

In conclusion it can be said that according to Vālmiki there is no fixed or unalterable dharma. The inner voice of man and the intelligence of a person must discern what is good or bad and hence Rāma's dharma is placed far above love and hatred, even above justice and unfairness. In order to abide by it, he must allow injustice and if necessary, the killing of Bāli and Śambhuka. Rāma thinks they had both violated the śāstras and he follows his kingly dharma by punishing the guilty. For Vālmiki dharma is an inner moral order rather than a mass of external rituals preserved and observed by people. There is no doubt that Vālmiki clearly says: '*Dharmasāramidam jagat*' (Araṇya Kāṇḍa: VIII. 26) (dharma is the eternal essence of the universe). It is at the same time a dynamic pragmatic principle changing according to time and space in its content, even as it abides in the form which makes it a thing of enduring value.

### **Dharma in *Mahābhārata***

*Mahābhārata* is a long continuous narrative (stories within stories) which deals with war. Initially Indian sacred texts like *Veda* and *Rāmāyaṇa* dealt with war between the divine and the demonic and the narration moved in a linear fashion. With the change in the social structure at the time of *Mahābhārata*, man became important. Now the wars are not fought between gods and demons but between equals. They are fought between men who are not only of the same royal clan but cousins known as Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas, over the question of succession to the throne.

As said earlier *Mahābhārata* is mythical history. Myths are stories woven around an archetype, an idea and an original model. So the stories are both primordial and eternal; they are indefinitely old as they are forever new. The *Purāṇas* have, therefore, self-renewing and eternalising aspects which appeal to the Indian mind.

The core content of *Mahābhārata* is dharma. It is the sustaining principle of life. It is also duty, morality, virtue. However, with the passing of time, the pragmatic aspect of dharma is also added to this normative order, opening up new horizons in our understanding of it. The author Vyāsa (also known as Vedavyāsa) uses the metaphor of a tree to explain dharma to the members of the clan or the ruling family of the warrior caste. The tree of *manyu*, dark anger and evil belongs to the Kauravas and the other, which is the tree of dharma, virtue and ethics belongs to the Pāṇḍavas. These two trees together constitute one massive tree which grows out of a seed and grows with its roots spreading underground and its branches spreading in every direction. This conceptualisation of *Mahābhārata* as a tree signifies one thing — all the matter within this epic is organically related, and is one totality. Nothing is grafted from outside.

The tree of the *Mahābhārata* is inspired by the upside-down imperishable Aśvattha tree, which has its roots upward and branches downward, and which has to be chopped down again and again. But the question is why does this tree have to be chopped down. The *Bhagavad Gītā* (considered to be the quintessence of Hinduism, it is a famous