

934
D814k

Drekmeier, Charles, Kinship and Community in Early India. Stanford University Press, Stanford, Calif. 1962

p. 131 The bulk of the Mahabharata, the "fifth Veda," is a collection of legends of the northwest, and especially the Punjab - India's holy land. The Ramayana contains the stories of the northeastern kingdoms. But here the legends were rewritten by one man, the poet Valmiki, who played a role analogous to that of Homer. The Ramayana contributes little to political theory, though it does dwell on the need for government and the misery and misfortune that result from its absence. The work recounts the exploits of one of the incarnations of Vishnu, the indefatigable hero Rama, who is depicted as bringing civilization to the benighted aborigines. Macdonell believed that Ramayana II-IV antedate the Mahabharata in its epic form. And there is little doubt that the first and last of the seven books of the narrative are later in composition than the others. But because the Rama legend presumably relates to the Aryan invasion of South India, we are probably not justified in concluding that it is an earlier work than the Mahabharata on the grounds that the setting of the latter seems to indicate that Aryan civilization had extended over a broader area and the culture had become less homogeneous than that described in the Ramayana. It can be said, however, that in their final form the Mahabharata and the Ramayana were approximately contemporaneous.

p.132

The Mahabharata is frequently more secular than religious in tone; the work had its origin in lays composed to commemorate the deeds of a great warrior and may have been connected in some way with the royal sacrifice. Many of the incidents go far back into the remote Vedic period. Transition from one story to another is often confused and awkward. These lays were later worked over by the priests, who expanded the meaning of the ballads, linked them together with prose narration, and interpolated treatises on ethical and theological problems. The major brahman modifications and additions probably date from about the second and first centuries B.C. A considerable part of the rajadharma portion of the Shantiparva, which shares so much with the dharmashastra texts, belongs to the first centuries A.D. Many of the peoples mentioned could not have been known to the Indians before this time. And some of the practices referred to in the epic suggest certain quasi-feudal institutions of Gupta times. But a large portion of the epic predates the apotheosis of the knight Arjuna, which would make it earlier than the time of the grammarian Pānini, who lived in the fourth century B.C. The mythology of the Mahabharata may in some respects be more ancient than the Rigveda itself.

p. 132

. . . These words, and those recounting the rivalries of the two noble houses and the adventures of Yudhishtira (Yudhishtira), add up to a narrative bulk eight times the size of the Iliad and Odyssey combined. . .

p. 132

Hopkins many years ago concluded that the original narrative core of the epic is impossible to isolate from the later mythical and moralistic accretions,⁴ and few present-day students of the Mahabharata would question this judgment.

Several years before Hopkins' commentary on the epic, Dahlmann argued that the work must be analyzed in terms of both narrative and didactic components, but he concluded that the story of the great battle had been made the vehicle of a moral lesson by a diaskaenast sometime in the later Brahmanic period - and went so far as to suggest that the engagement between the Kauravas and Pandavas may never have taken place.⁵ Fifty years earlier, Holtzman had advanced the theory that at first the Kauravas were the representation of virtue, and that traces of this earlier moral superiority remain, giving the epic a tone of moral ambiguity.⁶

**

4 Hopkins, 182

6 Holtzmann, 180

5 Dahlmann, 80