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“Man as a Debtor”: Introduction to the Problem (on the Material of the Mahabharata)

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Abstract

Based on the ancient Indian epos The Mahabharata, this paper analyzes the idea according to which man is born an obligor. Man, in accordance with the provisions of Brahmanism, is burdened from birth with four basic duties – “duty to the gods”, “duty to the ancestors”, “duty to the sages”, “duty to people”. This thinking is part of the ancient Indian culture and largely determines its nature and specificity. The text of the Mahabharata for the most part is of a didactic nature, full of calls for the fulfillment of “one’s duty”, which is understood mainly as debt obligations related to the varna position of a person. These debts have a socio-political, religious and moral character and do not have a direct bearing on economic relations in society. Thus, each varna must perform a strictly defined circle of duties, ensuring the functioning of society on the whole. The article is concerned with a concept that is central in the ancient Indian religious and mythological worldview – dharma, which is directly connected with the idea of man as a debtor. The Mahabharata contains several words to clarify the “state of duty” of a person – dharma, ṛṇa, “indebted person” - ṛṇin, vrata, kārya. The relationship between the “four debts” and the “four stages of life” is investigated. The “state of being indebted” obtained from their birth is revealed to man through “the system of duties” at different stages of life. Dharma as a debt is also found in the doctrine of the “three life goals” (trivarga). It is concluded that for a person of ancient Indian culture, life outside the “debt system” is completely undesirable since their fulfilment leads to the path the goal of which is “liberation” (moksa).

Keywords: The Mahabharata, duty, dharma, indebted man, varna, ashrama, samsara, moksa.

"El hombre como deudor": Introducción al problema (sobre el material del Mahabharata)

Resumen

Basado en los antiguos epos indios El Mahabharata, este artículo analiza la idea según la cual el hombre nace obligado. El hombre, de acuerdo con las disposiciones del brahmanismo, está cargado desde el nacimiento con cuatro deberes básicos: "deber a los dioses", "deber a los antepasados", "deber a los sabios", "deber a las personas". Este pensamiento es parte de la antigua cultura india y determina en gran medida su naturaleza y especificidad. El texto del Mahabharata en su mayor parte es de naturaleza didáctica, lleno de llamados al cumplimiento del "deber de uno", que se entiende principalmente como obligaciones de deuda relacionadas con la posición varna de una persona. Estas deudas tienen un carácter sociopolítico, religioso y moral y no tienen una relación directa con las relaciones económicas en la sociedad. Por lo tanto, cada varna debe realizar un círculo de deberes estrictamente definido, asegurando el funcionamiento de la sociedad en general. El artículo se refiere a un concepto que es central en la antigua cosmovisión religiosa y mitológica india: el dharma, que está directamente relacionado con la idea del hombre como deudor. El Mahabharata contiene varias palabras para aclarar el "estado del deber" de una persona: dharma, ṛṇa, "persona endeudada": ṛṇin, vrata, kārya. Se investiga la relación entre las "cuatro deudas" y las "cuatro etapas de la vida". El "estado de endeudamiento" obtenido desde su nacimiento se revela al hombre a través del "sistema de deberes" en diferentes etapas de la vida. El Dharma como deuda también se encuentra en la doctrina de los "tres objetivos de la vida" (trivarga). Se concluye que para una persona de la antigua cultura india, la vida fuera del "sistema de la deuda" es completamente indeseable, ya que su cumplimiento conduce al camino cuyo objetivo es la "liberación" (moksa).

Palabras clave: El Mahabharata, deber, dharma, hombre endeudado, varna, ashrama, samsara, moksa.

1. INTRODUCTION

Debt as an ethical problem has a long history in Western philosophy, starting with the ancient Greek philosophers (Zeno of Citium, Democritus and others) [19, p.119]. It is known that in ancient India, especially during the formation of philosophical thought, which also incorporates the process of formalizing *the Mahabharata* [2, p.113], theoretical reflections on ethical problems have not been attested. The problems that can be described as moral are one of the main for the heroes of the epic, but the ancient Indians did not know ethics as the science of morality [16, p. 38]. V. K. Shokhin prefers to use the term “moral consciousness” to explain such a historical situation which encompasses all the norms and rules that are reflected in traditions and customs [16, p.32]. Thus, in relation to ancient Indian reality, it is more correct to mention about rectitude (morality) and the components of moral consciousness, but not about ethics and ethical categories.

In this study, we will address a problem that is directly related to the formation and development of moral consciousness in ancient Indian culture – this is the idea of man as a debtor in religious, social, political and moral terms.

Resorting to the ancient Indian epic *The Mahabharata* to describe and analyze the ideas about man as a debtor, it should be

noted that this is not a study of the ethical category of debt since, we note again, its theoretical understanding is absent in ancient India.

According to *The Mahabharata*, man is born as being indebted, and his whole life should be directed towards returning debts (The Mahabharata I. 220. 11-14). This is primarily about socio-political and religious duties, which, of course, include a moral moment. The importance of returning debts for heroes can hardly be overestimated, which makes one argue about the role of such requirements for the society of that time. For example, S. L. Neveleva concludes that “the ideological attitude of Mbh is the preaching of dharma as a religious duty that determines not only the life of an individual and society on the whole, but also the existence of the universe” [13, p. 38].

When exploring the worldview of a society during the period of the formation of the epic, it is important to remember that moral requirements have not yet stood out in a separate moral sphere, and therefore, speaking of duty, we will always mean a complex of meanings. The ancient Indian society is traditional, and *the Mahabharata* is the Indian epic, the oldest basis of which is the heroic layer [2, p.298]. Therefore, we will draw attention to the conclusion of MacIntyre that “... morality and social structure in a heroic society are one and the same thing. There is only one set of social bonds. Morality as a separate entity does not yet exist. Evaluation questions are questions of social fact” [10, p. 169]. Thus, in ancient India of *the Mahabharata* period, one cannot speak of purely moral categories.

This means that people of Ancient India did not know purely moral problems since the solution to any question that, from our point

of view, could be called moral, was connected with its religious and socio-political contexts. The main role in the regulation of human behavior in ancient India belonged to *dharma*. *Dharma* can be defined as a religious and socio-moral mechanism that developed within the framework of Vedic mythology, Brahmanism, socio-political conditions of that time and the moral consciousness of ancient Indian society. Therefore, morality (moral consciousness) is part of the whole, which is *dharma*. L.N. Rangarajan points to the fact that “*Dharma* not only signifies an absolute and immutable concept of righteousness but also includes the idea of duty which every human being owes to oneself, to one’s ancestors, to society as a whole and to universal order” [25, p.1].

Here it is worth mentioning that a sense of duty [11, p. 134] is the most important sense for the development of society, the presence of which determines the implementation of certain rules (religious, moral, social, etc.) without external (legal) coercion (in the sense of rule, law), although their violation did not have huge visible consequences, but at the same time, their massive regular violation could result in serious structural changes in society.

Thus, a sense of duty is that internal coercion, the presence of certain internal requirements, formed under the influence of that social space with its specificity, which manifests itself most in the fields of culture (religion and morality). The whole system of training and education should be oriented towards making personal world views that will determine one in one’s actions within the framework of the existing so-called “debt system”.

Debt system in a society is a system of “debt” relations of a given society; this concept can be used to reflect the functioning of debt at different levels of public life. Of course, “debt system” is incorporated in other larger systems, such as, for example, religion. Debt system is a certain mode of social life, one might say, the debt mode of society.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

The object of this study is the ancient Indian idea of man as a debtor.

When studying the text of *The Mahabharata*, we used a phenomenological methodology, which made it possible to fruitfully apply the descriptive method to the primary sources. A hermeneutic approach was used to better understand the ideological content of *The Mahabharata*. Historical-philosophical, historical-genetic and contextual analyses were also applied.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

For Indian culture, everything that “must” is comprehended in the concept of *dharma*, it is so capacious that it can replace “must” and how to return the debt. Life according to *dharma* is life according to the ideal.

A very important point for understanding the characteristics of the ancient Indian culture as a whole is what can be described as an idea of the ideal way to recover a debt. This method is an ideal, norm, model of behavior, lifestyle. Here, duty and ideal (social, religious, political, cultural, etc.) coincide. According to Durkheim, “The main social phenomena: religion, morality, law, economics, aesthetics, are the essence of nothing more than value systems, therefore, these are ideals” [5, p. 302].

Debt system in Ancient India is part of the religious space of Brahmanism and emerging Hinduism. We find representations of a person’s duty to the death god Yama in *The Atharva Veda* (Atharva Veda VI, 117), and to the ancestors in *The Rig Veda* (Rig Veda VI, 61). The conceptions of man as one being indebted are part of the religious and mythological picture of the world of Ancient India.

“The transformation of chaos into space is the main meaning of mythology, and space from the very beginning includes a value and ethical aspect” [12, p. 169]. It is this reason that underlies the persistence with which the ancient sages demand the observance of all the rules of profane and sacral life. If one daily observes the norms and rules received from the ancestors, it is possible to preserve the stability of the structure of the world as a whole, otherwise chaos leading to death. Such worldview being sensitive to violations of long-established customs was formed under the influence of the economic structure of ancient societies when a person had to resist nature, which “in violation” of the expected weather conditions could spring unpleasant surprises (heat, drought, etc.). On the one hand, nature is a symbol of

repeatability, but on the other, it is always fraught with danger of breaking a predetermined rhythm, which forces man to help preserve order through one's actions. To do it, man possessed the two main categories of means: 1) economic; 2) customs, traditions, standards of living, ceremonies. All spheres of nature, according to the religious-mythological world image, are "divided" between the gods who support them, but to do it, they need "strength and motivation", which in many ways are human actions (sacrifices, etc.) Therefore, in ancient India, man was born as being indebted, as if he was supposed to be indebted in advance since he was born in an orderly world (arranged "for him" by previous generations of people and gods) and because of this he was obliged to pay back his debts, and thereby, contribute to preservation of the universe.

Living in accordance with "debt system" in ancient Indian society is a part of the process of endowing the world with meaning. In accordance with this, one can cite the comments by A. McIntyre, "Each individual has a missing within the framework of a well-defined and highly determined system of roles and statuses. ... In such society, man knows what he is, because he knows his role in these structures, and, therefore, he also knows what he owes to those who perform other roles and has a different status, and what they owe to him" [10, p.167]. According to A. K. Baiburin, "the traditional behavior program claims to provide patterns for all occasions. In reality, with their help, only those aspects of activity considered to be the most significant for the existence of the collective are regulated" [1, p.15].

The main content of the epic was created under the influence of the emerging orthodox Brahmin religious and philosophical tradition (tradition of *astics*), which found expression in the views of the schools of Sankhya and Yoga widely represented in the text. There are also the views, usually discussed, of the so-called *nastiks*, who reject the teachings of Brahmanism (Buddhism, Jainism, charvaka-lokayata, etc.) [17, p.40].

Returning to the modern understanding of duty, we give a dictionary definition, according to which, “duty” is one of the main categories of ethics, which “means morally reasoned coercion to act, moral necessity to be fixed as a subjective principle of behavior” [14, p.686]. J. Duncan and M. Derrett in their study *The concept of Duty in Ancient Indian Jurisprudence: The Problem of Ascertainment* define duty in the following way, “The word ‘duty’ is now defined as ‘action, or an act, that is due by moral or legal obligation; that which one ought or is bound to do’” [21, p.18]. But, exploring the problem of debt in *The Mahabharata*, it is important to recall that we are talking not so much about moral duty, but about debt, which is determined by religious and mythological ideas, social (varn-caste) structure and, of course, moral consciousness. Thus, our study is aimed at understanding what it means to “owe” in a period that is reflected in the epic *The Mahabharata*.

Of course, the ancient Indian spiritual tradition of *The Mahabharata* period does not attempt to define “duty”, but at the same time, “situations of duty” are of paramount importance for the heroes of the epic. It is worth mentioning that when exploring the idea of

what a person's duty is in ancient Indian society, we should always remember that duty is an element, part of a more complex whole – *dharma*. We will not find the appeals to perform duty outside the context of the *dharma* teaching in *The Mahabharata*. Thus, in the ancient Indian tradition, the concept of duty finds expression in one of the main modes of the broad meaning of the word *dharma* and in other more specific words.

The word *dharma* is most often translated as “duty” in various contexts, or it may remain completely untranslated when its meaning is beyond the scope of a specific meaning. The word *dharma* in the Russian edition of *The Mahabharata* is most often translated as “duty”. J.A.B. van Buitenen translates it as “law” [27, p. xii].

C. Ramanathan mentions that “The epic is replete with the use of Dharma in various senses as, ‘conduct’, ‘duty’, ‘virtue’, essences or nature of a thing...” [25, p. 97]. The same is argued by A. Kunst, “The concept of duty is a part of the totality of the idea of *dharma*, if by the sense and performance of duty is understood such behavior and series of actions as are inherent in the beings endowed with *dharma*” [23, p. 5].

According to *The Mahabharata*, we have several words to clarify the state of being indebted – *dharma*, *ṛṇa*, an indebted person – *ṛṇin*, *vrata*, *kārya*.

The word *ṛṇa* is rendered as “duty”, “indebted person” - *ṛṇin*. If we are talking about duty to a mentor, then this is *gurvartha*. Also, the word *vrata* means “law”, “lifestyle”, “vow”, etc., it can be used to convey the meaning – “state of duty” in family or social life, for

example, *pativrata* (Mahabharata III.60.14, III .222.8) – “matrimonial duties” or fidelity to the husband, “female duty”. When it comes to duty as a concrete matter, it is *kārya*, in the translation “work”, “business”, “responsibility”, “intention”, “goal”, etc.). But there is also *kārya anuttama* – “the supreme duty”, which, for example, indicates the debt of Arjuna to Shakra (Indra), when he (Arjuna) being alive had to launch to the heaven, to the world of Indra (Mahabharata III.164.33). “The duty of hospitality” is *atithi dharma* (Mahabharata III.250.9).

The desired state for man is “freedom from debt”, that is, *anṛṇa* or *ṛṇa mukta* (literally “freed from debt”) (Mahabharata III. 82.109).

The main leitmotif of *The Mahabharata* is the performance of *the Kshatriya duty* – the protection of citizens, battle and death in battle (Mahabharata VII.102.49; IX.3.10). In the epos, the situation of performing a duty is complicated by the fact that the battle will be with the related family of Kauravas, although, in the name of protecting the honor and dignity of the Pandavas. In the process of revealing the plot of *The Mahabharata*, the theme of duty is revealed in various spheres of life, thereby proving and showing the need to perform duty at all costs, which can be described as one of the main ideas of the Bhagavadgita.

Thus, the problem of duty is dominant for this epic, although it is comprehended mainly at the religious level, but with a philosophical implication [15, p. 35-66]. For example, Yudhisthira (the king of the Pandavas, the incarnation of god Dharma) asks dying Bhishma (the grandfather of the Pandavas and Kauravas, the incarnation of god

Dyaus) about what is “goodness”. The very formulation of the question can be interpreted as an attempt to comprehend the philosophical aspect of the problem (the essence of goodness), especially since the philosophical teaching of the Sankhya Yoga school is widely covered in the epos. Bhishma’s answer reflects the Vedic idea of the need to preserve the world order by human efforts – “Performance of duty is goodness here and in the next world” (Mahabharata XII.292.6). And also in *Karnaparva*, Krishna instructs Arjuna, “Dharma is called so because it is a support, dharma supports the living. Everything related to the maintenance of (the existing) is, without a doubt, dharma” (Mahabharata VIII.49.50-56). Tracing this understanding in the text, we can note the connection between the life of an individual person (microcosmos) and the universe (macrocosmos), including gods and all semi-divine beings (Mahabharata I.154.1-10) [6, p. 24]. The legendary king, Yayati, in *Adiparva* says, “By the power of my virtue, the heaven and the earth exist, and the fire also burns among people” (Mahabharata I.88.24). It’s about *dharma*.

It bears repeating that the Sanskrit term *dharma* in the context of *The Mahabharata* is often translated as “duty”, which corresponds to its semantic content in religious and religious-philosophical subjects, and even more so when it comes to *ksatra-dharma*, more associated with the military-political activities of the Varna Kshatriyas. Therefore, when various sages preach and clarify the paramount importance of “Dharma-duty”, they imply a belief that goes back to the Vedic period in the need to preserve the world order through

human actions, such as sacrifice, studying sacred texts, observing caste norms and duties and procreation (Mahabharata III 154.1-10).

The Adiparva of *The Mahabharata* explains that man is born as being indebted (*rñina*) (Mahabharata I.220.11-14). “People are born on earth, bound by four duties [*rñaiṣ caturbhiḥ*], which must be given to their ancestors, gods, sages and (other) people ...” (Mahabharata I.111.12). That is, “duty to the ancestors” is *pitrya rña*, “duty to the gods” is *deva rña*, “duty to the sages” (mentors – *gurus*) is *rṣi rña* and “duty to people” is *manuja rña*. A person carries out these duties with religious rites (sacrifices for the gods), abstained life (asceticism for the wise) and posterity (sons for ancestors). And also, further – “Gods are gratified with sacrifices, hermits – with reading the Vedas and repentance, ancestors – with sons and commemoration offerings, and (the rest) of people – with kindness” (Mahabharata I.111.14).

Indebted person is a part of the ancient Indian cosmos in which the law “action → result (*phala*, i.e. *fruit*)”, that is, the *karmic law* [22, p. 38-60]. In accordance with the doctrine of *samsara* [18, p.183-184], person is an imperfect state, framed the mistakes of previous births taking into account, therefore, the very fact of birth in the form of “man” already gives the right to consider him as one who is sinful. But at the same time, birth in the state of being human is desirable and difficult to achieve since it is this state that makes it possible to achieve liberation and therefore it is especially “sinful” to neglect it (Mahabharata XII.299.33-35). The true desire of a person should be the desire for a perfect state and, as a result, for liberation from the bonds of *samsara* (Mahabharata XII 299. 13), which cannot be

achieved without paying debts. The state of being human is something that needs improvement.

All the “four debts” of man are aimed at maintaining “his” level of the universe - divine, ascetic, the level of preserving the connection between generations (traditions) and the social.

A. Daniélou states: “Duty to the gods” is the proper performance of sacrificial rites, the praise of the gods, on whom, according to the conceptions dating back to the Vedic period, *the cosmic order* depends. Daniélou A. notes: “Des dieux, il a reçu le monde, il place qu’il y occupe et tout le système don’t il fait partie, ainsi que l’ordre social, image de l’ordre cosmique que régissent les lois divines” [20, p. 106].

So, for example, the first book of *The Mahabharata*, *The Adiparva*, places the highest value on explaining the need to perform the “duty to the ancestors” (*pitrya ṛṇa*), even for those who have chosen the path of hermitry and chastity. They find themselves unable to take advantage of the fruits of their asceticism due to their lack of descendants. The following tradition is given to explain why even the great ascetics need to repay their ancestors. The great Rishi, Jaratkaru, wandering, meets his ancestors, punished for his not having his posterity. They instruct him, “Neither the fruits of virtue nor the ascetic feats do not reach the path along which those who have sons walk here” (Mahabharata I.13.21). The sages almost directly declare that sons are the support of the kin and traditions – “Sons devoted to religion, upholding the law ... save their ancestors from hell”

(Mahabharata I. 69.19) [Mahabharata I.111.15, I.13.14-28, I.69.15-27, I.220.4-10, I.221.1-11, XIV.93.38-45].

The Adiparva is the only one of the eighteen books of *The Mahabharata* with confident persistence obliges to extend the clan, despite celibacy, which indicates the interweaving and contradiction of archaic ideas with the ideas of emerging religious and philosophical tendencies that deny the direct value of earthly happiness. But, the importance of procreation remains in the culture of India in the stable tradition of “four stages of life” (*cāturāśramās*) for the first three varnas.

The four stages of life (Mahabharata I 86.2-7) – *brahmacharya* (“discipleship”), *grhastha* (“life of a householder”), *vanaprastha* (“forest hermit”), *sannyasa* (“life of a wandering ascetic”) – should contribute to the realization of three or four goals life (*trivarga* or *chaturvarga*, or *purusartha* (literally “human purpose”)), according to the instructions of the sacred texts (Mahabharata XII.299.31).

During the period of “discipleship” (*brahmacharya*), a person pays “duty to a mentor” (sage) - *ṛṣi ṛṇa* or *gurvartha*. Repaying back this debt includes the disciple’s various responsibilities to teachers and certain behaviors (Mahabharata XII 242). *The Ashvamedhikaparva* sets out in detail everything necessary for the proper interaction between the disciple and his teacher. First of all, the disciple should take care of the goodness of the teacher, but not of his own. The disciple must be “devoted to truth and piety,” and eating food is possible only after the teacher permits (Mahabharata XIV 46.1-8).

Explaining the need to go through the four scales in the text of *the Mokshadharma* (Part XII of the *Santiparva* Book), the legendary king, Janaka, concludes, “So that the world does not split, so that karma does not break up. The ancients fulfilled the law of the four scales of life” (Mahabharata XII. 328.25).

Thus, the “state of being indebted” obtained from birth is revealed to a person through the “system of debts” at different stages of life, and, again, the most general concept for determining the state of debt is *dharma*. *Dharma* is a multi-level and multi-layered category of ancient Indian culture which has a semantic core – duty and rightness, ontologically entrenched, but at the same time, able to incorporate semantic shades that allow various religious, religious-philosophical and philosophical formations to adapt this category for their spiritual needs.

Within the framework of the traditional orthodox culture, which is represented by *The Mahabharata*, the term *dharma* in a broad sense is a set of rules and norms of spiritual and social life [4, p. 374.] The problem is that *dharma* in each particular case of use can have different meanings (as well as translation). For example, *dharma* as “moral law”, “law”, “duty”, “righteousness”, “virtue”, “justice”, “true path”, etc. In the Mahabharata, *dharma* is often translated as “duty”, which, in principle, meets the tasks of compilers of the text intended to give a clear orientation of a person’s life, where compliance with social and religious requirements comes first and, at the same time, a person understands his condition as “being ought to” which the world order “depends on”.

Therefore, it will be more correct to use in this case not just the concept of *dharma* but its more specific meaning “dharma-duty” which can also be clarified through understanding of “dharma-duty” as state or “path”, “destination”.

“Dharma-duty” is also manifested in the system of *trivarga*, i.e. “the three life goals” of the first three varnas – “*dharma* (“law”), *artha* (“benefit”), *kama* (“love”), and the fourth goal is subsequently added – *mokṣa*. Bhisma in *The Adiparva* explains, “He who turns his attention to law, benefit and love, to these three values, who acts in the right way, reflecting on each of (these) opposing things individually – on benefit leading to the repetition of benefit, on law leading to the repetition of law, and on love leading to the repetition of love, is wise” (Mahabharata I.99. 18-20). We are emphasizing at the fact that Bhisma stresses on the “repetition” of *trivars* in the world through the participation of each person, thereby affirming the need to maintain the world order through the joint efforts of all people, which becomes not only their life guidelines, but also the duty. Thus, the three groups of values and *mokṣa* are comprehended through obligation.

Dharma in *trivar* is first of all “duty” to one’s *varna*, for example *ksatra-dharma*. An individual’s debt is also referred to as *svadharma* or *svakarma* (that is, “one’s own duty” or “one’s own work”) (Mahabharata III 198.27; 198.30). “Facilitating sacrifices and teaching to Vedas are two of these duties and also accepting gifts – (*dharma*) of brahmanas, protection (of people) – the ksatriyas, concern for food – *dharma* of the vaisyas. Serving with the double-born is considered to be *dharma* of the sudras, who cannot accept charity,

make sacrificial offerings to the fire and take vows, but live with their patrons” (Mahabharata III.149.34-36). Thus, each Varna must fulfill a strictly defined circle of duties, ensuring the functioning of society as a whole (Mahabharata V. 130.28, VI.25.35). *Dharma* as the basis of all that is, a kind of “law” and laws, the adherence to which leads to *artha* and *kama*, and ultimately to “liberation” (*mokṣa*).

The Mahabharata again and again proves the paramount importance of performing the duty of Kshatriya for virtuous Pandavas, who sometimes begin to doubt its worthwhileness (Mahabharata VI. 24.31, VII.1.15) due to unwillingness to fight with relatives or friends who supported the opposite side of King Dhrtarastra and his sons (Kaurava). The compilers of the epic, showing the importance of duty for Kshatriya, thereby demonstrated the importance of “duty” (*svadharma*) for any other varna.

Usually, *artha* is understood as the accumulation and use of material wealth (Mahabharata III.34.35). The word *artha* is translated as “goal, benefit, gain, thing, wealth, business, need, etc.” [5, p. 70], which reflects mainly the material nature of this value. *Artha* corresponds to the status of the householder (*gṛhastha*). This group of values is most fully disclosed in Kautilla’s *The Arthashastra* (I-II centuries), where it is declared to be the most important, unlike *The Mahabharata*, where *dharma* is highlighted as “law” and “duty”.

And the third group of values is united by the concept of *kāma* and denotes “Satisfaction after one acquires worldly goods or satisfaction derived at touching them ...” (Mahabharata III.34.30).

According to *The Mahabharata*, the elements of *trivarga* must be balanced. If an imbalance occurs, then the results (*phala*) of the effort will not be achieved by man. Bhimasena’s speech reflects the traditional understanding of the interaction of the three groups of values, “Therefore, the wise never neglect either dharma or artha, for it is they that generate (blessings) of kama, like (a plate) of *arani* (generates) flame. Dharma always generates artha, while artha promotes dharma; ... The aspirant for artha (let) follow (the path) of high dharma, the king, aspiring to kama – (by the way) of artha; and only (the path) of kama does not lead to anything else” (Mahabharata III.34.28-32). Therefore, it is a kind of “moral” and socio-cultural ideal that takes into consideration all spheres of human life and thereby creates the potential for the harmonious development of society, where each of varnas carries out one’s “duty” (*dharma*) completely, following the four scales of life, balancing “*dharma, artha, kama*” and subsequently realizing *moksa* (“liberation”). That is why, when describing the “golden age” of *kṛtayuga*, the main feature is that each varna kept their dharma and went through the same ashramas, “leading a similar life, equal in knowledge, wisdom, power” (Mahabharata III.148.18), thus, creating a solid foundation for the existence of the universe, according to traditional ideas. By the way, *kṛta* (*kṛita-yuga*) is translated “done, fulfilled” [5, p. 170], which corresponds to the understanding of this *yuga* as perfect, in the meaning that it is a period of “fulfilled dharma”.

An important point in the desire to perform “your duty” (*dharma*), going through the four stages of life, realizing “*dharma*,

artha, kama and moksa” is the requirement of non-attachment to the result (*phala*) of actions. This is described in great detail in the famous *Bhagavad Gita*, which is part of *The Bhishmaparva* (Book VI of the Mahabharata) and also in *The Moksadharmā* (Mahabharata XII.299.38-38).

For example, Krishna instructs Arjuna, “Saying “That” without thinking of the fruit, various rituals of sacrifice and asceticism and giving rituals perform various exacting liberations” (Mahabharata VII.40.25). Also in *The Udyogaparva*, the sage Sanasujata speaks of those who crave for the fruits of their activities, that they will go to the worst worlds of Yama (Mahabharata V. 42.8). *The Moksadharmā* points to the fact that brahman must refuse to take the fruits of sacrifice, which ultimately leads to even more perfect fruits (Mahabharata XII.234.12).

The Moksadharmā is referred to the philosophical texts of *The Mahabharata*, therefore, the discussion of “duty” (*dharma*) is closely intertwined with the disclosure of the teachings of Sankhya. It is here that comprehension of *the higher Atman* and, as a result, “liberation”, appears to be the highest duty (Mahabharata XII.250.3-7).

One of the foundations of the teaching of Sankhya is the postulation of a causal relationship as having an ontological character, which completely excludes belief in fate and foresight. This idea was formed in Sankhya, but at an earlier time it was present in the belief that every effort brings its fruit [6, pp. 12-30]. That is why the performance of “dharma-duty” is of such great importance since the performance of virtuous acts and following religious norms will

necessarily lead to better consequences (“fruits”) (Mahabharata XII.292). Draupadi (the wife of the Pandavas) discusses the need for correct action, rejecting faith in chance and the other extreme – faith in fate (Mahabharata III.33.11-13). “Every fruit that ... is given to man ... is the fruit of their past deeds” (Mahabharata III.33.18). This is the karmic law (Mahabharata XII. 271.28). It is also claimed that the fruits of asceticism are gained in the higher worlds acquired after death (Mahabharata V.43.5).

In light of this, “liberation” (*moksa*), understood as *the highest dharma*, is liberation from actions, birth in this world. In *Moksadharma* we read, “For the sake of Liberation, one lives among (other) beings embodied, combined with the body” (Mahabharata XII.299.13). At the same time, to be born man is understood as “a difficult state” and, as a consequence, it is necessary to follow “dharma-duty”, supporting *dharma* as the law and foundation of the universe, and at the same time to reduce the imperfection of the world, achieving liberation (Mahabharata XII. 299.35). But the text contains conflicting statements about the finality of the state of liberation (Mahabharata XII.271.25-26).

The stage at which one achieves the fulfillment of the highest duty – *moksa* is the stage of *sannyā*. A person who has passed *ashrama of vanaprastha* (forest hermit), if one has the strength (more about this in Mahabharata XII.244.23), becomes a wandering hermit (*sannyāsin*), living on alms. Such person is distinguished by detachment from any affairs in this world, it is “a husband who has not been erred, indignant, who has rejected appetences, struggles”

(Mahabharata XII.244.29). *Sannyasin* refers to all beings, guided by *ahimsa* (ahimsa, “do not do harm to all living things”) and completely turns away from all worldly things, trying to move along this path in silence and complete loneliness, consciously avoiding any communication (Mahabharata XII. 245).

Moksa as the fourth goal, the stage of a *sannyasin*, is a kind of opposition to all previous scales and goals, where any activity, including the performance of rituals, is stopped, but there is a unifying moment – *dharma*. *Dharma* also signifies *trivarga* and *moksa* (Mahabharata XII. 271. 9). *Dharma* is a kind of common denominator, always remaining unchanged and constant in its essence, but a sufficiently plastic concept comprehending the moments that connect it with various views.

4. CONCLUSIONS

All of the aforesaid shows that the way the debt was presented, experienced and done (in aggregate – religious, social, political, economic, moral) in *The Mahabharat* is definitely what is designated as a custom [4, p.225].

As a result, we can conclude that *The Mahabharata* is a monument of thought that is conducive to the development of ideas about the due, where the main place is given to the concept of “dharma-duty”. Alongside with other components of Indian thought, the development of concepts about the due led to the formation of two

vectors, on the one hand, it is life being replete with activity, the fruits of which will become available only after death, on the other hand, this is the desire to overcome the worldly, the earthly, in order to arrive at the liberation with *the Divine Absolute* through overcoming the bonds of *samsara*.

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