate the Bharatas as a tribe in the

\begin{itemize}
\item The hostility for towns and folk is regarded as one of the important elements in Pastoral Poetry. Frank Keramode, \textit{Poetry Narrative, History}, London, 1990, p. 30.
\item The affinity between the representation of Heroes and the social structure and how the dire needs of the society are reflected in traditions are discussed by Gordon Childe in the context of Greek city states. The depiction of Zeus as the chief of the Pantheon is regarded as modelled after warlords of Greece acknowledging the Suzerainty of the king of Mycenae Gordon Childe, \textit{What happened in History}, London, 1942, p. 22.
\item \textit{Op. cit.} I. V 32.
\end{itemize}
later sections of *Rigveda*. They were regarded as *gramah* or War bands who played an active role in the Battle of Ten Kings. Indra was described as mounting the horse (*Adhitisthat*). The horses of the Maruts are said to have seats on their backs (*Prasthe Sadah*). Indra is the destroyer of cities and armies and the slayer of the *asuras* such as Vritra, Samhaba and Sushka who were described as *anasa* (tongueless-having an alien speech). Among the Pastoral groups cattle and grazing ground are the causes of conflict. There are references to the encounters of Indra with such *anasa* like Namuchi and Valen and how Indra protected the people of *Rugmadesa*. The use of pronouns ‘us’ ‘we’ in the songs reveal tribal society. In the tribal society of *vis* wealth was distributed among members of the tribe. Later wealth was distributed only among selected groups. The *Danastuti-s* in *Rigvedic Samhita* intersect these two stages in the redistributive system of tribal society in the early Vedic Age. *Danastuti-s* also refer to tribal leaders such as Sahadeva, Somaka, Vidathi and Rina Sanjaya. The names are associated with their ancestors. Later this became the model for genealogy, which indicates the tendency to legitimise rights of authority. The *Danastuti-s* belong to the later ages. When redistributive system included only selected groups, the Kshatriya and the Brahmans. The objects of

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42 O.H. De A. Wijesekara believes that considerable progress has not been achieved in the interpretations of the *Rig Veda* as studies on the *Rig Veda* by Max Muller and Grassmann still continue to influence the later scholars. He envisages a new approach which is termed as 'socio-semantic methodology.' He illustrates the pre-historic survivals in *Rig Veda*. For further details on the discussion of such primitive survivals in *Rig Veda* see O.H. De A. Wijesekera, *Buddhist and Vedic Studies*, Delhi, 1994, pp. 286-291.


45 *Rig Veda* Vol IV 8: V 19.

wealth were cows, and horses.\(^47\) Later land was also included. In the early ages of tribal chiefdoms, *gatha*-s were associated with *magatas* and *sutas*. They were the hereditary custodians of tradition.\(^48\) The open structure of tradition had the possibility for numerous additions, revisions and interpolations.\(^49\) By the first millennium A.D. the tradition was appropriated by the priest composers. The priests were regarded as those who offered prayers to gods for success in battles and cattle raids.\(^50\) Thus individual poems and cycles of poem found their way in the epic poem, which became the storehouse of the entire old bardic poetry.\(^\text{51}\) Later *gatha* was employed to designate epic narrative. Mahabharata began its existence as a simple epic narrative (*gafha*). The *gathas* were recited on occasions of performance of rituals, particularly *Aswamedha* sacrifice with year long preliminary. The leaders sang and others followed.\(^52\) They were regarded as the legends of gods and heroes. They were recited during the one year long preliminary celebration of the *Asvamedha* sacrifice. The recital lasted for a regular succession of every ten days.\(^53\) Two lute players the Brahmana and the

\(^{47}\) The notion of gift-exchange, the changes which occur in the concept in the later age and how it is utilised in building up the pattern of hierarchy in terms of wealth and status in the early Vedic age is discussed by Romila Thapar. For the relevant discussion on the socio-economic functions of *Dona* and its transformation from *Daksina* see Romila Thapar, *Ancient Indian Social History (some Interpretations)* New Delhi, 1990, pp. 105-120.

\(^{48}\) The contexts in Mahabharata which reveals Sanjaya the *suta* as the messenger of the king Dridhanidhra, and as the narrator of the war are regarded as illustrating sutas as custodians of the tradition. Talboys Wheeler, *Mahabharata with Reference to Early Vedic Age*, Delhi, 1953, p. 130.


\(^{50}\) The magico religious function is the primary function involved in exchange of gifts in the tribal communities of early Vedic age. Later the channels of redistribution are limited to the *Brahmanas* and the *Kshatriyas*. Romila Thapar, *Ancient Indian Social History (some interpretations)*, New Delhi, pp. 105-120.


\(^{52}\) The references to the singing of *Udgatha* in rituals to defeat the Asuras indicate the origin of *gathas*. It also refers to the practice of communal singing. V. Balakrishnan (trans) *Brahadarenyam Upanishad*, Kottayam, 1971, Chap. IV\(\text{P}10\). The care taken for the harmonious recitation in rituals is regarded as indicative of the solidarity among the groups while the focus on individualistic tone in the western music is regarded as reflexive of their social matrix. For further details see Madhuri Sondhi and Mary Walker (ed) *Ecology, Culture and Philosophy*, Delhi, 1988, p. 37.

Kshatriya were also present on the occasion. The former glorified the generosity of the princes while the latter extols the heroic deeds of the princes. There were also gatha-s to be sung at domestic ceremonies. Thus gatha-s originated from the memories of predatory raids and struggles for settlements. They were retained in the Mahabharata and the Ramayana in the new forms of Carita, Vijaya and Katha. Though the motif of combat was common to them, they were different in terms of peculiarities of structure. Narasamsi was another genre that existed in the Vedic Age.

**Narasamsi**

Nārāsamsi-s were regarded as the songs in praise of human heroes. “Poetry was identified as the basic mechanism of transmission and prestige as the chief motive.”\(^{54}\) The genesis of Nārāsamsi was from family traditions which narrated the victories of a few individuals. Though the Aryans had the status of elite through ritual status there also existed powerful anarya (non-Aryan) groups who controlled the land and resources.\(^{55}\) There were occasions of encounters and conflicts with the expansion of the Aryan settlements. This took place in the central and the eastern regions of India in the second half of the First

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\(^{55}\) The wealth of the powerful groups among Anaryas is referred to in the early mandalas of Rig Veda. They are spoken of as Dasas who live in towns (ayasth purah) and organised in clans (Visah) but they are spoken of with contempt as Krishmatvas, anasa and mridhra Vac. The Ajas, Sigrus, Ikshus, Kikutas, Panis are regarded as the tribes of non-Aryans though the details remain obscure. But the later literature spoke of them as non kin labourers (dasabhriyva) indicating the victories achieved by the Aryans in their expansion in the eastern regions, where most of these groups were in the stage of pliostocene period. The Indologists Zimmer, Keith and Oldenberg to located the various tribes mentioned in Rig Veda on the basis of the geographical information furnished by the Vedic literature. In the early studies on Aryans in India the concern is for finding out the original home and the early Aryan settlements. For the detailed account of Aryan settlements in India see Pusalker, “The Aryans in India.” *The Vedic Age* Bharathiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1951, pp. 248-255.
millennium B.C. Several non-kshatriya groups wielded authority in these regions, epitomized as mleccha desa. With the expansion of Aryan settlements, the powerful among the Anaryas, were conferred the status of Khatriya through a complex network of appropriation. The songs of victories which existed among the non Kshatriya groups were interwoven with the family traditions of Aryans in the heroic songs of later ages which are designated as narasamsi-s. These can be illustrated through the heroic traditions associated with Jarasandha, Kamsa, sisupala, and the victory of Gandharvas over Duryodhana and Karna. The content and basis of family traditions are usually viewed as a minor adjunct to historiography. Like the gatha-s, iteration was an important feature of narasamsi-s. In the poetical form they also had mnemonic devices which helped the people to memorise the tradition. This revealed their origin in the preliterate society. What makes them a distinct genre from Gatha-s is to be sought in terms of its functions and intentionality.

The heroic songs (naraamsi-s) were recited on occasions of ritual sacrifices like Asvamedha and Rajasuya. They created an image of legendary ancestors. There were later crystallized in the notion of Vamsa, which came to be

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57 Appropriation and restructuring are regarded as the operative basis of this complex network termed as 'Aryanisation/sanskritization.' The process is described through the categories of religion, society, culture and tradition. The key role played by tradition in assimilating the non-Kshatriya groups who enjoyed political and economic status is to be found in the representations which link them with legendary figures. Linking the rulers with divinity was unthought of at this stage. For further details on the social mobility in ancient India, *Op.Cit.* pp. 121-149.
58 Songs are regarded as the only genres of representation known to the Dravidians. The different genres of representation such as gatha-s, akhyana-s, narasami and carithas are regarded as emerging from the interaction with the Aryans. They are regarded as incorporating both the elements of non-bramhical and bramhical literature. For the detailed account of gatha-s and Carithas in Malayalam see T.M. Chimmur, *Padya Sahithya Charithram*, Kottayam, 1936, p. 178 and also see N. Krishna Pillai, *Katravude katha*, Kottayam, 1958, p. 270.
associated with rulers. Heroic songs underwent several additions and hence numerous versions existed to suit various occasions. They were characterised by poetic imagination to excite emotions in the audience. Memories of heros, were mixed up with individual experiences.

Ākhyāna (dramatic Narratives)

The origin of ākhyāna is traced to the dialogue-hymns in Rig Veda. This refers to some dramatic mode of delivery, a mode of transmission that originated from the tribal songs. So it was treated as an improvisation of Tribal songs. Dialogues in the stories of Krishna, Duryodhana and Arjuna seeking help from Krishna in Mahabharata are regarded as indicating affiliation to the literary form of ākhyāna. Thus the structure of ākhyāna made it a specific genre it developed out of the elements of oral and dramatic conditions which combined songs and dialogue. The narrative element was one of the primary features of its structure. There are single ākhyānas such as Ambopākhyānam Srmjayopākhyānam Nalo/pākhyānam and Manthapalopākhyānam. There are also cycles of stories as illustrated by Udangopākhyānam Sundopasundopākhyānam. The ākhyānas have a tendency to incorporate religious ideas. Elements of aristocratic values, kinship relations, memories of heroic deeds of ancestors, archaic traits in the

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61 Louise Pound, The poetic origins of ballad, U.K., 1921, p. 87 Akhyanas are to be located in the context of the emergence of kingdoms after the amalgamation of Tribes, between the first millennium B.C and the mid first millennium A.D. The areas of poetic imagination and alliteration are assigned to the professional poets (bards) who recited them on specific occasions, or for popular entertainment.
64 The old English tradition combined in themselves the heroic tradition and the spirit of christian religion. They were regarded as Pagan traditions in the garb of christian religion. For further details see David M. Zesmer, Guide to English Literature, New York, 1961, pp. 73-81.
form of myths are successfully interwoven with Brahminical values, to promote
the significance of the Brahmins in the later ages. The simplest and homogenous
Akhyanas can be regarded as of an earlier age. The complex Akhyana containing
heterogeneous subplots could regarded as Brahmanic compilations of the later
ages. As part of the bardic origin, the Akhyanas are appropriated in the
Mahabharata. They appear as stories told by rsis or the celestial devotee Narada
to the different characters, to suit various contexts.65

Vijaya and Jaya are two traditional patterns of historical literature in
ancient India. Vijaya/Jaya are about specific occasions of conflict and the
celebration of victory. Rajasanjaya Vijayam in the Mahabharata described the
war between the Pandavas and the kings (nrupas) who were assembled in the
palace of the king of Pancala. Digijaya in the Mahabharata narrated the Victory
of the Pandavas over all the lands. Vijaya/Jaya which had descriptions of
exaggerated royal splendour rather pointed out an advanced age of monarchical
states, when these traditional forms of historical literature were appropriated in
the Epic, with ample modifications. They were designed to project the heroic
valour of the Pandavas. They are eulogistic in character. The ‘digijaya’ gives a
detailed account of various monarchical states such as Kalinga, Vanga, Magadha,
Kekeya, Vaisali, Chera, Chola and Pandya. The increasing significance assigned
to conquest of land is visible in digijaya. Thus qualifies digijaya was an
interpolation. Vijaya/Jaya revealed themselves as patterns of historical literature

65 Romila Thapar, From Lineage to State, New Delhi, 1990, pp. 73-81. Also see, Pusalkar,
improvised, upon the *gatha*-s and *Narasamśi*-s. They are the forerunners of the chronicles of royalty which are further elaborated upon as historical biographies in the later ages of feudal chiefdoms. These genres existed during the medieval period. Like other traditional patterns of historical literature, *Vijaya* and *Jaya* shared the ethos of the great epics which centred round specific persons and events.

**The Ṛtihasa Tradition**

The Ramayana derived from the syllables *Rama* and *ayana* (adventures) implied the meaning-adventures of Rama. The principal characters were represented as bipolars. *Rama*, the tapsvi turned ruler of Ayodhya was the embodiment of Aryadharma while Ravana, the rākṣasaturned tapsvi was the oppressor and terror of *Aryadharma*. The theme of *Rāmayana* if reduced to its nucleus, is the expedition and war which Rama wages against Ravana. This core was popularly known as *Ramakatha*. It was the poem formed and transmitted by the rhapsodists as oral tradition for centuries. The existence of faint traces of the Rama legend in *Vedic* literature is recognized. The ancient Buddhist texts of the *Tipitaka* contained traces of *Ramakatha* as a popular song for special occasions. Mahabharata embodies *Ramakatha* as a form of recital associated with rituals and sacrifices. On such occasions the heroic exploits of sixteen kings (*Sodasaśrajo pākhyana*) were recited of which Rama was one. The *Anushtup*

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68 It is generally accepted that *Ramakatha* was the earliest form in which the story of Rama existed. The *Ramakatha* is regarded as well known in the early *Vedic* Ages. The different versions of *Ramakatha* and its transition to *Ramavarna* are discussed by Camil Bulcke. For details, see Abhayadev, (trans) *Ramakatha*. Trissur, 1989, pp. 40-48.

69 Romila Thapar, *Exile and Kingdom*, Bangalore, 1972, p.34.

verse, the most frequent and useful form of verse in poetry employed in Ramayana. It is in the form of sloka which has four caranas which literally means feet (lines). The refrain between the second and the third line, and the variations in the length of the syllables in the second half of the sloka reveal that they are intended for recital rather than reading. The compound phrase used for the two sons of Sita, ‘Kusilavau’ literally refers to bards or actors or rhapsodists (kavyopajivinho). The Ramayana composed by Valmiki is said to have been taught to Kusa and Lava who recite it to their father. Thus the Ramakatha existed as oral tradition for centuries.

**The Representation of Ramakatha in Hetrodox Religions**

Ramakatha was appropriated by the Buddhist tradition in the form of different Jataka stories. These representations focussed either on the story of Rama in the kingdom or the episode of exile. The Dasratha Jataka and the Sama Jataka were concerned with the events of the kingdom especially of the reign of Dasaratha. The origin myths narrated in them deserve attention. The focus was on the Koliyas, the Sakyas, and the Licchavis and their links to the Iksvaku lineage. These tribes are associated with the rise of Buddhism. The details of the kingdoms of kosala and vidhea which loomed large in the Ramayana were absent in the Buddhist traditions. The republics are legitimised while in Ramayana there is no reference to Buddhism or republics. The Paumacariyam of vimalasuri recast the Ramakatha in accordance with the

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4 Ibid.
values of Jainism. The geographical location of this Jain tradition is the Vindhyan region particularly the Narmada and Tapti valleys and Western India to the north of the Godavari river. The Buddhist and Jain traditions restructured *Ramakatha* by focusing on the motif of exile which was so common in the kshatriya traditions. Thus these versions are significant for:

a) Intention – the Buddhist and Jain traditions wanted to spread their social values. So they put forward an inverse representation of *Ramakatha* by appropriating the motif of exile, popular in the kshatriya traditions.

b) Sanctioned traditions

The origin myths are about the Koliyas the Sakyas and the Licchavis. They are traced to the *Iksvāku* lineage. "In the origin myths exile is permanent and the place of exile becomes the nucleus of a new Janapada with its own city." Thus the Buddhist traditions embody several layers of consciousness of the branching off by the junior lineage. The links to the *Iksavakus* lineage, legitimise the non kshatriya tribes associated with Buddhism. The Buddhist

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75 Ibid.
76 The version of *Ramakatha* in the Buddhist and Jain traditions are regarded as the 'embroidered versions.' They are motivated representations, which project brahminical rituals as anti-thesis. They are for legitimising the kshatriya status of tribal cheifships associated with Buddhism. This indicates the possibility that the *Ramakathā* was one among the kshatriya traditions. For further details, see Abayandev. (trans) *Ramakatha*, Kerala Sahitya Academy, Trichur, 1989. Allahabad, 1971, pp. 21-25.
77 Romila Thapar, *Ancient Indian Social History: Some Interpretations*, New Delhi, 1990, p. 110. Exile is associated with origin. They do not represent any specific event. But they point out the beginnings through allegorical expressions. This is a popular form of expression which has different connotations Jan Vansina narrates how the reference to the breaking up of a branch in some of the traditions of Africa indicates the branching off the lineages in the tribe. They are associated with the layers of consciousness of the past, though the details recede into subconscious. For further details on the trajectories in oral tradition, see Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition: A study in Historical Methodology*, London, 1961, p. 74.
Jatakas speak of videhas as one of the confederate clans of vaiji oligarchy. The licchavis were represented as the most powerful ganasanha. There are no descriptions of republics. Thus they exhibit the features of an official tradition.

**The transition from Ramakatha to Ramayana**

Ramakatha which existed as oral tradition was altered or additions were made by each rhapsodist to suit the occasion or to the taste of the patrons whom they served.78

"As in the case with all primitive epochs around this account of war as a nucleus, have gathered elements of every king drawn from traditions, the ideas, beliefs, the myths and the symbols of that civilization in the midst of which it arose and by the weaving in and arranging of all these vast elements and it became the complete and faithful expression of an ancient period."79

It also appropriates the social values, norms and ethos of the dominant culture in each locality. This explains the origin of the different recensions of Ramayana: (1) Northern; (2) North-Western; (3) Eastern; (4) Southern. They differ widely to the extent that about a third of the verses in each recension does not occur in the other. The northern recension attempts to infuse the spirit of Brahmanic culture as an index of civilization. New episodes related to kings and rsis are added as illustrated by the stories of Ryszasinga and Sagara. By the time these recensions came to be written down, they further incorporated legends of Surhasepa, the descent of the Ganges, the churning of the ocean, Ahalya, Parasurama, Trisanku and so on, which resemble the same legends narrated in the puranas. These representations reflect assimilation of a variety of animistic cults, and beliefs

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through vaisnavism. This was associated with the formation of kingdoms in the tribal territories.\textsuperscript{80} Hence the Balakanda and the Uttarakanda in the revised edition of Ramayana are regarded as later additions in the form of a kavya.\textsuperscript{81} The Uttarakanda narrates the renunciation of Sita, the banishment of Laxmana, and the termination of Rama’s life along with his brothers on the banks of the river Sarayu. It reveals the strong bonds of kinship visible in the epic literature. Thus "Ramayana ends in disappointment and sorrow so characteristic of the epic literature which overshadows the cheerfulness of valour and courage."\textsuperscript{82}

The Studies on Ramayana

Several scholars made valuable contributions to the studies on Ramayana. The pioneer Lassen pointed to the development of Ramakatha into epic in three stages in terms of space. According to him the core did not carry the narrative beyond the exile of Rama to the Himalayas. The second stage shifted the place of exile to the Godavari region which incorporates the accounts of his encounter with the aborigines. The third amplification occurred with the expansion of knowledge of geography. This further shifted the actions of Rama to Lanka. The transition from Ramakatha to Ramayana is regarded as reflecting the different stages of the Aryan conquest of the South.\textsuperscript{83} Lassen was followed by Weber, Muir, Frederich and Monier Williams. They discussed about the genesis of the

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\textsuperscript{80} Romila Thapar, Exile and Kingdom, Bangalore, 1972, p. 18. How the assimilation of fertility cult is reflected in the myth is illustrated by D.D. Kosambi in this analytical study of the myth of Pururavas and Urvasi. This reveals that the text contains several layers of development. For details, see D.D. Kosambi, Myth and Reality, Bombay, 1962, pp. 23-32.

\textsuperscript{81} M. Krishnamachariar, A History of Classical Sanskrit Literature, Delhi, 1989, p. 17.

\textsuperscript{82} G.H. Bhatt, The Valmiki Ramayana, Baroda, 1961, p. xiii.

\textsuperscript{83} A.D. Pusalkar, Studies in the Epics and Puranas, Bombay, 1955, p. 32.
different recensions of Ramayana, the similarities among them and the influence of Greece on the epic. The assumptions about the affiliation of Ramayana to the Homeric epics and the Aryanisation of the South characterised their discussions of Ramayana. The nationalists attempted to highlight the superiority of ancient Indian polity to justify political self-determination. The quest for fundamental culture inspired the social reformers in the 19th and 20th centuries to focus on the concepts of Aryadharma in Ramayana as the source of eternal social values.

This transition from Ramakatha to Ramayana if viewed in terms of social situations, involves

a) the first stage in which Ramakatha is enlarged by incorporating numerous layers of popular tales and heroic traditions which reflect the general experience of the pastoral age. The presence of tribal elements is regarded as preserving the cultural continuity;

b) the second stage of interpolations, which reflects the consciousness of the new settlements in the eastern and central regions and the experiences of encounters which correspond to the transition from the pastoral age to the age of agriculture,

c) the third stage of the representation arising from the elements of second urbanisation as evidenced by descriptions of cities;

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The internal evidence offered by the text was examined. Their concern was to prove the existence of a state system with external values. This approach is best illustrated in Law N.N., *Aspects of Ancient Indian Polity*, London, 1921; and Ghoshal U.N., *A History of Hindu Political Theories*, London, 1927.
d) improvisation to transform it to the formal standard of a *kavya* through focusing on sentiments and social values which corresponds to an advanced literate society and monarchical states.

**The Historical Basis of Ramayana**

In tracing the historical basis of Ramayana, Weber pointed out that the characters represented certain events and circumstances. It is pointed out that Sita (the furrow) is referred to in the *Rig Veda* as an object of worship, so it represents the Aryan agriculture. Hence it is regarded as the personified representation of the spread of agriculture towards the south of the peninsula.\(^5\)

Ramayana is regarded as an elaborated version of nature myths. Ramayana is regarded as the allegorical representation of the destruction of the chalcolithic culture by the Iron Age cultures.\(^6\) This epic is regarded as not representing any specific age or specific historical fact but as the embodiment of 'general experiences of different groups extending over centuries,'\(^7\) especially when the society went through a crisis or major upheaval. An understanding of oral traditions, its components, the modes of transmission and the general correlation between the literature and archaeological finds in terms of social context are considered necessary for detecting the layers of the epics.\(^8\)

It has been generally admitted that the original Ramayana consists of five *kandas* (II to VI). The *Balakanda* and the *Uttarakanda* are later additions.

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\(^{7}\) Romila Thapar, *Exile and Kingdom*, Bangalore, 1972, p. 5.

\(^{8}\) Romila Thapar, *Recent Approaches to the Study of Early Indian History*, Bombay, 1995, p. 29.
Event in kingdom and forest are identified as constituting the kernel of the epic. Descriptions which are stereotyped and repetition of events are regarded as universal features of epic literature. The women characters Kekeyi and Sita are represented as motivating the crucial events of the epic. These subplots reveal the fragments of popular tale. The intrigues of Kekeyi and the banishment of the legitimate heir is significant. This is a break from the tradition and contrary to the accepted norm. This is an index to the transitional stage in the law of primogeniture which indicates a society where the rights on land are clearly established. The emphasis on the patrilineal primogeniture suggests that:

(a) there is also an alternative primogeniture; 
(b) the patrilineal primogeniture emerges in a new powerful group as the differentiating feature from other groups which are henceforth considered as lesser (candravamsa). In candravamsa the distribution and expansion of the junior lineage are recorded. The Ramayana speaks of the territories of the sons of Rama, and his brothers in the Uttarakanda, which is the juxtaposition of the state system of the later ages, with the branching off junior lineages in tribal territories in the middle Ganga valley. The theme of exile symbolizes.

a) the purity of lineage of the new ruling groups because of ultimate descent from single set of parents. 

b) migrations motivated by demographic growth, or tensions within the initial group resulting in the process of fission so common in the lineage systems.

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90 Romila Thapar, *Exile and Kingdom*, Bangalore, 1972, p. 11.
The Text of Ramayana and the social Roots of Representation

The Ramayana which is regarded as part of the ancient historical tradition derives its material from several strata of an ancient lore. A close examination of the text reveals the core and periphery of the activities of Rama. These are the forest (Aranyaa) and the kingdom (Rajya). For the purpose of the continuity of the text these are arranged alternatively. The forest as the core is presented invariably in all the chapters (II to IV) which are regarded as constituting the original sections of text. The early sections of exile abounds in asramas. The asramas of Bharadwaja, Vashishta, Valmiki, Adya are regarded as the abodes of *Rama* in exile. The names bear the traces of later additions. How they all constitute the brahminical discourse is to be discussed later. The asramas reveal proximity to the settled areas. It is justified by the description that Rama reached the frontier of Kosala and entered *Aranya* after the journey of three days. The forests were the habitats of *rsis*, the *vanaprasthas* and *sanyasis*. The Ramayana reveals their status as ascetics and not as purohitas. The *ra̱kaśasas*, even Ravana, are described as the oppressor of ascetics, and *tapas* and not purohitas. Hence these different groups are employed to designate the Aryan language speaking groups who are differentiated from others through the ritual status. The subplot, illustrates the deeds of Rama who accompanies Visva̱mithra as the protector. This points out the dependency of these groups later designated as brahmanas, on the chief of the vis. The non-didactic portions of the text reveal them as dependent

on those in power. The didactic sections affirm the dependency of the ruler on purohita. This is an index of the mobilisation of the two groups – the Brahanmanas and the Kshatriyas as the power elite\textsuperscript{97} in later ages. The origin of purohita was somewhere with the beginnings of varna.\textsuperscript{98} The text reveals the absence of Brahma-sponsored rituals and depicts the ruler as performing rituals as the chief of the vis. To this are added the reflections of the social context, when the Brahamana has become a dominant ally of the power elite which is visible, in the Balakanda and Uitarakanda of the text. The different in-themes of didactic sections reveal the transition to varna system and also to the complex plural society of hierarchies. Ramayana reveals an age where there were occasions for usurpation. “Bharata argues against his being made king by referring to the rule of primogeniture and this is reiterated by Vasistha who recited the Iksvāku lineage to demonstrate the succession of the eldest son.\textsuperscript{99} This is an index of the change to the new rule of primogeniture which has not yet become well established. The kshatriya traditions in Mahabharata also reveal exile. Exile is the allegorical representation of the provisions for those excluded from the throne. The puranas do not refer to exile. They mention only the name of the Crown prince as such or they state the number of other princes.\textsuperscript{100} Another alternative is that the princes can live jointly as illustrated in Mahabharata.

\textsuperscript{97} Op. cit., p. 66.
There were octennial, triennial and annual tenures.\textsuperscript{101} "They retained assumptions about the past and also underpinned the social relations of the present."\textsuperscript{102} It has been said that "the Ramayana is a symbolic depiction of the dominance of the landlords (with their God Rama) over the peasants (Hanuman) or that it represents the conflict between agriculturists and food gatherers.\textsuperscript{103} In historical terms Ramayana is described as the juxtaposition between monarchical state systems and tribal chiefdoms prior to the emergence of the state.\textsuperscript{104}

It is mentioned that the route of the journey of Rama when banished from Ayodhya, is through the mid-Gangetic valley to the Southwest.\textsuperscript{105} The gifts given by Guha, the chief of the \textit{Nisada-vansha} to Bharata and by Sabari to Rama are tribal products—roots, fruit & fish. They suggest a food gathering society, less advanced than pastoralism.\textsuperscript{106} Larger forests like \textit{Maharanyaka} are mentioned in the later sections of exile. There are descriptions of encounter with alien groups which are described in expressions of horror and contempt such as \textit{Nisachara}, \textit{Raksasa} and \textit{Vanara}. The picture revealed by archaeology is that Dandakaranya was the abode of a wide range of tribes, such as the Bhils, the Gonds, the korkus, santals, and different linguistic groups. The region was the centre of chalcolithic culture which can be dated to the third millennium B.C.\textsuperscript{107} From the mid-second millennium B.C. onwards groups of the Aryan language speaking immigrants

\textsuperscript{101} This was regarded as prevailing in Rome, Sparta, Lagos of South Nigeria and Hawaii. The king at the end of the term was either deposed or put to death in an elaborate ritual or passed through some substituted ceremony. While among the Aryan speaking groups in India this was absent.

\textsuperscript{102} Romila Thapar, \textit{Ancient Indian Social History: Some Interpretations}, New Delhi, 1990, p. 296.

\textsuperscript{103} D.D. Rosambhi, \textit{Introduction to the Study of Indian History}, Bombay, 1956, p. 40.

\textsuperscript{104} Romila Thapar, \textit{Exile and Kingdom}, Bangalore, 1972, p. 22.

\textsuperscript{105} "From early times the null and forest belt was crossed by routes linking Ganga valley with coasts and with the Deccan plateau," Allchin, \textit{Origins of a Civilisation}, New Delhi, 1997, p. 250.


\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.
began to filter into the belt. The expressions of horror associated with alien groups indicate occasions of conflicts with them. These encounters took place in the contexts of encroachment of tribal territories. The infiltration is associated with the transition of lineages to kingdoms. Demographic growth, technological skills inadequate to sustain the population of the initial kin groups, and the consequent hostilities might have been the causal factors behind the acquisitive attitude towards the tribal territories. The coexistence of chalcolithic and agricultural elements in the Eastern and Central regions is recognised. Some of the Aryan language speaking groups would have won power by force of arms. In the descriptions of the battles and encounters the weapons used by Rāma are bows and arrows (āstras). The soldiers guarding Lanka carry swords while Ravana and his sons have magical weapons. The list of weapons are similar to the puranic lists which can be ascribed to human fantasies. The weapons used by the Vanaras indicate the Mesolithic phase in the regions. In the centuries that followed the rivalry of the tribes and the new groups was resolved by intermarriage, cultural acculturation, and constitution of social norms in accordance with the requirements of the mode of production and appropriation. The result of this interaction is a new class of acculturated Aryans who

108 Ibid.
109 Romila Thapar, From Lineage to State, New Delhi, 1990, p. 76-78.
110 Allchin, Origins of Civilisation, New Delhi, 1997, p. 244.
111 Ibid.
112 Vaishnavism is regarded as the symbolic representation of acculturation. This was effected through appropriation of the local cults especially the fertility cults with fabricated connections to the dominating culture of the Aryan speaking groups. For the relevant discussion see Romila Thapar. Ancient Indian Social History: Some Interpretations, New Delhi, 1990, pp. 296-305. The reflection of cultural acculturation in the traditions is analysed by D.D. Kosambi in his analytical study of the tradition of Pururavas and Urvashi. Here he identifies the different layers which denote the transition. For further details, see Kosambi D.D., Myth and Reality, Bombay, p. 23-32. This process is studied in terms of relations between the power elite and the commons. It is argued that this process reflects itself in tradition in accordance with the changes in production and appropriation of surplus. For further details, see Ramendra Nath Wani, Social Roots of Religion in Ancient India, Delhi, 1986, p. xiv.
maintained that they were of Aryan descent. These societies were complex as they consisted of plural ethnic elements. The class of acculturated Aryans who had power named their chiefdoms after their ancestral tribes. The ksatriya was largely an imagined status appropriated by new ruling families and sanctified by dependent priests. The emphasis in the *Uttarakanda* on the values of kingdom and monarchy as the legitimised form has its counterpart in Mahabharata. "This was established by seeking lineage connections with one of the two major lineages the *Suryavamsa* or the *Candravamsa* or some other status, conferring cosmic origin such as the *Agni-kula*." The descent lists mentioned in the *Balakanda* are brief. They are elaborated upon in the genealogical sections of the later *puranas*. The *Visnur Purana* speaks of the *Ramayana* in the genealogical sections on the *Iksvaku*. The *puranic* genealogies trace the origin of the *Iksvaku* from the flood legends. Here *Iksvaku* figures as the eldest son of the seventh Manu. The absence of the legends of flood in the *Ramayana* reveal that this component of historical tradition, designed to mark the beginnings of *vamsa* was a phenomenon un-thought of in the society at the time of the compilation of epic. Hence *vamsa* which knit together the reminiscences of lineage and the legitimacy of the ruling elite and rights in the land has not been fully evolved. The society was having the *varna* system. The Vaisyas were the chief producers and the Sudras constituted a section of the labour force. They were only functional groups. In the economy of the post-Vedic Age there was the expansion of agriculture, arts, drafts and trade making the society stratified. These processes coincided with the formation of states. The chief producers of

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social goods in this age were the Vaisyas, Sudras and Dasa but the ksatriyas who expropriated the surplus dominated the state. They gradually established their ownership of the surplus and controlled its distribution." There was the proliferation of endogamous Jati subdivisions. This was explained as an articulation of inter-varna hypergamy. The elaboration of varna division by the complex hierarchy of Jatis and the social tensions arising from this context are well reflected in the subplot which narrates the duties of the king to-Bharata. One of the duties prescribed is "the prevention of the mixing of castes and the maintenance of varna dharma. It refers to a tense situation of the dichotomy between the Aryan and the mleccha existed. The descriptions of Ayodhya and Kosala, the gifts handed over to Bharata and Hanuman "even if allowing for poetic exaggeration, suggest a fairly developed economy." "The archaeology of the Ganges plain shows that the earliest urbanisation dates back to the period of the Northern Black Polished ware of the mid-first millennium B.C. These descriptions of Ayodhya would date to a period subsequent to that.

The assessment of the text of Ramayana in terms of historiography reveals the open structure of the text which admits numerous additions and interpolations. Ramayana is the representation of past in any chronological framework. It is a compilation that covers several centuries. The text of Ramayana deserves serious attention from the angle of social contexts. It is rather an index of change, extending over several centuries of the transformation of tribal groups into urban economy of mid-Gangetic valley, Eastern and Central regions of India.

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117 Ibid.
118 Romila Thapar, Ancient Indian Social History: Some Interpretations, New Delhi, 1990, pp. 211-231.
119 Romila Thapar, Exile and Kingdom, Bangalore, 1972, 22.
The Mahabharata

The Mahabharata narrates the tension and feud between the Kurus and the Panchala. Like the Ramayana the Mahabharata reveals a heroic past, when society and existing values went through crisis or major upheaval. Unlike the Ramayana the Mahabharata centre round the Puru lineage. The events leading to the patricidal war, and the destruction caused by the war are discussed in detail. The narratives after the war are brief. The Mahabharata ends with the journey of the Pandavas to heaven. The epic literature thus ends in tragedy.

The Studies on the Mahabharata

The critical studies on the Mahabharata commenced by Lassen is followed by different groups such as the Indologists, Orientalists, historians and sociologists. The analytical and synthetic approaches dominated early studies on the Mahabharata. The Indologists focus on the different layers of the text. Weber and Ludwig attempt to explain the Mahabharata as an extension of nature myths in the Vedas. Hopkins propound the inversion theory which suggests that in the original poem the Kauravas are the heroes. It is perverted by Brahminical appropriation of the tradition in the process of creation of the epic literature. Though the inversion theory is refuted by many scholars the evolution of the epic poem has been studied in detail by many Indian scholars. The evolution of the

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121 Romila Thapar, Ancient Indian Social History Some Interpretations, New Delhi, 1990, p. 218.
123 The prime question which characterise these two approaches is whether the Mahabharata is a single text or a product of heterogeneous traditions. The analytical school with scholars such as E. Von Schroder, Adolf Holtzmann, and Grierson illustrate the transformation of original war poem (Bharatha katha) composed by the bards of the kurus in to the epical corpus through the appropriation of the dominant cults (the ksra cult the fertility cult) of the neighbouring tribes. Joseph Dahlmann Sorinsen defend the synthetic approach by insisting on inherent unity of the text. For a detailed discussion of the arguments of these approaches see Pusiker, Studies in the Epics and Purans, Bombay, 1955, p. xxx III.
epic poem is analysed with a view to provide a chronological framework for the history of ancient India. The most important theory about the growth of Mahabharata is propounded by Sukthanker and Dandekar who have elaborated upon the idea that the Bhargavas played a great role in the formative stages of the epic. Pargiter asserts that the traditions are originally belonged to the kshatriyas. They are tampered by the brahminical compilers. But the authenticity of this compartmentalisation into kshatriya/ brahminical tradition in the Indian context is also questioned by scholars like Pusalker and Dandekar.

Roots of the Mahabharata as a Text

The Mahabharata began its existence as a simple narrative (gatha). Nucleus of the Mahabharata is designed as Jaya (Victory). This is evident from the reference to jayonameti hatoyam. The words ‘Mahabharatayuddha,

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125 The Puranas and the epics of India were used as the sources by Pargiter to create a list of the various dynasties with approximate chronological framework. Pargiter F.E., Ancient Indian Historical Tradition, New Delhi, 1962.

126 It is regarded that the Mahabharata is the product of restructured traditions by the brahmanas who were the authors/compilers of the epic “Mahabharata in particular was in the hands of Brahmins belonging to the Brighu class who inflated it about its present bulk before the Gupta age” Tolboys Wheeler India of Vedic Age with Reference to Mahabharata, Delhi, 1953, pp.14-19. The role of the Brughus as the dominant lineage and the emergence of the brahmanas as the preservers of tradition which coincided with the transition from the preliterate to the literate society are elaborated upon by historians like D.D. Kosambi and Romila Thaper. This appropriation of traditions by the brahmanas is regarded as grounded on the needs and changes in the mode of production in the later vedic age. For the details of this approach see D.D. Kosambi Myth and Reality, Bombay, 1962 and also see R.S. Sharma, Survey of Research in Economic and Social History of India, New Delhi, 1986, pp. 41-108. How varna and vamsa determined social status in the lineage system, and how the itihasa tradition functioned as assumptions about the past are discussed in detail by Romila Thaper. For further details see Romila Thaper, From Lineage to State, New Delhi, 1990, pp. 42-69 and also see Romila Thapar, Ancient Indian Social History Some Interpretations, New Delhi, 1990, pp. 115-124.

127 Pargiter assumes that the kshatriya traditions which center around heroic deeds were in Prakrit language. They were restructured with didactic elements and vaisnavite traditions. The restructured traditions were rendered in Sanskrit. For details see Pargiter F.E., Ancient Indian Historical Tradition, New Delhi, 1962, pp. 21-24.

128 But the existence of Prakrit as the language of tradition is doubted by Pusalker who states that there is no evidence. For details see Pusalker Studies in the Epics and Puranas, Bombay 1955. Also see Dandekar R.N., Mahabharata Revisited, New Delhi, 1990, p.107.


and 'Mahabharatākhyānam' \(^{131}\) (the story of the Bharata battle) are found in the Mahabharata itself. Though there are differences of opinion about the date and details of the war between the Kurus and the Panchalas the war is undoubtedly recognized as nucleus of the Mahabharata. The Gatha-s and nārāsamśi-s are the direct precursors of this epic. \(^{132}\) On the one hand they developed into long epic poems (heroic songs) on the other they developed into entire cycles of epic songs centring around a hero as in the Ramayana, or an incident such as the bloody battle in the Mahabharata. \(^{133}\)

The text of Mahabharata begins with the conversation between Sauti who was a sūta and the sages assembled in the Naimsi forest. Sauti recognises Vaisampāyana as the earliest narrator of the story of Mahabharata and Vaisampāyana is regarded as the Guru. When Sauti visited the twelve year long sacrificial session (serpent sacrifice) officiated by the sage Saunaka in the Naimisaranya he recited the story (Bharatha Katha) in the form of a poem. The story (Bharatha Katha) is also described as itihasa, purana, ākhyana upākhyana and katha which reveals that it is derived from the ancient lore. Such descriptions reveal that:

a) the core of Mahabharata namely the poem of the war of Bharatha is anterior to writing and it is a part of the popular oral tradition.

b) there were specific occasions when such traditions were narrated. Such occasions of transmission helped to preserve the tradition.

c) it reveals sutas as the group engaged in the transmission and preservation of oral traditions.


\(^{132}\) R.N. Dandekar, Mahabharata Revisited, New Delhi, 1990, p. 128.

Progressive iteration\textsuperscript{134} is one of the features associated with the Mahabharata. In the Mahabharata more often the plots and subplots are carried forward through questions and answers. Often a legend is presented to a listener to explain a similar situation so that the listener immediately asks him to narrate the legend in detail. So the *Pauloma Parvam* and the *Āsthika Parvam* abound in legends which narrate the adventures of many heroes and incidents of the different ages. They reveal themselves as the products of compilations and interpolations. Hence it can be assumed that they are derived from different sources. In oral poems the legends undergo constant restructuring, where the archaic elements of earlier traditions are retained as the base.\textsuperscript{135} The *vaishnavite* traditions point out that these sections are later additions to the text. The *Pauloma Parvam* and the *Āsthika parvam* narrate the legends of the serpents (nagas). There are legends and cycles of legends such as the legend of *Kadru* the mother of serpents and Garuda.\textsuperscript{136} There are also legends about the origin of great heroes, seers (ex. the legends of Agastya, Chavana) universe and Kingship. These are supposed to extend over a long period from the first millennium B.C. to the first millennium A.D.\textsuperscript{137} The legend of Kadru reveal the collective consciousness about migrations and confrontations in the past. In the legend of Kadru the unprecedented increase in the number of serpents and tensions with in

\textsuperscript{134} Progressive iteration is regarded as one of the mnemonic aids which existed in the oral tradition. Romila Thapar, *Ancient Indian Social History Some Interpretations*, New Delhi, 1990, p.232.

\textsuperscript{135} One of the features associated with the transitions of ballads into epic was the mixing up of the traits of an earlier age with the recent environment. This is regarded as the chief evidence for interpolation. For the discussion on the features of the transition of the ballads into epic, *Op. cit.* p.87 and also see Grumonere F.J. A Library of the Worlds best literature, Vol. III, London, 1927, p.130.


\textsuperscript{137} Such legends on origin are termed as origin myths. They are designed to narrate the origin of grand events. Thus they are different from folk tales which are concerned with minor social aspects. For the discussion on the features of origin myth in Indian tradition see Romila Thapar, *Ancient Indian Social History Some Interpretations*, New Delhi, 1990, pp. 105-111.
the kingroups are indicated.\textsuperscript{138} It is recognised that there was a large scale movement of population from the Indus river regions in to uttarapada (upper Gangetic plains) in the post urban Harappan period.\textsuperscript{139} Most of the land was forest and Hastinapura is referred to as Kuru-Jangala (situated in a forest) in the Mahabharata.\textsuperscript{140} The migrations of the Purus, the Bharatas and the wanderings of the lineages are mentioned in the \textit{Rig Veda}. The process of conquest/alliances/assimilation of the earlier settlers continued for centuries. It resulted in the emergence of aggregational societies.\textsuperscript{141} Due to the striking dissimilarities between the core which was regarded as original and the text of Mahabharata it is asserted that Mahabharata "contains several layers of encrustation extending over centuries."\textsuperscript{142} In the preliterate societies where the mode of transmission was oral, myth was the popular format for passing information from generation to generation. The oral tradition appropriates the dominant aspects of the socio-political situations of the immediate past\textsuperscript{143} while retaining the ghosts.\textsuperscript{144} Thus they coincide with the transitions in society. But depicting the transitions in representation is not the motive. Hence they are presented in such a way that it

\textsuperscript{138} Vidvan Prakasam (ed.) \textit{Ashthai\textit{\textasciitilde}awam, Mahabharatam} (Mal) Kottayam, 1989, pp. 105-111.


\textsuperscript{140} The Archaeological remains from the excavated sites such as Hastinapura and Atranjikhera reveal that there was extensive deforestation in the early stages. Burning was a major method. This is referred to through the story of Agni and Khandavan in the Mahabharata. For the details of the excavation revealing the possibilities of migrations into uttarapada from the first millennium BC to the first millennium A.D. See Op. Cit. p. 117.

\textsuperscript{141} The term is borrowed from John Middleton and David Tait. Their studies on the features of the lineage society reveal that in this system different lineages are interlocked in relations based on common unilineal descent. Centralized political authority is absent. Such societies are termed as aggregational societies of segmentary lineage system. For the discussion of the structure or lineage system, and different types of societies see John Middleton and David Tait, \textit{Tribes without Rulers}, London, 1958, p. 4. For the discussion of lineage system in the context of India from the first millennium BC to the first millennium AD. See Ramila Thapar, \textit{From Lineage to State}, New Delhi, 1990.

\textsuperscript{142} Romila Thapar, \textit{Ancient Indian Social History: Some Interpretations}, New Delhi, 1990, p. 148.

\textsuperscript{143} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{144} The arcaic traits are termed as Ghosts by Umberto Eco. For further details see Umberto Eco, \textit{Interpretation And Over Interpretation}, London, 1992, p. 85.
facilitates the continuity of the narrative and projects the motive which is related to the powerstructure in the society of the immediate past. In the sedentary communities cattle raid was one of the means of accumulating wealth. In this activity leadership was essential. The Kuru panchala rajas and the Panins are regarded as engaged in cattle lifting. The stories of cattle raids associated with the Kauravas and the legends which exalt the heroic valour of the yadhus are mixed up with the social conditions in the monarchical states which belonged to the later period. Thus traditions of different social groups who belonged to different regions underwent the process of telescoping before they were appropriated in the creation of the Grand narrative. This is indicated in the myths of the origin of the kingship and the divinity of kings illustrate this. The notion of change is implicit in the origin myths of kingship which are presented in the form of speculation. The details of a primeval golden age in the uttarapada and the state of anarchy which followed are discussed in the Santi Parvam. Thus as different from other origin myths which narrate the absence of antecedents, the myths of kingship narrate a situation of anarchy as the background for the emergence of kingship. The story of the wicked ruler Vena, and the suggestions in the Aranyaka Parvam and the Adi Parvam to prevent the autocracy of ruler are derived from the collective memory of the occasions of crisis in the society in its transition to kingship. The Anuḥasana Parvam tells that people should take up arms and slay the king who fails to protect his subjects.

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146 Ibid.
147 The Buddhist tradition stresses on the absence of family and varuna as the essential features of a primeval golden age in accordance with the ideology of the religion, while the puranas elaborate upon lawlessness as the context for the emergence of the kingship. In the puranas the stress is on emergence of the kingship. For the details on the representations of kingship in the iithas-Purana tradition see Roy B.P., Political Ideas and Institutions in the Mahabharata, Calcutta, 1975, 1.154.
While the *Santi Parvam* exalts the authority of the ruler. The epic has many contexts where the kings are identified with *prajapathi*, *Deva* and *Indra*. The *Mahabharata* illustrates how the blindness of Dhritrāstra and the ailment of Pandu created disputes over succession to the throne. The later notions of *Devaputhra* associated with the *Pandavas* reveal itself as the assumption of a much later age. "Though the idea of divinity existed in the early Indian tradition the notion of *Devaputhra* developed only after the advent of the *Kusanas*."

**The Transition from Bharatakatha to Grand narrative**

The *Sutas* were the custodians of heroic poetry. They are regarded as the specialised groups having knowledge of the traditions. *Sutas* sang songs at the court in praise of the chieftains. They even accompanied them in the battle to witness the valour of the chiefs and eulogised them in their songs. The later *Bhatas* and the *Caranas* belong to this category. In the *Mahabharata* Sanjaya is a bard with respectable status. He narrates the details of the war at Kurukshetra to the king. In the hierarchy of *varna* system the *Sutas* occupy an intermediary position since they are regarded as the offspring of Brahmana father and

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149 The notion of divinity is regarded as functional by K.M. Panicker. Following this it is argued that the duties bestowed upon the king namely the protection of the people, environment, morality later equate kingship with God. For the further details see K.M. Panicker, *Origin and the Evolution of Kingship in India*, Baroda, 1938, p.35. The notion of divinity attached to the office of the king is regarded as the representation of an age which is accustomed to absolute monarchy.
154 Such heroic traditions are identified as the trajectories of heroic history. They are found in chiefdoms where the hero and the group are considered as identical. For the relevant discussion on the features of heroic history in the context of Greece see Marshal Sahalins *Islands of History*, New York, 1979, pp. 42-67.
kshatriya mother.\textsuperscript{155} The Mahabharata is designated as itihasa due to the myths and legends of heroes of the past. Originally \textit{itihasa} means ‘thus it was’.\textsuperscript{156} The term \textit{itihasa} was employed to designate any tradition relating to certain heroic events of the past.\textsuperscript{157} Thus \textit{itihasa} is derived from the ancient lore where \textit{katha} and legend are the forms of expression.\textsuperscript{158} Many legends in the Mahabharata are also regarded as katha (Ex. the legend of Agasthya, and the legend of Chavana). The individual poems and the cycle of poems, local traditions and popular tales preserved by the \textit{Sutas} are appropriated and found their way in the epic compilation. Thus the epic poem of Mahabharata is constituted out of the entire old bardic poetry.\textsuperscript{159} “Even in its existence in oral tradition in the epic literature variation in words and contents occurred from generation to generation from place to place and from bard to bard.”\textsuperscript{160}

H. Jacobi identifies four stages in the creation of Mahabharata (a) the development of the story (b) the origin of the epical poem (c) the creation of the epical literature by the \textit{Sutas} (d) the interpolation of the didactic elements. He assigns the early stages of the development of the epic poem to the Pre-Archaemedian period and the present form of the Mahabharata is assigned to the third or second century B.C.\textsuperscript{161} The origin of the Mahabharata in the written form is explained through the narrative which illustrates how Vyasa the great

\textsuperscript{155} Romila Thapar, \textit{Ancient Indian Social History: Some Interpretations}, New Delhi, 1990, p. 119.
\textsuperscript{156} \textit{Op. cit.} p. 115.
\textsuperscript{158} R.N. Dandekar, \textit{Mahabharata Revisited}, New Delhi, 1990, p. 93.
\textsuperscript{160} \textit{Op. cit.}, p. 88.
sage accomplishes writing of the Mahabharata through Ganesa. Mahabharata in its textual form assigns the authorship to Vyasa and speaks of several recensions and reductions. *Sumantu, Jaimoni, Paila, Suka* and *Vaisampayana* are regarded as the five rhapsodists who in their turn published the five versions. Each recension was the outcome of a complex and composite growth. The differences in the recensions are regarded as originating from the appropriation of local traits of culture, faith and traditions. The period of the growth of *Samhita* in to the epic remained a domain of speculations.

The transition of the epic literature from the preliterate to the literate tradition also coincides with changes in the socio-political organisation. There are widespread migrations into the Gangetic plains and to the Vindhyan regions. It is recognised that there was a demographic rise in the new settlements. This justifies the assimilation of the local population especially of those who owned wealth/power in the regions. The symbolic alliances between the pastroalists (the early Aryan language speaking migrants) and the primitive agriculturists

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Attempts to find out the period of evolution of the epic centre round two factors a) the different layers of the text b) the different aspects of socio political organisation alluded to in the text. As for the layers of the text it is generally agreed that the text has three sections a) Jaya with 8800 stanzas c) third section with 24000 stanzas known as Bharata with out any upakyanas b) Adi Bharata with 10000 verses in which also included upakyanas. Winternit assigns (400 BC-400 AD) as the period of evolution of epic, while Kunjunni Raja asserts that the core (Adi Bharata) to 200 AD. For further details see Pusalker, *Studies in the Epic and the Puranas*, Bombay, 1955, p. 110. On the basis of astronomical calculations the Mahabharata war is assigned to the first millennium B.C. Due to the references to Siva, Bhrama and Visnu the text of Mahabharata is regarded as post Bhudhist. F.E. Pargiter, *Ancient Indian Historical Tradition*, New Delhi, 1962, pp. 102-105. Correlating archaeological evidences (OCP and PGW cultures) and literacy evidences in the Vedic literature, a long period of evolution is assigned to the text of Mahabharata (from 1st millennium BC to the post Gupta period) Romila Thapar, *Ancient Indian Social History: Some Interpretations*, New Delhi, 1990, pp. 249-256. Romila Thapar, *Recent Perspectives of Indian History*, Bombay, 1995, pp. 18-34.

(the dominant among the local population) assume new dimensions. The increase in the number of lineages brought a change within the vise of the Rigvedic period. Those who managed to appropriate farmlands in the new regions are elevated to the status of grahapati who later constitute the category of the Vaisyas. The wet cultivation prevalent in the eastern regions which demand intensive labour necessitate labour beyond the kingroups. Those who are precluded from the acquisition of farms are driven to the position of labourers who constitute the category of Sudras. The leadership in cattle raids give way to leadership in the settlement of new lands. Thus the leader Gopa, Gopati, janasya Gopati (who is later termed as rajan meaning to glow/shine) becomes nripati and naresvara (the lord of the men) Kula (clan) is the unit of the family and a group of clans constitute the jana. The Rajanya (senior lineages) from among whom the Raja is chosen is displaced by kshatriya the term being derived from ksatra (land). This is expressed by the naming of the territories after the Kshatriya lineage such as Kekeya, Madra and Matsya etc. The Mahabharata narrates the names of tribes who took part in the war at Kurukshetra and the tribes derive their names from the lineages to which they belong.

Among the dominant senior lineages the members are bound together and differentiated from others on the basis of ritual with the increase in population the number of lineages also increased resulting in the formation of the gotra system due to the insistence on the exogamous basis of the gotra system. The stories of matrimonial alliances of the Pandavas testify the significance of

165 Romila Thapar, From Lineage to State, New Delhi, 1990, p. 89.
lineage (*Vamsa*) which existed among the Khsatriyas. The status attached to the Khsatriyas marks the beginning of the emergence of them as the power elite. Mahabharata like Ramayana abounds in stories of alliances between the Brahmanas and the Khsatriyas. The appropriation of ethnic groups in the wake of new settlements are legitimised in traditions. There are stories which reveal that both *Asuras* and Aryans are the children of Kasyapa by different wives. There are also narratives which relate the *Nagas* to Vasudeva Krishna. The increasing relationship of interdependence between the Brahmanas (Priests) and the chieftains (Khsatriyas) is well reflected in the shifts which occur in the preservation, occasions of transmission of the traditions. Myths that narrate heroic actions now assume the form of a tale with necessary modifications. It was recited on occasions of religious ceremonies (yajnas) in the ruling families. The focus is on didactic elements. They attempt to moralize through narratives. They are not designed to explain why and how events happened in the past. But they explain the 'grand events.' This paradigm is further elaborated upon by the *puranas*. There is a class of minstrels known as the ‘yayatikas’ and ‘yavakritikas.’ They recite the tales (legends) which besides exalting the khsatriya ruler, elaborate upon his *Vanisa* to legitimise his special privileges and social status. This is to the accompaniment of lute and other musical instruments and last for nearly twelve days. The emergence of new group as seers and preservers of tradition result in the decline of the social status of Sutas.

171 The creation of the universe, of Devas, of Asuras re regarded as the aspects discussed by the later mythologies. They project the superhuman powers of Brahmins and their ability to bestow favour/curses on the land and ruler. For further details of the emergence of this power elite see Ronula Thapar, *Ancient Indian Social History Some Interpretations*, New Delhi, 1990, p. 149.
172 The chiefship usually tied to a particular lineage of the locality. Regulation of succession is illustrated by myths which speak of a permanent descent line,” John Middleton and David Tait, *Tribes Without Rulers*, London, 1958, p.19.
The bipolar representation of Sanjaya and Karna in the text of Mahabharata reflects the honour/dishonour, which is associated with Sutas in the early/later ages. "The emergence of specialised roles and the changes in the socio, economic status mark the beginning of the birth of civilisation and the beginning of historic period."

Once the notion of documentation occurs in a society the oral tradition gradually loses its validity. Mythology the chief component of the historical tradition, assume new dimension. Among the heterogeneous parallel traditions a few become the favoured ones. They tend to freeze and they are linked to another component of historical tradition namely genealogy.

**Genealogies as "routinized charisma"**

Genealogical sections in the Mahabharata are in the form of (a) descent lists of Taksha and in the Puru lineage (b) narratives which focus on origin (origin myths) (c) the dominant Vamsas - the Candra Vamsa and the Surya Vamsa around which different ruling groups are clustered.

Lineages in the genealogies are identified as the dominant racial and linguistic groups - the Aryans, the Dravidians, the Mundas etc. They are rarely records of times of past though they have its own sense of time which is expressed in the measuring of generations. The genealogies though primarily concerned with the list of succession also contain reminiscences of migrations, especially about

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1\textsuperscript{175} The term is borrowed from Sahalin. In his work "The Islands of History" he analyses how different cultural orders produce historic consciousness and different historical practices Marshal Sahalin. *The Islands of History*. New York, 1974.

1\textsuperscript{176} The interaction between cultural order and traditions in the context of Indian culture is a major theme to be found in the writings of Romila Thapar. It is illustrated through analysing the origin myths in ancient Indian tradition. For details see, Romila Thaper, *Ancient Indian Social History Some Interpretations*, New Delhi, 1990, p.218.

1\textsuperscript{177} F.E. Pragiter, *Ancient Indian Historical Tradition*, New Delhi, 1962, pp. 45-59

the distribution of lineages. The genealogical records are designed to fulfil certain needs and they are traced to the emergence of private property that is associated with agricultural economy. The genealogical links narrow down and legitimise the access to property. Among the social groups which have ritual status, with the increase in the number of rituals, specialisation in rituals arise. Particular rituals are associated with particular groups. Meticulous care is taken by each group to record the names of seers, purohitas of them as they are to be memorised on rituals. There are also records of gotras since knowledge of the gotra is an essential part of social and ritual identity.

The format of the epic is so designed around two Vanśas the Surya Vanśa or the Ikṣvaku lineage, and the Chandra Vanśa or the Aila lineage so that different dynasties are clustered around them. Both of them owe their descent from Manu. The lists preserved in them reveal that the former is associated with the monarchical system of the kingdoms of Vidhea and Kosala. The Mahabharata focuses on the Aila lineage or the Gandra Vanśa. This lineage while revealing traces of matrilineal descent speaks of the distribution of tribes in the central, western and northern India. The settlements of the sons of Pururavas are described. Later the descent list is displaced by the names of the segments. Once again the lineages of Puru is described which covers an extensive area. Many of the names are not that of Kings but off tribes. The Yadava-vamśa which plays a key role in Mahabharatha war has a wider geographical reach including the

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180 Romila Thaper, From Lineage to State, New Delhi, 1990, p.118.
central regions and western India. The strength of van\textit{\textsc{s}}a is depicted by describing the number of segment lineages who took part in the war at Kurukshetra. The details of the \textit{Yadava Van\textsc{s}}a in the Mahabharata illustrate how different groups are interlocked in the segmentary lineage system. The wider expansion of segments also include the assimilation of tribes, local cults, and deities. This is revealed by the stories of origin. "This distribution of segments suggest a period before the emergence of stable kingdoms or the political forms are more in the nature of Chiefdoms."\textsuperscript{183} In the Mahabharata genealogies of greater depth are rare, indicating that they have undergone the process of selection where only the important names are memorised. The details of \textit{Candra Van\textsc{s}}a refer to \textit{Pancha-Jana}, which denote the dominant five tribes of Yadu, Turvasa, Druhya, Anu and \textit{Puru}.

Thus genealogies are compilations and hence derived from the family history of different lineages. The genealogies with myths of origin are turned in to a part of the cultural/religious order by specialised groups such as the priests and genealogists attached to the ruling houses. They are recited on occasions of ritual. Thus they undergo experiential rebirth. They thus became the chief constitutive elements of great tradition.

\textbf{Early Puranic traditions}

The term purana signifies ‘ancient tale’ or ‘ancient lore’ or ‘old narrative.’ Later the term purana is employed to designate a separate genre of sacred literature. \textit{Vayu Purana}\textsuperscript{184} defines purana as “that which lives from ancient

\textsuperscript{183} Romila Thaper. \textit{From Lineage to State}, New Delhi, 1990, p.185.
times” while *Matsya Purana*\(^{185}\) explains the term as denoting “records of past events.” Purana is regarded as a related category of *itihasas* in the Vedic literature. The *Vayu Purana* and the *Brahmanda Purana* designate themselves as *Purana itihasa*. The *itihasa- purana* tradition is recognised as one of the main constituents of the ancient Indian Historical tradition.\(^{186}\) The puranas retain strands of continuity with earlier forms of historical tradition such as the *gatha-s*, *narasamśi-s*, the *itihasas* and with the *Vakovakyaś* in Vedic literature, as the themes of the puranas are derived from the ancient lore. The contents of the puranas are regarded as secular in nature\(^{187}\) and the puranas are assigned to the interface between oral and literature traditions in ancient India.\(^{188}\)

**Origin and Development**

Progressive iteration is one of the significant features in the recital of the puranas. The leading dialogues and sub-dialogues are linked to the Sage Parasara or to Ramaharshapa the disciple of Vyāsa. Ramaharshapa is recognised as *Suta*.

The puranic texts especially the *Visnu Purana* reveals several aspects associated


But some scholars do not recognise *Puranas* as a related category of the *Ithihasas*. They regard *itihasas* as the narratives of the heroic deeds of great men while *puranas* are regarded as dealing with the actions of gods. For further details see Krishnamachāriari, M., *History of Classical Sanskrit Literature*, New Delhi, 1989, p.57. The absence of rituals and mantras are pointed out by Pargiter as supportive of his conclusion. He assumes that the *Puranas* originally must have been Kshatriya tradition in Prakrit. Later they are sanskritised through the interpolation of Brahmana traditions by the Brahmanic compilers. But many European scholars are of the opinion that the *puranas* are important from the religious point of view and consider them as sacred literature.

“The earliest reference to the *Puranas* is from a religious point of view regarding the Kshatriya origin of the *Puranas* had been correct.” Prof. Keith, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, London. 1914. p.1027 and also see Winternitz *History of Indian Literature*, Calcutta, 1952, pp. 523-524.

with the origin of puranas in textual form. Sumati, Aṇṅivarcas, Maitreya Samsapayana, Arturata and Sarvani are mentioned as the disciples of the Suta Bomharashapa. The last three are regarded as the compilers of the root samhitas, "Like Mahabharata the puranic tradition has all along been floating and dynamic and the texts has been subjected to numerous revisions, additions, omissions, and modifications. The roots of puranas has always been designated as ancient lore." On the basis of the identity of language in the dynastic lists and on the basis of references to purana in the singular term, it is asserted that there was only one purana till the compilations of the Atharvaveda. The Bhagavathapurana mentions the names of six puranikas as a specialised group having knowledge of the puranas. There are numerous occasions associated with the rites of consecration when the puranas are recited. The puranas are meant for recital, as they are composed chiefly in the Sloka metre. The popular belief associated with the puranas is that they enable men to attain Rudraloka (the heaven designated for the commons). This reveals that puranas were recited before the public. This indicates the possibility of the transition of the puranas from the floating traditions to a specialised class of literature. The puranic tradition at this time preponders over the itihasas. The puranas and the itihasas are treated as distinctively different which is visible with the development of

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193 The origin, stages of evolution of saivism and vaisnavism as the dominant religious sects is the prime concern of the purāṇas. Thus the pantheistic texture of the purāṇas encouraged studies of the purāṇas. These studies reveal the significance of the epigraphic material for the phenomenology of religions. To cite a few examples R.G. Bhandarkar *Vaishnavism, Saivism and other Minor Sects*, Bombay, 1913. H.C. Ray Chaudari, *Material for the Study of the Early History of Vaishnavism*, Calcutta, 1920.
pantheistic and Vedantic texture of the puranas. There are assigned to the advanced stages of religion. The Bhavisyatpurana which belongs to the age of Sutra literature illustrates the shift in the notion associated with the puranas. By this time the puranas constitute a special category termed as “the Sacred literature.”

There are eighteen Mahapuranas and eighteen Upa-puranas according to the traditional view (For the names of the Maha-puranas and Upa-puranas see Table 2.2). But the later studies on puranas differ from each other as to the exact number of the puranas. The puranas are later classified on the basis of (a) rasa (Sathvika, Tamas and Rajas) (b) characteristics (Laksana) (c) contents (divinity to which the purana is dedicated). The five characteristics of the puranas as defined by Amarasimha are (a) Sarga (creation) (b) Pratisarga (dissolution and recreation) (c) Vamsa (geneologies) (d) manvantara (ages of Manus) and Vamsyanucarita (genealogies of kings). But most of the puranas do not strictly adhere to this model. Hence the concept of Pancalaksana remains theoretical.

Some of the puranas discuss matters like dana (gifts) Vratas (religious observances) Tirthas (Sacred places) Sraddha (rites in honour of the dead). The later concept of Dasalaksana facilitates the inclusion of several aspects such as medicine, grammar, drama, music etc. in the puranas. Thus knowledge

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194 In the upanisadic period the chapters on cosmogeny which appropriate sanikhya and Upanisadic ideas are added in the puranas along with descriptions on the ages of the Manus” Pusalker, Studies in the Epics and Puranas, Bombay, 1951, p. IV.


196 Pusalker considers that there are only seventeen Maha Puranas because he does not include Siva Purana in the list of Maha Puranas. Pargiter includes the Siva Purana and the Vayu Purana in his list of the Maha Puranas which are considered as nineteen in number. For the relevant discussion on the number of the puranas see Pusalker, Studies in the Epics and Puranas, Bombay, 195, pp. 51-58.
elaborated upon the intellectual tradition of the *Vedic* literature is appropriated in the *puranas* of later ages. Thus the *puranas* claim to present an overview of the past but representation of past or, manifesting knowledge is not the prime motive of the *puranas*.\(^{197}\) The function of the *puranas* becomes evident only through the analysis of its chief components, which is to be discussed later.

**Studies on the *puranas* - an Overview**

Before the 19th century the *puranas* were regarded as literary compilations full of legends and myths. In the early decades of the 19th century Wilson attempted a systematic study of the *Puranas*. He introduced the English translation of *Visnu Purana* with critical notes. This initiated the study of *puranas* as a specialised category, which needs serious attention. The early scholars identified the characteristic features of *puranas* through the theoretical model of *Panchalakṣaṇa*.\(^{198}\) Meyer attempted to establish the relation between *puranic* tradition and *Smṛti* literature.\(^{199}\) The articles of R.C. Hazara on the *puranas* focus on the ritualistic nature of them. He attempts to introduce a chronological account of Hindu rites and Customs.\(^{200}\) The studies on *puranas* by F.E. Pargiter, Pusalker and Dikshiter focus on the significance of the *puranas* as a part of Ancient Indian Tradition. The critical studies on *puranas* were undertaken by Smith, Jayaswal Bhandarker and Altekar as sources for the construction of political history of ancient India. The possibilities for the study of

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\(^{198}\) Kirfel, *Dasa Purana Panchalakshana*, Bonn, 1927.


cultural history from the *puranas* has now received serious attention.\textsuperscript{201} The study of *puranas* in terms of social functions provides yet another dimension.

Myth, genealogy, and historical narrative are regarded as the constituents of the *puranic* tradition.\textsuperscript{202} The myths and genealogies are largely drawn upon from the ancient lore. They are further elaborated in the historical literature of the Post-Gupta Period.\textsuperscript{203} Thus myths in the genealogical section of the *puranas* are assigned to the Post-Gupta period as the *puranas* are documented in this age.\textsuperscript{204} The myths and genealogies being derived from the ancient lore, narrate the distribution of lineages, the mobility of the social groups, the origin of the universe, the legends of flood, and the origins of the dominant lineages.

**The Puranic myths as a Traditional form of Representation**

The remote past is discussed in the form of myths. The *puranic* myths are available in the *Vamśamucarītī*, which is regarded as the core of the *puranic* tradition. The *puranas* contain stereotype myths and narratives which are traced to a long period from the first millennium B.C. to the first millennium A.D.\textsuperscript{205} As part of the oral tradition they have open structure. This enables the appropriation

\textsuperscript{201} It is pointed out that there was reluctance on the part of scholars to incorporate *puranas* in the study of religions in India. The *puranas* did not enjoy the sanctity or the *vedas* or the significance of the *smritis*. The orientalists and indologists focussed on the overarching Sanskrit traditions. The significance of *puranas* in the making of regional tradition in Bengal is studied by Dr. Kunal Chakrabarti. For further details see Dr. Kunal Chakrabarti, *Religious Process The Puranas and the making of a Regional Tradition*, New Delhi, 2001. To cite a few examples which attempted to study the cultural history from the *puranas*, see Devendra Kumar Raja Ram Patil, *Cultural History from the Vaya Purana*, Delhi, 1973 and Rajkumar Arora, *Historical and Cultural data from the Bhavishya Purana*, Jullunder, 1972, S.G. Kantawala, *Matya Purana*, Baroda, 1964.\textsuperscript{202} Romila Thaper, *Ancient Indian Social History Some Interpretations*, New Delhi, 1990, p.231.\textsuperscript{203} *Op. cit.* p. 201.\textsuperscript{204} *Op. cit.* p. 218.\textsuperscript{205} Romila Thaper, *Ancient Indian Social History Some Interpretations*, New Delhi, 1990, p. 98.
of the changing social assumptions. Myths become meaningful only if viewed as the lived experiences. Subjective experiences is the operative base of myths.206

Two features associated with the puranic myths are

a) The myths are charters of faith for the people because they believe that the past as narrated by the myth are true.207

b) The blurring of the contours of past and present which is visible in the puranas have their own logic. This is best illustrated in the perception of time, changes, and space.208

They myths of origin constitute a considerable section of the puranas. The myths of origin narrate the creation of the universe (a) the legends of flood, (b) the origin of Manu and the history of seven Manus (c) origin of the two royal lineages—the Surya Vamsa and the Candra Vamsa.

The puranic versions of the legends of flood are different from each other. The legend of flood referred to in the Mahabharata is elaborated upon in the puranas. The legend of flood is further elaborated in the Satapata Brahmana. The differences are due to the motive of the tradition concerned. Visnu Purana which is regarded as the model209 presents three accounts of the creation of the world. These accounts framed in upanisadic ideas depict Brahma as the creator. Hierarchical stratification is a significant feature of these accounts.

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209 Visnu Purana satisfies the requirements of Pancalakshana and hence regarded as the model. More over, the Visnu Purana is regarded as complete in form while the Vayu and Brahma Puranas are regarded as incomplete as a few sections of them are lost. For the relevant discussion see Pusalker, Studies in the Epics and the Puranas, Bombay, pp. 63-65.
These accounts of creation insist on 'the mechanical solidarity.'\textsuperscript{210} The flood legends are to be found in the Sarga and the Pratisarga sections of the \textit{puranas}.

The \textit{Pratisarga} of the \textit{puranas} also narrate the origin of Manu as the saviour of the human beings as the progenitor of the human race. In one version \textit{Vaivasvata} Manu has ten sons among whom he divides the whole country. But all the \textit{puranas} depict \textit{Ila} one of the descendants of Manu as hermaphrodite from whom descended the two royal lineage-the \textit{Surya Vaṁśa} and the \textit{Candra Vaṁśa}. Like the Buddhist tradition, the \textit{puranic} tradition too insists on twin siblings as the procreator of the \textit{Jana}. This is designed to assert the purity of the lineage.\textsuperscript{211}

The story of Manu indicates the pictured the significance of authority as above and beyond the rest of the human community. Unlike the arch (sovereign power) in the polis of Greece Manu derives his authority from divinity. Cosmological time is discussed in the \textit{puranas} which compute time in vast cycles.\textsuperscript{212}

Cosmological time serves as the background for the actions of the divine kings who maintain relations with the cosmos and with the subjects in this world.

\textsuperscript{210} The term is derived from Durkheim who asserts that religion is the projection of social experiences. Durkheim influence the writings of Maxwebber and Talcott parson who further elaborate upon the social conditioning of religions. The phenomenologists criticise this and point out the irreducibility of religions to social functions. The anthropologists too believe that the sociological explanations of religion are not valid for primitive groups who do not have clans or totems. For the discussion on the sociological explanations of the \textit{puranas} see Gunal Chakravarthy “Recent approaches to the study of religion” in Romila Thaper (ed) \textit{Recent Perspectives of Early Indian History}, Bombay, 1995.

\textsuperscript{211} Romila Thaper. \textit{From Lineage to State}, New Delhi, 1990, p.64.

\textsuperscript{212} The perception of time in the \textit{puranas} is a major theme to be found in the studies on \textit{puranas}. The computation of time in vast cycles is taken literally and attempts are made to provide a chronological framework by F.E. Pargiter and Pusalker. The conception of time in vast cycles is regarded as grounded in seasonal changes which are employed as conventional time markers in the traditional forms of representation. Romila Thaper, \textit{Ancient Indian Social History Some Interpretations}, New Delhi, 1990, p. 247.

The cyclic conception of time brings forth the opinion of the western scholars that for Indian thought time is unreal. This is challenged by Anand K. Coomaraswamy in his work on Time and Eternity. He admits that the introspection of time is complex and vexing in different traditions. The cyclic conception of time is only a geometrical metaphor. It is not related to the change of events but to changes in social patterns. The consciousness of temporality is an essential ingredient in it. For further details on the different dimensions of the concept of time in India see Anand K. Coomaraswamy, \textit{Time and Eternity}, Bangalore, 1990, pp. 180-198.
This is best illustrated by the myth of Pururavas and Urvasi.\textsuperscript{213} The \textit{Candra Vamśa} illustrate Pururavas as the great ancestor. The story of Yayati which appears in many of the \textit{puranas} points out the supremacy of the Puru lineage. This stereotype myth exalts Puru as the son who exchanges his youth with the oldage of his father. The son, Puru is conferred upon with sovereignty. Different groups such as the \textit{Yadavas, Yavanas Bhojas} and a variety of \textit{mlecchas} are referred to as the descendants of the other sons of Yayati-yadu, Turvasa Druhyu and Anu. Thus the \textit{puranic} tradition speaks of the distribution of lineages and legitimise the rights to land and thus create a space for them. The consciousness of the identity of various social groups are reinforced through tradition. The stories on the Brāhamana-Khsatriya relations indicate the significance of groups who have political power. The myths in \textit{puranas} reveal two dominant traits which are constitutive of the consciousness of past in the traditional society. In the \textit{puranic} tradition these myths on the one hand become the trajectories of the grand tradition. This is the domain of specialised knowledge which narrate the legitimacy of succession. This was preserved in the royal households, and by the dominant groups who were the elite. The occasions of rituals and ceremonies reaffirm them, through experiential rebirth. For the commons, the \textit{puranic} myths are the lived experiences, constitutive of ones own social identity. It also narrates the co-existence of heterogeneous groups.

\textsuperscript{213} This is regarded as a stereotype myth which has been rendered in the form of narrative in a variety of texts. Romila Thapar views this as legitimising the high status of the Suryavamsa from an apsara. Romila Thapar, \textit{Ancient Indian Social History Some Interpretations}, New Delhi, 1990, p. 305. D.D. Kosambi interprets this is indicating the transition to patriarchal society. The stress on genealogy and the story of the sacrifice of Puruvas and his transformation in the Ghandharva are regarded as illustrative of this. For further details see D.D. Kosambi, \textit{Myth and Reality}, Bombay, 1962, pp. 16-32.
Genealogy

Genealogies in the *puranas* are assigned to the interface between the oral and the literate traditions. In the earlier *puranas* such as the *Matsya* and the *Vayu*, genealogies form a separate section. Genealogies were (a) ignored as full of myths and legends or (b) attempts are made to identify different races from them and thereby recast the early history of India or (c) taken literally in the attempt to form a chronological framework for the history of early India. Thus there were different approaches to the study of *puranas*. The *puranas* are recently regarded as "attempts at reconstruction of the past through registering the changes in the society."^214

The origins of genealogy are traced to the vedic literature which refers to the descent list of dominant lineages, seers, *rajrisis* and kings. They also speak of the links among these groups. The family pedigree of the Bharatas, the purus, the family pedigrees of *rsis*, Brahman *gotras* are visible in the vedic literature. With the proliferation of lineages and Brahman *gotras*, the demarcation of social groups through rituals existed. Hence the lists of the *purohitas* became a part of the sacrificial rituals of each social group. Moreover, the occasions of warfare and new settlements necessitated descent lists which specifically assert the rights of succession, legal rights and social status. Genealogies are regarded as "metaphysical extensions."^215 The documentation of lineage in the *puranas* is regarded as marking the transfer of the representation of past from such

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215 The term is borrowed from Michel Foucault. The trajectories which constitute Genealogy are analysed by him. For further details see Paul Rabinov, *The Foucault Reader*, London, 1984, pp. 125-147.
specialised groups as the bards, the Suta, the Magadha to the literate group. The Ganga-Yamuna, doab its fringes and the middle Gangetic plain are the regions discussed in the puranas.

**Narratives in the Puranic Tradition**

The narrowing down of parallel traditions in favour of royal traditions is visible in the narratives of the puranas. Though they elaborate upon the mythologies they are created in a network which suggests an overview of the past. The narratives in the puranas focus on the social situations which are considered as significant. They are associated with the projection of Kingship. The narratives abound in many accounts of battles. Here the king stands in a certain relationship with the neighbouring units (rulers of other kingdoms) and with his kin groups. “The kingship provides a general time indication for the diverse incidents of lineage tradition or personal recollection which taken by themselves would be in a strict sense socially meaningless and temporally more duration.”

The creation of the ‘Divine King’ and the origin of the four varnas from his divine body rather reveal the ethos of the changing socio-economic structures in the formation of state. In the puranas, the king is divine, and he is able to mediate with the cosmos. Manu is historicized as one who introduced hierarchical stratification and restored order. This heroic tradition has speaks of a great king who has enormous powers to introduce

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216 The idea is borrowed from the observations on archaic kingship. The anthropology of archaic kingship initiated by Frazer has been elaborated upon by many scholars such as Heusch, Geertz, Adler and also by earlier classical scholars such as Evans Pritchard and Dumezil through the categories of Divine kings, sacred kings and Magical kings etc.

rapid changes. "The main relationships of society are at once projected historically and embodied currently in persons of authority. The situations of cosmic disorder has been identified as the chaos following the death of a divine king."\textsuperscript{218}

The narratives in the \textit{puranas} contained elements from early traditions and also new elements which reveal the appropriation of the socio economic aspects of the immediate past change. Horror of the changes and the details of changes are well reflected in the descriptions of the \textit{Kali} Age which are present in all the \textit{puranas} in different versions. They are mostly in the form of sweeping statements in the tone of prophecy. They also reveal fairly good knowledge of geography and knowledge of various social groups in different parts of India. They speak of the break up of large family communities, the fragmentation of property, the alarming increase in the population of Sudra labourers, and \textit{mlecchas} and the rise of petty chiefs which led to the emergence of the tendencies setting off towards the post Gupta period.\textsuperscript{219} The \textit{Visnu} and the \textit{Brahminda} refer to the decadence of towns. The \textit{Visnupurana} further states that the weak and poor man will have to serve the strong and the rich man as his master which indirectly alludes to the growth of landed estates.\textsuperscript{220}

\textsuperscript{218} \textit{Op. cit.} p.43. Another dimension o the cosmic disorders illustrate that they are employed as time markers. This is common in various west Asian versions to which the Indian versions seem approximate. Romila Thapar Genealogies and the oral tradition in the Methodology of the use of oral sources in History, \textit{Report of the First India Zimbabwe Conference}, Harare, 1989, p.21. Many scholars assert tat cosmic disorders signifies the consciousness of change and the expression of horror over change. For further details see B.N.S. Yadava "The Accounts of the Kali Age And The Social Transition From Antiquity to the Middle Ages" in \textit{The Indian Historical Review}, Vol.V, No. 1-2-1978-79, p.32 and also see Anand K. Coomaraswamy. \textit{Time and Eternity}, Bangalore, 1990, pp.110-119.

\textsuperscript{219} B.N.S. Yadava, "The Accounts of the Kali Age And The Social Transition From Antiquity To The Middle Ages," in \textit{The Indian Historical Review}, Vol. II, No. 1-2-1978-79, pp. 43-49.

\textsuperscript{220} \textit{Op. cit.} p.54.
The narratives are used as sources from which the social situations of India in the ancient period are analysed. They envisaged the theoretical model of *varna* as the basis of social order which emerged from advanced economic system.\(^{221}\)

**Representation of Space and Time in the Puranas**

Though Indo Gangetic Doab is the Central place in the *puranic* tradition, the *puranas* also narrate long lists of mountains, rivers and places. At times they are referred to in associations with places of pilgrimage and as part of the 'accretions'.\(^{222}\) The distinction between real space and cosmological space is a phenomenon unthought of. There are different categories of spaces such as profane space, experiential space, real space in the *puranic* tradition. The stories which narrate the relationship between the Brahmanas and Kshatriyas are regarded as archaic survivals. They narrate events that are supposed to have taken place in Cosmos. Here the space is representational.\(^{223}\) The Corpus of the *puranas* became poetic literature and the historical material embedded in the

\(^{221}\) The Greek society and the Roman society in the days of empire is the normative framework for such studies. Hence they insist on a society of hierarchical stratification with slavery of the Greek model. Relations between the church and the state in medieval Europe too influence their ideas of Brahmana-kshatriya relations in ancient India. For the details of this approach see Rajkumar Arora, *Historical and Cultural data from the Bhavishya Purana*, Jullunder, 1972, pp. 172-190.

\(^{222}\) The term is borrowed from Devendrakumar Raja Ram Patil. He says that the sections dealing with the origin and development of Saivism and Vaisnavism constitute the bulk of the Purāṇas. It is here that the influence of the Brahmīn reductor is felt. For further details see *Cultural History From The Vaisu Purana*, Delhi, 1973, pp. 124-132.

\(^{223}\) The term is borrowed from Henri Lucienfèvre. In this analytical study on the production of space he illustrates the generative process of space which he calls as discourse of space. He asserts that the representational space which portray space in symbols, images occur in sacred literature, and they are associated with heroic communities. Notions of space are regarded as related to the cultural peculiarities of different social groups. Here the notion of political power is implicit in representational space and hence shifts occur in the representational space. For further details see, Henri Lucienfèvre, *The Production of Space*, London, 1974, pp. 36-59.
The narratives in some of the *puranas* such as the *Linga purana* and the *Brahmanda purana* speak of various aspects of the socio economic structure of an age as late as the 16th century. Along with the *puranas* new forms of appropriation came into existence.

**The non-Pururistic traditions**

The historical tradition of the *itihasas* and the *puranas* was displaced by new trends. These trends were expressed through the new literary forms of *kavya*-s and *carita*-s. The term *kavya* was used to designate the work of a poet. In its narrower sense the terms *kavya* and *carita* are used as equivalents to poem, prose or verse.225 *Kavya*-s are regarded as of two categories - *Mahakavya*-s and

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Laghukavya-s. The structure of kavya-s had three elements - metrical verses, prose and mixed. Some of the earliest kavya-s written by Kalidasa, Ashvaghotha, Kumaradas and Katyayana set the model for the subsequent Kavya-s. The literary convention of these kavya-s are adapted by the later works which belonged to this tradition ‘Kumarasambhava’ of Kalidasa. ‘Kirtharjuneeya’ of Bharavi, ‘Sisupala vadha’ by Maha, ‘Naushatheeya caritha’ of Sree Harsha were regarded as the Pauchamahakavyas in Sanskrit. These kavya-s dealt with specific themes drawn from the itihasa-s and the puranas. Ashwaghosha, Nagarjuna, Vasubindu, Dignaga, Vasumitra, Dharma Pala, Dharma Kirti, and Santha Rakshitan were regarded in Buddhist literature as the authors of kavya-s. The Buddhist too used Sanskrit kavya-s to popularise their religious ideas.

The kavya-s are classified in to several categories on the basis of theme (a) Kavya-s which dealt with dance, drama, music and other fine arts (Sastra Kavya-s) (b) Kavya-s which focus on linguistics (c) Kavya-s which are philosophical (d) Kavya-s which are designed to express rasas to entertain the listeners (e) Kavya-s which deal with historical themes. It is this last category which is relevant in this context.

The Meherauli Pillar Inscriptions with poetically coloured genealogy, the Prasasati in the Sun temple in Mandasor composed by Vakhhatta in Malava and Hariseiza’s panegyric account of Samudra Gupta reveal familiarity with Kavya

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style even in the Gupta Period. Like the *kavya*-s a few of the *carita*-s such as *Pandavacarita*, *Devicarita*, *Ramacarita*, derived themes from the *itihasa*-s and the *purana*-s. *Buddhacarita* of Ashwaghosha elaborated upon the stories of life of Buddha as narrated in the *Tripitaka*. But most of the *carita*-s like the *kavya*-s dealt with the descriptions of the glory of kings and Petty chiefs. Hence the *kavya*-s and *carita*-s are regarded as more secular in nature. They are regarded as historical literature as distinct from the *itihasa*-s and the *purana*-s which belong to the domain of ancient Indian historical tradition. The *kavya*-s and the *carita*-s marked the origin of historical biographies and historical narratives in India. This new genre of historical narratives and historical biographies, centred on individuals and events as distinct from the *itihasa*-s and the *purana*-s which focused on the dominant lineage. The sense of continuity is visible in the *kavya*-s and the *carita*-s in the sequence of events narrated in them. The *kavya*-s and the *carita*-s have four components:

a) Origin of the Patron and his *Vamsa*
b) The personal qualities of the Patron
c) The achievements of the Patron
d) General overview of the state of affairs in the region

The historical facts are obliterated by the primacy accorded to the panegyric beginning, end and gross exaggerations. These *Kavya*-s and *Carita*-s traversed between the two paradigms of literature and history. These *Kavya*-s and

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Caritas followed the literary conventions of the tradition. Since Vamsa being the criterion of social status in the traditional society, the authors of such historical literatures illustrated the greatness of their patrons through fabricated genealogies. They drew upon the Vamśavalis or family chronicles and oral traditions maintained in the regions/kingdoms. Thus this historical literature marks "the shift from the heroic tradition to the Court tradition, from the tribal leader and tribe to the king and his court." The court poet displaced suta and became the authority of historical knowledge. The authors of kavya-s and carita-s were well versed in the puranic tradition as most of them belonged to the literate groups (Brahmin gotras) continuity with the itihasa puranic tradition is to be sought in the narratives associating the patrons were depicted as related to the heroes and legends of the puranic tradition. This genre of historical literature was rich in details, as they focused on specific regions, limited temporality, and specific individuals. The purpose of these historical biographies and historical narratives being eulogistic, the authors glossed over or at times even sacrificed the historical facts.

The Socio Economic Roots of the kavya-s and the carita-s as Representations of past

The new trends in the appropriation of past in the kavya-s and the carita-s are to be located in the changed socio-economic political situations setting off towards the medieval period. The major aspects of these changes are described

\[232 \text{ Op. cit. p. 264.} \]
\[233 \text{ Op. cit. p. 266.} \]
\[234 \text{ Op. cit. p. 274.} \]
\[235 \text{ Dr. T. Bhaskaran Bharatheya Kavasastram (Mal) (Indian Poetics), Trivandrum, 1978, p.110.} \]
through the framework of kali age in the Mahabharata and in many of the Puranas. “Though some trends paving the way for transition from antiquity to the middle ages were operating from earlier times, the central phase of the transition as the epigraphic evidence suggests appears to have commenced from the sixth century especially from the declining days of the Gupta empire. The Lingapurana and the Vayupurana describes the decline in the population of cities in an exaggerated manner, in the sections dealing with the Kali age. The social tensions as a result of the Huna invasions, the decline in economic status, the consequent improvement in the conditions of the serfs, the decline of urban centres and the increasing number of villages are vividly described in the puranas as the features of the age of decadence (the Kali age). The shift of political power from the state, to the Samantas (chiefs) in the post Gupta period is evident from the emergence of mandalas in different regions. Mandala denoted a number of village (mandalaṃ gramopalak sitaṃ graṃasamūhah). The number of villages in the possession of ambitions chiefs, land lords and rulers increased and they tended to become more or less closed units of economy. Such a state of affairs fostered local loyalties. The changed relations of production which centred on the ownership of land fostered the sense of dependence. It also fostered the feudal values of valour, loyalty and subordination. The historical literature of kavya-s and carita-s which were designed primarily to euologise the patrons were rooted in these peculiar socio economic and political circumstances.

236 B.N.S. Yadavas, “The Accounts of the Kali Age And The Transition From Antiquity To The Middle Age” in the Indian Historical Review, Vol. V. NOSI-2-1978-79, p.32.
238 R.S. Sharma, Survey of Research in Economic and Social History of India, Delhi, 1986, pp.28-49
An overview of the historical kavyas in Sanskrit

The *Raghuvamsa* of Kalidasa has nineteen Sargas. It narrates the names of thirty generations of kings from Dileepa the founder of *Raghu Vamsa*, to the last ruler Agni Varman. Historically the seventeenth and eighteenth Sargas described the heroic exploits of Dileepan, Raghu, Aja, Dasaratha, Rama, Kusa, Adithi and other rulers. Most of the themes, and legends are drawn from the *itihasa purana* tradition. The eighteenth Sarga deals with several events in the region of king Sudarsana - his misrule, and the court intrigues etc. It ends with the descriptions of the accession of Agni Varma. The *kavya* centers around “events of royalty, yagas, Dana (royal gifts) wars, royal marriages and royal hunting expeditions which are described in detail with literary ornamentation and gross exaggerations.”

*Gaudapaho* which eulogizes the heroic valour of Yasovarman the king of Kanouj is acclaimed as the earliest historical narrative in Sanskrit (725 A.D.). The court poet Vakpathi Raja, a contemporary Bhavabhuthi also gives an account of the defeat of his patron by the king of Kashmir Lalidatiya. The work is not available in complete form. *Bhuvanbooyam* by Sanghuka (814-851 A.D) narrates the war in Kashmir between Mammen and Utpalan. *Kalhana’s* references to the author and this work reveal the popularity of the work. But it is not available in complete form.

*Rashtraundavanamsa Kavyam* (1596 A.D) by Rudrakavi the court poet of king Pratapashah of Mayooragiri describes the glories of *Bagula vamsa* and the history of the ancestors. The authors attempts to give a comprehensive account of the ruling dynasty of Mayooragiri in 20 chapters (Sargas).

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The Lagukavya-s which are known by the epithet Vilasa also deal with specific individuals and regions narrates the wisdom and services of the 'Vastupalaka' the great amatya of the ruler, Veeradhava. Similarly in Somapala Vilasam (12th cent A.D) the hero is Somapala the minister of Rajapuri. Kalhana the court poet who hails from Kashmir also includes the war between Sompala and Sussala the king of Kashmir.

Mooshakavamśa kavya narrates the early history of Kolathunad, the ruling Vamsa & its glories. It is believed that Athula the court poet of Sreekanda the king of Kolathunad might have written this kavya between 1012 and 1043. Imitating the literary conventions of Mahakavya-s and also combining the indigenous patterns of ulpatti, Mooshakavamśa kavya narrates the rule of 95 rajas. The first six Sargas associate the Vamsa with the hero Parasurama. The eleventh Sarga in Anushootoop verse resembles vamsavali designed for narration. The Sargas (11 to 14) describe the rule of nineteen rajas. The 15th Sarga ends with the descriptions of the coronation and ceremony of Raja Sreekanda. Saluva Dhudyam by the court poet Rajanatha Didiman is composed before Narasimha Saluva ascended the throne in Vijayanagar. It is roughly assigned to 1480 A.D.242 It is mainly deals with the glories of Saluva Vamsa and the heroic deeds of Narasimha Saluva of Vijayanagar.

Mathura Vijayam which portrays the early history of Vijayanagar is significant as one of the sources for the later historical writings on Vijayanagar.

The work which centres round the king *Kambana*, his achievements, conquests in the south and war with Muslims gives primacy to bravery (*Virarasa*). This incomplete *Kavya* ends with the defeat of the Muslims by *Kambana*. *Mathuravijayan?* is in the paradigm of the *Kavya*-s of Kalidasa, but rich in historical elements. *Prabodha Chinthamani* (1306 AD) attempts to give a comprehensive account of the Satavahana, Chalukya and *Vakela Raja Vamsas*. The *Kavya* written by Meruthankan attaches great significance to *Vamsavali* and the mutual relations of these political powers.²⁴³ Rajenda *Karnapuram* (11<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) eulogies Harsha. This eulogistic *Kavya* written by the court poet Sambhu retains historical elements.²⁴⁴ *Keerthe Kaumudi* (13<sup>th</sup> cent A.D) narrates the significance of the Chalukya vamsa of Gujarat. In 533 slokas this *Kavya* attempts to narrate the list of the Chalukya rulers of Gujarat from Bhima who is depicted as the great ancestor. It also offers the *Vamsavali* of the ministers of the Chalukya rulers in Gujarat. Someswara the poet who belongs to the Purohita group of Chalukya kings reveals his knowledge of the itihasa *purana* tradition and oral tradition in this work.

*Hammiramaha Kavya* by Nayachandra is designed to narrate the heroic story of Chaukan king Hammira. In accordance with the convention the ancestry of king Hammira is narrated with all poetic grandeur. The *kavya* is significant for the detailed account of the war between the Rajputs and the Turks. The wars Prithviraja III and his son Hariraja waged against the Turks are narrated in the

literary style of \textit{kavya}-s. The heroic resistance of king Hammira to the invasions of Aluddin Khilji is the climax of this \textit{kavya}. Garbed in the values of Rajputs and their ethos, the \textit{kavya} ends in tragedy with the defeat of king Hammira and his heroic death Padmavati and the epic on the Paramara king Sindhu raja of Avanti are examples of romantic legends which has historical basis. Cosmogenic ideas of puranic traditions are drawn upon heavily in the Panegyric accounts of the heroes. Thus they become mystic interpretations of history.

\textit{Rajatarangini} (chronicles of Kashmir) by Kalhana is acclaimed as the earliest history of Kashmir.\textsuperscript{245} Kalhana hailing from the Brahmin \textit{gotra} of Kashmir is well versed in the \textit{itihasa puranic} tradition has strong sense of evidences, and historical truths. His work \textit{Rajatarangini} which was started in 1148 A.D. was completed in two years. \textit{Rajatarangini} is a general history of Kashmir and not of any particular dynasty. Kalhana claims that he has made a thorough use of the past resources, contemporary documents, edicts, inscriptions, coins, and the earlier works on the history of Kashmir. Most of the sources especially the earlier works on the history of Kashmir are not available to us. Kalhana claims that he corrects the errors in the earlier works on Kashmir by verifying them with the ordinances of former kings, laudatory inscriptions as well as written records. Another significant feature of \textit{Rajatarangini} is the proper chronological order and the judgements of the author on various events.

\textit{Rajatarangini} is a work of approximately 8000 verses in Sanskrit. Books I to III narrates the past history of Kashmir as revealed from Traditions.

\textsuperscript{245} R.C. Majumdar, \textit{Historiography of India}, Delhi, 1992, p. 303.
Book IV to VI narrate the histories of Karkota and Utpala dynasties. This portion is written on the basis of works of contemporaries or near contemporaries. Book VII and VIII give an account of the two Lohara dynasties which ruled Kashmir. Being a contemporary, Kalhana utilises his personal knowledge and the events are presented from the dimensions of an impartial eye witness. Rajatarangini makes a sincere attempt to provide a true history of Kashmir in verse. He presents a broad framework in which different rulers are depicted. The beginnings are traced to the legendary king Lava, which asserts the halo of greatness of the ruling family. The events of the reigns of Lalitaditya, Yasaskara, Meghavaham Mihirakula, Uccala and Jayasinha. His descriptions of events is impartial. This historical biography also evaluates the activities of these various rulers. His notion of historiography which retains lesser degree of mythologies is a clear improvement on the romantic legends of Bana, Bilhana and Jayanaka. Rajatarangini pictures an age of turmoil, insecurity. The resistance to invasions, adventures of nobles, corrupt bureaucrats, court conspiracies, palace intrigues all are depicted faithfully. The caricature of different personalities and their peculiarities reveals the keen observation of the author. Local administration, system of law, management of revenue and societal structure are also discussed.

**An overview of the carita-s as representations of past**

The carita-s like the kavya-s are numerous. They flourish mostly from 600-1400 A.D. The genre of historical biography in the form of carita on the model of the literary style of kavya-s originates with Harsha carita composed by the court poet Banabhatta. It is composed in the first quarter of the seventh
century A.D. Bana being a member of the Bhargava lineage is well acquainted with the domain of ancient historical tradition. In this *carita* bana does not give a total picture of Harshas reign till the end. Narration of the series of events in the reign of Harsha is not the motive of Bana. Rather he attempts to project the legitimacy of the succession of Harsha the youngest son to the throne. Naturally the treachery of the Mukhari king and the war with Mukhari kingdom is central in this *Kavya*. Like *Harshacarita*, *Vikramanka Devacarita* too focus on situations of tensions. here the crisis over succession to the throne and the fratricidal war are pangeegyrically coloured in favour of the patron Vikramaditya VI, the chalukya king of Kalyani. Bilhana the author of this *carita* also is of Brahmin descent. The traditional pattern of mythology is relied upon in this *carita*. The war between the cholas and chalukyas, and the exploits of Vikramaditya VI are also discussed. Inspite of the presence of historical elements *Vikramanga devacarita* cannot be considered as purely historical because it gives only highly partial account of the king. This *Carita* in the literary style of *Kavya* also mixes up romance and other stories while narrating the life story of the patron Vikramaditya VI. Bilhana tries to assemble historical elements in to an intelligible fabric though he is not able to keep away the traditional pattern.246

“If we do not want to reduce the medieval history in to a mere chronicle of events, a rope of sand instead of historical wreath, with events strung on the thread of ideas we shall have to study the events and facts in the context of the cultural complex of the medieval historians and to understand

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sympathetically their ideas however antiquated they may be". Rama Carita of Sandhayakaranandin speaks of the glories of pala king Ramapala. The author like Banabhatta narrates the significant events of the reign of king Ramapala, and a little bit of autobiography in this epic. He introduces two plots in this epic poem. The epic poem is rich in analogies between Rama the epic hero of the solar dynasty and Ramapala who invades the kingdom of his enemy Bhima and the recovery of the empire from him. Like other caritas the beginning of this poem deals with origins of the pala dynasty in the traditional pattern of supernaturalism. The ancestry of the royal family of palas is elaborated through legends and myths. The core of the carita deals with the fratricidal war between the eldest son Mahipala II and the youngest son Ramapala. He evaluates the kings as wicked/wise through descriptions of their policies, though in the colours with imagination and exaggerations. Rama carita also describes some of the campaigns of Ramapala against the neighbours as well as the various measures introduced for the reorganisation of administration and in support of learning. Sandayakaranandin the author also gives a narrative of the reigns of the sons of Ramapala namely Kumarapala and Mandapala.

Another historical prose narrative of ancient India is Vikramankabhyadaya, an incomplete biography of the Chalukya king Vikramaditya VI. This work consists of three chapters and they deal with a graphic description of the geography and people of Karnataka. The splendour of the court and the history of the Chalukyas from the earliest times to the reign of

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Vikramaditya VI are also described. Someswara III the author of this historical biography is the son of Vikramaditya. The halo of the royal family of Chalukyas is the core of this historical biography. Divine will, supernatural forces are invoked heavily and often the pattern of narratives resembles the earlier *akhyaṭa*-s. The historical elements are embedded in stories.

The epic *Prithvirajavijayam* praises the heroic deeds of chauhana ruler of northern Rajasthan. Jayanaka a native of Kashmir derives inspiration from the epic Ramayana and *Prithvirajavijayam* is composed in the framework of heroic legend. It is laced with biographical sketches. This kavya is composed between 1191 and 1193 after the two battles of Tarain. In conformity with the prevailing literary conventions, Jayanaka traces the ancestry of the chauhans to the solar dynasty. Prithviraja III is hailed as an incarnate of Vishnu who saved the kingdoms from the mlecchas. Here the author gives a graphic description of the state of affairs in and around Rajasthan. In depicting the Queen, the author draws insights from the tradition of Tilottama and Urvasi.248 Thus he adopts the literary conventions, to show his genius as a poet. In the later portions of this kavya the author Jayanaka refers to the importance of historical evidence and inscriptions which are employed by him as sources for his work. Chandra another court poet composed the *Kavya Prithiviraajarasa*. The work traces the origin of the chauhan family from the sacrificial fire and narrates the heroic deeds of Prithviraj. The author derives his ideas and pattern from various ballads, oral traditions, epics and other kavya-s and carita-s which existed in many regions of


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Northern India. It is more a romantic legend and "in its historical value it is much inferior to the work of Jayanaka." *Navahasanka carita* of Padma Gupta eulogises the patron, the king of Munja. It is ascribed to the first quarter of the 10th century. The *Kumarapala Carita* of Hemacandra (1088 A.D) is a poem of 28 cantos. The first part of the work which is in Sanskrit describes the exploits the patron Anhuilvad, the king of Gujarat.

In Keralam, *caritams*, the poetic narratives were composed in the linguistic mixture of Sanskrit and old Malayalam they are assigned to 1300-1600 A.D. *Caritams* which retain a few perspectives of the past are genuinely interesting, the most notable of them being *Unniaccicaritam*, *Unnityaticaritam* and *Unniccirutevicaritam*. They are different from the *ulpatti* pattern and the *puranic* traditions though not without similarities. Primarily what set aside them is their objective which is neither the legitimization of Brahmanic dominance nor the popularization of the Vedic religion, or the representation of the past itself. But their objective is the poetic presentation of a theme centred on passion, the core of them being the descriptions of the celestial beauty of three courtesans devadasis, Unniaci, Unniyati, and Unniccirutevi comparable to apsaras. The repeated occurrence of prayers at many points especially the invocation at the beginnings suggests a kind of relationship with the *puranic* traditions. Except for the reference to the story of Gardua in the *Unniacci caritam puranic* themes are generally absent in them. Their theme and climax, introductory description locate them in the context of *caritams* in other parts of India. The references to Katirur, and Pakkannar in *Unniaccicaritam* and Sandesa in *Unniccirutevi caritam*
indicate the familiarity of these authors with the prevalent oral traditions. The caritams have “a recognizable literary form with well defined phases of introduction and climax of plot/theme.”

Unniacci the devadasi of the Thirumarudur temple in Wynad is the central figure of the first caritam. The story begins with the Gandarva who chanced to see her and be fascinated by the heroine, comes down to the earth in search of her abode and succeeds in the attempt. The text is incomplete but fulfils the chief requirement namely description of the heroine. Unniyaticaritam focuses on Unniyati the devadasi of Kandiyur temple, and the daughter of Iravikerala Varma of Odanadu. It narrates the story of her previous birth as pravoot and the curse caused by chandra before ending with the description of the arrival of the two celestial personages Suvakan and Mathi Deepan deputed by Chandra. Unnichirutevicaritam depicts the journey of Indra from heaven to earth to have a glance at the heroine unnichirutevi, the devadasi of Poyilam, South Malabar and the daughter of a reputed chief. The structure of the caritam has enabled the author to describe in detail the landscape and other aspects closely associated with the social and cultural context of Keralam. This distinctive feature of caritams provides us with the contexts for historical explanations. The conception of heaven and the world as constituting single space which occurs in native traditions is visible here.

249 See the relevant discussion on the features of Caritams in Romila Thapar, “Historical writing in Ancient India,” Ancient Indian Social History some interpretations, New Delhi, 1990, pp. 274-275.
A close reading of the texts indicates three forms of exchange which the author performs. First with the God, second with the reader and third with the specific character other than the heroine. Here the focus is on the ideas of past revealed through the latter forms of exchange and how they constitute a sense of the past.

Famous temples, swarupams, nadus, markets, trading centres, names of monarchs\(^{250}\) details of coinage, and different occupational groups are presented through these exchange between the author and the reader, or the subcharacter of the theme. It is significant that it also implies a set of socio-economic relations in the particular social system. The references to landed aristocracy and the satire on bramhins who roaming about and enjoyed the privileges indicate the suppressed social tensions of the age. There is no emphasis on dana or on the legend of Parasurama. In short, the caritams embody the collective experiences.

The long list of agricultural products reveals the prosperity of farming.

The framework of the caritams which can accommodate Kolathunad and Venad in single line or prayers to God and the beauty of the heroine as successive, contradict the modern ideas on continuity. Local loyalties account for the glorified accounts of places and rulers. To sum up, the historical sense present in the caritams of Kerala has two indications, first, it was primarily the product of the socio-economic and political structures of the regions, second the concept of universal history or even history which includes the alien (Paradesi) was a phenomenon unthought of.

\(^{250}\) Often name of the dynasty is the signifier. Individual names figure rarely.
The *caritas* a genre of literature which arise out of growing regionalism are (a) a continuation of the *kavya* tradition with modification (b) the products towards the final phases of the evolution of regional languages (c) the types of literature which are designed to convey the rasa of Bhakti or Veeram (d) the types of literature which focus on beautiful ladies, and the description of places which are on the way to their abode.

The authors of the *kavya* and *carita* tradition retain notions of *Pramanya* (authoritative) as the basis of knowledge. This is evident from the fact that the themes and ideas are borrowed from different sources. But the following features are significant in this context. They are (a) the absence of the distinction between source and fact (b) the absence of distinction between primary sources and Secondary sources (c) the absence of distinction between myths, legends-facts. Myths and legends which are a part of the cultural order and belief systems are applied as truth. Hence their historical explanations are strongly influenced by the ideological assumptions, and value judgements about kingship which prevailed in the society. Hence the interpretations are in accordance with the ethos of contemporary society. In the case of the *kavya* and *carita* traditions the authors are acquainted with a large number of sources. Half of the sources are experiential and hence subjective. Most of the authors being court poets, were acquainted with the manners of the court and customs of other regions. They utilise these experiences and observation in the composition of their works.
Thus sources of the traditional compositions are “largely disconnected material detached from a large context illustrative but neither serial nor synoptic.”

The pre-colonial forms of representation are discussed above because these can be regarded as the pan-Indian model. The ulpatti pattern, the different categories of songs such as padai pattukal, thottam pattukal, theyyam pattukal and other categories of popular songs displayed remarkable similarities with the categories of tradition discussed in the pan-Indian model. Genres of literature such as ula, parani, kathipadalkal, nattupadalkal, pallupadalkal, tutu which existed in Tamilakam also shared the framework of either one of the categories in the pan-Indian model. These pre-colonial forms of representation of past in Tamilakam and Keralam are discussed in detail in the subsequent chapter.

To conclude, the representation of past in the pre-colonial society in India was pluralistic in nature. It was an admixture of fictional history. Different genres were employed to diffuse knowledge of the past. Thus representation of past was associated with myths, genealogy, narratives, poetry and drama. These forms of representation of past were sensible in the pre-modern epistemic order which had its own world view, epistemological positions and logic. The pre-colonial forms of representation mixed up archaic memories with the social, economic situations of immediate past. This made them sensible and acceptable.