

THE MAHABHARATA: A STUDY IN AFFAIRS OF STATE

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Abstract

The epics of India are revered and referred not only in India but also world over for their philosophy, message, insight into human life and solution to various problems. The Mahabharata is no less a point in this case, it has been explored for its vastness and magical reality from time to time. It covers almost all aspects of human life and reminds multifarious people of the discrepancies, disagreements and disputes which affect the social, economical and political fabric of that period. The present paper attempts to reveal the political trends of that period and its aftermath. It aims to present these ideas through the analysis of the situations, characters, and ideology prevalent during that period.

Keywords: politics, economics, king, dharma, society, understanding, present

The Mahabharata is not mere a text of *Dharma, karma, gyana, nirwana, rasa* and philosophy but this epic saga is beyond these things. This paper explores this epic with different lenses such as socio-political and economic aspect embedded in it.

According to the Marxist concept literature helps in understanding the culture and the class conflicts of any period. It helps in providing comprehensive view of the society, of how the change in ideology brings economical and political changes in the society. The *Mahabharata* is equally important to understand the political point view of Ancient India and its relevance to comprehend present world's political scenario.

Kshatriyas were the rulers of that period. A king was considered as supreme authority of power. He enjoyed the same respect in the eyes of his subjects as the creators. The king in his turn had to look after the well-being of his subjects, provide justice to all, and ensure the safety and security of the kingdom. The king at that time was not an ordinary being but an embodiment of various virtues such as righteousness, chastity, humility, simplicity, intelligence, valour, sincerity, self-restraint, self-sacrifice, compassion, gratitude etc. He was also expected to be determined, liberal, and committed to the well being of his subjects. It was challenging to the king to maintain and be up to the mark to abide by the qualities. 'No man is an island', so was the king since he was dependent on other employees for the execution of his duties. These employees needed to have some of the qualities as: patriotism, loyalty, faith, and the capability and courage to direct the king on the righteous path in order to ensure the proper execution of the duties assigned to them. With the change of time there were changes in the ideology which caused deterioration of the state of affairs. But as has been said 'uneasy lies the head that wears the crown' or 'Power corrupts man and absolute power corrupts man absolutely.' This seemingly utopian system too had some loopholes due to vicious greed, nepotism and envy. The problem arises when creator himself becomes destroyer of his subjects. The *Mahabharata* is not far from all these flaws. The territories of the state were spread over vast area which required various administrators to monitor and supervise their duties. The period of *Mahabharata* had the system of democratic decentralization which was quite similar to the Panchayat system. It meant a thorough check was required from top to the grass root level. Though the *Mahabharata* was based on *dharma*, it also highlights the importance of self-interest to protect one's kingdom. In the world there no is friend or foe it is self-interest that motivates people. According to time and need, a foe might turn out to be a friend and a friend may turn out to be a foe, they are on the flip side of each other. This is something which is quite evident in the current Indian political scenario as well.

We have discussed the rule, ruler and the qualities requisite for each rung. Let us now shift the lens on the economy of that period. In the period of the *Mahabharata* there was no currency and coinage system. It was transitional phase of economy from pastoral to agrarian economic system and acquisition of land played an important role. This avarice for land resulted in the blazing of *Kandavprastha* and also the tragic conflict of the *Mahabharata*. Cows were the most precious possession of that period and even *Duryodhana* was happy with cows when he had to make choice between *Krishna* and *Nand's* cows. Cows were among the precious possessions staked by *Yudhisthira* in the game of dice testifying their importance. There were even instances of curses inflicted due to the killing of cows. So, the cow-herder and their chieftain enjoyed certain privilege over others. The caste system was significant in swaying of the economy of the period. The major four divisions were *Brahmin*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaisya*, and *Sudra*. However, there are only stray references of farmers,

fishermen, butchers, ferrymen and the like indicating discrepancy in the economic system. The revenue was generated via different sources as: “With a sixth part upon fair calculation, of the yield of the soil as his tribute, with fines and forfeitures levied upon offenders, with the imposts, according to the scriptures, upon merchants and trades in return for the protection granted to them, a king should fill his treasury”(Ganguly sec-71, 159). It was the disparity and chaos in socio-political and economic order that lead to war and strife.

Krishna is considered as the architect of the *Mahabharata*. *Krishna* was the eight child of *Devaki* who killed *Kamsa* as prophesied. To get rid of the conflict on day to day basis of *Jarasndha*, he left for Dwarka for good. Though the memory of past must have still haunted his mind, he took the advantage of the situation of the *Mahabharata*. The situation in *Hastinapur* was not rosy. It was under the custody of *Bhisma* who was working under the blind ruler *Dhritarashtra*. *Shakuni* was adding fuel to the fire of *Kaurava* and *Pandava* conflict for his own good. This situation was worsened by the presence of the *Kuru* clan at the backdrop. *Shakuni* made the most out in that situation to take his revenge. *Shakuni* who loaded the dice was the main manipulator of the political games of the time. It was *Shakuni* who hatched the conspiracy of *Lakshagraha* to end the claim of *Pandavas* for power. *Krishna* and *Shakuni* were thus the prime agents and political players of the *Mahabharata* but while the former tried to bring order out of disorder, the latter created disorder out of order. *Krishna* tried his level best to help the righteous *Pandavas*, whereas *Shakuni* did the same for the villainous *Kauravas*. With the help of *Krishna*, *Yudhisthir* started ruling *Indraprastha* prosperously. He was the embodiment of all the qualities that made an ideal king. *Krishna* in the meantime took revenge on *Jarasndha* with the help of *Bhima*. *Krishna* made the righteous *Yudhisthira* king with support of *Bhima* and *Arjuna*. *Krishna* thus succeeded in establishing federal political system by uniting the smaller kingdoms with *Yudhisthir's* *Indraprastha*, and he celebrated this occasion by *Rajsuya yajna*. This *Yajna* invitation was extended far and wide. This caused a sore in the eyes of *Shakuni* who then contrived against the *Pandavas* by challenging them to a game of dice which was tempered with, resulting in *Yudhisthira* losing everything in the game of dice. *Shakuni's* lust for power disrupted the plan of *Krishna*. The *Pandavas* were forced to go into exile and soon after they returned, the great war of *Mahabharata* took place. Thus it began with chaos and ended in a chaos.

One can bring in *Dharma* to have a better perspective. The main aim of a man's life was dictated by the four principles of *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha*. The present paper also highlights how some of the *Karmas* without *dharma* led to the horrific tragic tale of the *Mahabharata*. *Dharma* is the sheet anchor and steering wheel that guides human beings on how to live. Without it there would be chaos in the world as then we would witness everything as right as nothing as wrong. *Dharma* is like the sun which dispels the darkness of the world. *Dharma* stops people from indulging in sinful activities. The period of the *Mahabharata* was that of the decline of *Dharma*. Loss of *Dharma* resulted in chaos. In fact,

it seems that 'the sea of faith' began to retreat. For the restoration of *Dharma*, *Krishna* upheld the *dharma* in his famous adages delivered to *Arjuna* in the battlefield, popular as the *Bhagwadgeeta*. *Karma* without *dharma* is of no use, *dharma* without *Karma* is of no use. So, they complement each other. *Bhisma*, who was well versed in all duties, taught *Yudhishtira* how the path of *Rajdharma* leads to salvation and destruction of all evils from the world. It emphasised that a *Kshatriya* should work for the welfare of its people otherwise he would be ruined. It was king's duty to protect *Dharma* and to give up his likes and dislikes to protect *Dharma* as *Bhisma* did. *Dharma* played an important role on socio-political and economical aspect of the society. The claim of restoration of *Dharma* should be evaluated against the social, cultural and political ground. Reasons for various crimes in the present society were complete loss of *Dharma* from top to bottom.

Thus, the *Mahabharata* discussed various things and can be read as a commentary on diverse aspects such as the king, his duties, duties of others, *dharma*, *Karma*, politics, economics and society. It is an epic of imperishable message, knowledge and guidance for the entire world. It brings us to the summation of this topic. This paper has attempted to give an overview of the socio-political and economic aspects of that period. Moreover, this paper does not claim to be a complete and comprehensive study on the proposed topic. This paper is only an attempt to discuss in detail some of the aspects of the *Mahabharata* which are often neglected in its general reading as a story of the battle between *Pandavas* and *Kauravas*.

Works Cited:

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