

Religion and Politics as Projected in the *Mahabharata*

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India is vastly enriched with two epics – the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. These great literary creations of the classical Sanskrit literature have a noteworthy influence on religious thought, moral judgment and literary works of Indian people from the hoary past. In the modern scholarly world the *Mahabharata* is considered as the central principle point on which the study of religious social and political thoughts and contemplations of Indian tradition are reflected. The epic *Mahabharata* is ascribed to the name of *Krishnadvaipayana Vyasadeva* on 4th century B.C., but this epic has got its present form through several decades (i.e between 4th century B.C - 4th century A.D). In the *Ramayana*, the '*Garhastya-dharma*'-the practice and duties of the family life (the second stage of the life according to the Hindu scriptures) is narrated. But the *Mahabharata* describes the four means of eternal goal- '*Dharma*'-the virtue, '*artha*'-the wealth, '*kama*'-the chaste and '*moksa*'- the liberation-the ultimate goal, elaborately. In the *Mahabharata*, the word *Dharma* is stated as the code of conduct that should be performed for the benign stability of this mortal world and the world beyond death.

The word religion in ancient India is meant by the term "*Dharma*" (*Dharman*), which denotes several meanings- 'law, usage practice, customary observance or prescribed conduct, duty, right, justice, virtue, morality, religion, religious merit, good works' etc. (Monier Williams). When the derivation of the term '*Dharma*' is *dhan-* '*ri*+*mak*', the word signifies the meaning: from which all wealth could be ascertained. The second resulting form is as follows: '*dhring*+*man*'- which retains all the approved conduct of the world. The *Mahabharata* prescribes these meanings in several verses:

- i) *Dharanat sravati dharmo hi dharanad veti niscyayah/* (XII.90.18) 'righteousness is called *Dharma*, because it helps the acquisition and preservation of wealth.' (M N Dutt)
- ii) *Dharanad dharmam ityahurdharmo dharayate prajah/ Karnaparvan*(VIII.69.58)
"*dharma* (morality) is so-called because it protects all". (M N Dutt)

The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* mentions that after creation of the universe the Supreme Creator noticed the disharmony among different entities, and consequently to maintain harmony created '*Dharma*'. This concept of *Dharma* is represented in the *Mahabharata* in a strong manner. To clarify *dharma*, again, it is said in the 142nd chapter of *Shantiparvan* that code of good conduct is *dharma* or the morality (*Lokayatramihaikē tu dharmam prahurmanishinah* (XII.142.19) and righteousness is *dharma* which 'prevents injury to creatures' – '*Dharanad dharmamityahurdharmena vidhritah prajah*.' (XII.109.11).

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