A Critical survey of the Mahabharta

Garima Sharma
Research Scholar B.P.S.M.V khanpur Kalan, sonepat.

Abstract: *The Mahabharata, world's largest epic ever written. The value of this epic is not reduced even an inch in the last 5500 years rather it will be going to increase by the time passes. This is a paper aimed at the critical study of this spiritual epic and how is it relevant in the contemporary times. It looks Mahabharata from a different point of view.*
Keywords: *Different Translations, Relevance in India and abroad, Principal Themes, Dharma, Adharma.*

I. Introduction

Mahabharta is one of the major epics of India in Sanskrit language. It contains one lakh shalokas and long prose passages. Mahabhatra is not merely an epic but also a source of knowledge. It is always been said by many people that what is not there in Mahabharta is present nowhere. It is believed that Mahabharta was first written by Ganesha on the dictation of ved vyasa, who is also an important character in the epic. The origins of the epic probably fall between 8th and 9th century BCE. The first English translation was given by Kisari Mohan Ganguly and M.N. dutt. Ther are many abridged editions including the work of William Buck, C. Rajagopalachari, Romesh C.Dutt and many others. Mahabharata contains answer to all questions of life. One great scholar Max has correctly said, "What is found herein may also be found in other sources, what is not found herein does not matter." I first read the C. Rajagopalchari version and finally culminating into the canon version by Kisari Mohan Ganguli. Throughout these versions, the complexity never dimmed but kept on growing and made the story even more enticing. Mahabharata is present in the consciousness of each Indian. Mahabharata is divided into 18 parvas and 100 sub-parvas. The end of the "yudh" of Mahabharata marks the beginning of 'kali yugh' in which moral values and noble ideas have lost and man is heading towards complete dissolution of morality.

Mahabharata being a major Indian epic, is always been the centre of attraction for many critics from all over the world. Mahabharata is an oral epic. The principal theme of the Mahabharata, can be simply put as, the struggle for property in a joint family. Mahabharata shows the quarrel between princes - the sons of Dhritarashtra and Pandu, namely Kaurava (the descendents of King Kuru) and Pandavas (sons of Pandu), respectively - for the throne of Hastinapura. The number of works and researches has been done on Mahabharta. The epic employs the structure of frame tales i.e. story within story. Some critics say that the text is unstructured and chaotic. Hermann Oldenburg supposed that the original poem must once have carried an immense "tragic force" but dismissed the full text as a "horrible chaos". There are many films inspired by mahabharta including Kalyug(1981) and Rajneeti(2010). Kalyug is a modern day version of the epic which depicts the conflict between two rival business families. It is similar to the epic in the characterization and events but is different in screenplay and plot. Like Mahabharata it is a tale of intrigue and inevitable war between two families. Rajneeti also goes parallel to the Mahabharata where the shades of Krishna, Arjun, Bheema, Duryodhana, and Karan can be seen in the characters portrayed. The film basically borrows its plot from the two major epics- Mahabharata and Godfather. Not only the Indian authors and directors but people from worldwide are interested in the epic. Apart from that many other films are also there from English directors and one of the same titles released in 1989 by peter brook.

A comic adaptation is also there which is sometimes called as Amar Chitra Katha illustrated by Dilip Kadam. Many of its titles are based on the particular events of the epic. There are many popular novels which are inspired by Mahabharata. These are *The Palace of Illusions* (2008) by chitra Banerjee Devakaruni, the novel presents the feminist perspective of the epic in which the whole of the Mahabharata is described from the point of view of Draupadi. It tells the story of a woman living in a patriarchal world. She said my problem with Drapadi (apart from the fact that she is flimsy) is that she is ordinary. Most of the book revolves around a handful of things she needs – Karna (the man she humiliated and chose not to marry), her palace and the manicured gardens, what clothes to wear when, how to keep Kunti away from controlling her husbands, what to make of the relationship with Krishna. There is a good chunk of the book wasted on how she fights with her mother-in-law Kunti to become the more powerful woman in the house. In fact, she even thinks cooking brinjal is a woman's equivalent of shooting a moving metal fish's eye by looking at its reflection in water that Arjuna had to do to marry her. Another good portion of the book is about her obsession with her palace, the gardens, the flowers, the mirrors, the water; the home she contributed towards building. The one thing she will think about

every time she sees water/ gardens/ mirrors. Then every event she is invited to, she talks about what clothes to wear and what will make her seem like what. The rest of course is her obsession with Karna. Krishna gives clothes to Draupadi when she was disrobed but in *Sarala Mahabharata* it is said that it was not Krishna but surya who give clothes to Draupadi when she was disrobed by kauravas. Krishna of course did have a distinct role, but it was rather indirect, and also unknown to the humans, including Draupadi. *The Difficulty of being Good: on the subtle art of Dharma (*2013) by Gurcharan Das, the book interrogates the epic. It seeks to answers the questions that why being good? What exactly is Dharma? Why should one practice it? Each character in the epic embodies a moral failure or a virtue in it. Das explores Mahabharata from many perspectives and compares the vices and virtues of the characters to that of the contemporary individuals. The Difficulty of Being Good shines the light of an ancient poem on the most challenging moral ambiguities of modern life. *Mahabharata Re-Imagined* (2013) by Trisha Das is also a novel that retells the story of Mahabharata from various view points. *The Great Indian Novel* (1989) by Shashi Tharoor is a fictional work that takes up the story of Mahabharata and resets it in the Indian independence movement. Mahabharata is not a novel but an epic. "The great Indian novel" is also a pun of "the great American novel" for roughly translating the Mahabharata. Tharoor emphasize on the older generations by some of the significant characters in the novel. The Mahabharata is an epic tale describing the historical dynastic struggle over the throne of the kingdom of Hastinapur between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. In this novel, Tharoor recasts the story of Indian democracy as a struggle between groups and individuals closely related by their personal and political histories. The organisation of the sections and chapters of the novel mirrors the organisation of the Mahabharata. The novel has 18 "books," just as the Mahabharata has 18 books. The characters are explored from very different perspectives in *Yuganta* by Iravati karve, *Mrityunjay* by Shivaji Sawant,*Yajnaseni* by Pratibha Ray, Yugandhar by Shivaji Sawant.

Many comparative studies have been done on Mahabharata. Mahabharata is many times compared with Indian literature as well as Greek and other literatures. Mahabharata is compared to the great war of Trojans. Both are the epics of a civilization. Both The Mahabharata and The Iliad are about wars that started mainly because of kings or princes and their flawed characters. In The Iliad, the Trojan War began because Paris, a prince of Troy, stole King Menelaus' wife, Helen. However, the war was also driven by the greed of Agamemnon, a powerful and fearsome king. Meanwhile, in The Mahabharata, the war began mostly because of Duryodhana's jealousy of the Pandavas. The royalty of both stories have flaws in their characters that force their countries and people into war. In conjunction, the two stories both contain important moral lessons. Although The Iliad and The Mahabharata were written and set in vastly different cultures, they share many similarities such as the themes and values they possess. War is considered honorable and glorious, women are possessions, and all-powerful Gods interact with mankind. The Ramayana and the Mahabharata are the two epics of India. They show some differences between them when it comes to their dates of composition, authors, characters and the like. The Ramayana was written by Sage Valmiki. On the other hand, the Mahabharata was written by Sage Vyasa. The Ramayana contains the story of Rama, the son of King Dasaratha of Ayodhya. It deals with how Rama fought against Ravana, the king of Lanka and killed him in a hard fought battle. Ravana had erred by abducting the wife of Rama, Sita by name. On the other hand, the Mahabharata contains the story of the rivalry between the Pandavas and the Kauravas, who were both called by the name of Purus. The Ramayana described the battles at their earliest phase where sophisticated weapons were not used. On the other hand, the Mahabharata described battles in which sophisticated weapons were used. This shows that the Ramayana has happened in the Treta Yuga and the Mahabharata happened later in the Dwapara Yuga. Mahabharata also comes in the serial version on different channels. These serial versions also depict the role of an ancient epic in the contemporary times. In a serial version on Star Plus it is said by Krishna for the current times

<blockquote>
"bhula kar Geeta ka Gyan har baar maanavta haari hai
Aaj bhi is sansaar me khi na khi Mahabharata zaari hai."
</blockquote>

Means, in the present times people are unaware of the moral and ethical values which are given in Geeta and because of that reason there is only war in the society everywhere.

Works cited

[1]. Buehler and Kirste, "Indian Studies, Contributions to the History of the Mahabharata." 1892.print.
[2]. Chintāmani Vināyaka Vaidya, "The Mahabharata; a Criticism." 1905. "Epic India; or, India as described in the Mahabharata and Ramayana." 1907.print.
[3]. *Mahabharata*, by William Buck, University of California Press, 1973.print.
[4]. Sir M. Williams, "Indian Epic Poetry, with full Analysis of the Ramayana and Mahabharata." 1863.print.
[5]. The *Bhagavadgita* in the *Mahabharata*, text & translation by J.A.B. van Buitenen, University of Chicago Press, 1981.print.
[6]. The *Mahabharata*, a Film by Peter Brook, in three parts - *The Game of Dice, Exile in the Forest, The War* - Parabola Video Library.print.
[7]. The *Mahabharata*, by Jean-Claude Carrière, translated from the French by Peter Brook, Harper & Row, 1987.print.
[8]. Wheeler, "The Vedic Period and the Mahabharata." 1867.print.
[9]. B.K. Matilal (ed): *Moral Dilemmas in Mahabharata* Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1989. Print.