

Historical Echoes in Mythical Realms: Unveiling New Perspectives in the *Mahabharatha* Epic

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Abstract

“Time creates all things and time destroys them all. Time burns all creatures and time again extinguishes that fire” (Anukramanika Parva, Adi Parva). The pluralism of Hinduism sets it apart from other modern religious practices. While other religions are diverse, Hinduism is polythetic, or the polar opposite of monolithic, as Wendy Doniger points out. Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty is an American Indologist with a five-decade professional career. “The texts wrestle with competing truths, rather than offer pat answers” (Hindus, 43-44). The *Mahabharata* is the world’s longest epic poetry, and it has been called the world’s longest poetry. It has approximately 1,00,000 shlokas, over 2,00,000 individual poem lines (each shloka is a couplet), and extended prose passages in its fullest version. The *Mahabharata* is nearly 10 times the length of the *Iliad* (762 BC) and *Odyssey* (8th century BCE) combined or around four times the length of the *Odyssey*. The *Mahabharata* has been studied extensively for its layers, which have been identified and dated. Some of the current Mahabharata’s elements can be traced back to Vedic times.

Stephen Greenblatt coined the phrase “New Historicism” in 1980. Following that, it continues to spread over the same decades. He pointed out that co-text and non-literary material from the same historical period are used to replace content. According to him, this implies that we must also keep track of time through non-literary content. Throughout most of history, humans were primarily interested in the aesthetic value of work, such as themes, characters, storylines, and morals. However, we are now looking at a variety of additional groups of ideas. As a result, we

can refer to it as New Historicism. In Classical Sanskrit literature, several stories from the *Mahabharata* took on separate identities. For example, the legendary Sanskrit poet Kalidasa (c. 400 CE), who lived during the Gupta period, wrote *Abhijnanasakuntala*, which is based on a story that predates the *Mahabharata*. In this research paper, the researcher tries to excavate the epic *Mahabharata* with postmodern theories.

Keywords: New Historicism, Puranas, Vedas and Upanishads

Introduction

Mahabharata have eighteen classifications and we can call it eighteen parvas. The first one is 'Adiparvam'. The Pandavas and the Gritarashtras, the Chandravamsa's kings, are brothers. Dhritarashtra, who was born blind, married Gandhari and produced a hundred sons. They are known as the Kauravas. Pandu had five offspring with his two wives, Kunti and Madi: Yudhishthira, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakulan, and Sahadevan. They are known as Panchapandavars.

According to Wendy Doniger few Hindus, on the other hand, will use the same mixture. While some common threads run through all Hindu depictions, none are explicitly important or properly central. This pluralism contrasts with religious ideologies, which assume that all of their members share core beliefs or practices. Veda Vyasa is a famous writer in the world of classic literature. He is the author of the world-renowned text *Mahabharata*. Parasaran, the father of Veda Vyasa was a great scholar and he created many verses in the Rig Veda. Shakti was the eldest son of Parasaran Maharshi. He was also a preacher. Shakti once cursed King Kanmashapadan, saying, "Let you become a monster that eats human flesh" (17). The soul of that great man, the soul of Brahma, did not leave the body, but Adhyashyanti, the wife of Shakti. He looked around to see where this sound was coming from, and the first Shanti said, "Father, do not be surprised. The son of your son Shakti is in my womb" (17). Parasaran also wrote many 'sookthas' in *Rig Veda*.

New Historicism is a literary theory that proposes understanding and interpreting literature in light of both the author's and critic's histories. New Historicism, which is based on Stephen Greenblatt's literary criticism and inspired by Michel Foucault's philosophy, recognizes not only that a work of literature is influenced by its author's time and place, but also that a work of literature is influenced by its author's time and place. A New Historicist views literature from a

different angle, by checking how a writer or his name is associated with the work and how these works reflect the author's time. For example, when studying Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (1606) one always comes to the question of whether the play shows Shakespeare as anti-Semitic.

The New Historicist understands that this isn't a simple yes-or-no question that can be answered by studying the text. They know very well that it is very difficult to think so. New Historicism acknowledges and embraces the idea that our understanding of great literature changes over time. According to Foucault, "all discourses are social constructs by which power is maintained" (176). In one of his cardinal essays, *The Order of Discourse* (1972), Foucault maintains, "In every society, the production of discourse is controlled, organized, redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its materiality" (177). In the same way, all history is a narrative written according to the point of view held by the historians.

History is another text even as literature is: "Literature is another cultural artefact, even as history is, and it can tell us something about the social life of the times when they were and the textuality of history" (177). New historicism, according to Louis Montrose's popular description, focuses on both the historicity of the text and narrative, and it aids in deconstructing conventional historians' use of other documents that are merely forms of grand narratives, which has been called into question by new historicism. "That is to say that master or way, no history in the traditional sense; there are only representations are foregrounded" (177). Every matter of these histories of marginalized groups assumes importance because of the plurality of historical voices. There is history. Thick descriptions are used by New Historicists to investigate a cultural production to explore the meanings of the cultural production as well as the social norms that produced it. It is a search for meanings rather than reality. As a result, professional and minor private matters Historical research is subjective since it examines historical events from the eyes of humans. This is referred to as self-possession.

The life of Vedavyasa was eventful and he became perfect as a human being. As a devotee, he had extraordinary abilities and powers. The events of the *Mahabharata* are intertwined with his material life. All these events were simmering in his heart during his lonely life. He decided to compose a poem based on these events. He did not want to tell only narrative events in the poem.

1770

Vyasa decided to include in it the principles contained in the Vedas and the essence of the Upanishads. He was convinced that he was being heard. Therefore, he incorporated beautiful and idealistic stories from the 'Puranas' and 'sub-Puranas' into his poetry. He firmly believed that composing a poem by combining the principles of the Vedas, the essence of the Upanishads and the stories of the 'Puranas' would lead the common people to the path of karma, wisdom, and devotion.

The *Mahabharata* written by Vyasa is also known as the 'Panchama Maveda' as it is considered to be the fifth Veda. No matter how much one studies the Vedas and Upanishads, one cannot become a scholar without knowing the *Mahabharata*. This is why it fully discusses the four quadruples of virtuous lust. It is also known as 'Dharmashastra' because it explains all kinds of Dharma and points the finger at Dharma. It can be considered a genre of economics because it deals with everything necessary for the acquisition of meaning, such as land and money. Lust is a term used to refer to the relationship between a man and a woman in general and a marriage in particular. None of the 'Vishwakavyas' are as large as the *Mahabharata*. The *Mahabharata* is considered an epic.

The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* of the Greek poet Homer are known as the greatest legends in the world. The *Mahabharata* is twice the size of the combination of the two. Gripping listeners and readers for more than two thousand years, The *Iliad* is the tale of the Trojan struggle and the craze of Achilles. Combining the abilities of a poet and pupil, Robert Fagles brings the energy of modern-day language to this enduring heroic epic. If The *Iliad* is the arena's best battle tale, then The *Odyssey* is literature's best evocation of every reader's adventure through existence. The *Mahabharata* is as famous in the epics as the butter on the skin, the nectar in medicines, and the cow in the herds. Before the writing of the *Mahabharata*, many stories, story structures, events, descriptions, and ideas should be included. Vyasa had arranged things in his mind. However, he was confused as he could not find a helper to copy the concepts in his mind.

The relationship between text and context is inextricably linked. Literary texts are formed by and inspired by historical backgrounds. Louis Montrose describes the tradition of new historicism in a few words: "A reciprocal concern with the historicity of texts and the textuality of history? New historicism is based on a parallel reading of literary and non-literary texts (chosen

1771

from the archive) both of which belong roughly to the same historical period. It does not privilege the literary text” (M. S. Nagarajan, 176).

The work of art is the product of a negotiation between a creator or class of creators, equipped with a complex, communally shared repertoire of conventions, and the institutions and practices of society. To achieve the negotiation, artists need to create a currency that is valid for a meaningful, mutually profitable exchange. “It is important to emphasize that the process involves not simply appropriation but exchange since the existence of art always implies a return, a return normally measured in pleasure and interest”. (M. S. Nagarajan, 12)

Conclusion

The *Mahabharata* is a collection of eighteen parts entitled Parvam. The *Mahabharata*, which has two thousand one hundred and nine chapters and one lakh verses, has twenty sections of prose. Although this passage is a paraphrase of the Siddhas, the spiritual flow can be seen throughout the book, but all the themes are as closely related to humans and other living beings as possible. In the light of many unequivocal pieces of evidence and references in the *Mahabharata* itself, the *Mahabharata* was written in BC three thousand and three thousand five hundred years before. We can see from time to time the facts described by Vyasa about five thousand years ago. Much of the material in the *Mahabharata* (the subject matter of the *Mahabharata*) is identified with today’s environment and sequence of events. It is doubtful whether the *Bhagavad Gita* (2nd century BCE), has the potential to be immortal. The song also teaches the way to heaven.

It does not attempt to prioritize the literary text and treat history as a context. Literary and non-literary texts are handled similarly, with the former being used to read and comprehend the latter. Both are seen questioning, contradicting, and changing each other and thereby telling one another. New Historicism is informed by Derrida’s belief that every part and feature of reality is textualized. There is nothing outside of the text. It is founded on Foucault’s concept that social constructs are defined by dominant discursive activities. In the early 1980s, it was the American critic Stephen Greenblatt who popularized the word. *Representations* (1983) became its organ, publishing essays that promoted a modern historicist interpretation of Renaissance literature.

Greenblatt established his theory of what he called the poetics of new historicism in his Essay *Towards a Poetics of Culture* (1990). It is a procedure for him, not a doctrine.

Another feature of the *Mahabharata* is that Vyasa narrates his family story. He lived through the story appeared on many occasions and played a pivotal role. It would not be a big mistake to say that the germ of the story is his autobiography. So much so that it clings to his personal life. The *Mahabharata* was written after the time of the Pandavas. Vyasa taught this first to his son Shukan and later to his disciples. Janame Jayan, the son of Parikshit, the grandson of Arjuna, a disciple of Vaishampayan, narrates the ‘Mahabharata’ for the first time. Then we get the *Mahabharata* in the way that the Sutan, who was listening to it, later told the sages of Shaunakali in the Naimisharanya. The gods weighed the four Vedas on one side and the ‘Vyasabharata’ on the other. India, which weighed more than the Vedas, has since been known as the Mahabharata.

India, which weighed more than the Vedas, has been called the Mahabharata ever since. Because it adds to the glory and seriousness; “The Mahabharata is also known as the ‘Victory’. It is so named because it gives victory to the listeners. As such, the Sahi Theetallajas originate from this epic” (22). He wrote, “Yadi hasti tadanyat yanne hasti nat kvachit” (22) which means “it can be found in many other things” (22). But what is not in it will not be found anywhere else. This is not self-aggrandizement by diameter. There is no exaggeration in this. What words are needed more than the words of Vyasa to call out the heights of the Mahabharata? Dushyanthan was one of the most famous kings of the Chandravamsa. He ruled the country in an enviable manner. He had no leniency in destroying enemies and was as troubled as the depths, and as patient as the shore. He came and went from time to time, and the earth became a fertile field.

Personal investments are inevitable in any representation, but that does not mean that all representations are self-indulgent. All historical writings are narratives to be studied like literary texts; history is often told and interpreted. History is neither linear nor progressive. There is no one-way flow of power. It spreads through discussions and exchanges of ideas. History must be free of eschatological (doctrine of final things such as death, condition after death, etc.) or teleological (doctrine of final causes of things) connotations. There is no such thing as an age’s united, monolithic spirit. Historical epochs are not homogeneous entities.

There is no totalizing historical theories or a common history; only inconsistent and contrasting histories exist. In other words, there is only a play of discourses that contradict, destabilize and change each other. The past is a concept that we create. It is a construct based on ideology. Personal identity is formed by the society in which it resides and is shaped by the culture in which it exists. Insanity and madness are cultural categories that can be described in a variety of ways. Both historical interpretations are subjective. Historians are only in a position to explain history. It is time to rethink history and literature.

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