



An Exploration into the Historical Actuality of the Mahabharata

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Abstract

The wise sage Krishna Dvaipayana Vyasa, better known as Vyasa or Veda Vyasa wrote the epic Mahabharata, one of the greatest epics in Indian history. Legendary evidence suggests that Lord Ganesha penned the epic while seated in a cave with sage Vyasa. The epic's original length of 8,000 verses was eventually enlarged to the 100,000 verses that is currently available in Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute. The Hindu scriptures are classified into two classifications, one being the "*Smriti*" (comprising of the four Vedas and the Upanishads) and the other being the "*Shruti*" (comprising of the 18 Puranas and the Itihasa). The word "Itihasa" in Sanskrit means "*Thus it was*", which can be translated to that which has happened in the past. The sages at the time wrote history in such a manner that it contains the four *Purusharthas* of life, which could also mean the four goals of life that are Dharma (righteousness, and moral values), Artha (prosperity, and economic values), Kama (pleasure, love, and psychological values), and Moksha (liberation, spiritual values, self-realization). Due to the integration of the four *Purusharthas* into the Itihasas, the Itihasas are detailed in a story format to enrich mankind on how one must undertake the way to live one's life. There are only two texts that come under Itihasa which are *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. The Mahabharata depicts the dynastic struggle between two factions of the Kuru dynasty, the one being the Pandavas, and the other being the Kauravas. The Mahabharata concludes with the Kurukshetra War, which resulted in a Pyrrhic victory for Pandavas. Naturally, there has been a debate on the authenticity of the incidents described in the text since the Hindus place the Mahabharata as history. Many disciples transmitted the epic orally from generation to generation as it has spread its influence throughout human culture over many years. Since it had been transmitted orally, there were several opportunities for additions and changes at various points in the process. As a result, the epic volumes with extrapolation have been prepared. This raises the question of whether the epic is based in fact, or rather if it is at all historic. Luckily, positive traces of historical events were discovered during several archaeological investigations conducted near the Mahabharata sites. This research is to bring to light the several facts lined up with the Mahabharata that may be able to prove that the Mahabharata is more than a myth.

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1. Introduction

The Mahabharata is one of the two Itihasa. The other being "The Ramayana". The Mahabharata is an ancient Indian epic comprising of 1,00,000 verses. The epic gives a detailed account of the Kuru dynasty. The question that comes into light is whether the entire event of the Mahabharata happened or whether it is a fabricated piece of literature. It cannot be ignored that the Mahabharata contains extrapolations which have been added over the course of time. But just because there are extrapolations added that does not mean there is no historicity to the event of the Mahabharata. The consensus doubts whether the Mahabharat happened since foreign scholars have argued that the Mahabharata along with the Puranas are pieces of literature which has come into being during the modern age. The objective of this research is to delve into the historical pieces of evidence that corroborates with the historicity of the Mahabharata.

2. Historical Actuality

At the time when the Mahabharata was written down it was impossible to document information as we could do it today. All these ancient stories were transmitted orally from generation to generation with the help of teachers or instructors. Over the course of thousand years, there have been extrapolations made to the story of the Mahabharata. But as I did say before just because there are extrapolations made to the story of the Mahabharata that does not mean there is no kernel of truth to it. The literary evidence which has been discovered over the passage of time suggest that there was a Bharat war which happened during the ancient time. Questions regarding the date and the time of the Kurukshetra war will always be under scrutiny because of the variations arising between the different scholars. The European scholars suggest that there was a war fought between the Kauravas and the Panchals which hints at the existence of a war between the Kauravas and the Pandavas since the wife of the Pandavas, Queen Draupadi was daughter to the Panchal King Drupada. From this we can conclude that the Panchal soldiers had aligned themselves with the Pandavas in the Kurukshetra war. Although there have been several extrapolations made to the text of the Mahabharata, certain facts such as the geographical description of kingdoms cannot be ignored. In the end of day, the historical actuality of any event depends on the evidence which have been gathered pertaining to that event. Ancient forms of literature such as the four Vedas and the Upanishads do not mention anything about the Mahabharata. Assuming that the Mahabharata was composed after the Kurukshetra war, then we are in a state where we cannot ignore the historical actuality of such an event. Now we will chronologically delve into the various evidence that suggest that there is historical background to the event of the Mahabharata.

2.1 Excavation Of Hastinapura

The Mahabharata describes various sites, some of which have retained the same names today as they were mentioned in the text. Some of these sites were Hastinapura, Ahicchatra, Kampil, Mathura, Kaushambi, Kurukshetra, etc. Prof. B.B. Lal, an archaeologist from the Archaeological Survey of India decided to mainly focus his work upon the above-mentioned sites. Around 1800 BCE, the drying up of the Saraswati River led to the decline of Sindhu- Saraswati civilization. Due to the drying up of the Saraswati River, many of the people who had settled in the urban sites situated near the banks of the Saraswati River abandoned their homes and migrated to various other locations. As a result, the urban nature of the Sindhu-Saraswati civilization declined to a more rural nature over the passage of time. Although the civilization declined to a more rural nature, however, many of the cultural and material aspects of the previous civilization were still present. People would migrate to various other places across the Indian subcontinent. The initiation of the Classical Indian civilization was a result of the eastward migration of the people towards the Gangetic Plains. The Gangetic Plains were always inhabited by people and can be dated to as far as the Sindhu-Saraswati civilization. From the village of Jhusi situated near the Ganga-Yamuna confluence, evidence was obtained that clearly shows that the people situated in that area grew domesticated rice to as far back as 7477 BCE. Other evidence gathered through Paleobotany shows that the crops grown today in the Gangetic Plains (such as Sesame, Green pea, Jowar, Mustard, Linseed, etc.) were being cultivated to as far back as 800 BCE. Now this is where we delve into the work of Prof. BB Lal. It was during the years between 1950 and 1952 that Prof. BB Lal started working on the various sites mentioned in the Mahabharata. One of the focal points of his archaeological work was Hastinapur, the capital city of the Kurus. A new kind of pottery was found at the lowest levels of Hastinapur during his excavation. Prof. BB Lal called this new kind of pottery Painted Grey Ware (PGW). The carbon dating of these pots traces it back to 1200 BCE. Hastinapur was not the only site which resulted in the discovery of PGW materials. The Mahabharata mentions a site known as Ahicchatra which was the capital city of the Northern Panchalas. Ahicchatra or Ahikhet or Ahikshetra is situated in Bareilly district in Uttar Pradesh. Prof. BB Lal and his team were able to excavate PGW materials from the site of Ahicchatra as well. Upon carbon dating the PGW materials excavated from Ahicchatra, the period to which it dated was around 1200 BCE to 600 BCE. The land in Ahicchatra which yielded PGW materials extended up to 40 hectares signaling that there was urban settlement in that area. Prof. BB Lal and his team were also able to discover Painted Grey Ware (PGW) sites in the Indo-Gangetic plains and upper Yamuna-Ganga doab.

2.2 DISCOVERY OF PGW SITES OUTSIDE OF HASTINAPUR

1200 BCE is coined as the beginning of the “Iron Age” in India because of various research conducted over the course of time. But recent discoveries show us that Iron was utilized in the Ganga Valley years before 1200 BCE. At the time, Copper and Bronze was a rare material in the Sindhu-Saraswati civilization but Iron Ore on the other hand was abundantly available in the Vindhya and the Himalayan Foothills. Excavations in Uttar Pradesh have turned up in Iron artefacts, Tuyeres, and Slag in layers radiocarbon dated between 1800 and 1000 BCE. Archaeologist Jagat Pati Joshi discovered the sites of Dholavira (Present-day Gujarat) and Surkotada (Present-day Gujarat) where he was able to find PGW sites in the Hakra riverbed. The Hakra is a remnant of the Vedic Saraswati River. Joshi discovered that at Dadheri (Present-day Gujarat) and Bhagwanpura (Haryana) the Late Harappan and PGW materials were interlocked in the 2nd Millenium BCE. In 2008, archaeologist RN Singh discovered an overlap of Harappan and PGW levels in Alamgir (Present-day Yamuna). Both Copper and Iron Artefacts were also discovered from Alamgir. All these discoveries points at the very fact that there is a singular continuity between the Sindhu Saraswati Civilization and the PGW sites.

2.3 MATHURA

Mathura holds a significant place in ancient scriptures such as “Mahabharata” and Puranas like “Bhagavata Purana” and “Harivamsa Purana”. Krishna belonged to the clan of Vrsni and Mathura has been the ancestral home of the Vrsnis. The Bhagavata Purana states “Formerly, Surasena, the chief of the Yadu dynasty, had gone to live in the city of Mathura. There he enjoyed the places known as Mathura and Surasena. Since that time, the city of Mathura had been the capital of all the kings of the Yadu dynasty...”. Surasena was formerly a king of the Yadavas and was the paternal grandfather of Krishna. Megasthenes, a Greek historian and explorer, had documented the existence of the Surasena people in his works. “*Anguttara Nikaya*” (a Buddhist scripture and one of the five Nikaya) states that the Surasena people existed during the Buddhist period of the 4th Century B.C.E. Various archaeological findings substantiate the existence of Vaishnavism in Mathura from 2nd century B.C.E. In a village called “Mora” situated in Mathura, certain inscriptions known as the “Mora Well Inscription” was excavated which has been carbon dated to 1st century C.E. These inscriptions allude to the “Pancavira” which are the five heroes among the Vrsnis. These five heroes are identified as “Baladeva” (also known as Balarama, brother of Krishna), “Akrura” (uncle of Krishna and Yadava prince), “Aniruddha” (grandson of Krishna and Rukmini and son of Pradyumna and Rukmavati), “Samba” (son of Krishna and Jambavati), and Vasudeva (also known as Krishna). The Vasu doorjamb inscription is currently held in the Mathura Museum of Archeology. This inscription written in Brahmi script confirms the worship of Krishna to as early as 1st century C.E. Similarly, an ancient image of Balarama which can be carbon dated to 2nd century B.C.E., confirms the worship of Balarama as well. This image is currently maintained in the State Museum of Lucknow. A stone carving of Vasudeva carrying infant Krishna to Gokula from 5th Century C.E., is preserved in the Mathura Government Museum. Mathura district has brought out numerous late Harappan potsherds which were mainly observed in regions such as Gosna, Gantholi, Nojhil, etc. Through the finding of potsherds in the Mathura region it can be interpreted that Mathura has been a source of red sandstone which further affirms the region’s ancient past. Mathura is a region which has the potential for further excavations and research studies in the future.

2.4 DWARKA

Dwarka is regarded as the city where Krishna and the Yadavas resided. This city was formed by Krishna due to the consistent invasions and attacks perpetuated by Jarasandha. The consistent attacks led by Jarasandha was a cause of great worry for the Yadavas, due to this reason they decided to vacate Mathura. The region of Anarta situated in the west coast of Gujarat was considered as an ideal location to set their base and due to this reason, they decided to construct the city of Dwarka in this region. The oldest inscription regarding Dwarka was found in the Palitana copperplate grant of Samanta Simhaditya. This inscription is carbon dated to 574 CE. The plates clearly state that Krishna lived in the capital city of Dwarka.

2.4.1 EXCAVATION BY THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF OCEAN TECHNOLOGY

In December 2000, oceanographers from the National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT) came across the ruins of a vast ancient city in the Gulf of Cambay. The oceanographers took up several photographs of the ocean floor which further resulted in the discovery of an ancient city 40 meters beneath the sea. Excavations were undertaken by dredging the site for several weeks and this resulted in the uncovering of nearly 2000 artifacts. The ruins which were found beneath the sea spread across 9 kms on the banks of an ancient riverbed that could potentially indicate the existence of a dam which was built using stone and bricks. The ruins found were undertaken for research by the Birbal Sahni Institute of Paleobotany (BSIP) – Lucknow, the Physical Research Laboratory – Ahmedabad, and the National Geophysical Research Institute (NGRI) – Hyderabad. The artifacts can be traced back to anywhere between 9000 to 12000 years. The ancient city uncovered by the NIOT has consistently been advocated as the city of Dwarka where Krishna and the Yadavas resided but still there is no concrete evidence to prove that it is the same city however, the possibility of it being the city of Dwarka cannot be dismissed completely. These findings by the NIOT have resulted in the theory that urbanization had progressed to heightened levels even as far back as 9000 years ago, and due to this reason, the prospective scope of research is endless.

2.4.2 PROMINENT EXCAVATIONS HELD IN DWARKA

Archaeologist H.D. Sankalia and his team held the first onshore excavation of Dwarka during the year 1963. This excavation enabled the researchers to come up with the conclusion that the antiquity present in Dwarka must be at least 2000 years old. However, the excavations held by archaeologist SR Rao and his team between 1979-1980, created a paradigm shift when it came to the excavation of Dwarka. As SR Rao and his team of archaeologists were excavating the western square of the present Dwarkadhisa temple, they came across a well-maintained Vishnu temple that can be dated back to the 9th century C.E. A trench which was dug on the northern edge of the recently discovered Vishnu temple brought to light two other ancient Vishnu temples. Beneath the most ancient Vishnu temple, SR Rao and his team were able to discover a crumbled residential settlement which could very well have been built during the period between prehistory and written history. Highly gleaming fragments of redware pottery were also excavated which most likely can be dated to anywhere between the 12th and 15th century B.C.E. It can be concluded that the current Dwarkadhisa temple was built upon the ruins of an ancient Vishnu temple. Archaeologist SR Rao advocates that urban culture was very much prevalent during the protohistoric period from the excavations and the research he undertook. He pointed out that the discovery of Late Harappan ware in Dwarka that belongs to the second millennium B.C.E is highly significant. The team undertook manual survey and documentation of the town plan through sonar and magnetic surveys which proved to be fruitful. Only after surveying the south of the second channel, can the plan of Dwarka city be reconstructed. There are various remains located in the southern channel which are yet to be excavated and researched upon. There is scope for more data to be collected from the deeper areas of the submerged city. Thereby, it is difficult to fixate on the date of submergence of Dwarka.

2.4.3 SEALS AND INSCRIPTIONS RELATED TO DWARKA

Krishna's Dwarka is viewed as a port city for sea trading. Due to this reason, it was expected of the residents at the time to carry seals for identification. This system has been mentioned in the Harivamsa Purana. This highly correlates with a seal of 17th-16th century B.C.E. that was also found in Bet Dwarka. Upon researching this seal, it has been interpreted that this seal was used as a mode of identification to prevent outsiders from entering the city. Another prominent artifact which was excavated was the Votive Jar which contains certain characters that are inscribed. The inscription states "Mahakaccha Sah pah". Archaeologist S.R. Rao has interpreted it has an appeal by the offerer seeking protection from the sea god. In the Mahabharata, the concept of the sea god Varuna protecting the seas is clearly stated. The Mahabharata clearly states, "*the Illustrious Varuna began to duly protect seas, lakes, rivers, and other reservoirs of water*". A Lotus Iconography was also recorded in the observations of archaeologist G.P. Singh. Archaeologist G.P. Singh's observations give a description of "various shells with Lotus (Padma) engraved on massive stone walls and fort walls". Through these observations it can be interpreted that only certain settlements have been excavated and there are many more subsequent settlements which are yet to be explored. Archaeologist S. R. Rao is of the

opinion that from the site structures that have been discovered, we can have a clear understanding of the town planning system adopted at the time, however, the area surrounding the port is still to be explored and researched upon. There are several unexplored areas in line with the explored areas which has scope for further research. As of this point, it is difficult to construct a full-scale plan of the submerged Dwarka without exploring the south of the second channel which comprises of several structures. Although 3100 BCE is taken as the standard date of the Kurukshetra War as proposed by Aryabhata, further explorations will enable us in coming up with a definite date, however, such explorations were never conducted. It is ascertained that the actual Dwarka was submerged due to a subsidence or tectonic events. The archaeological investigations of such subsidence or tectonic events needs further research. To conclude, there is scope for further research on the subject matter which is Dwarka.

2.5 KURUKSHETRA

The site of Kurukshetra holds a significant position in the Mahabharata since this was the site where the Mahabharata War/Dharmayuddh was held between the army of the Pandavas and the army of the Kauravas. Throughout the text of the Mahabharata, the site of Kurukshetra has been labelled as a Dharmakshetra. From this we can infer that the site of Kurukshetra holds religious prominence even before the holy Mahabharata war. This site has been a witness of numerous battles even before the Kurukshetra war. Ancient texts of the Vedic literature such as *Pancavimsa Brahmana*, *Satapatha Brahmana*, etc., consistently mentions Kurukshetra as a site of sacrifice for the Gods and sages. Due to the religious significance of Kurukshetra, the site was chosen as the battlefield for the holy war between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. It has been cited that one of the main reasons for undermining the historicity of the Kurukshetra War is the lack of evidence pertaining to skeletal remains found. However, it is important to understand the system integrated for the disposal of the dead in ancient India before further delving into this topic. Cremation is commonly observed as the last rite during the Vedic period. The Mahabharata explicitly states that the warriors who died in the Kurukshetra War were cremated. A site known as Asthipura or Bone Town, has been referenced in the Puranas which has been identified as the site where the warriors who died in the Kurukshetra war were cremated. Since the bodies of the warriors were cremated, it can be understood that it will be difficult to find the skeletal remains. Ironically, a 1st Century C.E. Buddhist Kavya poem known as "*Saundarananda*" written by Asvaghosa, comprises a verse which states, "*And where is the power once possessed by the Kurus who blazed in combat with speed and stamina, and then lay in ashes, like sacrificial fires whose firewood has burned, their life-breath snuffed out?*". Through this verse, we can interpret that the Kuru warriors were cremated after the Kurukshetra War. V.N. Dutta (an Indian writer, historian, and professor emeritus at Kurukshetra University) states that a Chinese Pilgrim Hieun Tsang who had visited Kurukshetra in 634 CE had recorded that "a terrible fight had taken place in the region of Thanesar in remote times". A Chinese traveler known as Yuan Chwang who had visited India in 629-645 CE recorded that a great war was fought at Kurukshetra. It must be noted that the Kurukshetra War continued for 18 days, thereby, it would have been difficult to conduct the crematory rites for all those who have fallen to death in the war. Due to this reason, many of the dead bodies were left open in the battlefield. The Mahabharata states "*Other carnivorous creatures, subsisting upon animal food, having gorged upon fat and marrow and bones and blood, began to eat the delicate parts of corpses. Others, drinking the fat that flowed in streams, ran naked over the field*". From this we can interpret that the dead bodies which were left open in the battlefield were consumed by carnivorous animals. The Mahabharata also vividly explains the way the carnivorous animals attacked the bodies of Salya and Duryodhana. Another interesting subject matter which gauges the interests of many are the weapons utilized in the Kurukshetra War. The Mahabharata gives a description of the various weapons utilized in the Kurukshetra War. Artifacts such as Anthropomorphic Copper weapons, Antennae swords, and harpoons were discovered in sites connected to the Mahabharata. It has been noted that the war of a magnitude like the Kurukshetra War is difficult to have happened within the limits of present-day Kurukshetra city. Due to this reason, it has been inferred that the historical Kurukshetra War would have happened in a land which exceeds the geographical limitations of present-day Kurukshetra City. As a result, archaeologists argue for excavations to take place beyond the geographical limitations of Kurukshetra. The expansive nature of Kurukshetra has been explained in the

Mahabharata. The Mahabharata describes that the location where Arjuna was in pursuit of Jayadratha was three *yojanas* away from where Drona was trying to capture Yudhishtira. Three *Yojanas* would span anywhere between 24 to 27 miles. It is hard to say that the archaeologists have explored and excavated a region of 27 miles in diameter within the region of Kurukshetra City. The prominent role played by chariots and horses in the Kurukshetra War cannot be disregarded. Due to there being no evidence of horses and chariots recorded in the early archaeological findings within the Harappan sites, the researchers have now come up with the conclusion that chariots emerged in the Indian subcontinent only during the 15th century BCE. However, recent archaeological findings thwart this theory. The Mahabharata as well as other forms of Vedic literature acknowledge the existence of chariots. Prof. B.B. Lal states that three sites within the Harappan period have provided evidence of the use of spoked wheels. These three sites are Kalibangan (present-day Rajasthan), Rakhigarhi (present-day Haryana), and Banawali (present-day Haryana). Due to the recent findings from Harappan sites, we can conclude that the Harappan people were accustomed to horses. One of the biggest excavations that thwarted the 15th century theory was the discovery of Sanauli Chariots. The excavation site which produced Sanauli Chariots is in the Ganga-Yamuna Doab in Sanauli, Uttar Pradesh, India. This site produced Bronze Age solid-disk wheel chariots which were excavated in 2018. After closely examining the Sanauli excavation site it has been stated by researchers that the rituals with respect to the Sanauli burials show a similarity to the Vedic rituals.

2.6 INDRAPRASTHA

The city of Indraprastha holds a prominent place in the Mahabharata. This city is revered as the second capital of the Kurus after Hastinapura. The area falling under Khandavaprastha consisted of dense forests which was not suitable for habitation. The Pandavas assumed the responsibility of clearing the forests and establishing their rule over this region. The city of Indraprastha is located near to the banks of Yamuna. Due to the dynastic succession conflict between the Pandavas and the Kauravas, Dhritarashtra unwillingly decided to share a portion of the Kuru kingdom with the Pandavas. Later, over the course of time, Indraprastha came to be known as "*Indrapat*". According to the *Bhagavat Purana*, the city of Indraprastha fell under the region of Khandavaprastha which was a jurisdiction of the Kurus. It has been noted by various scholars that Indraprastha was known to "*Ptolemy I Sober*". Ptolemy I Sober was a Macedonian Greek general, historian, and successor to Alexander the Great. Ptolemy I Sober is widely revered for founding the Ptolemaic Kingdom that is based in Egypt. As per the geography dating undertaken by Ptolemy I Sober in 2nd century C.E., a city known as "*Indabara*" is recorded. Scholars such as McCrindle and Upinder Singh, are of the belief that *Indabara* is the same as Indraprastha. As per geographical mapping, the site of *Indabara* is in the neighborhood of Delhi. The present-day Indraprastha is also situated in the current city of Delhi. The tale of Indraprastha does not close out with the Mahabharata. The Buddhist scriptures such as the Jatakas also give a description of Indraprastha. The Buddha decided to deliver a few of his sermons in the city of Indraprastha. This decision was made because the city of Indraprastha was a prominent site at the time. Abul Fazl who served as the grand vizier of the Mughal Empire recognizes the city of Delhi with the ancient name of Indraprastha. Abul Fazl states "*Delhi is one of the greatest cities of antiquity. It was called Indrapat*". *Indrapat* is recognized as another name for Indraprastha. An inscription was found in Sarban which lies near to the present-day Rashtrapati Bhawan, New Delhi. This inscription is dated to 1328 CE. As per this Sanskrit inscription, Indraprastha is identified as a district of the Delhi region. Another significant inscription known as the Naraina stone inscription was identified. This inscription was dated to 1327 CE. The inscription states "There is a province named Hariyana in while lies the city of Dilli." The inscription further states "In the western direction of Indraprastha, there is a village called Nadayana". This is significant since it fixates the location of Nadayana (which is present-day Naraina) towards the west of Delhi to the west of Indraprastha. When we contrastingly compare what we have found in the Naraina inscription with what Abul Fazl stated, it becomes obvious that the city of Delhi was the ancient city of Indraprastha. Various excavations were held in Purana Qila by B.B. Lal. The first series of excavations were held by B.B. Lal and his team between 1954-1955. These excavations produced Painted Grey Ware (PGW) which can be dated back to 1000-500 BCE. Another set of excavations were held in 1969-70 by B.B. Lal and others which produced Northern Black Polished Ware. The antiquities excavated can be dated back to the Harappan

period. From this we can infer that the influence of the Harappan civilization was not confined just to the area surrounding the Indus Valley, but it also extended to Delhi as well. The PGW materials excavated from areas interlinked to the Mahabharata like Hastinapura, Kurukshetra, Indraprastha, etc., enables us to infer that all these sites share the same material culture. We can also infer that probably all these sites existed during the same period. Several scholars such as Upinder Singh are of the belief that the area of Delhi has significant scope when it comes to further excavations since so much of the area is yet to be explored and excavated. It is only through further excavations that we can come up with an aggregate date to ascertain when the Mahabharata war actually happened since the traditional date proposed by Aryabhata has not been discarded by scholars and archaeologists.

2.7 OTHER ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

Various seals were discovered during the excavations of the Indus Valley. The most significant seal which was excavated is the Pasupati Seal. This seal was discovered while excavating the area relating to the Mohenjo-Daro. The seal is a symbol of the Vedic deity Pasupati. From the seal, the description of Pasupati is that of a three-faced horned figure sitting on a throne that symbolizes the personality of a yogi, with the legs bent double under him, and his toes facing downwards. The stance of Pasupati from this seal represents a yogic asana known as *Kurmasana*. In this seal, the deity Pasupati is surrounded by animals such as rhinoceros, a buffalo, a tiger, and an elephant. The carbon dating of the Pasupati seal dates back to 2700-1500 B.C.E. This dating closely resembles the timeframe as to when the Mahabharat happened. The worship of Pasupati is also confirmed in the Mahabharata. The Mahabharata describes the worship of Pasupati in the town of Varanavata. Just like the Mahabharata, the *Bhagavat Purana* also confirms the worship of Pasupati. According to the *Bhagavat Purana*, Krishna and his cowherd friends worshipped Pasupati, and his consort, Goddess Ambika on the banks of river Sarasvati, and had also spent one night on the banks of the river. Another prominent seal which factors is the Steatite Seal. The Steatite Seal is a soapstone tablet which was excavated from an archaeological site at Mohenjo-Daro, Larkana district, Sindh (in present-day Pakistan). This seal can be dated to 2000 B.C.E. This seal which was excavated from Mohenjo-Daro shares a resemblance with a story in Krishna's life. The Steatite seal is a tablet which describes a young boy uprooting two trees. After uprooting the two trees, two figures emerge. There is an episode known as the *Yamalarjuna* episode in the *Bhagavat Purana* and the *Harivamsa Purana*. The young boy in the Steatite Seal is viewed to be Krishna, and the two figures who emerged from the two trees that were uprooted, are considered to be two cursed Gandharvas. According to the *Bhagavat Purana*, the two cursed Gandharvas, are Nalakubera and Manigriva. Various archaeologists view this discovery detrimental in ascertaining dates related to Krishna. The archaeologist who excavated the site of Mohenjo-Daro, Dr. E.J.H Mackay is of the belief that the soapstone tablet discovered is depicting the *Yamalarjuna* episode. Various other scholars and researchers are also sharing the same belief. Thus, we can infer that the inhabitants of the Indus Valley civilization were aware about the *Yamalarjuna* episode. As a result, we can also interpret that Krishna held a significant image at the time. The game of dice holds a prominent place in the Sabha Parva of the Mahabharata. A game of dice was held between the Pandavas and the Kauravas which resulted in Yudhishtira losing all his possessions that ultimately led to 13 years of exile for the Pandavas. B.B. Lal and his team were able to excavate artifacts such as the dice from Harappan sites.

2.8 ACCOUNTS OF TRAVELERS

2.8.1 PTOLEMY

During the 2nd Century CE, a renowned Alexandrine geographer known as Ptolemy visited India. Ptolemy refers to Mathura as *Modoura*, the city of Gods. As per the Puranas and the Mahabharata, Mathura was the city of Krishna. McCrindle states "Modoura, the city of Gods: There is no difficulty in identifying this with Mathura, one of the most sacred cities in all of India and renowned as the birthplace of Krishna. Its temples struck Mahmud of Ghazni with such admiration that he resolved to adorn his capital in a similar style. The Greeks write the name *Methora* as well as *Modoura*. It is situated on the banks of the *Jamna* (also known as Yamuna), higher up than Agra, from which it is 35 miles distant.

2.8.2 DION CHRYSOSTOM

A reference to the Mahabharata is mentioned in the writings of Dion Chrysostom (between 40 and 105 CE). Dion Chrysostom is a renowned Greek sophist and rhetorician. Dion Chrysostom mentions in his writings that “Indians possessed an *Iliad* of 1,00,000 verses”. The *Iliad* is a Greek epic written by Homer which can be dated to 8th century BCE. The *Iliad* consists of 15,693 lines. When Dion states he came across an *Iliad* of 1,00,000 verses, does it mean the Indians had their own version of the *Iliad* which was 1,00,000 verses long since the *Iliad* had only 15,693 lines. As of now, there is no recorded evidence of Indians translating the *Iliad* and having their own version of the *Iliad* which was 1,00,000 verses long. The only other probability would be the Mahabharata. Since, Dion is referring to an Indian epic which was as significant as *Iliad*, it can therefore be interpreted that the only Indian epic which is 1,00,000 verses long is the Mahabharat. Since Dion was not aware of the Mahabharata, it can be interpreted that Dion was using the phrase “*Iliad*” to refer to the Mahabharata.

2.8.3 AL BERUNI

Al Beruni was a 10th century Iranian scholar and polymath. During the year 1017, Al Beruni visited India. Al Beruni wrote a book on India called *Tarikh Al-Hind* (History of India). In *Tarikh Al-Hind*, Al Beruni provides several references to Krishna and the Mahabharata. Al Beruni provides a summarized description of Krishna’s life from the time he was in Mathura all the way to his involvement in the Mahabharata war. Other references such as Jarasandha’s attacks on Mathura, Krishna’s killing of Shishupala, mentioning of Kurukshetra as the site of the Mahabharata war, several quotes from the *Bhagavad Gita*, etc.

2.8.4 ABUL FAZL

Abul Fazl served as the grand vizier to the Mughal emperor Akbar throughout the entire reign of Akbar until his death in 1602. Abul Fazl wrote the book “*Akbarnama*”, which comprises the history of Akbar’s reign. The third volume of *Akbarnama* is known as *Ain-i-Akbari*. *Ain-i-Akbari* recounts events pertaining to the Mausala Parva from the Mahabharata. This also includes the events such as the infighting amongst the Yadavas which led to their decline. The city of Indraprastha which was later known as *Indrapat* has been referenced in *Ain-i-Akbari*. The *Ain-i-Akbari* also summarizes the Mahabharata. The *Ain-i-Akbari* provides details on pinning down the year of the Kurukshetra war. It states that there is a 35-year difference between the time when Yudhishthira is crowned king and his renunciation. This corresponds with the Mahabharata text.

2.9 CARVED AND INSCRIBED EVIDENCE

2.9.1 HATHIBADA GHOSUNDI INSCRIPTIONS

These inscriptions are dated to 2nd-1st century BCE. They were discovered from Nagari Village which is situated near Chittorgarh that is present in Rajasthan. This inscription states “*enclosing wall round the object of worship, called Narayana-Vatika for the divinities Sankarsana-Vasudeva who are unconquered, and they are the lords of all.*” This inscription clearly establishes the worship of Vasudeva-Sankarsana worship in India during ancient times. Vasudeva-Sankarsana here is referenced to Krishna.

2.9.2 NASIK CAVE INSCRIPTIONS OF PULUMAVI

These inscriptions are dated to 1st or 2nd century CE. These inscriptions were excavated from the Pandavleni Caves, which is situated 8 km south of Nasik City. This inscription references the names of Kesava (Krishna), Rama (Balarama), Bhimasena, and Arjuna. Through this inscription, we can interpret that the above-mentioned figures of the Mahabharata were renowned even during ancient times.

2.9.3 HATHIGUMPHA INSCRIPTIONS OF KHARAVELA

These inscriptions are dated to the time period between 2nd century BCE and 1st century CE. They were discovered in the Udayagiri Hills, Bhubaneswar, Odisha. This inscription contrastingly compares the childhood activities of King Kharavela with the childhood activities of Krishna. Although the childhood activities of Krishna are not emphasized in the Mahabharata, but it is deeply explored in the *Harivamsa Purana* which serves as an appendix to the Mahabharata.

2.9.4 HELIODORUS PILLAR

The Heliodorus Pillar is carbon dated to 2nd Century BCE. It was discovered in Besnagar, Vidisha District, Madhya Pradesh. This pillar was constructed by Heliodorus who was a Greek traveler from Takshashila (present-day Taxila) was. The inscription states "This Garuda pillar of Vasudeva, the God of Gods, was constructed here by Heliodora (also known as Heliodorus), the *Bhagavata*, the son of Diya (Dion), of Takshashila." This inscription is the oldest Epigraph available today, that references Vasudeva (another name for Krishna) and can be dated to the 2nd or 3rd century BCE. Throughout the Mahabharata text, Krishna has been referred to as Vasudeva since he is the son of Vasudeva.

2.9.5 NANAGHAT CAVE INSCRIPTIONS

The Nanaghat Cave inscription is carbon dated to 2nd Century BCE. It was discovered in Nanaghat, Western Ghats, Maharashtra. This inscription is significant since it recognizes Krishna and Balarama as individuals belonging to the Lunar Dynasty. As per the Mahabharata and the Puranas, Krishna and Balarama hailed from the Yadava clan of the Lunar dynasty. We can interpret that both Krishna and Balarama were prominent personalities, and this was the reason why they were mentioned in these inscriptions.

2.9.6 MORA WELL INSCRIPTION

The Mora Well Inscription is carbon dated to 1st century CE. It was discovered in Mora, Mathura district, Uttar Pradesh. The Mora Well Inscription references the "*Pancavira*". *Pancavira* here refers to the five heroes among the Vrsni clan. From the Mahabharata and the Puranas, we know that Krishna belonged to the Vrsni clan. Scholars have identified the five heroes of the Vrsni clan as Sankarsana, Vasudeva, Pradyumna, Samba, and Aniruddha. This conclusion was derived with the help of a verse from the *Vayu Purana*. There is a verse in the *Vayu Purana* which states "Sankarsana, Vasudeva, Pradyumna, Samba, and Aniruddha – these five are glorified as the race (of Vrsnis)." Here, Sankarsana implies Balarama (brother of Krishna). Vasudeva implies Krishna. Pradyumna is the son of Krishna and Rukmini. Samba is the son of Krishna and Jambavati. Aniruddha is the son of Pradyumna and Rukmavati and is grandson to Krishna and Rukmini.

2.9.7 AJAGARA STONE INSCRIPTION

The Ajagara Stone Inscription is carbon dated to 2nd century CE. This inscription was discovered from Ajagara Village which is 50 kms away from Prayagraj. This inscription references a few names like Arjuna, Nakula, and Sahadeva. From this we can infer that the inscription was also constructed to preserve some of the stories from the Mahabharata. This stone piece was recovered from a tank. It is perceived this is the same tank where a conversation was held between the Pandavas and the Yaksha. This episode between the Yaksha and the Pandavas is recorded in the Mahabharata.

2.9.8 BARABAR HILL CAVE INSCRIPTION

The Barabar Hill Cave Inscription is carbon dated to 4th century CE. This inscription was discovered from Jehanabad district, Bihar. This inscription states "The beautiful image, placed in this cave of the mountain Pravaragiri, of (God) Krishna." From this inscription, we can infer that the worship of Krishna was existing in 4th century Bihar".

2.9.9 KHOH COPPER PLATE INSCRIPTION

The Khoh Copper Plate Inscription is dated to 5th century CE. It was discovered from Khoh in Madhya Pradesh. This inscription has a verse which states, "And it has been said in the Mahabharata by the venerable Vyasa, the arranger of the Vedas – O Yudhisthira, best of kings, carefully preserve land that has been given, whether by thyself or by another (verily) the preservation (of a grant) (is) better than making a grant." This inscription also confirms that the Mahabharata has 1,00,000 verses.

2.9.10 PALITANA COPPER PLATE INSCRIPTION

The Palitana Copper Plate Inscription is carbon dated to 6th century CE. It was discovered in Bhavnagar District, Gujarat. According to this inscription, Krishna lived in a place called Dwaraka. Through this we are

able to associate the relation of Krishna with Dwaraka. This corresponds with the information provided in the Mahabharata and the various Puranas, where Krishna is said to have ruled from the city of Dwaraka.

2.9.11 AGATHOCLES COINS

These coins are carbon dated to the 2nd century BCE. It was discovered in Al-Khanoum, Takhar Province, Afghanistan. There are two figures observed in these coins who are identified as Vasudeva Krishna and Sankarsana. Vasudeva Krishna is shown holding a chakra and a pear-shaped vase. Sankarsana is another name for Balarama. Sankarsana holds a plow in his left hand and a club in his right hand. From the Puranas, we can clearly infer that Krishna holds the Sudarshan Chakra and Balarama wields a plow. The Mahabharata also mentions Balarama's usage of club as a weapon. Through these coins, we can infer that Vasudeva Krishna and Balarama were prominent figures and that is the reason why they were marked in coins.

2.9.12 A COIN DEPICTING BALARAMA

This coin is dated to the 2nd century BCE. This coin can be found in the Government Museum in Mathura, Uttar Pradesh. In this coin, they have depicted a figure holding a plow in his left hand and a stick in his right hand. The figure depicted in these coins share a very close resemblance with the figure depicted in the Agathocles coins.

2.9.13 AN INDO-SCYTHIAN COIN

This coin is dated to 1st Century BCE. This coin is currently preserved in British Museum, London. This coin depicts Balarama holding a club and a plow. This coin too shares a close resemblance with the above-mentioned coins.

2.9.14 AN IMAGE OF BALARAMA FROM MATHURA

This image is dated to 2nd century BCE. This image is currently preserved in State Museum, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh. This image is depicted as a standing image of Balarama holding a plow.

2.9.15 JANSUTI IMAGE OF BALARAMA

This image is dated to 2nd century BCE. This image was discovered in Jansuti, near Mathura. It is currently preserved in Lucknow, Museum. This image portrays Balarama with a snake canopy, holding a plow and a club. From the Puranas, we are able to infer that Balarama is associated with Snakes, since Balarama is perceived to be an avatar of Adisesha. From the scriptures, Adisesha is portrayed as the serpent bed in which Lord Vishnu rests.

2.9.16 MALHAR IMAGE

The Malhar Image can be dated back to the 2nd century BCE. It was found in Malhar, Bilaspur District, Chhattisgarh. This image depicts a four-armed deity wielding a club and a conch in the upper hands. This deity is identified as Vasudeva Krishna.

2.9.17 IMAGES FROM PATNA MUSEUM

These images can be dated back to 1st century BCE. These images were located in Deogarh, Uttar Pradesh and are currently preserved in Patna Museum, Bihar. One image depicts a deity holding a Gada, Chakra, Padma, and Sankha who has been identified as Vasudeva Krishna. The next image depicts Goddess Ekanamsa. The last image depicts a deity holding a plow in his left hand who has been identified as Balarama.

2.9.18 IMAGES OF KRISHNA, BALARAMA, AND SUBHADRA

These images can be dated back to 1st or 2nd century CE. They were found in Mathura and is currently preserved in Karachi Museum, Pakistan. The images constructed with red sandstone consists of the three deities Krishna, Balarama, and Subhadra. Balarama is shown as holding a plow. Subhadra is placed in the center. Krishna is shown as holding a club, discus, lotus, and Sankha.

2.9.19 CARVING IN BHARAT KALA BHAVAN, VARANASI

This carving is traced to 5th century CE. It is located in Bharat Kala Bhavan, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh. One carving consists of Yashoda, the mother of Krishna, churning butter, with infant Krishna moving towards the pot of curd as he watches Yashoda.

2.9.20 CARVING IN DEOGARH TEMPLE

This carving is traced to 6th century CE. It is located in Deogarh Temple, Lalitpur district, Uttar Pradesh. This carving depicts Krishna raising Govardhan hill. This carving corresponds with the story of Krishna raising Govardhan hill from the *Bhagavata Purana*.

2.9.21 CARVING IN PARHARPUR TEMPLE

These carvings are dated to 7th century CE. They are located in Naogaon, Bangladesh. These carvings comprise of Vasudeva carrying infant Krishna, carvings of Radha and Krishna, Krishna battling the wrestlers Chanura and Mushtika, etc. The story of Krishna fighting the wrestlers Chanura and Mushtika is also present in the *Bhagavata Purana*.

2.10 RELATION OF MAHABHARATA WITH BUDDHIST LITERATURE

The most prominent texts of Buddhist literature are the Tipitaka, the Jatakas, the Suttas, Mahavastu, etc. Outside of the traditional sources such as the Mahabharata and the various Puranas, the earliest mention of Krishna is in the Buddhist text the "Jatakas". The Jatakas are a collection of stories pertaining to the previous lives of the Buddha.

2.10.1 GHATA JATAKA

The Ghata Jataka provides a detailed account of the life of Krishna. The Ghata Jataka narrates a detailed account starting from the birth of Krishna, the death of his maternal uncle Kamsa, the establishment of Dwaraka, till the destruction of the Yadavas.

2.10.2 MAHA-UMMAGA JATAKA

This Jataka narrates the story of Krishna's marriage with Jambavati. This Jataka tells the story of how Krishna fell in love with Jambavati on his way from Dwaraka to the park, and, how Krishna took Jambavati back to her home and gifted her with precious items and made her one of his principal queens. The description of Krishna in Buddhist scriptures closely resembles with his description in the Puranic scriptures.

2.10.3 VIDHURA-PANDITA JATAKA

In this Jataka, the Buddha states that in his previous life he was born as Vidhura and his friend Ananda was born as Dhananjaya (Dhananjaya is another name for Arjuna).

2.10.4 KURU-DHAMMA JATAKA

In this Jataka, the name Dhananjaya has been mentioned. From this it is more than likely that the Dhananjaya mentioned here is referenced to Arjuna since Arjuna has been referenced with the name of Dhananjaya innumerable times in the Mahabharata.

2.10.5 SAMBHAVA JATAKA

In this Jataka, a conversation between Vidhura and Dhananjaya is mentioned. Sanjaya is also depicted as an intellectual person. These three characters which are Vidhura, Arjuna, and Sanjaya are mentioned in the Mahabharata.

2.10.6 KUMBHA JATAKA

In this Jataka, the battle within the Yadavas is narrated as it was in the Mausala Parva of the Mahabharata.

2.10.7 BUDDHACHARITA

The Buddhacharita is an epic poem written by Asvaghosa on the life of Gautama Buddha. The Buddhacharita was composed in 1st century CE. The life of Krishna and various events of the Mahabharata are mentioned in the Buddhacharita. It talks about the famed feats of the grandson of Surasena. From the Mahabharata and the various Puranas, we know that Surasena was the paternal grandfather of Krishna. References to Bhishma, Parashuram, and King Pandu were also made in the Buddhacharita. The Buddhacharita also mentions the destruction of the Vrsni clan due to an iron rod. From the Mausala Parva of the Mahabharata, we know that the destruction of the Yadavas occurred due to an iron rod.

2.10.8 SAUNDARANANDA

Saundarananda is a poem written by Asvaghosa. This poem is centered on Nanda who is the half-brother of the Buddha. The Saundarananda mentions events such as the killing of Kamsa in the hands of Krishna, and the death of Krishna by an arrow shot by a hunter named Jara.

2.10.9 LALITAVISTARA SUTRA

The Lalitavistara Sutra is a Buddhist Sutra that tells the life of Gautama Buddha. It is believed to have been composed in 3rd century CE. The Lalitavistara Sutra states that the king of Hastinapur descended from Pandu, the king of the Pandavas. The Lalitavistara Sutra mentions the names of all the five Pandavas which are Yudhisthira, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula, and Sahadeva.

2.11 RELATION OF MAHABHARATA WITH JAIN LITERATURE

Various Jain literature contains several references to the Mahabharata. Several Jain works elaborate on the relationship of Krishna with the Pandavas. Works of Jain Literature such as the Sthananga, Antakriddasanga, Prasnavyakarana, Uttaradhyayana, etc., contains references to the Mahabharata. However, there are major variations between the Jain version and the Brahmanical version of the Mahabharata. In the Jain version, Draupadi was born in Kampilyapura, on the other hand, in the Mahabharata, Draupadi was born in Panchal. As per Jain literature, Draupadi was the daughter of King Makandi, whereas, in the Mahabharata, Draupadi was the daughter of King Drupada. As per the Jain sources, the most significant war was fought between Krishna and Jarasandha, whereas, in the Mahabharata, the most prominent war was fought between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. The Harivamsa Purana of Jinasena gives a detailed description of Krishna. As per various Jain works, Krishna is stated to be the seventh child of Devaki, whereas, as per the Puranas, Krishna is stated to be the eight offspring of Devaki. The Mahabharata states that Bhima killed Jarasandha but the Jain sources states that Krishna killed Jarasandha. The Jain religion depicts Krishna as a Salakapurusara. Salakapurusara is a title conferred to an illustrious person or a person renowned to achieve mighty feats. As per the Jain cosmology, there are 63 illustrious persons who have been conferred the title of Salakapurusara who appear during each half-time cycle. The deeds of these 63 illustrious persons have been compiled in Jain history. The Salakapurusara are classified into 24 Tirthankaras, 12 Chakravartin, 9 Balabhadras, 9 Vasudevas, and 9 Prati-Vasudevas. The origin of Salakapurusara begin with the Tirthankaras. The Jain religion accepts Krishna as one of the nine Vasudevas. Tirthankaras are placed in the top of the Salakapurusara hierarchy, however, Krishna does not constitute the top of that hierarchy. As per Jain religion, Tirthankara are teachers and compilers of the Jain philosophy. Neminatha is recognized as the twenty-second Tirthankara in Jainism. The Jain sources recognizes Krishna as a cousin of. Each half-cycle has nine sets of Balabhadras, Vasudevas, and Prati-Vasudevas. The Balabhadras and Vasudevas are a class of two-mighty half-brothers who appear nine times in each half-cycle of the Jain cosmology to slay the Prati-Vasudevas like Ravana, Jarasandha, etc. Balarama, Krishna, and Jarasandha come under the ninth class of Balabhadra, Vasudeva, and Prati-Vasudeva.

2.12 REFERENCES IN ANCIENT TAMIL LITERATURE

2.12.1 KALITTHOKAI

The Kalitthokai is the sixth book in the Sangam period Tamil Literature. According to this literature, a forest fire occurs. An elephant is saving its herd from the flames emerging from dry bamboo. This incident is compared to the Lakshagriha episode of the Mahabharata. According to Kalitthokai, the eldest son of the

blind king tried to kill the five kings who were famous throughout the world. The eldest son did so by burning the house of wax in which the five kings were present. According to the poem, the five kings escaped the house unarmed. Here, the five kings mentioned are the Pandavas. The blind king mentioned here is Dhritarashtra. The eldest son of the blind king mentioned here is Duryodhana. The Kalitthokai refers a battle between an elephant and tiger. Here, the poet compares the battle between the elephant and the tiger to the battle between Duryodhana and Bhima.

2.12.2 PERUMPANARRUPPATAI

Perumpanarruppatai is an ancient Tamil poem of Sangam literature. The poem is said to have been composed around 190-200 CE, while the poem is originally from the 2nd century. The poem contains references to the five heroes having well-decorated chariots who never lost a war. The poem states that they have destroyed hundred in battle. Therefore, we can interpret that the Perumpanarruppatai addresses the five Pandavas who destroyed a hundred Kauravas in the Kurukshetra war.

2.12.3 SILAPPADIKARAM

Silappadikaram is one of the greatest Tamil epics of ancient Sangam literature. Silappadikaram is authored by Ilango Adigal. Silappadikaram was probably composed in 2nd century CE. Silappadikaram corresponds with the Mahabharata narrative that the Chera king took upon the responsibility of feeding the armies during the Kurukshetra war. The Silappadikaram references the burning of the Khandava forest by Arjuna. The Silappadikaram states that "*the burning of Kantavanam by Arjuna, who has the flag of the monkey.*" This corresponds with the Bhagavad Gita which states the flag of Hanuman resided on Arjuna's chariot.

2.12.4 KRISHNA IN SANGAM LITERATURE

Krishna has been referenced in the Sangam literature with various names like Mayon, Mayavan, etc. The name of Thirumal is also another name for Mayon, which means a deity of black or dark complexion. This corresponds with the way how Krishna is traditionally depicted. Krishna is traditionally associated with dark or black. The Natrinai is an ancient Tamil classic poem which was likely composed somewhere between 100-300 CE. This poetic work is attributed to various authors instead of just one author and is considered to be a compilation of various poetic works. Natrinai compares Balarama's complexion with that of the bright waterfalls of a hill. Here, the poet indicates that Balarama's color is as bright as the waterfalls. This poem also compares Krishna's complexion with the slopes of a hill. Here, the poet indicates that Krishna's color is dark like the slopes of a hill. The Kalitthokai as mentioned above identifies Thirumal as the one who is victorious in battles and possesses a golden discus. In the Mahabharata, it is stated that Krishna possessed the discus. This discus was used as a weapon by Krishna. The Paripatal is an ancient Tamil classic poem like the Natrinai which was believed to have been composed in 3rd or 4th century CE. The Paripatal references that Thirumal had an image of Garuda etched on his flag. This corresponds with the Mahabharata where the image of Garuda is etched on the flag of Krishna. The ancient Tamil literature references Dwaraka city. Tamil literature refers Dwaraka as Tuvarai. The Puranuru is an ancient Tamil poetic work that is a collection of various poems. These poems are dated to the time period between 2nd and 5th century CE. Although, some of the poems in the Puranuru can be dated to 1st century BCE as well. In the Puranuru, King Irungovel of the Velir clan is considered to be the forty-ninth descendant from Dwaraka. As per the Puranuru, the Velirs ruled the city of Tuvarai (Dwaraka) in the past. Iravatham Mahadevan proposes that the Velirs could be descendants from the branch of the Yadavas, who migrated from Dwaraka to Tamil country. Mahadevan contrastingly compares between the Pancaviras and *aim-perum-velirs*. The aim-perum-velirs are identified as five great Velir chiefs described in Sangam literature. Similarly, we have seen how five Yadavas were glorified in north India. Earlier in this study, we had looked upon the Pancavira Vrsnis referred in the Mora-well inscriptions. The various references in Sangam literature, along with the various Tamil literary works shows that the Mahabharata was also renowned in Tamil country as well.

2.13 LITERARY REFERENCES AND EVIDENCE

2.13.1 PANINI

Panini was a renowned Sanskrit grammarian and scholar variously dated between 7th and 4th century BCE. Panini is revered for his piece of writing on Sanskrit grammar known as the “Astadhyayi”. Panini is widely known as the “Father of Indian linguistics”. The Astadhyayi directly references Krishna and the Mahabharata. The Astadhyayi (4.3.104) directly references the “disciples of Vaisampayana”. Vaisampayana was a disciple of Veda Vyasa and was one of the original narrators of the Mahabharata. As per Astadhyayi (4.1.114), it refers to “Those belonging to the race of Andhaka, Vrsni, and Kuru.” We know that Krishna belonged to the Vrsni race. We also know that the Pandavas and the Kauravas belonged to the Kuru dynasty. In Astadhyayi (6.2.38), Panini refers to the word “Mahabharata”. From this we can know that the Mahabharata was renowned even at the time when Panini lived that is the time period between 7th and 4th century BCE. In Astadhyayi (8.3.95), Panini refers to the name “Yudhisthira” who was the eldest among the five Pandavas.

2.13.2 PATANJALI

Patanjali was a sage who lived in ancient India. Several estimates based on the analysis of Patanjali’s works proposes that he lived during the time period between 2nd century BCE and 4th century CE. Patanjali is the author of various Sanskrit works. The most prominent of his works is the “Yoga Sutras”. The Yoga Sutras is a compilation of various synthesized and organized knowledge about Yoga which Patanjali gathered. The “Mahabhasya” is also another renowned work of Patanjali which majorly focuses on Sanskrit grammar and linguistics. The Mahabhasya is a commentary on the previously mentioned Astadhyayi of Patanjali. The Mahabhasya contains several references to Krishna and the Mahabharata. In Yoga Sutra (3.2.11), Patanjali mentions about the killing of Kamsa in the hands of Krishna. In Yoga Sutra (4.1.14), Patanjali mentions about Kunti and Gandhari. In the Mahabharata, Kunti is the mother of the Pandavas and Gandhari is the mother of the Kauravas. In Yoga Sutra (4.1.114), Patanjali refers to Ugrasena, Vasudeva, Baladeva, Nakula, Sahadeva, and Bhima. From the Mahabharata, we know that Ugrasena is the grandfather of Krishna. Vasudeva is another name for Krishna. Baladeva is another name for Krishna’s brother Balarama. Nakula, Sahadeva, and Bhima are three amongst the five Pandavas.

2.13.3 CHANAKYA’S ARTHASHASTRA

Chanakya is a renowned Indian polymath. Along with being a renowned polymath, Chanakya was also an author, strategist, philosopher, economist, jurist, and politician. Chanakya is said to have lived from 375 to 283 BCE. Chanakya’s most prominent work is his treatise on ancient India’s polity known as the “Arthashastra”. Chanakya was also a counselor and advisor to Chandragupta Maurya. Chandragupta Maurya was the founder of the Mauryan empire. A certain statement in the Arthashastra reads “An expert gambler wins a victory like Jayatsena and Duryodhana”. From this statement, we can interpret that Chanakya viewed Duryodhana as a great gambler. From the “Game of Dice” episode in the Mahabharata, it is known that Duryodhana employed the help of his maternal uncle Shakuni to play a game of dice on behalf of the Kauravas, against Yudhisthira who represented the Pandavas. Chanakya further continues stating “of the two parties, one has to suffer from defeat, as is well known from the history of Nala and Yudhisthira”. We know from the Mahabharata that Duryodhana suffered defeat in the Kurukshetra war, largely because he was not willing to give the Pandavas a portion of the kingdom. Chanakya also addresses the episode of the Mahabharata where the Yadavas had to face their decline due to a curse given by a group of sages. Chanakya also mentions amongst the sages who cursed the Yadavas, Krishna Dvaipayana Veda Vyasa was also one of them. “Chanakya Niti” is a collection of aphorisms authored by Chanakya. In Chanakya Niti (12.5), Chanakya reveres devotion towards Krishna.

2.13.4 PANCHATANTRA

Panchatantra is a collection of ancient Sanskrit fables revolving around animals. It is estimated that the Panchatantra is dated to around 200 BCE, although the fables could be even more ancient than 200 BCE. As of this point, the author of the Panchatantra is unknown, however, the Panchatantra has mostly been attributed to Vishnu Sharma and Vasubhaga. The Panchatantra is perceived as a Hindu text. The Mahabharata comprises of several passages depicting animal fables. Similarly, Panchatantra refers to

certain events from the Mahabharata. The Panchatantra references the “Burning of the lac-house” episode of the Mahabharata. The Panchatantra also states, “The saintly poet Vyasa has sung the entry of the Pandu princes into Virata’s court.” The Mahabharata describes the 13-year exile of the Pandavas. The Pandavas had to stay hidden during their last year of exile. The Pandavas remained incognito in Virata during their last year of exile. If they failed to stay hidden during their last year of exile, then they will have to repeat another 13 years of exile. The Panchatantra also references another incident from the Mahabharata. The Panchatantra states, “Foes indestructible by might are slain through some deceptive gesture, As Bhima strangled Kichaka, approaching him in woman’s vesture.” The Mahabharata mentions the death of Kichaka in the hands of Bhima. Since the Panchatantra references these many instances from the Mahabharata, we can interpret that the stories of the Mahabharata existed during 200 BCE or even before that.

3. Conclusion

I had undertaken this research purely due to my fascination with the story of the Mahabharata. The Mahabharata is one such epic which entails all human emotions. I truly stand with my belief that the Mahabharata is the greatest piece of literature out there to understand human psychology. Through this study, I aimed to cover all those aspects which could to a greater extent prove that the Mahabharata is more than a myth and there definitely is a kernel of truth to it. The various evidence laid out in this study prove that the Mahabharata cannot be a myth. This study is in my view a very fundamental study as there is so much to be uncovered regarding the historicity of the Mahabharata. There is still scope for many more excavations and research to be undertaken. I hope this study will prove to be an inspiration for many more researchers and scholars to uncover the truths about ancient India since we have just scratched the surface and there is still many more left to explore. With that I would like to conclude by thanking my family for standing by me in this journey. I owe it all to them.

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