

Mahabharata as a Document of Literary Art**Bhakti Bhabana Mishra**

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Abstract-

The dateless and deathless epic the Mahabharata occupies prime position among the valuable relics of old-world literature of India. It is loved with untiring love by the Hindus for it has kept alive through many centuries the sweet memories of the ancient heroes of the land. The Mahabharata is regarded as the store-house of political wisdom, the repository of philosophical doctrines and cosmogonic anecdotes, the container of religion, mythology, mysticism, ritualism, conduct of daily life, compendium of fairy tales and fables and at the same time a good specimen of literary art like its counterpart the Ramayana. It exercises tremendous influence in different forms and patterns of Sanskrit. Discussion of this literary work would help us to appreciate the supreme genius of the creative artist. Here we are required to recognize and analyses the component parts of the poetic art such as kavyas, natakas, riddles, lyrics, prose romances, fairy tales and fables and to see how far Vyasa has been successful in the attainment of poetical experience on such fields and evaluate the Mahabharata as a document of literary art.

Keywords-

Mahabharata, literary art, epic poetry, Vyasa, narrative structure, character development, Indian literature, Sanskrit epics, aesthetics, Fairy tales,

Introduction-

The Mahabharata, one of the greatest epics in world literature, transcends its religious and philosophical roots to stand as a monumental work of literary art. Attributed to the sage Vyasa, this Sanskrit epic not only serves as a historical and spiritual compendium but also displays a profound literary structure marked by narrative complexity, psychological depth, and aesthetic finesse. This paper explores the Mahabharata as a literary masterpiece, analyzing its storytelling techniques, character development, thematic complexity, use of poetic devices, and its lasting influence on world literature. By examining its structure and content, this paper highlights how the Mahabharata exemplifies the highest standards of classical literary composition. The Mahabharata is not merely an ancient Indian epic—it is a literary cosmos encapsulating the moral, philosophical, and existential dilemmas of human life. Comprising over 100,000 verses, it is the longest known epic poem and is traditionally attributed to the sage Vyasa. While it is often read for its religious significance, particularly the Bhagavad Gita, the Mahabharata also deserves recognition as a towering literary accomplishment. The epic includes narratives within narratives, multi-dimensional characters, poetic elegance, and dramatic dialogues that anticipate modern literary techniques. This paper evaluates the Mahabharata not as a sacred text alone but as an artistic composition reflecting refined literary sensibilities and exceptional craftsmanship.

Emotional Mood-

Santarasa or the quietistic emotion is the central pivot around which the Mahabharat moves, other sentiments are made subordinate to it. Vyasa is the seer of truth and master of expression which is best revealed in the description of Davita vana-

“तचलतालम्रामधुकनोपा कदम्बसर्जुनाकरीः

तपत्ये पुष्पधनिरुपेतं महावनम् राष्ट्रपतिर्दादर्स ॥¹

Lyrical Elements in the Mahabharata-

In lyrical composition a different technique is adopted. In this form of literary art the poet analyses the psychology of characters and interpretes the movement of course of event according to his own feelings. In the description of the sea in the Vanaparva we find sparks of poetics imagination. The wave drifted by swiftly blowing wind, appears to take part in a dance, and with exhibition of whirlpools it appears to roar in violent laughter the foam representing the laughter.

Evidence of Dramatic element in the Mahabharat:

The great epic of india, the Mahabharat in its older portions recognises the existence of drama in explicit manner. The terms nata nartaka occur in the Vanaparva

अनतसासताथथास्वे नतनताका संगाः ।²

The term sutradhara occur in the Adiparva

इत्यब्रवीत्तः सूत्रधारसुतः पौराणिकस्तथा ।³

The term nataka occurs in the Sabhaparva

नाटकं विविधं काव्यं, तस्य कारणानि च विविधानि सन्ति ।⁴

The Harivamsa evidence the fact that recitation of dialogue hymns later being accompanied by musical accompaniment and dramatic gestures made the sacrificial sessions highly interesting dramatic.

Division of Lyrics-

The lyrical branch of Sanskrit poetry divides itself according to its subject matter into religious and erotic lyrics. The religious lyrics are often not the expression of direct religious emotion but are rather to be looked upon as the utterance of superstitious terror and uneasy apprehension and in that part they bear the direct character of magic spells and incantations, the same character is found faithfully preserved in the Mahabharata.

Religious Lyric-

The nocturnal scene described in the VII parva 185, is full of poetic beauty and the style recalls in some places the lyrics of Kalidasa.

Erotic Lyric-

The courtship of love is best presented with much delicacy and romance in the Nala poem. Being deserted in the forest by Nala Damayanti laments, “ I see you; you are seen, conceal yourself behind the bushes. Why do you not speak to me? Cruel king it is not for myself I grieve, it is for you. I weep, thinking what will become of you, left all alone. How will you fare under some tree at evening, hungry and thirsty and weary, not beholding me. O’ my king?” Sakuntala Dusmanta poem can be cited as another best erotic lyric.

Evidence of Riddles in the Mahabharata-

We may conveniently treat a category of slokas known as kuta slokas or riddles in the Mahabharata. They have been introduced with a desire to exhibit poetical powers. It is affirmed in beginning of the Mahabharata that there are 8,800 kuta slokas in all throughout the whole work. The characteristic feature of riddles is problem which generally lies in the use of a word which has two meanings.

Problematic Riddles-

The Yaksha Prasna episode at the end of the Vanaparva is striking example of problematic riddles.

It is used to bring out Yudhisthira's entire philosophy of life in a condensed form. The questions put by Yaksha and answers given by Yudhisthira reflect almost the whole of Indian ethics. A few are quoted- Yaksha- What is heavier than the earth? What is higher than the sky? What is swifter than the wind? What is more numerous than the grass?

Yudhisthira- A mother is heavier than the earth. The father is higher than sky. The spirit is swifter than the wind. Thoughts are more numerous than the grass etc.

Evidence of Prose Composition in the Mahabharata-

Through the Mahabharata is composed in the slokas, there are many passages composed in prose style, some entirely in prose form, others partly in verse and partly in prose. The prose section is distinguished by three characteristics. Simplicity, depth and correctness. The reader is charmed and pleased by the sound but he has not to ponder over the letters before he gets the meaning.

The prose scattered in the epic resembles the prose used in the Upanisads and Brahmana books. Its compilers retained some of the prose portions. Its style is archaic without compounds.

Evidence of historical kavya in the Mahabharata-

In case of description of the Mahabharata historical facts have also been dealt with. Composition of kavya bearing upon historical facts is not an uncommon feature in Sanskrit literature. The poets tried to compose the life history of their patrons in tempting language. In the Adiparva of Mahabharata has been glorified as a historical document. The kernel of the epic must have had a basis in history. There might have been rivalry between the two neighbouring tribes. Kurus and Panchalas. In the Yajurveda these two tribes appear united and in the Kathaka Samhita, king Dhritarastra Vaichitravirya is mentioned as a well-known figure. This nucleus is expanded by Vyasa into full plot.

Evidence of fairy Tales and Fables-

The epic kernel forms only about one fifth of the whole work. It has become so overgrown with didactic matter that in its final stage it is not an epic at all but an encyclopaedia of moral teachings. DHARMAN has shown, on the basis of well selected and convincing examples that the relation between narrative and didactic matter was definitely not of a casual character, but it was intentional and purposive. The didactic matter he insisted was a necessary and an essential element of the poem of which the fable itself was invented just for the purpose of illustrating certain well-defined maxims of law, certain legal, moral and ethical principles has been started clearly by V.S. Suklankar.

“यतो धर्मं ततो जयः”⁵

The narratives in the Mahabharata can be mainly categorized into two parts- the Brahmanical legend and the ascetic poetry.

Conclusion-

Thus we come to the conclusion with observation of Anandavardhana that the Mahabharata is a brilliant specimen of literary art, being unsold by emotional mode of quietism. The Mahabharata is much more than an ancient epic or a spiritual scripture—it is a towering monument of literary art. Its structural complexity, psychological depth, and philosophical richness position it among the greatest literary achievements of humankind. By transcending the boundaries of time, geography, and culture, it continues to inspire writers, philosophers, and artists. As a document of literary art, the Mahabharata exemplifies how narrative can serve as a vessel for truth, beauty, and the endless inquiry into what it means to be human.

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