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4. Show your acquaintance with the different views about the origin of Rāma's story.

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5. What does ancient Indian tradition say about the origin of the *Rāmāyaṇa*?

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### 3.5 The arrangement of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the contents of its Books

Vālmīki's great epic the *Rāmāyaṇa* is made up of seven Books called Kaṇḍas. The first Book is known the *Bālakānda*. As indicated by its very name, in this *Kāṇḍa* have been narrated the events of Rāma's childhood. In it, it is stated that the wise and powerful king Daśaratha, who was ruling in, Ayodhyā was childless. So, for obtaining sons he performed a Putreṣṭiyaga. As a result of this sacrifice the three queens of the king bore him four sons. Rāma was bom to Kauśalyā, Bharata to Kaikeyī and Lakṣmaṇa and Śatrughna to Sumitra. In this *Kāṇḍa* we read about the incidents leading to Sītā's marriage to Rāma. Sītā was called so because, she was obtained by her father king Janaka of Videha from the furrow created on earth, when he was ploughing the land.

The actual story of the epic begins in the second Book which is called *Ayodyākāṇḍa*. In this *Kāṇḍa* we read about Rama's selection as the successor or his father and Kaikeyī's intrigue which led to Rāma's banishment to the forest for fourteen years. Rāma leaves for the forest together with Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa. After his deparature. king Daśaratha passes away. Bharata who was away from Ayodhyā when all these incidents took place, returns to the capital. On learning about the manipulations of his mother, he

becomes angry at her and is full of anguish. Bharata goes to the forest and tries to persuade Rāma to return to Ayodhya, but in vain. He returns with Rāma's sandals which he places on the throne in Ayodhyā and himself rules the country from Nandīgrāma.

The third Book is called *Araṇvyakaṇḍa*. In this *Kāṇḍa* has been described Rāma's life as a forester and his fights with various demons for protecting the hermitages in the forest. in this *Kāṇḍa* we come across the episode of Śūrpanakhā the sister of Rāvaṇa who tries to persuade either of the two brothers to marry her. Lakṣmaṇa cuts off her nose. in retaliation, Rāvaṇa abducts Sītā with the help of Mārica, when she was alone in the hut. The bird Jaṭayu attacks Rāvaṇa in an attempt to rescue Sītā but does not succeed. Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa begin their search for Sītā. They take an eventful journey towards the south in search of Sītā.

The fourth Book called *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa* narrates the episodes related to Rāma's alliance with Sugriva the king of the Vāranas. Rāma places him on the throne of Kiṣkindhā after killing Vālin, his elder brother. Sugriva promises to help Rama in rescuing Sītā from Rāvaṇa's clutches. Hanumat, one of the councilors of Sugriva sets out towards the south with an army of Vānaras. They arrive at the shores of the ocean and Hanumat gets ready to jump across the ocean to Laṅkā, from atop the mountain called Mahendra.

The fifth Book is known as *Sundarakāṇḍa*. It presents a description of the beautiful island of Laṅkā, the city of Rāvaṇa and his magnificent palace. Hanumat enters the city and searches for Sītā. He finds her confined in a Aśoka-grove and assures her that Rāma will come very soon to rescue her. He returns to Kiṣkindhā with a message from Sītā.

The sixth Book called *Yuddhakāṇḍa* is the most voluminous of all the Books of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. In it has been described in detail the battle between Rāma and his forces and Rāvaṇa and his army of demons. The army of Vānaras builds a bridge across the ocean and Rāma gets ready to invade Laṅkā. Rāvaṇa's brother Vibhīṣana advises Rāvaṇa to hand over Sītā to her husband, but in vain. He leaves Rāvaṇa and joins Rāma. A fierce battle takes place in which many heroic Rākṣasas including Rāvaṇa's son Indrajit and brother Kumbhakarṇa are slain. Finally a terrible duel between Rāma and Rāvaṇa takes place. The fight continues for several days and night. At the end, Rāvaṇa dies at the lands of

Rāma. Vibhisana is installed on the throne of Laṅkā. Sītā is rescued, but is made to prove her purity of character through an ordeal by fire. Sītā proves her innocence by taking the ordeal. Rāma returns to Ayodhyā with his wife, brother Lakṣmaṇa and his friends and is crowned the king of the country.

The seventh Book is named *Uttarakāṇḍa* i.e. the last Book. In this *Kāṇḍa* are found numerous legends and episodes which are in nature similar to legends and episodes found in the *Mahābhārata* and the Purāṇas. Only one third of this Book is related to the story of Rāma. It is in this Book that we read about Sītā's abandonment by Rāma. At Rāma's direction Lakṣmaṇa takes her to the forest on the other bank of the Gaṅgā and leaves her there. She is taken to the hermitage of Vālmiki by his disciples. Her twin sons Lava and Kuśa are born in the hermitage. When the boys grow up, Vālmiki teaches them to sing the poem of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Rama performs an *Aśvamedha* sacrifice. His sons accompanied by Vālmiki go to the place of sacrifice and there they sing the saga of Rāma and Sītā. At the request of Rāma, Sītā is made to come to Rāma's place of sacrifice. To her humiliation she is asked to prove her innocence for a second time by her husband. By way of an oath she requests Mother Earth to open up. The earth opens up and Sītā disappears in her womb. Soon after this Rāma vacates the throne. He installs Kuśa and Lava as the rulers of two regions of the country with their respective capitals in Kuśāvati and Śrāvastī

### Stop to Consider

Some scholars have explained the etymology of the word *vānara* as follows- *naro vā < vā nara < vānara*. The word is thus believed to have come from the expression *naro vā !* through metathesis. *naro vā !* means looks like a human.

#### SAQ:

1. Show your acquaintance with the arrangement of the *Rāmāyaṇa*

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.....

2. How does Rāma succeed in reaching Laṅkā?

.....  
.....

3. In which *Kāṇḍa* of the *Rāmāyaṇa* we read about the city of *Laṅkā*?

.....  
.....

4. Why did *Rāvaṇa* abduct *Sītā*?

.....  
.....

5. Which is the most voluminous Book of the *Rāmāyaṇa*?  
Give an idea of its contents.

.....  
.....

6. From which *Kāṇḍa* begins the actual story of the *Rāmāyaṇa*?

.....  
.....

### 3.6 The Salient features of the *Rāmāyaṇa* as a *Kāvya*:

Vālmīki, the author of the *Rāmāyaṇa* has referred to his work, as a *kāvya*, an *ākhyāna* and an *itihāsa*. He also says that his work aims at delineating the first three *Puruṣārtha* viz., *dharma*, *artha* and *kāma*. The *Rāmāyaṇa* is the very first specimen of a full-fledged ornate poem (*kāvya*), written in Sanskrit. Its author Vālmīki was a great innovator in Sanskrit poetry and enjoys the credit of starting a new trend in the art of composing simple narratives in the metre called *Anuṣṭup*. His verses became famous as *Śloka*s. He became well-known as the *Ādikavi* and his *Rāmāyaṇa* became famous as the *Ādikāvya*.

The *Rāmāyaṇa* contains in it the requirements of a *Mahākāvya*, as defined in the *Alaṅkāraśāstra*. It appears as if the definition as well as the requirements of a *Mahā Kāvya* have been enumerated by taking the *Rāmāyaṇa* as a model ornate poem. The style of writing of this epic is simple and graceful. The poet has employed figures of speech like *Rūpaka* and *Upamā* taken from nature and also from day to day life. He has been successful in effective presentation of the various *Rasas*, by using only one single principle metre. And he has maintained the same standard of writing all throughout the work. In the whole range of Sanskrit literature there is hardly a poem which can match the *Rāmāyaṇa* in its purity and

clearness of diction and simplicity of style. It abounds in wonderfully true poetry and displays true understanding of human emotions. *Rāmāyaṇa* is undoubtedly a great poem worthy to rank among the classical master pieces of world- literature.

This great epic aims at depicting the life of a perfect man - an ideal character to be followed by ordinary men in difficult situations of life. In Rāma we see a person who stands for duty, self sacrifice, compassion and protection of the weak. He is handsome, possessed of prowess and intelligence, is an epitome of self control. He is brave but is never proud of his bravery. He never speaks untruth, is respectful towards the elder and kind towards the miserable. Rāma is well versed in *dharmā*, pure in spirit and fully aware of the duties of a *Kṣatriya*. With such qualities of head and heart Rāma was very dear to all who came in contact with him.

In this epic importance has been laid, on upholding moral values. Rāma has been shown as a person well versed in moral values. His three brothers and his wife also stand for right conduct and their virtues are spontaneous.

The incidents narrated in course of the plot of the epic are realistic, but are interspersed with the supra-natural. This is because, the characters are at times shown as human, at times as superhuman and at other times as both human and superhuman.

It has been mentioned in 3.4 the core of the story of Rāma is historical. Vālmīki has referred to his work as a *carita*. Had it been entirely a work of imagination, the poet could as well have said so, which he has not done. If the story had been his invention, he would not possibly have inserted in it the story of an unjust slaying of Valin by Rama.

Besides being a *Kāvya*, the *Rāmāyaṇa* is also a sacred text teaching the virtues of righteousness. It teaches the principles of *sanātānadharma* and *sadācāra* which is one of the basic principles of *dharmā*. This great epic has also included in its fold, topics which deal with the *Arthaśāstra*, administration, policy, diplomacy, warfare and so on. The benefits of good governance are shown through the depiction of *rāmarājya*

### **Stop to Consider:**

*Puruṣārtha* means the principal object of human existence. Puruṣārthas are four in number - *dharmā* i.e., righteousness or

duty, *artha* i.e. riches or the needs of life; *kāma* the desires and *mokṣa* i.e., emancipation from the cycle of birth and death. Another name for these four Puruṣārthas is *caturvarga*.

A *Mahākāvya* is an ornate poem arranged into a number of chapters. It depicts the story of a *kṣatriya* hero who is *dhirodatta* and valorous and hails from an illustrious family. There can also be a number of heroes in a *Mahākāvya* all hailing from one single illustrious family. The principle *rasa* in it can be either *vira* or *śṛṅgāra* or *śānta* or *karuṇa*. One principle metre is used all through the composition barring the end (*avasāna*) of the chapters. The story is based either on some historical events or on the life of an ideal man. A *Mahākāvya* deals with all the Puruṣārthas; but only one of them is presented as the fruit of the composition.

#### SAQ

1. What are the salient features of the epic *Rāmāyaṇa*?

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.....

2. Why did Vālmīki earn the epithet *Ādikavi*?

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.....

3. What are the literary merits of the *Rāmāyaṇa*?

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4. What does the *Rāmāyaṇa* teach us?

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### 3.7 Valmiki-the author of the Rāmāyaṇa

Ancient Indian tradition has transformed Valmiki from the author of the *Rāmāyaṇa* to a person of historical eminence like Vyāsa the compiler of the Vedas and the *Mahābhārata*. Both of them appear as characters in the two respective epics.

In the *Mahābhārata* Vālmīki has been mentioned as a sage and a poet. We know nothing tangible about Vālmīki except his name. Legends which gathered around his name after he created the *Rāmāyaṇa* became popular among the masses. According to traditional account, Vālmīki was a highway man who waylaid travellers and robbed them of their valuables. His original name, it



is said, was Ratnākara. He became repentent of his sins and was converted into the good ways of life by the sage Nārada. After undergoing severe penance he became a *maharṣi*. He got the name Vālmīki because, he was covered by an ant-hill during his penance.

According to one account found in the *Skandapurāṇa*, a Vālmīki passed his childhood and youth among the Kirātas and thus could not acquire the culture and refinement of the Aryans, although he was an Aryan by birth. He had to be reconverted to the Aryan ways of life and conduct. According to yet another legend found in the same *Purāṇa*, Vālmīki was a *dvija* by birth and his earlier name was Lohajaṅghā. He became a robber to save his family during a famine. Later on by the grace of the Saptarṣis he repented for his sins and consequently became a sage.

In the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* we find the following story behind the name Vālmīki was a Brahmin birth and his name was Ratnākara. He was born and brought up among the Kirātas. He became a robber to earn his living. Once he came across the Saptarṣis and followed them with an intention of robbing them of their possessions. When the Ṛṣis learned about his intention, they advised him to ask the members of his family as to whether they would share with him, his sins. When Ratnākara realised that his wife, his sons and other relatives were unwilling to share his sins, he repented for his misdeeds. As per instructions of the Ṛṣis he engaged himself in deep meditation on the word *marā*. While he was meditating in this way the two syllables of the word *marā* transported into the word *rāma*. In course of time on his rigid body arose an ant hill (*Vālmīka*). Subsequently at the end of thousands of years he emerged from the ant hill and by the grace of the Saptarṣis became known as Vālmīki. This was as it were, his second birth and he became a *dvija*.

In an account found in the *Mahābhārata*, it is said that Vālmīki fell into a position of dishonour due to some dispute with the Brahmins and was accused of *brahmahatyā*. He was freed of this grave sin by the grace of Lord Śiva.

The *Rāmāyaṇa* introduces Vālmīki to the readers as one who was a witness to many incidents in Rāma's life. He has been referred to by using epithets like *tapasvī*, *muni*, *mahāmuni*, *bhagavān*, *dharmavid*, *mahāmāti* etc. In the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, he has been called

a friend of king Daśaratha. In this *Kāṇḍa* Vālmīki refers to himself as the tenth son of Pracetas. According to the *Rāmāyaṇa* he had hermitages by the rivers *Tamasā* and *Gaṅgā*.

Some scholars have tried to identify Vālmīki with Bhārgava Cyavana. But according to the Bengali *Rāmāyaṇa* Vālmīki was a son of Cyavana. From a statement found in the *Buddhacarita* of Aśvaghōṣa, S.K. Chatterji has inferred that it was Bhārgava Cyavana who made the first attempt at writing an ornate poem on the life of Rāma. However, he could not succeed in doing so. His work was taken up and completed by Vālmīki who was a descendent of the Bhargava sage.

According to A. C. Mahajan the internal evidences of the *Rāmāyaṇa* indicate that Vālmīki was a contemporary of Rāma. Mahajan has placed the epic before 600 B. C and concludes that Vālmīki too belonged to the same period. He holds that his view is supported by external evidence supplied by the *Mahābhārata*. Mahajan is of the opinion that Vālmīki wrote his poem when Rāma had already acquired kingship of the Kośala country.

**SAQ**

1. Show your acquaintance with the traditional accounts on the life of Vālmīki.

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2. What opinions do scholars hold about Vālmīki?

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3. What does the epic *Rāmāyaṇa* tell us about its author?

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### 3.8 Interpolations in the *Rāmāyaṇa*

it is generally believed that the nucleus of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is to be found in the Books II to VI. But from internal evidence of the poem it is clear that the epic underwent many interpolations through the centuries. There is enough reason to believe that the epic before being written down was in circulation in the form of a ballad. It was first sung by Lava and Kuśa in the forest in an assembly of sages, thereafter in front of the ordinary people of Ayodhyā and finally at the venue of the *Aśvamedha* sacrifice performed by Rāma. Thus the story of Rāma was originally orally circulated just as it was done by Lava and Kuśa. In course of time the task of singing the epic was taken up by the Sūtas i.e. professional singers. At this stage of its oral transmission many additional material entered the epic. This continued for years, perhaps for centuries. The professional reciters and travelling singers in order to cater to the tastes of the listeners composed verses of their own and inserted them into the original poem. They inserted various glorifications of local gods and holy places as well as episodes, as demanded by local, and contemporary tastes. The Sūtas also introduced into the epic lengthy delineations of different Rasas - heroic, humorous or erotic as per the tastes of the audience. In a similar manner, verses with moral sayings and didactic pieces were added to the original composition to cater to the taste of learned listeners. On certain occasions the singers took the liberty of elaborating the descriptions of nature.

Many additional materials found in the *Rāmāyaṇa* are made up of repetitions and imitations of earlier descriptions. Some examples of repetitions are Sītā's prayer to the rivers *Gaṅgā* and *Jamunā*, Ravaṇa's approach to Mārica and the descriptions of Rāvaṇa's spies. Instances of imitations are the faked head of Rāma in imitation of the faked figure of Sītā, the descriptions of the hermitages, accounts of duels, battles and battle- fields. Imitations are also found in the narrations of laments and pathetic situations.

Insertion of Purāṇic legends also led to interpolations. Boons and motifs were invented in order to justify several incidents. Again incidents of earlier births of some of the characters were inserted to account for what happened to them in the story of the epic. Geneological lists, etymological legends, exaggerated descriptions,

introduction of the supernatural and the marvellous are some other noteworthy instances of additional material found in the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

The Bālakāṇḍa (Book I) and the Uttarakāṇḍa (Book VII) could not possibly have been parts of the original *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki. In these Books there are not only numerous self contradictions but even the language and style of composition are somewhat inferior to those of Books II and VI. Furthermore, in the rest of the epic there occurs no reference to the events described in the first Book. In Books II to VI, barring some evidently interpolated parts, Rāma has been shown as a human hero. In these Books there is nothing to show that Rāma was looked upon as an incarnation of Viṣṇu. It is only in Book I and VII that he has been called so. We have already mentioned that Vālmīki wanted to portray the life of an ideal man. However, in course of time under the influence of the theory of incarnation of God and with the depiction of Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata* Rāma too became depicted as an incarnation. This fact accounts for a considerable amount of spurious portions in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Over and above both the first and the last Book contain many Purāṇic legends which are not related to the story of Rāma and thus are later additions done by interpolators.

Some scholars however, believe that the entire *Uttarakāṇḍa* (Book VII) should not be treated as spurious. They think that parts of it like the stories of Lakṣmaṇa and Śatrughana, the abandonment of Sītā, birth of Lava and Kuśa, the *Aśvamedha* performed by Rāma, the installation of the twin sons of Rāma as kings of two regions of the Kośala country and Rāma's ascent to heaven belong to the original epic. The *Rāmāyaṇa* could not have ended with the coronation of Rāma depicted in the *Yuddhakāṇḍa*. This is because the story of Rāma can logically come to an end with a record of all the incidents that took place in his life including his final departure from the earth.

So far as the other Books are concerned, it is in the *Yuddhakāṇḍa* that we find some spurious portions. In this *Kāṇḍa* the narrations of burning of Laṅkā and carrying of the mountain called *Gandhamadan* by Hanumat, the fire ordeal of Sītā, the lengthy descriptions of battles and the *Phalaśruti* found at the end of the Book are believed to be the works of interpolators.

### Stop to Consider

Interpolation: Interpolation means insertion of new or additional matter without authorization into a text, thereby altering its contents. Such interpolated portions contained in a text are to be treated as spurious i.e. as not genuine or authentic.

Ballad: A ballad is a simple narrative poem, composed in short stanzas and adapted for singing. The stanzas of a ballad are sung to the same melody.

Didactic : Didactic means intended for instruction on moral or ethical values.

#### SAQ

1. Show your acquaintance with the nature of the interpolations in the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

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.....

2. Why do most scholars believe that the *Balakanda* and the *Uttarakāṇḍa* are later additions to the original epic composed by Vālmīki?

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.....

### 3.9 Summing up

In this unit we have discussed the characteristics of Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa* which enjoys the epithet *ādikāvya*. From this discussion we are able to get an idea of the core of the story of Rāma which scholars believe, is historical in nature. We have also learnt how the story grew up around this historical core and became a full-fledged ornate poem. This unit has given us an idea of the arrangement of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the contents of the individual Books. We have also come to know from the discussions presented in this unit that down the centuries Vālmīki's composition has undergone many interpolations done by the reciters and singers of the poem. Furthermore, this unit has provided us with noteworthy information about Vālmīki who is known as the *ādikavi* because of the fact that he introduced a new trend or a new style of composition in the field of ancient Indian poetic literature.



## UNIT IV

### Influence of the Rāmāyaṇa on Indian Society and culture

- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Objective
- 4.3 Date of the *Rāmāyaṇa*
- 4.4 Recensions of the *Rāmāyaṇa*
- 4.5 Redactions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in Sanskrit
- 4.6 Influence of the epic on later Sanskrit literature
- 4.7 Commentaries on the *Rāmāyaṇa*
- 4.8 Indian society as reflected in the epic of Vālmīki
- 4.9 Summing up.
- 4.10 Suggested Readings

#### 4.1 Introduction

The *Rāmāyaṇa* which is the oldest and the most glorious poem of India presents before us a graphic picture of the political, social and individual life of ancient India. In this epic we come across almost all the virtues that man can possibly have. No where else poetry and morality have been so charmingly interwoven as it has been done in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. By virtue of its great qualities this epic has become the property of almost the entire Indian nation. Furthermore, so touching the story of Rāma was that it exercised great influence on later Sanskrit literature. Not only Kāvya and Nāṭakas were based on this epic, even a number of reproductions of the story of Rāma came into existence in different parts of the country.

#### 4.2 Objective

In this unit we shall discuss the following topics related to the *Rāmāyaṇa*-

- the date of the epic
- the recensions of the epic
- redaction of the epic
- its influence on later Sanskrit literature
- commentaries on the *Rāmāyaṇa*
- and Indian society in the age of the *Rāmāyaṇa*

#### 4.3 Date of the *Rāmāyaṇa*

Scholars in general examine the date of the *Rāmāyaṇa* from two points of view.

These are (a) the date of the genuine portion of the epic and (b) the date by which the later Books i.e. Books I and VII were added to the original work of Vālmīki. The date assigned by different scholars to the genuine portion (Books I to VI) are as follows -

1. Jacobi places it between 800 B.C - 600 B.C
2. Macdonell feels that it should be placed before 500 B.C.
3. Keith too is of the opinion that the genuine *Rāmāyaṇa* should be placed before 500 B.C.
4. According to Winternitz it belongs to 300 B.C.

Jacobi has held the view that the genuine portion of the *Rāmāyaṇa* was composed before the nucleus of the *Mahābhārata* assumed a definite shape. This according to him is because, while the heroes of the *Mahābhārata* are never mentioned in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the story of Rāma occurs in the later work- a number of times. Book VII of the *Mahābhārata* quotes a verse which it says, has been composed by Vālmīki. The verse is found in Book VI of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Similarly Macdonell argues that the *Rāmāyaṇa* must have been known in general before the *Mahābhārata* achieved a logical shape. He further holds that the *Rāmopākhyāna* found in the *Mahābhārata* seems to have been based on the story of Rāma. This according to him seems to be so, for the *Upākhyāna* contains verses which more or less are similar to lines, found in Vālmīki's work. In this connection we should take note of the following -

The relation between the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Rāmopākhyāna* found in the *Mahābhārata* has been examined by a number of scholars. It has been concluded by them on the basis of the evidence presented by a number of verses of both the works that

the author of the *Upākhyāna* was greatly influenced by the work of Vālmīki. It may also be noted that scholars have expressed the view that this *Upākhyāna* is in all possibility based on an earlier story of Rāma and not on the work of Vālmīki. This is because, it has not been sufficiently proved that the *Rāmāyaṇa* is the source of the *Rāmopākhyāna*.

Winternitz however, thinks that the nucleus of the *Rāmāyaṇa* cannot be of earlier composition than the *Mahābhārata*. He feels that the *Rāmāyaṇa* is a later composition because, the society and the ways of life reflected in it represent an advanced civilisation compared to the one found in the *Mahābhārata*. The *Mahābhārata* according to him belongs to a rough and rather war loving society. And this points to a period which is earlier than that of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. S.K. Chatterji too believes that the *Mahābhārata* is earlier than the *Rāmāyaṇa* and says that the work of Vālmīki belongs to a more cultured and advanced state of society.

A.C. Mahajan feels that the *Mahābhārata* cannot be of an earlier date than the *Rāmāyaṇa*. This is because, the powerful kingdoms, the magnificent palaces, the great sacrificial rituals, the developed knowledge of weapon and warfare found in the *Mahābhārata* point to a more advanced civilization than the one seen in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Another noteworthy fact is the presence of the Yavanas in India in the days of the *Mahābhārata*. This epic mentions the Yavanas (Greeks) as the allies of the Kurus. The Sakas and the Pahlavas have also been mentioned in the *Mahābhārata*. The *Rāmāyaṇa* on the other hand, is totally ignorant of these races of people.

As a matter of fact, there seems to be enough evidence that the whole of the *Rāmāyaṇa* was known by the time the *Mahābhārata* was composed. The reasons for this may be put as follows-

1. The statement found in Book I of the *Rāmāyaṇa* to the effect that Rāma ruled the country for 11 thousand years has been reiterated in the *Aranyaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*.
2. In the same *Parvan*, Rāma has been referred to as an incarnation of Viṣṇu.
3. In the *Dronaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*, Nārada tells Sanjay the story of Rāma as found in Books II to VI of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.
4. Rāma's exile has been described in the *Śāntiparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*. In it Rāma's great qualities as a king and the



*Aśvamedha* performed by him have been spoken of. Thus, this *Parvan* knows the *Uttarakāṇḍa* of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

According to Shroeder the kernel of the *Mahābhārata* was composed by the bards of the Kurus, between 700 B.C. to 400 B.C. In this connection we may also take into consideration the view held by Mirashi that the epic compiled by Vaiśampāyana must have existed before the time of Āśvalayana and Pāṇini, i.e. before 500 B.C., for both of them knew Vaiśampāyana as the recaster of this great epic. Āśvalāyana, in fact has called him *Mahābhāratācārya*. According to Vaidya the revised edition of the *Mahābhārata* can be dated to about 250 B.C. According to Winternitz the transformation of the epic *Mahābhārata* into our present work must have taken place between 400 B.C. to 400 A.D. This means the kernel of the epic must have existed much before 400 B.C. According to S.K. Chatterji the nucleus of the *Mahābhārata* was composed around 900 B.C.

In view of the above discussions we can make an observation as follows –

It is accepted that the *Rāmāyaṇa* is earlier than the *Mahābhārata*. We need to place the work of Vālmīki at least in 500 B.C. This makes the epic pre-Pāṇinian. Mahajan too believes that it is pre-Pāṇinian. He also states that Vālmīki's work is older than Buddhism. For it has no traces of Buddhism in it. Over and above this, the political condition of eastern India revealed in the epic is pre-Buddhistic. According to Vincent Smith, Buddha died in 427 B.C. On the basis of these arguments Mahajan has placed the *Rāmāyaṇa* in 600 B.C.

**SAQ**

1. Which of the two epics is earlier, the *Rāmāyaṇa* or the *Mahābhārata*? State the views of different scholars in this connection.

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2. Present a discussion on the date of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

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#### 4.4 Recensions of the *Rāmāyaṇa*

The text of the *Rāmāyaṇa* has been preserved in two recensions namely, northern and southern and these two widely vary from each other. Each of these two recensions consists of three versions. The northern recension has been subdivided into north-eastern, north-western and western versions. The southern recension consists of Telugu, Grantha and Malayalam versions.

The southern recension preserves a more or less uniform text in all its versions. However, the versions of the northern recension exhibit some peculiarities of their own. The north-eastern version consists of five subdivisions namely, Newari, Maithili, Assamese, Bengali and Devanāgarī. The north-western version comprises two sub divisions namely Sāradā and Devanāgarī. The north-eastern and the north - western versions seem to have come from the same source. This is because, these two recensions have much in common to each other. In this connection we need to take into consideration the noteworthy fact that the north-eastern recension which agrees with the north - western recension consists of verses found in the southern recension. It is also to be noted that portions missing in the north - eastern version are found not only in the north - western and western versions but also in the southern recension.

The southern recension is available in both southern and Devanāgarī scripts. The southern scripts include Telugu, Kannaḍa, Nandinagarī, Grantha and Malayalam. The southern versions have preserved the original text of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. But in the northern versions, the text of the epic has been polished both in its form and matter by simplifying the difficult readings and also by modifying its contents to suit contemporary thought.

In both the northern and southern recensions the *Rāmāyaṇa* comprises 24,000 verses arranged into seven Kāṇḍas. The textual variations found in the different versions of these two recensions are due to differences in the oral traditions of the professional singers. In spite of these variations the recensions have preserved a common text to a considerable extent.

**SAQ**

1. Show your acquaintance with the recensions of the  
*Rāmāyaṇa*.

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**4.5 Redactions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in Sanskrit.**

There exists a number of literary works which has either re-narrated the story of Rāma or has dealt with the cult of Rāma. Some works of this type are as follows –

The work called *Rāmāyaṇakathāsāra* narrates in brief the story of Rāma as it has been presented by Vālmīki. The author of the work is Subbaya Shastri. The book consists of seven Kāṇḍas and each *kāṇḍa* is written in a different metre. Another work of the same nature is the *Tattvasaṁgraharāmāyaṇa* of Rāmabrahmānanda. This work consists of seven Adhyāyas and contains many incidents not found in Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa*.

The *Vāsiṣṭha Rāmāyaṇa* also known as Jñāna Vāsiṣṭha is attributed to Vālmīki himself. He is said to have written this work as an appendage to the *Rāmāyaṇa*. It is supposed that its contents are based on the teachings of sage Vāsiṣṭha. The work contains six chapters and primarily deals with Yoga and *Advaita Vedānta* which are presented through illustrative stories.

Yet another work attributed to Vālmīki is the *Adbhūtarāmāyaṇa*. This work in 27 cantos deals with the story of Sītā. She is depicted as killing a hundred headed Rāvaṇa whom Rāma could not defeat.

Another noteworthy redaction of Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa* is the *Adhyātmarāmāyaṇa*. While Vālmīki's aim was to present in his epic the life of an ideal man, the author of this work aims at presenting the spiritual implications of Vālmīki's story. In Vālmīki's epic Rāma is depicted as a heroic man, whereas in the latter work he is an incarnation of Viṣṇu. And Sītā appears in this work as an incarnation of goddess Lakṣmī. The work is an extract from the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*. In it the narrative is presented in the form of a dialogue between Śiva and Pārvatī. *Adhyātmarāmāyaṇa* comprises seven Kāṇḍas of the same names as found Vālmīki's

work. Two chapters of this work known as *Rāmabṛdaya* and *Rāmāgītā* are treated as very holy texts.

Another work dealing with the story of Rama is the Satyopakhyaṇa. In it Rama's story includes incidents not found in the original work of Vālmīki. It seems that this work of some unknown author was initially orally transmitted among the people. It is said that the stories of Satyopakhyaṇa were at first told by Vālmīki to Marīcāya who in turn, narrated them to Vyasa. From Vyasa, Suta learned the narrative and he recounted them to the Rsis in the forest of Naimisa.

Two other works dealing with Rama's story are the Mularamayana and the Anandaramayana. In both these works stress is laid on the importance of the role and character of Hanumat.

A very late work based on the Rāmāyaṇa is the Ramacarita of Padmavijayagani, a Jain writer. This is lengthy work written in an intermixture of prose and poetry. This work was composed during the reign of emperor Akbar in 16th century A.D.

### **Stop to consider**

To redact means to put into a suitable literary form or to revise, or to bring back. Thus a redaction is a reproduction of a literary work.

#### **SAQ**

1. What do you know about the redactions of the Rāmāyaṇa? Which according to you is the most noteworthy redaction of the epic?

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### **4.6 Influence of the epic on later Sanskrit literature**

We can see the influence of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* on almost all aspects of Indian life. A very significant influence of these two epics happens to be on the later Sanskrit literature of our country. The personalities of Rāma and Sītā seem to have exercised so great an influence on Indian mind that their life story has found expression in the form of a good number of Kāvya and Nāṭakas.

The very first influence of the *Rāmāyaṇa* seems to have been on the *Mahābhārata* itself. In the *Vanaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata* occurs the famous Rāmopākhyāna as it has been narrated by Vālmīki. This story does not mention the fire ordeal of Sītā and the incidents narrated in the *Uttarakāṇḍa* of the *Rāmāyaṇa* are also not found in it. Many of the Puraṇas and Upapurāṇas also contain Rāma's story.

Aśvagoṣa appears to be the first author of classical Sanskrit literature who came under the influence of the ornate poetry of *Vālmīki*. Aśvagoṣa (100 AD -200 A.D ) is indebted to Vālmīki for his literary style and diction and also for the imageries he used in his works. However, he did not choose any event from the *Rāmāyaṇa* as a theme for any of his compositions.

Kālidāsa (400 A.D ) the most well known poet of ancient India was profoundly influenced by the epic of Vālmīki, both in spirit and matter. His *Raghuvaṃśa Mahākāvya* has for its theme the story of Rāma. Vālmīki's influence on Kālidāsa can be clearly seen in the later's poetic skill, in his deep understanding of human nature, in his treatment of nature and also in his calm and composed outlook on life. Like Aśvagoṣa, Kālidāsa too is highly indebted to the *Ādikavi*, for the perfections he attained in his literary style, poetic imagery and embellishments. The influence of the *Rāmāyaṇa* can be seen even in the depictions of character in some of his plays. Thus for example the repudiation of Śakuntalā by Duṣyanta, her stay in the hermitage of Marīci and the birth of Bharata in the hermitage seem to have been modelled on the similar episodes of Sītā's banishment, her stay at the hermitage of Vālmīki and the birth of her sons in the hermitage narrated in the *Uttarakāṇḍa* of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

During the period 600 A.D. - 700 A.D. was composed the *Rāvaṇavadha Kāvya* by the poet Bhaṭṭi. This *Kāvya* is popularly known as Bhaṭṭikāvya and it was composed to illustrate the principles of Sanskrit grammar. Rāma's story was also dealt with in the celebrated *Kāvya* known as *Jānakībaraṇa* of the poet Kumāradasa. This work is available to us only in part. Another *Kāvya* called *Rāmacarita* composed by a poet Abhinnada by name describes the story of Rāma from the incident of Sītā's abduction upto the death of Kumbha and Nikumbha at the hands of Rāma.

Some other *Kāvyas* which have for their theme the story of Rāma are - *Udāra Rāghava* of Śākalyamalla, *Citrabandha Rāmāyaṇa* of Venkaṭeśvara, *Rāmacandrodaya* and *Rāmayamakārmava* of Venkatesa and *Rāmāyaṇamañjari* of Kṣemendra.

Some Śleṣakāvya were also written with the story of Rāma as one of the themes. The *Rāmacarita* of *Sandhyakara* simultaneously presents the stories of Rāma and Rāmapāladeva the younger brother of king Mahīpāla of North Bengal. Another *Śleṣakāvya* called *Rāghavapāṇḍavīya* of Dhanañjaya presents at the same time the stories of Rāma and the Pāṇḍavas. Similarly, the *Rāghavanaiṣadhīya* narrates the stories of Rāma and Nala. The *Rāghavapāṇḍavayādavīya* of Cidambara presents simultaneously the stories of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Mahābbhārata* and the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*.

The famous Campukavya based on the *Rāmāyaṇa* is the *Rāmāyaṇacampū*. It is ascribed to King Bhoja and is written in an intermixture of prose and poetry.

There are Kāvya written on isolated episodes taken from the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Thus, we have a work called *Rāvaṇarjunīya* written by Bhaṭṭa Bhīma or Bhauma. Just like the *Bhaṭṭikāvya*, this poem too was composed for illustrating rules of Sanskrit grammar. In this Kāvya has been narrated the fight between Rāvaṇa and Kārtavīrarjuna. Another work of this type is the *Prākṛit Kāvya* called *Setubandha* authored by Pravarasena. This work consists of fifteen cantos.

A considerable number of Sanskrit plays has been based either on the main story of the *Rāmāyaṇa* or on some episode found in it. The earliest plays of this type are the *Pratimā Nāṭaka* and the *Abhiṣeka Nāṭaka* attributed to Bhāsa. The *Pratimā Nāṭaka* presents almost the entire story of Rāma in seven acts. The other play begins with the slaying of Vālin by Rama and enthronement of Sugrīva and ends with the fire ordeal of Sītā and coronation of Rāma after his return to Ayodhyā.

Bhavabhūti has presented the story of Rāma in two of his plays. These are *Mahāvīracarita* and *Uttararāmacarita*. The former deals with the early part of Rāma's life upto his coronation after his return of Ayodhyā. The latter work begins with the banishment of Sītā but unlike the original *Rāmāyaṇa* ends with the re-union of Rāma and Sītā.

The *Bālarāmāyaṇa* of Rājaśekhara is a dramatization of the story of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in ten acts. Another play dealing with the story of Rāma is the *Hanumannāṭaka* of Dāmodaramiśra. It consists of fourteen acts and hence, is known as a *Mahānāṭaka*.

Murāri is the author of a play known as *Anargharāghava*. *Prasannarāghava* is another play based on the *Rāmāyaṇa* and its author is Jayadeva. A few other plays based on the *Rāmāyaṇa* are the Āścarya Cūḍāmaṇi of Śaktibadhra, *Kundamālā* of Viranāga, *Rāmābhyudaya* of Śrīrāmadeva and *Adbbutadarpaṇa* of Mahādeva.

Some plays written on smaller episodes taken from the *Rāmāyaṇa* are *Unmattarāghava* of Bhāskarakavi, *Dūtangada* of Subhaṭa, *Janakipariṇaya* of Rāmabhaṇdra Dikṣitā and *Gaṅgavatāra* of Nilakaṇṭha Dikṣitā.

### Stop to consider

Śleṣakāvya consists of verses embellished with the *Alamkāra* known as *Śleṣa*. The use of *Śleṣalamkāra* leads to the expression of more than one meaning by words which are by nature expressive of one meaning. Thus a *Śleṣakāvya* consists of verses with double meanings and both the meanings are intended to be expressed. *Śleṣa* is of two kinds viz. *Arthaśleṣa* and *Śabdaśleṣa*. In the second variety the vital thing is the use of particular words which if substituted by other words, the *Alamkāra* will disappear.

#### SAQ

1. Present a discussion on the influence of the *Rāmāyaṇa* on later Sanskrit literature. Which Sanskrit poet was most influenced by the literary style of Vālmīki?

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### 4.7 Commentaries on the *Rāmāyaṇa*

The most well known commentary on the *Rāmāyaṇa* was composed by Govindarāja of Kanchi in the 16th century A.D. This commentary called *Bhūṣaṇam* is a learned and authoritative work. It can help a reader of Vālmīki's epic in appreciating the poem. The work has been arranged into seven sections in accordance with the seven *Kāṇḍas* of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The seven sections are known by the following seven respective names -*Maṇimañjira*, *Pitāmbara*, *Ratnamekhala*, *Muktābhāra*, *Sṛgaratilaka*, *Maṇimukuṭa* and *Ratnakirīṭa*.

Another important commentary on the *Rāmāyaṇa* is the work called *Vālmīkībhṛdayam*. It was written by Ahobala of Kanchi. He also translated into Sanskrit a Tamil commentary on some selected verses of the epic. Ahobala's pupil Brahmavidyādhvarin wrote a critical commentary on some verses of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. This work is known as *Virodhamañyarī*.

A unique commentary on the *Rāmāyaṇa* is the work called *Dharmākūtam*. It is unique in the sense that it presents a critical analysis of the manner in which the events and incidents narrated in the *Rāmāyaṇa* illustrate the principles of *dharmā* at every step. The author of this critical work was Tryambakamakhin who hailed from Tanjore.

The *Rāmāyaṇasārasaṅgraha* is an exposition of randomly selected verses of the epic and its author is Varadarāja. A similar work is the *Rāmāyaṇasāracandrikā* of Śrīraṅgam. *Kalpavallikā* is an exposition of several important verses of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The author of this work is Nṛsiṃhaśāstrī. In this work the author has interpreted the *Rāmāyaṇa* as a manifestation of the will of the Goddess Tripureśvarī. The *Rāmāyaṇārthaprakāśikā* is an exposition of certain minor incidents in the life of Rāma.

An anonymous commentary on the *Rāmāyaṇa* is the work called *Caturārthī*. As indicated by its very name, it gives four different meanings to verses taken from the epic. The unknown author of the work has displayed much resourcefulness and learning in his interpretations.

Some other commentaries on the epic are *Rāmāyaṇatattvadīpikā*, *Rāmāyaṇadīpikā*, *Subodhinī* and *Rasanīsyandini*.

**SAQ**

1. Show your knowledge of the noteworthy commentaries on the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

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**4.8 Indian Society as reflected in the epic of Vālmīki**

In the *Rāmāyaṇa* we see a many sided picture of a perfect social as well as individual 'life. As it appears the aim of Vālmīki was to present the highest principles of spiritual, moral and ethical



life as laid down in the scriptures. Vālmīki aimed at howling the world how inner perfection of a man can issue from virtuous actions thereby overcoming all evil forces.

In Rāma we find a disciplined human being and a just ruler. By virtue of his inner discipline he towered above all, even above the hermits. He was honoured by them as a protector of *dharāma*. In the age of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the king was totally devoted to the cause of the people. The primary duty of the king was to ensure the happiness and contentment of the masses. *Varṇāśramadharma* i.e. the duties and obligations of the four castes was carefully maintained and guarded by the state and care was taken to uphold common law and social order. The masses were helped in their times of difficulties. They were protected against all calamities and were provided opportunities for employment. Those who could not carry on their livelihoods were provided both moral and material support. The state looked after the health and hygien of the people. It maintained public gardens and other public places.

In order to encourage literacy the state helped the Gurugṛhas in every possible manner. The task of imparting education to the young was taken up by the teachers who led sublime lives. They gave their best to their disciples free of cost. The society fully realized the value of education. Hence, where-ever a teacher established a *gurugṛha* be it in the town or in the forest, the society provided the establishment every necessity for its smooth running. The kings and the nobles arranged for the comfort of the teacher and his disciples. Over and above, the writers and artists were encouraged to carry on their works by offering them rewards in cash.

A note-worthy aspect of governance during the days of the *Rāmāyaṇa* was that at every turn of the affairs of the state the ministers, other officials and the learned members of the society assembled for discussion. Sometimes the commoners also joined them and freely expressed their opinion.

In the age of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, maintenance of *dharma* was the primary out look of the society. Different sections of the people followed their own path of duties as laid down in the scriptures. In those days it was believed that development of personality should be through the performance of studies, civic duties, religious practices, renunciation of wordly ties and so on.

Marriage was looked upon as a sacred institution. The best place for a wife was believed to be by the side of her husband. Service to her husband and the family was considered to be the *dharmā* of a wife. Accepting the principles of married life, Sītā remained true to Rāma all through her life, inspite of the worst kind of hardships, trials and humiliations she had to face. And she came to be looked upon as the epitome of an ideal wife. Vālmiki, drew the character of Sītā as per the norms laid down by the society for a perfect wife. Conforming to the norms of a perfect wife, Sītā inspite of the attitude adopted by Rāma towards her, kept praying for his well being.

A noteworthy aspect of Aryan family life is seen in the close bonding between the four brothers namely Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, Bharata and Śatrughna. The single minded devotion of the younger brothers towards Rāma has no parallel. The three younger brothers entertained equal attachment and submissiveness towards their elder brother. There was Lakṣmaṇa whose heart shrank at the thought of living in comfort when his elder brother was threatened with exile for twelve years. He was angry with Kaikeyi for her machinations, but being obedient to Rāma suppressed his anger. Leaving behind the comfort of the palace he followed Rāma to the forest and served him like a humble servant and dutiful son. There was Bharata who never sat on the throne of Ayodhyā. Instead of sitting on the throne in Rāma's absence, he placed his elder brother's sandals on the throne and ruled the country from Nandigrāma as Rāma's regent. In Rāma we see a loving and dutiful son, a faithful brother, a devoted friend and a magnanimous foe. And as a ruler his character transcends all his private virtues.

**SAQ**

1. What was the primary concern of the ruler in the age of the *Rāmāyaṇa*?

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2. Draw a picture of the society as reflected in the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

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#### 4.9 Summing up

As is the case with all the literary monuments of ancient India, so also the exact date of the great epic composed by Vālmīki has remained unknown to us. On the basis of certain internal and external evidences scholars have placed the *Rāmāṇa* before 600 B.C.

Through the ages the story of Rāma has spread far and wide in the country and this has led to the rise of a number of recensions of the epic such as north-eastern, north-western, western and southern. All these recensions consist of a good number of versions like Newari, Assamese, Bengali, Śāradā, Devanāgarī, Telugu, Grantha, Kannaḍa, Nandināgarī and Malayalam.

Such was the popularity of the *Rāmāyaṇa* that it inspired a good number of reproductions of the story of Rāma. Noteworthy among them are the *Rāmāyaṇakathāsāra*, the *Adhyātmarāmāyaṇa* and the *Vāsiṣṭha Rāmāyaṇa*. Many Kāvya and Nāṭakas were also authored by poets and dramatists either on the main story of Rāma or on some episode taken from the epic. Over and above, the literary style of Vālmīki acted as a model for famous Sanskrit poets like Aśvaghoṣa and Kālidāsa.

The number and variety of commentaries that were written on the epic stand testimony to the popularity of the *Rāmāyaṇa* among the learned.

Literature is said to be the mirror of a society. This adage is truly applicable in case of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. In it has been perfectly mirrored a many-sided picture of Indian society that prevailed in the age of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

Here we also need to look into the influence of the *Rāmāyaṇa* on the masses of rural India. When we do so, we see that the story of Rāma and his ideology have exercised a far-reaching influence upon the common masses of India. Till date the common people of India do not treat the characters of this epic as fictional or imaginary. These characters have rather been accepted as real life heroes. The popularity of the story of Rāma has led to the rise of an oral tradition of narrating the exploits of Rāma in different regions of India. And this tradition which exists in different linguistic communities of rural India has even touched the so called illiterate commoners of our

country. As a result of this, the stories of Rāma, Sītā, Hanumāna and the others have become a part and parcel of Indian folklore across the length and breadth of the country.

### **Suggested Reading**

1. History of Classical Sanskrit Literature, M. Krishnamachariar, Delhi.
2. A History of Indian Literature, M. Winternitz, Vol. I, Delhi.
3. The Cultural Heritage of India, Vol. II, The Ramkrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta.
4. A Comparatives Study on Oral Rāmāyaṇī Tradition of Assam, Bengal & Orissa, Bijoya Baruah, Post Graduate Dept. of Assamese, Dimoria College, Khetri, Kamrup (M)
5. रामकथा (उत्पत्ति और विकास), फादर कामिल बुल्के, प्रयाग।



## UNIT - V

### An Introduction to the Mahābhārata

#### Contents :

- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Objective
- 5.3 Origin and development of the *Mahābhārata*
- 5.4 Some important commentaries of the *Mahābhārata*
- 5.5 Name of the characters of the *Mahābhārata*
- 5.6 Brief description of important characters of the *Mahābhārata*
- 5.7 Summing up
- 5.8 Sample Questions
- 5.9 Reference books.

#### 5.1 Introduction :

*Mahābhārata*, the great epic of India, is one of the greatest books of the world. The *Mahābhārata* is very much revered in India and basically among the Hindus. As the tradition says, the great sage Vedavyāsa was the author of the *Mahābhārata*. Legend says that, he was born out of the union of sage Parāśara and the virgin girl Satyavatī. As he was born in an island (dvīpa) he is also called Dvaipāyana. While he composed the *Mahābhārata*, God Gaṇeśa is said to have acted as his amenuensis : The *Mahābhārata* is one of the longest poem in the world containing one hundred thousand verses. It comprises eighteen parvas including supplement titled *Harivaṃśa*. It is written in Sanskrit, the ancient sacred language of India delineating the great war between the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas. The *Mahābhārata* is an important source of information of the development of Hinduism and is considered

by the Hindus as both a text about moral law (*Dharma*) and a history (*Itihāsa*). It is an exposition of *dharma*, including the proper conduct of a king, of a warrior, of an individual living in times of calamity and of a person aspiring release from rebirth. It is called *Mahābhārata* not only because of its hugeness and heaviness. It contains the essence of all scriptures; it is an encyclopaedia of ethics, religion, politics and philosophy and it is said whatever is found in the *Mahābhārata* can be found everywhere and nothing can be found elsewhere what is not there in the *Mahābhārata*. The very name *Mahābhārata* is enough to bring the thrill of sacred ideas, thoughts and concepts. It is not at all a poetic product but rather an entire literature. In other words its valuable message and voluminous content of the story of *Bhāratas* made it a great one.

The core event of the story of the *Mahābhārata* is the great battle that was fought on the field of Kurukṣetra between the five sons of king Pāṇḍu called Pāṇḍava and their allies on the one side and the hundred sons of king Dhṛtarāṣṭra called Kaurava with their allies, on the other. It is from the womb of this mighty *Mahābhārata* that famous scriptures like the *Gītā*, *Viṣṇusahasranāma Anugītā*, *Bhīsmasṭava rāja* and others came into existence. The *Mahābhārata* is the source of so many epics, dramas and other literary works. It is so wide that the saying of vyāsa “यदिहास्ति तदन्यत्र यत्रेहास्ति न तत् क्वचित्” would be always true. In fact, by studying this mighty scripture one can get a true picture of Indian culture.

Its composition appears to have passed through at least three stages. According to the scholars the transformation of the epic *Mahābhārata* into the present compilation perhaps took place between the 4th century B.C. and the 4th century A.D.

## 5.2 Objectives :

In this unit we are going to discuss some important aspects of the *Mahābhārata*. From this unit you will be able to know about

- brief introduction of the *Mahābhārata*.
- origin and development of the *Mahābhārata*.
- some important commentaries of the *Mahābhārata*.
- name of the characters of the *Mahābhārata*.
- and brief description of some important characters of the *Mahābhārata*.

### 5.3 Origin and Development of the *Mahābhārata*

The *Mahābhārata* is a book of great antiquity. No one can say firmly regarding how this great epic originated. Still much has till now been discussed and asserted about it. Complying with the derivation, as accorded with grammatical principle the very meaning of the term '*Bhārata*' is that where the war and vigour of the kings of *Bhārata* lineage have been described. Renowned grammarian Pāṇini gives the meaning of the term '*Bhārata*' as '*Samgrāma*' i.e. war (Pāṇini: Aṣṭādhyāyī 4.2.56), with the help of which the meaning of the '*Mahābhārata*' can be interpreted as 'great war'. Another name of the '*Mahābhārata*' is '*Mahābhāratākhyāna*'. Towards the later part of the epic itself, it has been stated that due to its greatness and weight the epic is entitled so. But this explanation could not satisfy the scholars in as much as the very term '*Mahābhārata*' indicates the existence of a great '*Bhārata*' and it provokes the probability of a small '*Bhārata*' prior to the greater one.

As mentioned in the epic itself, it is called *Mahābhārata* because of its hugeness and heaviness. In other words its valuable message and voluminous content made it a great story of the historic battle of *Bhārata* 'महत्वात् भारवत्त्वाच्च महाभारतमुच्यते'। The *Mahābhārata* is 'Jaya'. The name 'Jaya' indicates the victory of the Pāṇḍavas from which it can be asserted that the great *Bhārata* war was the subject matter of Jaya. The name 'Jaya' occurs in the very beginning of the *Mahābhārata* that runs as :

नारायणं नमस्कृत्य नरं चैव नरोत्तमम्।

देवी सरस्वतीं व्यासं ततो जयमुदीरयेत् ॥ (आहिपर्व. १.)

One can find no legendary descriptions there in the 'Jaya'.

This history of the triumph of the Pāṇḍavas forms the core of a popular narrative which was turned into a ballad recited by wondering minstrels. It must have been the earliest recension of the epic, and naturally must have been in this form small text of about 8,000 to 10,000 stanzas. It is just likely that this recension grew further into a *Bhārata* with more 24000 stanzas. The theme of the work was enlarged upon a fratricidal was between the two vast armies and may have included at least a brief account of the race of the *Bhāratas*. At last when it was extended to a greater length of 1,00,000 slokas it came to be called *Mahābhārata*. Devarṣi Nārada read out the *Mahābhārata* to the Gods.

एकं शतसहस्रं तु मानुषेषु प्रतिष्ठितम् ।

नारदोब्राह्मण्यद् देवानसिता देवलः पितृन् ॥ ( आदिपर्व : 107 )

According to the text of the *Mahābhārata*, Vyāsa at first taught it to Śuka, as it is mentioned earlier, followed by five other disciples named Sumantu, Jaimini, Paila, Śuka and Vaiśampāyana. But Vyāsa approved the authenticity only to Vaiśampāyana's *Samhitā* and the *Asvamedha parva* of Jaimini's *Samhitā*, the other three were not probably upto the degree of excellence.

From the study of the *Mahābhārata*, it is known that there were many recension of the epic. One recension assigns Lord Gaṇeśa to the compiler of this great work for three continuous years. And after the end of the Kauravas, Vyāsa published the book.

Janmejaya, the great grandson of Arjuna performed a snake sacrifice where Vyāsa was present. Here to fulfill the wish of Janmejaya, Vaiśampāyana being permitted by Vyāsa read out the story of the epic named 'Jaya'. Janmejaya expressed his curiosity in between the speech of Vaiśampāyana the answering parts of which became mingled with the main text later on. This is the second of Vyāsa's work named " *Bhāratasamhitā* '.

Sometimes after Janmejaya's snake sacrifice Sage Śaunaka performed another grand sacrifice in *Naimiṣāraṇya*. It continued for long twelve years. Here sage *Sauti* was present. *Sauti* had the occasion to listen the *Bhāratasamhitā* in the snake sacrifice of Janmejaya, *Śaunaka* requested *Sauti* to narrate the *Bhārata Samhitā*. He did it accordingly along with his own views and opinions. He simultaneously offered apt examples and other legendary descriptions. He also annexed the part ' *Harivaṁśa* ' to it. As a result the size of the *Bhārata Samhitā* became large. This large recension became famous as *Mahābhārata* due to its magnanimity both in size and in depth of knowledge of subject matter.

### **Stop to Consider :**

Jaya is the core of the *Mahābhārata* and was authored by Vyāsa.

Jaya became *Bhārata* when Vaiśampāyana added details and conveyed it to Janmejaya. *Bhārata* became *Mahābhārata* when *Sauti* added further details and conveyed it to the Ṛsis in the *Naimiṣa* forest.



#### 5.4 Commentaries of the *Mahābhārata*

There are a number of commentaries on the *Mahābhārata* by many scholars viz. Nīlakanṭha, Arjunamiśra, Sarvajña Nārāyaṇa, Vaiśampāyana, Vādirāja, Vimalabhatta, Caturbhuja, Devabodha etc which are discussed below :

1. *Nīlakanṭha* - Nīlakanṭha is the most well known commentator of the *Mahābhārata*, the full name of Nīlakanṭha is Nīlakanṭha Caturdhara (choudhary). His commentary *Bhāratabhāvādīpa* written 18 parvas of the *Mahābhārata* is very famous. His father's name was Govinda and also son's name was Govinda. Nīlakanṭha lived at Kurpara in Maharastra probably in the 16th century.
2. *Arjunamiśra* - Arjunamiśra lived in a village of Bengal. The name of his commentary is *Bhāratābhavaḍīpikā*. His father's name was Īśāna. Arjunamiśra mentions Devabodha, Vimalabodha, Sarvajñanārāyaṇa and Śāndilya. He seems to be flourished in the later part of the 14th century A.D. His commentary is short but in full of essence. According to him *Harivaṃśa* is undivided part of the *Mahābhārata* and so he wrote commentary on *Harivaṃśa* also.
3. *Devabodha* - Devabodha is of the oldest commentator of the *Mahābhārata*. He wrote commentary on *Ādīparva*, *Sabhāparva*, *Bhīṣma parva*, and *Udyogaparva*. The name of his commentary is *jñānadīpikā*. It is not expanda but is considered as authentic. He is called as Paramahaṃsa Parivrājakācārya. He folurished earlier than 1150 century.
4. *Caturbhuja Miśra* - Chaturbhuja Misra is an honourable commentator of the *Mahābhārata*. He wrote a commentary on *Virātaparva* named “*Bhāratopāya-Prakāśa*”. He seems to be flourished between 1250 and 1660 A.D. He lived at Kampila in Uttarpradesh.
5. *Ānandapūrṇa Vidyāsāgara* - Ānandapuraṇa Vidyāsāgara was an ascetic and lived in the middle part of 14th century A.D. Vidyāsāgara was his surname. In the history of Advaita Vedānta he was a reputed author whose works are : *Pañcapādikā Tikā*, *Nyāyakalpalatika*, *Bhāvaśuddhi*, *Vidyāsāgari*, *Mahāvidya-Viḍambana Tikā*, *Samanvaya Suta Vivṛti*, *Nyāya Condrika*, *Vedānta Vidyā - Sāgara* and *Prakṛitya Mañjari*. He wrote commentary on the five parvas

- of the *Mahābhārata*, viz. *Ādīparva*, *Sabhāparva*, *Bhīṣmaparva*, *Śāntīparva* and *Anuśāsanaparva*.
6. *Vādirāja* - Vādirāja was a Madhva ascetic who lived in South India between 1450 to 1500 and his commentary is an extensive work. He wrote commentary on the *Virātaparva* and *Udyogaparva* named *Lakṣābharāṇa* or *Lakṣālamkāra*.
  7. *Sarvajña Nārāyaṇa* - Sarvajña Nārāyaṇa appears to be the earliest commentator whose work is at least extant in fragments. His commentary is named as *Bhāratārtha-Prakāśa*.
  8. *Vimalabodha* - Vimalabodha wrote commentary on the eighteen parvas of the *Mahābhārata*. The name of his commentary is “*Viśamaśloki*”. His date is about 1050 A.D.
  9. *Vaiśampāyana* - Vaiśampāyana wrote commnetary on the *Śāntīparva* or *Mokṣadbharmaparva*. He seems to be flourished 1150 A.D.

Gadanand wrote “*Bhārata Jñāna Dipaka*” and Kavindra wrote “*Bhārata Vyākhyā*” on the *Mahābhārata*.

Besides, we get the names of some commentators of the *Mahābhārata*. They are Nandikeśvara, Nanda-nācārya, Paramānanda Bhattacharya, Ratnagarbha, Rāmakṛṣṇa, Lakṣaṇabhata, Śrinivāsācārya etc.

### **Stop to Consider :**

#### **Commentary - भाष्य**

The definition of a भाष्य (commentary) is mentioned thus:

सूत्रार्थो वर्ण्यते यत्र पदैः सूत्रानुसारिभिः ।

स्वपदानि त्र वर्ण्यते भाष्यं भाष्यविदो विदुः ॥

According to the expert of भाष्य, भाष्य is that where the meaning of a sutra is described in letters following the sūtra and also where the own words of the commentators are described.

### **5.5 Characters of the Mahābhārata**

Abhimānyu	Son of Arjuna
Adhiratha	Sārathi of king Śāntanu
Ambā	Daughter of Kāśirāja
Ambikā	Daughter of Kāśirāja, wife of vicitravīrya
Ambalikā	Daughter of Kāśirāja, wife of vicitravīrya
Aniruddha	Grandson of Kṛṣṇa; son of Pradyumna and Rkmavati

Arjuna	Fourth son of Kuntī sired by Indra
Aśvatthāmā	Son of Droṇa
Bhagīratha	King of solar dynasty
Bhīma	Third son of Kuntī, sired by wind god
Bhīṣma	Eight son of Śāntanu and Gaṅgā
Bṛhaspati	Spiritual head of deities
Citrāngada	Son of Śāntanu and Satyavatī
Devayānī	Daughter of Śukrācārya
Dhṛṣṭadyumna	Son of Drupada
Dhṛtarāṣṭra	Elder brother of Pāṇḍu
Droṇa	Son of Bharadwāja
Drupada	Father of Draupadī and Dhṛṣṭadyumna, king of Pāñcāla.
Draupadī	Wife of five Pāṇḍavas, daughter of Drupada.
Duryodhana	First son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Gāndhārī and eldest of hundred Kauravas.
Duḥśāsana	Brother of Duryodhana, son of Gāndhārī and Dhṛtarāṣṭra
Duḥśalā	Daughter of Gāndhārī and Dhṛtarāṣṭra.
Ekalavya	Enimitable archer and student of Droṇa.
Gāndhārī	Wife of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, mother of hundred Kauravas, sister of Śakuni, daughter of king Gāndhāra.
Gaṅgā	Mother of Bhīṣma, wife of Śāntanu.
Ghatokasa	Son of Bhīma.
Jayadratha	Son-in-law of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and king of Sindhu kingdom.
Karṇa	Eldest son of Kuntī, sired by sun-god.
Kṛpācārya	Teacher of Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas
Kṛṣṇa	Incarnation of Lord Viṣṇu, friend and charioteer of Arjuna.
Kuntī	Wife of Pāṇḍu, mother of Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma and Arjuna.
Mādri	Second wife of Pāṇḍu, mother of Nakula and Sahadeva,
Nakula	Son of Mādri and Pāṇḍu.
Pāṇḍu	Younger brother of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, husband of Kuntī.

Sahadeva	Son of Mādri and Pāṇḍu.
Satyavatī	Daughter of fisherman, wife of king Śāntanu, mother of Citrāngada and Vicitravīrya.
Śakuni	Younger brother of Gāndhārī, maternal uncle of Duryodhana and expert diceplayer.
Śakuntalā	Wife of King Duṣyanta, mother of Sarvadaman.
Śāntanu	Married to Gaṅgā and father of Bhīṣma.
Śukrācārya	Spiritual head of demons.
Vedavyāsa	Son of sage Parāśara and Matsyagandhā, creator of <i>Mahābhārata</i> and many Purāṇas.
Yayāti	Son of King Nahuṣa, father of Puru.
Yudhiṣṭhira	Second son of Kuntī.
Yuyutsu	Son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra from vaiśya maid, who fought for Pāṇḍavas in Mahābhārata war.
Vaiśampāyana	Disciple of Vedavyāsa, who gave discourse of <i>Mahābhārata</i> to Janmejaya.
Vicitravīrya	Son of Śāntanu and Satyavatī.

## 5.6 Brief description of some important characters of the *Mahābhārata*

### 5.6.1 Bhīṣma

One of the prominent character depicting affection, truth, valour, might and courage in the epic *Mahābhārata* is Bhīṣma, the grandfather of the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas. Bhīṣma was born to king Śāntanu of the lunar dynasty and Gaṅgādevī. His boyhood name was Devavrata. He got the name Bhīṣma when he vowed to sacrifice his right to become the king and to remain bachelor for life for the sake of his father's marriage with Satyavatī.

He was a highly skilled warrior and won many battles including one against Paraśurāma. In addition to the military skills he had vast knowledge in the field of politics, ethics and in other fields. As grand old man he acted as the guardian of all members of the dynasty with sincerity and responsibility.

He was a manifestation of wisdom and he tried throughout his life for keeping away the hatred and jealousy between the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas and to save the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas. He had repeatedly urged Duryodhana to desist from war with the Pāṇḍavas but that was not heeded to and war broke

out between the two forces. As a true kṣatriya he did not shy away from the responsibility assigned in the war and fought valiently against the Pāṇḍavas as the general of the Kuru army. In the war he fell and was on the bed of arrows for some days. Even in the death bed he gave many advices to the Pāṇḍavas as the general of the Kuru army. In the war he fell and was on the bed of arrows for some days. He was endowed with the boon at the death at own will by his father and he died accordingly.

### 5.6.2 Droṇācārya

*Droṇācārya* was the son of sage Bharadwāja. He was learned person with great skill in the military warfare. He was an invincible warrior. He was the guru of the royal family of Kuru and Pāṇḍavas. Under his guidance the Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas acquired great skill of warfare. He could recognize the special talent of Arjuna, the third Pāṇḍava and for that he had favoured to a great extent to make him one of the greatest warrior of all time.

Being involved with the royal family of the Kuru for long time had got involved in the war of Kurukṣetra for the Kauravas. After the death of Bhīṣma he became the general of the Kauravas in the war of Kurukṣetra and fought valiently against the Pāṇḍavas and got killed in the war.

### 5.6.3 Dhṛtarāṣṭra

*Dhṛtarāṣṭra* was the son of Vicitravīrya's first wife Ambikā. He was fathered by Vyāsa. He was born blind. Dhṛtarāṣṭra along with the brother Pāṇḍu and Vidura were brought up under the care of Bhīṣma, who took every one to educate and enlighten them in every sphere of knowledge and skill. Dhṛtarāṣṭra married Gāndhārī, daughter of Subala, the king of Gāndhāra. He became father to a hundred sons and one daughter by his wife Gāndhārī. The daughter was named Duḥśalā. She was given in marriage to Jaydratha, the king of Sindhu. Dhṛtarāṣṭra was one of the dominating character of the *Mahābhārata*, who had a very low-esteem and believe that his blindness was a curse, making him unfit to rule. He was very much affectionate towards his sons and for this on many occasions he acted in order to meet the interest and demand of his sons, which could harm to Pāṇḍavas.

At later stage of his life Dhṛtarāṣṭra had to pass his live with deep sorrow in his mind as he was the mute observer of the killing of hundred sons one by one in the hands of Pāṇḍava in the battle of Kurukṣetra, Yudhiṣṭhira became the king. Dhṛtarāṣṭra with his wife Gāndhārī went to forest and at Gangādvāra they performed severe penance and were burnt to death in wild fire.

#### **5.6.4 Duryodhana**

Duryodhana is one of the central characters of the epic *Mahābhārata*. He was the eldest of the one hundred sons of the blind king Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Gāndhārī. The entire epic *Mahābhārata* revolves mainly around the activities of Duryodhana. As a son of a Kṣatriya king he was over ambitious of his position and power and had always espoused jealousy to his cousins, the Pāṇḍavas and had left no stone unturned to harm the Pāṇḍavas including their killings.

He was a hero and man of many qualities. He was powerful too. The literal meaning of Duryodhana is “hard to conquer” and he had till the last day of his life fought against the Pāṇḍavas he had turned himself the villain of the epic.

#### **5.6.5 Śakuni**

Śakunī, one of the chief manipulators of the *Mahābhārata*, was the maternal uncle of Duryodhana. He was one of the main villains in the Hindu epic *Mahābhārata*. He is believed to be an extremely intelligent but devious man. He had intelligently planned the events for the overall destruction of the Kuru dynasty He is credited as the mastermind behind the *Mahābhārata* war. Śakunī had two sons named *uluka* and *vṛkasura*. He was a great devotee of Lord Śiva. Because of this role and activities as depicted in this *Mahābhārata* he is considered for ages as one of the most scorned personalities in Hindu mythology. He is the person who poisoned the mind of his explosive nephew Duryodhana and fueled up the destructive war of *Mahābhārata*, thus becoming the cause of the destruction of the Kauravas. Śakunī was killed by Sahadeva on the seventeenth day of the Kurukṣetra war.

#### **5.6.6 Arjuna**

Arjuna, the third Pāṇḍava is one of the most important characters of the epic *Mahābhārata*. He was a great warrior and

had a primary role in ensuring the victory of the Pāṇḍavas over Kauravas. He was the most favourite student of Guru Droṇa. He had a very sharp brain and could acquire any military skill at ease. He is considered one of the finest archer and peerless warrior. He was the principal warrior for the Pāṇḍavas in the war of Kurukṣetra.

Arjuna was a close friend and brother in law of Lord Kṛṣṇa. The epic *Mahābhārata* says that in the war of Kurukṣetra, when he came face to face with the Kaurava army he declined to take his bow and arrow against his own kith for the sake of acquiring power and kingdom. Lord Kṛṣṇa the charioteer of Arjuna then gave him the lesson about the life, about the permanency of self which came to be known as *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*, a golden treasure of Hindu Philosophy. On being realized the truth of self Arjuna got prepared to fight in the war.

### 5.6.7 Karṇa

Karṇa was the son of Kuntī and his father was the solar deity Surya. He was borne to Kuntī before her marriage to Pāṇḍu and was thus abandoned. He was brought up by Rādheya, the washerman's wife and for that he is also known as 'Rādheya'. The word Karṇa denotes 'ear' and he was named Karṇa because he was borne with divine earrings. He had his education under Paraśurāma. Karṇa was the king of Aṅga. He was one of the greatest warriors whose material, exploits are recorded in the *Mahābhārata*, an admiration expressed by Kṛṣṇa and Bhīṣma within the body of this work. Karṇa was the closest friend of Duryodhana and fought on his behalf against the Pāṇḍavas in the famous Kurukṣetra war. Karṇa had a very strong personality. He had to fight against misfortune throughout his life but was firm to keep his word under all circumstances. He was one of the greatest warrior of the *Mahābhārata*. He was defeated and killed in the war by Arjuna who fought with the assistance of Kṛṣṇa and on the impact of the curses which were showered in him at different occasions.

### Stop to Consider

The life of each of the characters of *Mahābhārata* is a study in itself. Yudhiṣṭhira is the embodiment of virtue. Arjuna of courage, Bhīma of strength, Duryodhana of strong and determined will to

enjoy the present, Bhīṣma of wisdom and bravery, Dhṛtarāṣṭra of being defeated and bringing repentance at every turn, Draupadī of strength of character and conjugal devotion, while the chief actor in the whole drama is the greatest hero - Śrīkṛṣṇa- the politician, warrior, statesman and philosopher.

### SAQ

1. Give a brief idea about the *Mahābhārata*.
2. Write about some important commentaries of the *Mahābhārata*.
3. Write the names of any six chapters of the *Mahābhārata*.
4. What is the subject matter of *virātaparva*.
5. What is the significance of *Śāntiparva*.

### 5.7 Summing up :

In this unit we have discussed the origin and development of the *Mahābhārata*. The *Mahābhārata* is commented by many scholars in different period. Here we have mentioned some important commentaries along with their commentators. There are many characters in the epic Mahābhārata. We have mentioned almost all the names of characters of the epic of which only some important characters are discussed in brief. For details you have to go through the original book.

### 5.8 Sample Questions :

1. Give an introduction to the *Mahābhārata*.
2. Discuss the origin and development of the *Mahābhārata*.
3. Show your acquaintance with the commentaries of the *Mahābhārata*.
4. Mention the names of the different characters of the Mahābhārata. Write a note on one important character.
5. Write the names of important characters of the Kuru Dynasty. Give an idea about the two characters among them.

### CYP

1. What were the names of Karṇa's foster parents?
2. Who was the writer of Mahābhārata?
3. Who was the wife of Dhṛtarāṣṭra?



4. Who was the mother of Karṇa?
5. Who won the war of Kurukṣetra?
6. How many slokas are there in the Mahābhārata?
7. Who wrote the commentary Bhāratabhāvadīpa?
8. Who was Vicitravīrya?
9. What were the names of Bhīṣma's parents?
10. Who was the father of Abhimānyu?

### 5.9 Suggested Reference Books :

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## UNIT - VI

### Contents of the Mahābhārata

#### Contents :

- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 Objectives
- 6.3 Story of the *Mahābhārata*
- 6.4 Influence of the *Mahābhārata*
- 6.5 Contents of the *Mahābhārata*
- 6.6 Recension of the *Mahābhārata*
- 6.7 Summing up
- 6.8 Sample Questions
- 6.9 Suggested Reference Books

#### 6.1 Introduction :

In the previous unit you have learnt a brief introduction of the *Mahābhārata*. The most renowned epic of India is the *Mahābhārata* which can be considered as one of the greatest books of the world. It contains the history of ancient India and all the details of its political, social and religious life. Besides the main episode, it contains much philosophical and devotional material, such as discussion of the four goals of life (*puruṣārtha*). It states the brilliant records of mighty heroes, warriors of great prowess, sages and ascetics. In essence, the story of the epic represents an extended exploration of the responsibilities set forth by the code of *dharmā*.

## 6.2 Objectives :

In this unit we will discuss the story of the *Mahābhārata*, influence of the *Mahābhārata* on classical later literature, contents of the *Mahābhārata* and recension of the *Mahābhārata*. From this unit you will be able to know about

Story of the *Mahābhārata*

Influence of the *Mahābhārata*

Contents of the *Mahābhārata*

Recension of the *Mahābhārata*

## 6.3 Story of the Mahābhārata

The *Mahābhārata* is the history of the great war between the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas. The Kauravas were collectively the hundred sons of the blind king Dhṛtarāṣṭra and the Pāṇḍavas were the five sons of Pāṇḍu who died of a curse. Each of the Pāṇḍavas had a special quality in them and were dutiful for which they were very loved by the people in the kingdom. This made the Kauravas jealous and they began to hate the Pāṇḍavas and they planned many times to destroy the Pāṇḍavas. They first tried to kill the Pāṇḍavas by burning them inside a palace, specially built with inflammable materials but the Pāṇḍavas managed to escape unhurt. After that the Pāṇḍavas along with mother Kuntī moved from place to place. During that time the Pāṇḍavas married Draupadī, daughter of king Draupada by the extraordinary skill of archery of Arjuna in hitting a moving target. After their marriage with Draupadī, Dhṛtarāṣṭra sent for Pāṇḍavas and handed over a portion of kingdom to them. The Pāṇḍavas expounded and improved the condition of the country and established their capital at Indraprastha. They performed the Rājasūya sacrifice with great pomp. The Kauravas were also invited there but on seeing the good fortune of the Pāṇḍavas, they got more enraged. They continued their efforts to demean and ruin the Pāṇḍavas. With an evil design in mind the Kauravas invited the Pāṇḍavas to a game of dice; and with the help of dirty tricks they won all their wealth and kingdom of the Pāṇḍavas. They insulted their wife, Draupadī in the presence of all in the courtyard of king Dhṛtarāṣṭra. On being defeated in the game of dice, Yudhiṣṭhira along with his brothers and wife Draupadī were compelled to go on exile from the kingdom and live for twelve years in a forest and one year in

disguise. On completion of the specified period of the exile of the Pāṇḍavas returned and asked the Kauravas to return their property and kingdom. But the Kauravas flatly refused to return their kingdom. This gave rise to the great family war in Kurukṣetra in which all the Kauravas were annihilated and the Pāṇḍavas alone survived and got the victory. The Pāṇḍavas were able to attain success on account of their righteous cause and divine grace. After the end of the war of Kurukṣetra in which all sons of Kauravas were killed. Dhṛtarāṣṭra and his queen Gāndhārī and Kuntī, the mother of the Pāṇḍavas, lived a life of asecicism in a forest retreat and died with yogic calm in a forest fire. Kṛṣṇa and Vāsudeva left after around thirty six years after the battle took place. When the Pāṇḍavas realised that it was time to leave this earth, they embarked upon the Great journey towards the heavenly abode. On their journey towards the heaven Sahadeva, Nakula, Draupadī, Arjuna and Bhīma fell down one by one and died and Yudhiṣṭhira could only ascend to the heaven along with the dog.

### **Stop to Consider :**

The *Mahābhārata* can be interpreted in three ways:

1. Normally, it is the story of a particular royal family that becomes involved in a fierce fratricidal war. At this level, it elucidates some qualities of heroism and courage.
2. Ethically, the war is seen as the perennial conflict fought in daily life between good and evil, justice and injustice, right and wrong, dharma and adharma.
3. Spiritually, the war is seen as the battle between the higher and the lower self.

### **6.4 Influence of the *Mahābhārata***

धर्मं ह्यर्थे च कामे च मोक्षे च भरतर्षभ ।

यदिहास्ति तदन्यत्र यत्रेहास्ति न तत् क्वचित् ॥

The verse mentioned above bespeaks the magnanimity of the *Mahābhārata*. The *Mahābhārata* is the store-house of *dharmā*, *artha*, *kāma* and *mokṣa* and whatever is found in the *Mahābhārata* can be found elsewhere and nothing can be found elsewhere what is not there in the *Mahābhārata*. The very name *Mahābhārata* is enough to bring the thrill of sacred ideas, thoughts and concepts. Having been composed by the great sage Vedavyāsa

this mighty scripture consists of one hundred thousand verses. It comprises eighteen parvas delineating the great war between the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas.

Due to its incredible speciality, the *Mahābhārata* has rightly been designated as the fifth Veda. It is from the womb of this mighty *Mahābhārata* that the famous scriptures like the *Gītā*, *Viṣṇusahasranāma*, *Anugītā*, *Bhīṣmastavarāja* and others came into existence. The *Mahābhārata* is the source of so many epics, dramas and other literary works. It bears great amount of principles which can provoke the poetic minds of the people. It is because of this fact that the western scholars regard the *Mahābhārata* as 'epic within epic'. If the Sanskrit works which are based on the *Mahābhārata* are imagined to be excluded from area of Sanskrit literature then the whole existing scenerio would be different as the number of works would become too low. Such is the impact of the *Mahābhārata*.

In later ages, the origin of the *Mahābhārata* possessed such an expanded form that the minor parts of it could be found in the magnum works of the most celebrated Bhāsa, Kālidāsa, Māgha, Śrīharṣa, Bhavabhūti, Bāṇa and whose not.

That the *Mahābhārata* is a major source of other literary activities is stated in the text of the *Mahābhārata* itself.

“सवैषां कविमुख्यानामुपदीप्यी भविष्यति।”

Again,

“इदं कविवरैः सर्वेशश्यानमुपजीव्यते।”

Every aspect of spirituality, poetics, society, literature, religion, history has got due place in the classic. It is mentioned in the *Mahābhārata* that as Navanīta is the best in curds, Brāhmaṇa among men, Āraṇyakas in the Vedic lore, nectar in medicine, cow in four footed animals so is the *Mahābhārata* in the whole range of *Itihāsa*.

Right from Bhāsa down to posterities there is hardly anyone who has not been influenced by the *Mahābhārata*. This fact would be vouchased from the following chart of books based on the epic.

1. Epics -

- (i) *Śisupālavadham* of Maharṣi Māgha
- (ii) *Naiṣadhīyacharitam* of Śrīharṣa
- (iii) *Kīrātārjunīyam* of Bhāravi

2. DRAMAS –

- (i) Six dramas out of thirteen composed by the pioneering dramatist Bhāsa, entitled Dūtaghatotkacha, Dūtavākya, Karṇavāra, Madyamavyāgoga, Pañcarātra, Urubhaṅga.
- (ii) *Abhijñānśakuntalam*, the greatest drama of Mahākavi Kālidāsa.
- (iii) *Veṅśambhāra* of Bhattanārāyaṇa
- (iv) *Vālabhāratam* of Rājesekhar.

3. CAMPUKAVYAS

- (i) *Nalacampu* of Trivrikramabhata
- (ii) *Bhāratacampu* of Bhattanārāyaṇa
- (iii) *Pāncālī Svayamvara campu* of Narayana Bhatta
- (iv) *Draupadīpariṇaya campu* of Chakrakavi.

Thus we can see from the above list that in the annals of the extant five epics of Sanskrit literature (Pañcamahākāvya) three of them are based on the *Mahābhārata*. It is in the *Sabbāparvan* that we find the germ of the *Naiṣadhacharitam*. The love story of king Nala and Damayantī, the daughter of the king of Bidarbha has got lucid narration there in the *Sabbāparvan*. Likewise, the *Śīsupālavadhā* which is the erudite outcome of Mahākavi Māgha is the expanded and innovated form of its origin which are found in the chapters 33-45 of the *Sabbāparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*. This huge epic of 20 cantos is but the production originated from the *Mahābhārata*. There exist many a verse which resemble the origin texts of the epic.

But it must be admitted that Māgha has profusely displayed his mastery and brought much innovations like those of the third canto to thirteen canto as a result of which this epic has become the gem of Sanskrit literature.

Likewise, the *Kirātārjunīyam*, the legendary credit of Maharṣi Bhāravi has been originated from the *Mahābhārata*. This poem, as it accords with the *Mahābhārata*, describes how Arjuna obtained the ‘pāśupāta’ weapon from Lord Śiva.

Coming to the realm of drama it can be stated that the influence of the *Mahābhārata* has always been abundant towards Sanskrit dramas. Bhāsa, the father of Sanskrit drama was greatly inspired

by the sublimity of this great classic as a result of which six dramas out of this thirteen dramas are based on the *Mahābhārata*.

Then comes the *Abhijñānaśakuntalam* the yolk of Sanskrit dramas. It is rightly considered to be one of the greatest poetic production that India ever has. Mahākavi Kālidāsa has applied his unparalleled genius in the drama. It is again the *Mahābhārata* that provides the central theme of the play. The love story of Duṣyanta and Śakuntalā has been narrated in the *Mahābhārata* at length. The original story is in simple form. Kālidāsa grasped it from the Ādiparvan of the epic and gave it the classic touch to make the *Abhijñānaśakuntalam* the most unparalleled in the dramatic literature of India.

Not only that, the influence of *Mahābhārata* is greatly seen in compo literature also. Campu is the composition of mixed prose and verse. The *Nalacampū*, *Bhārata campū*, *Pāncālīsāyamvara campū*, *Draupadīsāyamvara campū*, all the examples of this kind of literature based on the *Mahābhārata*.

The impact of the *Mahābhārata* on Indian vernaculars is also worth-mentioning. The religious vows performed by the common mass accord the principles of the epic till today. Dr. Winternitz describes the *Mahābhārata* as a whole literature and doesnot look upon it as one poetic production. It is not only a poem but also a ‘repository of the whole of the old bard poetry’.

So, it may be genuinely said that the past, the present and also the future of this great land India are latent in the great epic, the *Mahābhārata*. Hence, it is worthy to refer here to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of Independent India, who made a never failing remark in his ‘Discovery of India’, that in order to understand the karnal of India’s all comprehensive greatness one must make a cohesive study of the *Mahābhārata*.

The epic *Mahābhārata*- its characters, incidents, legacy etc. occupy prominent place in the overall psyche of the Indian masses. This is reflected by the overall creative writings on various aspects of the happenings and characters of the *Mahābhārata* in the text of various languages. It is not merely confined to the classical Sanskrit literature but extends upto various other languages too.

### **Stop to Consider**

Every episode of the epic *Mahābhārata* relates great moral lesson. The *Bhagavadgītā*, is well known in every civilised country

of the world. The ethical and moral values which are scattered all over the poem are a treasure and wealth for all people of all ages. The *Śāntiparva* and the *Anuśāsanaparva* of the epic form one long treatise on religion, philosophy and ethics. The stories of Śakuntalā, Nala and Damayantī, Sāvitrī, Dharma-vyādha etc. forward great lesson to the society. The most important message of the epic is that the goal of life can be attained through pain and suffering. It is the means through which a person is moulded, disciplined and strengthened.

### 6.5 Contents of the *Mahābhārata*

The *Mahābhārata* contains eighteen books known as parvas. The title, chapters, contents of the eighteen parvas are given in the followings chart.

Book Title	Chapters	Contents
1 Ādiparva	1-19	Introduction, birth and upbringing of Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas
2 Sabhāparva	20-28	Life at the court, the game of dice, and the exile of the Pāṇḍavas. Maya Dānava erects the palace and court (sabhā) at Indraprastha.
3 Vanaparva	29-44	The twelve years in exile in the forests.
4 Virātaparva	45-48	The year in exile spent at the court of Virāta.
5 Udyogaparva	49-59	Preparation for war.
6 Bhīṣmaparva	60-64	The first part of the great battle with Bīṣma as the commander of the Kauravas.
7 Droṇaparva	65-72	The battle continues, with Droṇa as the commander.
8 Karṇaparva	73	The battle again with Karṇa as the commander
9 Śalya-parva	74-77	The last part of the battle, with Śalya as the commander



10	Saupatika parva	78-80	The killing of Pāṇḍava army in their sleep by Aśvatthama and Kaurava army.
11	Strīparva	81-85	Lamentation of Gāndhārī and other women.
12	Śāntiparva	86-88	The crowning of Yudhiṣṭhira and his instructions from Bhīṣma.
13	Anuśāsanaparva	89-90	The instructions from Bhīṣma about various aspects.
14	Āśvamedhikaparva	91-92	The royal ceremony of Aśvamedha (horse-sacrifice) by Yudhiṣṭhira
15	Āśramavāsika parva	93-95	Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Gāndhārī-and Kuntī leave for the forest and eventual death in that forest.
16	Mausala parva	96	The inflighting between the yādavas with maces (mausala).
17	Mahāprasthānika parva	97	Mahāprasthāna of Yudhiṣṭhira and his brothers and wife.
18	Svargārohonaparva	98	Return to the spiritual world (svarga) of Yudhiṣṭhira.

#### 6.4.1 Ādiparva

Ādiparva is the first of the eighteen parvas of the great epic *Mahābhārata*. It consists of nineteen sub-parvas. The Ādiparva relates the history of Bhārata and Bhṛgu race in detail. The early life of the princes of the two princely families of the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas is narrated in this parva. Also presented in this parva is how the *Mahābhārata* was narrated by sage Sauti to Ṛṣis who assembled at *Naimiṣāraṇya*. Further the narration of the *Mahābhārata* at the sarpasatra of Janmejaya by Vaiśampāyana at Taxila has also been described. It gives the information about the incident of vārānasī where a palace was constructed with the use of lac, a highly combustible material. The Pāṇḍavas were informed about the newly constructed palace for them and ultimately the five brothers went to live in that beautiful palace with their mother. The Pāṇḍavas came to know the motive of Duryodhana, they were helped by one of the servants of Vidura who constructed an

underground tunnel from that palace to a near by forest and one night they escaped through the tunnel with their mother after setting fire in the house of lac and they escaped from the lākṣāgrha. In the forest Bhīma killed a Rākṣaṣa named Hidimba and married his sister Hidimbā. It relates the *svayambara* of Draupadī, daughter of Drupada, and her marriage with the five Pāṇḍavas. It also states about the marriage of Subhadrā with Arjuna.

#### **6.4.2 Sabhāparva**

The *Sabhāparva* is the second parva of the epic *Mahābhārata*. It contains nine sub-parvas. This parva provides an account of Maya Dānava who constructed the palace for Yudhiṣṭhira. Besides, the courtly life of Pāṇḍavas has also been narrated in this parva in a very fascinating way. The other contents of this parva are the descriptions of lokapāla, the preparation for the Rājasuya sacrifice, the (death) destruction of Jarāsandha by Bhīma and the death of Śiśupāla on the occasion of the sacrifice by Śrīkṛṣṇa. The sight of the magnificent courtyard and the arrangement made for Yudhiṣṭhira caused sorrow and envy in the mind of Duryodhana and out of jealousy and anger he planned for deceiving Yudhiṣṭhira through the game of dice. This parva of *Mahābhārata* deals with the events related to the defeat of Yudhiṣṭhira at play in the hand of the tricky Śakuni, the humiliation faced by Draupadī in the court in public view as a consequence of the distress caused by the gambling. The endeavours of Duryodhana to engage Yudhiṣṭhira again in the game and the exile of the defeated Yudhiṣṭhira with his brothers are narrated in this parva.

#### **6.4.3 Vanaparva**

*Vanaparva* is the third of the eighteen parvas of the great epic *Mahābhārata*. It comprises twenty two sub-parvas. This parva opens with Janmejaya's query regarding the life of the Pāṇḍavas in the forest. It contains description of many subjects viz. the conversation between Yudhiṣṭhira and Śaunaka, Yudhiṣṭhira's attainment of Akṣaya-pātra from God sun, Vīdura's advices to Dhṛtarāstra, Vyāsa's narration on the legend of Surabhi and Indra. It also describes the curse of Maitreya on Duryodhana for his rude behaviour, the annihilation of kirmira by Bhīmasena, the acquire of Pāśupata weapon by Arjuna from Lord Śiva. It also consists of

the legend of Nala and Damayantī which has been narrated by Bṛhadāsya. It states the greatness of tīrthayātrā, description of some famous pilgrimage of India and highlights the importance of pilgrimage. It also contains description of voyage of the Pāṇḍavas in search of the 'Arani' i.e. sacrificial wood and how the four Pāṇḍavas viz. Sahadeva, Nakula, Arjuna and Bhīma got senseless on the bank of lake and regained consciousness by the grace of yakṣa who was satisfied with the words of Yudhiṣṭhira.

#### **6.4.4 Virātaparva**

*Virātaparva* is the fourth parva of the *Mahābhārata* containing five sub-parvas. This parva contains an elaborate description of the thirteen year of exile lived by the Paṇḍavas in the kingdom of virāta. As per the condition of the game of dice where Yudhiṣṭhira was defeated, the five brothers and their wife, Draupadī stayed in that kingdom in disguise according to their skill and quality. It beautifully states how the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī efficiently disguised themselves and stayed well in the kingdom of Virāta without being noticed by anybody. It narrates the death of Kichaka, the general of the army of Virāta and the brother of Sudesṇā, wife of Virāta, for his misadventure towards Draupadī by the second Pāṇḍava, Bhīma.

It also describes the defeat of all the kuru warriors in the hands of Arjuna disguised as Brihannalā. This parva contains the description of marriage of Abhimānyu and Uttarā the daughter of Virāta. It describes the events after the end of the thirteen year of exile of the Pāṇḍavas, how they along with their wife Draupadī made themselves visible with more power, effort and determination.

#### **6.4.5 Udyogaparva (Book of the effort)**

*Udyogaparva* is the fifth parva of the *Mahābhārata* containing eleven sub-parvas. It narrates the preparation for war between the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas. It presents a narrative picture of the period after the Pāṇḍavas successfully fulfilled all the conditions of thirteen years banishment. After the end of the banishment the Pāṇḍavas claimed the kingdom of Hastināpura. Duryodhana had no choice left but to give Pāṇḍavas their due portion of kingdom. It also gives an account of the greed and hatred of the Kauravas

towards the Pāṇḍavas. Moreover, the well known Viduranīti is imbedded in this parva. Viduranīti was held by Vidura to Dhṛtarāṣṭra just before the commencement of the Kurukṣetra war. The effort of kṛṣṇa to bring peace between the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas has also been described in this parva.

#### **6.4.6 Bhīṣma Parva**

*Bhīṣma Parva* is the sixth parva of the *Mahābhārata* and it consists of five sub-parvas. The *Bhagavadgītā*, the best known Hindu sacred text is contained in this parva. In this parva there are details of the battle kurukṣetra between the armies of the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas, the kuru forces being commanded by Bhīṣma, the grandfather of Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas. Here, Kṛṣṇa smote with piercing words Arjuna, the foremost in battle among all wielders of weapons (to inspire for fighting). In the war, Bhīṣma killed thousand of soldiers and generals of Pāṇḍavas everyday. Not being able to contain Bhīṣma in the war on the night of the ninth day of the war, the Pāṇḍavas went to Bhīṣma, to ask how he could be defeated. After learning the trick Arjuna on the tenth day went to the war accompanied by Śikhaṇḍi an eunuch and at the sight of Śikhaṇḍi Bhīṣma stopped his weapons, as he had a vow not to use arms against women or who was born as a woman. Seizing this opportunity Arjuna showered weapons on his grandfather. After some time Bhīṣma fell down from his chariot. Bhīṣma stressed his life on the bed of arrows for some days. This parva possesses vivid presentation about Bhīṣma and the first part of the great battle of Kurukṣetra.

#### **6.4.7 Droṇa Parva :**

*Droṇa Parva* is a major part of the *Mahābhārata*. It contains description of the events mainly the Kurukṣetra war. It consists of eight sub-parvas.

In this parva, Droṇācārya is portrayed as the royal guru of the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas and one of the most powerful warriors of the time. After the death of Bhīṣma the force was commanded by Droṇācārya in the war. The Droṇaparva ends with the death of a number of great warriors including Abhimānyu, Ghatotkasa and Jayadratha in this war. This parva narrates very minutely and clearly all the happenings relating to Droṇācārya becoming the general of

Kuru army after the death of Bhīṣma and his subsequent death in the hands of Dhṛṣṭadyumna, the son of Drupada.

#### **6.4.8 Karṇa Parva**

*Karṇa Parva* contains description of the battle of Kurukṣetra in detail. After the death of the guru Droṇācārya, Duryodhana installed Karṇa as the commander of kuru army. When Karṇa became the commander of the kuru army, Śalya the Madra king refused to be the charioteer of Karṇa. But on being praised by Duryodhana he agreed to be the charioteer of Karṇa. The battle of between different warriors of Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas and the death of six sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra in the hand of Bhīma are described in this Parva.

This parva contains a vivid description of the fight between Arjuna and Karṇa. In the battle field when the two war heroes came face to face fierce fight took place. They forcefully challenged each other. Rain of arrows were showered by both which darkened the sky. After long war the wheel of the chariot of Karṇa went inside the earth and for that force of Karṇa lowered and at that time he was killed by Arjuna. It is said that the valient hero Karṇa was killed because of the curse of his guru Paraśurāma.

#### **6.4.9 Śalya Parva**

*Śalya Parva* is the ninth parva of the epic *Mahābhārata*. It consists of three sub-parvas. Śalya was the king of Madra. After the death of Karṇa he took over the charge of the commander of the Kuru force and this Parva of *Mahābhārata* deals with the events leading to the taking over the charge by Śalya and the subsequent deaths of Śalya and Śakuni in the hands of 'Yudhiṣṭhira and Sahadeva respectively. This Parva also narrates how after the demolition of the kuru force in the war Duryodhana had only a small troupe alive and how he went to the lake and creating for himself a room within its waters. He stretched there for sometime. On receiving the information of hiding Duryodhana in the lake through intelligence sources received from the fowler Bhīma informed Yudhiṣṭhira of the same. Then Yudhiṣṭhira went to the lake and used humiliating speeches towards Duryodhana. Duryodhana unable to bear affronts, came out on the water. Then comes the encounter with clubs, then the fracture of Duryodhana's

thigh in the battle of Bhīma with the mac. These are described in the ninth parva of the *Mahābhārata*.

#### **6.4.10 Sauptika Parva :**

The *Sauptika Parva* consists of three sub-parvas and contains description of the slain of the sons of the Pāṇḍavas in the hands of Aśvatthāmā and others in the war of *Kurukṣetra*. There heroes of the kuru army viz, Kṛtavarmā, Kṛpā and Aswaththāmā came to Kurukṣetra and found the king Duryodhana lying on the ground. Seeing they became very sorry and agrived seeing the pathetic condition of Duryodhana. The son of Droṇa, Aswaththāmā vowed to kill Pāṇḍavas and their allies. He was accompanied by Kṛtavarmā and Kṛpā. One night when all were asleep they slew all sons of Draupadī and all Pāṇḍavas along with Dhṛṣṭadyumna. However the Pāṇḍavas and Satyakā escaped from the hands of the three. This parva mentions how Aswaththāmā discharged his celestial bow to destroy Pāṇḍavas and how Pāṇḍavas got the jewel form him and gave it to Draupadī who was in grief.

#### **6.4.12 Śāntiparva**

*Śāntiparva* is the twelfth parva of the epic *Mahābhārata*. It contains three sub-parvas. Moreover, it consists of *Viṣṇuśahasranāma* containing one thousand names of Viṣṇu which is a popular strotra of the Hindus. At the beginning of this parva, Nārada is seen narrating the happening leading to the curse of Paraśurāma on Karṇa and the destiny of Karṇa to be killed in a great battle where the wheels of his chariot would sink in the battle. It also describes the earlier life of Karṇa and his hard work to attain Brahma weapon. It relates the crowning of Yudhiṣṭhira as the king of Hastināpura after the victory of Pāṇḍavas and instruction given by Bhīṣma to the newly anointed king. It elaborates the duties of a king, rules for adversity and rules for attaining salvation. It is the largest parva of the epic and is very important as it contains knowledge of various philosophical and ethical aspects. It deals with the four āśramas of human life, which is very essential for the development of the society. In the *Mokṣaadharma-parva* it narrates about the salvation, prakṛti, puruṣa, self, creation, dissolution of the world. In fact, it discusses a lot of philosophical, ethical, social, political topics which play an important role in the life of a human being.

### 6.4.13 Anuśāsanaparva

*Anuśāsanaparva* consists of two sub-parvas. It contains description of instruction is given by Bhīṣma on many subjects such as the duties of a king, a householder, a forest life and others. It describes the rules of charity, its merit, the greatness of charity of anna (rice) bhumi (earth) etc. It also states the greatness of Brāhmaṇa and appreciation of Brāhmaṇa. This parva is important as it contains the philosophical concept about heaven, hell, bondage, liberation etc. The mention of *Śivasahasranāmastotra* and *Viṣṇuśahasranāmastotra* are found in this parva. It mentions about the ascension of Bhīṣma to heaven. This thirteenth section of the *Mahābhārata* has laid down accurately the various duties of a man. As it contains so many rules and regulation it is treated as *Anuśāsanaparva*.

### 6.4.14 Mausala Parva

Mausala Parva is the fourteenth parva of the epic *Mahābhārata*. This parva narrates the instances leading to the death of Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma, the destruction of the yādava ladies over their dead husband and the subsequent submersion of Dvārakā, city of Kṛṣṇa in the sea and taking of the survivors of Dvārakā to Hastināpur by Arjuna. This parva is one of the last parvas, followed by *Mahāprasthāna parva* and *Svargārohan parva*.

### 6.4.15 Āśvamedhikaparva

*Āśvamedhikaparva*, the fifteenth parva of the *Mahābhārata*, consists of three sub-parvas. This parva contains the narration of the horse sacrifice (Āśvamedha) performed by Yudhiṣṭhira as token of his show of supremacy over other kings. *Anugītā* is an important part of this parva and this part highlights some aspects of the philosophical issues viz. three guṇas (sattva, rajas and tamas), effect of the guṇas, means of attaining liberation etc. The *vaiṣṇavadharma parva* deals with many important aspects of humans life, e.g. dharma, the duty of four varṇas, hospitality, vrata, the greatness of charity of various things such as *anna*, *bhumi*, *jala*, *pañcamahājajña* etc.

#### **6.4.16 Āśramavāsikaparva**

*Āśramavāsikaparva* is the sixteenth parva of the *Mahābhārata*. The description of the move of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Gāndhārī and Kuntī to the hermitage renouncing the worldly affairs. Dhṛtarāṣṭra is also described as giving some political instruction of Yudhiṣṭhira. In this parva, Vidura is portrayed as a noble person having various virtues. Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Gāndhārī by the blessing of vyāsa were able to see their dead sons and relatives and could thus discard their sorrows. The last part of this parva states that after some days, a forest conflagration takes place and immolate themselves in the fire to secure heaven. This parva also relates the lamentation of Yudhiṣṭhira and other Pāṇḍavas at the death of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Gāndhārī and Kunti and the performance of their funeral Śrāḍha.

#### **6.4.17 Mahāprasthanika parva**

Mahāprasthanika parva is the seventeenth parva of the *Mahābhārata*. It narrates the story of renunciation of throne by Yudhiṣṭhira and his journey with his wife and brothers to heaven. On their journey towards the heaven Sahadeva, Nakula, Draupadī, Arjuna and Bhīma fell down one by one and died because of the sin committed by them and Yudhiṣṭhira could only ascend to the heaven alongwith the dog.

#### **6.4.18 Svargārohana parva**

The *Svargārohana parva*, the eighteenth and the last parva of the *Mahābhārata* narrates how celesial messenger showed Yudhiṣṭhira the picture of hell where one has to suffer because of acts of sin or crime. Yudhiṣṭhira heard the heartrending lamentations of his brothers abiding in the region under the disciplines of Yama. Then Dharma led Yudhiṣṭhira to the region specified for the sinner. Yudhiṣṭhira then left the human body by taking a plunge in the celesial ganges, and attained that region where he began to live in eternal joy with all other gods. This parva ends by saying the greatness of the *Mahābhārata*.

#### **Stop to consider**

Bhīṣma's name in his boyhood was Devavrata. He was the eight son of Śāntanu, a king of lunar dynasty.



His mother is goddess Gangā. She brought him up in heaven untill his teenage years, when he returned to earth to live with his father, the reunion with his absent father, king Śāntanu was intense, joyful and loving. Bhīṣma was devoted son and a courageous warrior. But his father was unhappy and lovesick. So, Bhīṣma took a “terrible vow” to sacrifice his marriage and throne, that king Śāntanu could marry Satyawatī and her son would be king. The Gods showered flowers on the scene. Because he had taken such a Solemn oath, was declared that he would be known by the name of “Bhīṣma”. The loving father Śāntanu also gave him a boon that Bhīṣma would die only when he wished.

### ***Svayamvara :***

A Kṣatriya custom of princess selecting their husbands themselves. There are three kinds of *Svayamvara*. The first type is *Icchāsvayamvara*, the second one is *Savyavasthāsvayamvara* and the third is *Śauryaśulkasvayamvara*. No condition is attached to *Icchāsvayamvara*. Anybody may be chosen as husband according to the wish of the bride. In the second it will be stipulated that the bridegroom will have to possess certain qualifications. The third type is meant for adventure heroes.

## **6.6. Recension of the Mahābhārata**

The text of the *Mahābhārata* has been preserved in two recensions, viz the northern and the southern. These recensions have been sub-divided into versions according to the different provincial scripts in which the text has been handed down. Thus the northern recension comprises Sāradā or Kāshmirī, the Nepālī, the Maithilī, the Bengalī, and the Devanagrī versions. The Southern recension, has given the telugu, and the Mālayalam versions. There are numerous differences, divergences, deviations, and discrepancies of several kinds, between the northern and the southern recensions. The southern recension is considerably longer than the northern one; this excess in volume is due not merely to the repeated addition of fresh passages and episodes through the work, but other factors as well.

**SAQ :**

1. Give a brief idea about the Kurukṣetra war.
2. Name some important characters of the *Mahābhārata*.
3. Write the names of the Pāṇḍavas.
4. Write a note on the classical Sanskrit works based on the *Mahābhārata*.
5. Who are the parents of Kauravas?
6. What is the real name of Bhīṣma? What is his father's name?

**6.7 Summing up**

In this unit we have discussed the influence of the *Mahābhārata* on classical literature, viz. drama, kāvya, campukavya etc. The *Mahābhārata* contains eighteen parvas, each of these relates to different episodes, legends, ethical, spiritual and philosophical teachings. A brief idea about the contents of different chapters have been given in this unit. Here, you have learnt about the Kurukṣetra war which is the plot of the epic. Through study of the original text book you will be able to know the subject matter of the epic which can help to develop the character of each and every individual of the society. It should be mentioned that *Mahābhārata* is considered as the store house of knowledge.

**6.8 Sample Questions :**

1. Give an idea about the story of the *Mahābhārata*.
2. How many chapters are there in the *Mahābhārata*? Write a note on the *Bhīṣmaparva*.
3. Name the last chapter of the *Mahābhārata*. Give an idea about it.
4. Discuss the influence of the *Mahābhārata* on later literature.
5. Write briefly the contents of the *Anuśāsanaparva*.

**6.9 Suggested Reference books**

*Mahābhārata*, Vol. 1-6 Gita Press, Gorakpur

Rajagopalachari, c., Mahabharata, Bombay, 1958. The great war of Ancient India, Allahabad, 1915.

Ray, P.C., The Mahabharata of Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana vyāsa, Calcutta, 1893

Winternitz, M., History of Indian Literature, Calcutta 1927

Bhagavati, K. Saṁskṛt Sāhityar Jilinani.

1. Who composed Venisāmhāra?
2. How many chapters are there in the Ādīparva?
3. What is Svayaṁvara?
4. Name the different kinds of Svayaṁvara?
5. Bhāratacampu is composed by whom?
6. Who composed Kirātarjunīyam?
7. Name the 18th chapter of the Mahābhārata.
8. What was Bhīṣma's boyhood name?
9. What is the content of the Strīparva?
10. What is the meaning of Udyoga in Udyogaparva?



