



International Journal of Sanskrit Research

अनन्ता

ISSN: 2394-7519

IJSR 2023; 9(6): 111-112

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www.anantaajournal.com

Received: 11-10-2023

Accepted: 15-11-2023

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Why the Mahabharata is considered as an Epic: An analytical study

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Abstract

The Mahabharata is considered as one of the greatest epic in the world literature. It contains about one lakh verse. It has eighteen parvas and divided into many sections. The Bhagavad Gita is a small part of the Mahabharat. The poet portrayed all the characters with the supernatural powers. We have learnt many moral lessons from the Mahabharata like being a woman does not make you a lesser individual, stand by right even fight for it, half knowledge can be dangerous, the eternal bond of friendship etc. The Dharma is the major theme of the Mahabharata.

Keyword: Mahabharata, epic, poem, hero, war, dharma, god

Introduction

The Mahabharata is a largest ancient Indian epic. This epic was written about the battle of two branches of a family - the Pandavas and Kauravas for the throne of Hastinapura. Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa, himself played a character in the epic and composed it. It contains about one lakh verse. It has eighteen parvas and divided into many sections. The Bhagavad Gita is a small part of the Mahabharat. The Mahabharata is one of the greatest of ancient Indian, indeed world, literature.

Definition of an Epic

Epic is a long narrative poem recounting heroic deeds, although the term has also been loosely used to describe novels, motion pictures.

According to Oxford dictionary, “*Epic is a long poem, typically one derived from ancient oral tradition, narrating the deeds and adventures of heroic or legendary figures or the past history of a nation*”.

According to Cambridge Dictionary, “*Epic is a film, poem, or book that is long and contains a lot of action, usually dealing with a historical subject*”.

According to Dictionary.com, “*Epic is a noting or pertaining to a long poetic composition, usually centered upon a hero, in which a series of great achievements or events is narrated in elevated style*”.

Characteristics of an Epic

- The first and foremost characteristic of an epic is its bulky size. An epic is an extensive and prolonged narrative in verse. Usually, every single epic has been broken down into multiple books.
- Another essential feature of an epic is the fact that it dwells upon the achievements of a historical or traditional hero or a person of national or international significance. Every epic extolls the valour, deeds, bravery, character and personality of a person who has incredible physical and mental traits.
- Exaggeration is also an important part of an epic.
- Supernaturalism is a must-have feature of every epic. Without having to use supernatural elements, no epic would certainly produce awe and wonder. There are certainly gods, demons, angels, fairies, and use of supernatural forces like natural catastrophes in every epic.
- Morality is a key characteristic of an epic. The poet’s foremost purpose in writing an epic is to give a moral lesson to his readers.

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- The theme of each epic is sublime, elegant, and has universal significance. It may not be an insignificant theme that is only limited to the personality or the locality of the poet. It deals with the entire humanity.
- Invocation to the Muse is another important quality of an epic.
- The diction of every epic is lofty, grand and elegant. No trivial, common or colloquial language is used in epics.
- The use of epic simile is another feature of an epic. Epic simile is a far-fetched comparison between two objects, which runs through many lines to describe the valour, bravery and gigantic stature of the hero. It is also called the Homeric simile.

Characteristics of an epic found in the Mahabharata

- In the Mahabharata we found that it is divided into total 18(eighteen) parvas and divided into many sections. This bulky size is the first and foremost characteristic of an epic.
 - In the Mahabharata we also found the achievements of many great heroes like Krishna, Bhishma, Drona, Arjun, Karna, Bheema, Duryodhana and Abhimanyu. This is one of the characteristics of an epic.
 - In the Mahabharata we also found that almost all the characters have the super naturalistic qualities. There are too many characters are incarnation of Gods. They have supernatural powers.
 - There are many lessons we could learn from the Mahabharata.
- a. **A revengeful instinct can only lead to one's doom:** In the Mahabharata, the major reason behind the destruction of all was revenge. The Kauravas lost everything due to revenge of the Pandavas.
 - b. **Stand by what's right, even fight for it:** Arjuna was initially hesitant to battle against his relatives but Krishna has reminded him about Dharma that he (Arjuna) should stand by what's right and should fight against anybody to protect Dharma.
 - c. **The eternal bond of friendship:** We found the friendship between Krishna and Arjuna as well as between Karna and Duryodhan in the Mahabharat.
 - d. **Half knowledge can be dangerous:** Abhimanyu teaches us how half-knowledge can have an adverse impact on every individual's life. Abhimanyu knew how to enter the Chkaravyuh but he did not know how to exit from it.
 - e. **Being a woman does not make you a lesser individual:** Draupadi was humiliated by the Kauravas for the fault of her own husbands. She was violated but she was bold enough to take a stand and ensured justice.
- In the Mahabharata the poet uses many times epic simile like Dhritarastra scolds his son Duryodhana for seeking war against Yudhisthira, likening him to a child that wants the moon. He extends the simile by saying that you cannot seize the wind with your hand, meaning that Duryodhana is attempting to manipulate forces that are more powerful than any human can control.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can say that the Mahabharata is one of the greatest ancient Indian epic in the world literature. We found all the key characteristics of an epic in the Mahabharata like, its bulky size, achievements of historical or traditional heroes, supernaturalism and sublime themes, epic simile etc.

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