

**Epilogue
of
Mahabharata**

By

M. R. Yardi



Bharatiya Vidya
Bhavan
Pune Kendra

BHAVAN'S BOOK UNIVERSITY

Adhyaya - 1

INTRODUCTION

When the Critical Edition of the Adiparva of the Mahabharata was completed by Dr. V. S. Sukthankar in 1933, it was hailed as ' the most important event in the history of sanskrit philology, since the publication of Max Muller's edition of the Rigveda with Sanana's commentary.'¹ The Critical Edition contained a complete critical apparatus, giving not only the constituted text, but also the variant readings of the Mss. utilised and spurious passages which were excluded from the constituted text, the latter being shown in the critical notes and the appendices. Dr. Sukthanakar appended a prolegomena to this edition, in which he gave a full account of the Mss. available, their classification and the principles followed in the constitution of the text. This was fortunate as he lived to complete only another parva, the Aranyaka. The work relating to the other parvas was completed by 1966, with matching zeal and scholarship, by his successors in accordance with the principles laid down by him. A student of this great epic of India has now available to him; a really critical edition of the Mbh. based on an extensive and carefully Ms. material collected from all over India.

1. Winternitz, ABORI, Vol. XV, 1934, p. 159.

It became obvious that the critically constituted text was not the original Bharata, which was recited by Vaishampayana at the snake sacrifice of king Janamejaya. Dr. Sukthankar himself did not claim that it was reconstruction of the Ur. Mahabharata. It is stated in the epic itself that this original text did not contain any episodes or legends and consisted of only 24,000 stanzas. On the other hand, the critically constituted text has a dimension which is more than three times the size of the original Bharata as given in the epic. Furthermore, passages which are suspected to be interpolations on intrinsic grounds, such as the childish stories of the old maid and the five Indras,¹ remotely connected if at all, with the Bharata war, had to be retained in the constituted text, as they are to be found in all versions. As observed by Winternitz, these interpolations must have come to be added at some earlier period to which the manuscript tradition did not reach back. A different approach was, therefore, needed to identify such earlier interpolations and recover the original Bharata. It was thought that the statistical approach would enable us to go a step further than the Critical Edition and identify not only the original Bharata but also the interpolations which came to be made thereafter.

A statistical analysis of the Anushtubh style in the Mbh. Critical Edition has disclosed, by the application of the tests of homogeneity, five styles, which are significantly different from one another. According to the internal evidence in the Mbh. the number of compilers too is five corresponding to the five different styles found in the epic by the statistical study. Among them the adhyayas belonging to one style give a self-contained but a bare account of the Bharata war and the number of verses which they contain comes close enough to 24,000. This is the Bharata of Vaishampayana, which was later expanded by four bards, Suta, Sauti, the Harivamshakara and the author of the Parvasangraha. It has also been possible to determine the successive additions made by these later redactors by the same method (MGG, pp. VII, VIII).

1. Ibid, p. 174.

The later redactors have also enriched the epic by the additions of legends and folklore. In the additions made by Suta, we come across such legends as those of Agastya, Rishya-shringa, Mandhatru, Jantu, Shyenakapotiya and Ashtavakra (Aranyaka) and of Galava (Udyoga). Among the more important legends added by Sauti are those of Sunda and Upasunda (Adi), Savitri and Satyavan (Aranyaka), and of Viduraputranushasana (Udyoga), Muchakunda, Chirakarika, and Kundadhara (Shanti), Nachiketa (Anushasana) and Uttanka (Ashvamedhika). Harivamshakara has added the Nalopakhyana, the story of the Deluge, the Matsyopakhyana, the tale of the frog girl and the Ramopakhyana (Aranyaka), Sarasvatopakhyana (Shalya) and Narada's visit to the Shvetadvipa (Shanti). As pointed out by the Critical Editor and further confirmed by internal evidence, the Ramopakhyana has close parallels with Valmiki's original Ramayana indicating that the latter was used as a source by the Harivamshakara.

These redactors have further enriched the epic by incorporating in it many passages dealing with politics, religion and philosophy. Suta has added the Viduraniti and the Sanatsujatiya (Udyoga), Shukanuprashna and the dialogues of Bharadvaja with Bhrigu and Janaka (not necessarily the same as epic Janaka) with Vasishtha, Bhrigu, Yajnavalkya and Panchashikha (Shanti), Dhritarashtra's advice to Yudhisthira on the duties of a king (Ashramavasika). Suta has dealt with the Sankhya and Yoga doctrines which had gained considerable popularity in his days. Additions made by Sauti include the Janbukhandavinirmanaparva, the Bhuparva, the Bhagavadgita (Bhishma), most of the passages in the Rajadharma and most of the philosophical passages in the Mokshadharma (Shanti) and the passages dealing with danadharma (Anushasana). The Harivamshakara has added the Shukanucharita and the famous Naranarayaniya section (Shanti). The Naranarayaniya section recounts the visit of Narada to Shvetadvipa, where he met god Narayana and received from him instruction in the Pancharatra religion of the satvatas. The author of the Parvasangraha has added the dialogue of Sulabhaa with Janaka and that of Shuka

with Vyasa (Shanti). He has further dealt with various kinds of fasts and their rewards and recounted the thousand names of god Vishnu (Anushasana).

Suta Lomaharshana has made two important changes in the story of the Mbh., firstly his composition shows a clear bias in favour of the Pandavas and against the Kauravas. For instance, Suta has incorporated two incidents in the Mbh. story to extenuate, if not condone, some of the palpably wrong actions of the Pandavas. The adhyayas 56 and 57 of the Sabhaparva tell us how Yudhishthira, after losing his wealth and kingdom, staked himself, his brothers and his wife, Draupadi, and how after he lost this game too, Draupadi was brought to the audience hall of king Dhritarashtra by Dushyasana in a half-naked condition while she was in her menses. This incident has been added to justify the two barbarous acts of Bhima, namely drinking the blood of Dushyasana and striking Duryodhana below the navel against the rules of mace-fight. If Jayadratha was killed by a stratagem after the sunset, did he not try to abduct Draupadi and deserve it ? These two incidents have been responsible for evoking universal sympathy for the Pandavas. Secondly, Suta spoke of Pandavas as having performed the ashvamedha sacrifice, of which there is no mention in the Vaishampayana text. Suta seems to have been a bard in the court of a great king in the line of Purus. Evidently, this great king could not bear to think that his illustrious ancestors should go down in history without an ashvamedha sacrifice to their credit. In chapter X - MGG, this king has been identified as king Prasenjit of Kosala, who was a contemporary of Buddha (MGG, p. 130).

Sauti has further brought about a still more fundamental transformation of the epic. To him the Bharata was not merely a fratricidal war between Kauravas and Pandavas, but the struggle for supremacy between the good and the evil. The Pandavas are depicted as god-fearing and urgent devotees of Lord Krishna, now deified as an incarnation of god Vishnu. The oldest Pandava, Yudhishtira is known as Dharmaraja, a just and

righteous king, ever desirous to know what is right and wrong and meticulous about doing the right thing. This is how a number discourses on dharma, niti and moksha have found their way in the epic. Most of the political and philosophical passages such as Rajadharmā, the Bhagavadgīta and much of the mokshadharmā and dharma in the Anushasanaparva, have been added by Sauti. It is because of this that J. Dahalman and A. Ludwig question the authenticity of the war and interpret the epic as an allegory in which the Kauravas and the Pandavas symbolise the dharma and adharma or light and darkness respectively.

Sauti has brought about another important change in the epic, which was to project Arjuna as a great war hero and Krishna as his divine guide. The divinity of Lord Krishna is left in no doubt and all except Duryodhana and his close circle are made to acknowledge it. After dealing with the Bhargava legends, Dr. Sukthankar concluded, "The infiltration of masses of Bhargava material in the shape of the Bhargava myths and legends, the manner of its treatment and even that strange admixture of the epic with dharma and niti elements, which has puzzled many enquirers into the genesis of the Mbh. thus appears to find a simple and straightforward explanation in the assumption of an important unitary diascuasis of the epic under very strong and direct Bhargava influence (CSM p. 336). There is no doubt that the whole text of the epic was recast by Suta and Sauti under the strong influence of Shaunaka, whom Sauti addresses as Bhargava (I.16.6) and Bhrigunandana (I.27.35).

We are now in a position to state what the critically constituted text is. Dr. Sukthankar himself described it as a modest attempt to present a version of the epic as old as the extant manuscript material would permit us to reach with some semblance of confidence. He was candid enough to admit that the vulgate text of the Mbh. was fairly readable and would appear to be even 'better than the Critical Text'. For this he gave the

reason that the former had been purged by the continuous amendments made by scribes for centuries. He, however, claimed that the constituted text had one merit, namely that it was 'cleaned of puerile modern accretions and obvious errors of repetitions, which lengthen and weaken the text.'

It would be worthwhile to repeat here Sukthankar's view about the objective of Mbh. textual criticism. He observed that the Mbh. is not and never was a fixed and rigid text, but a fluctuating epic tradition, a theme avec variation, not unlike a popular Indian melody. Our objective should be consequently not to arrive at an archetype (which practically never existed) but to represent and view and explain the epic tradition in all its variety, in all its fulness, in all the ramifications. The statistical studies disclose how this epic tradition was built up principally by Vaishampayana, Suta, Sauti, the Harivamshakara and the author of the Parvasangraha. In fact the constituted text appears to comprise the text of Vaishampayana inclusive of the additions made thereto by the above mentioned authors. It contains 6546 stanzas less than the Parvasangraha figure of 82136 stanzas. This means that the Critical Editors of Mbh. have succeeded in retrieving 92 percent of the Mbh. version, which the author of the Parvasangraha had before him, which by any standards, is a truly remarkable achievement.

The epic tradition as recorded in the first adhyaya (verse 25) of the Adiparva states that Vyasa's work is available in an expanded version as well as in a short version. The Ashvalayana sutras also mention the work called Mahabharata as well as Bharata. The status of the work is also variously described as itivritta (verse 14) and itihasa (verse 16), both meaning history, then as purana (verse 15), as upanishad (verse 19) and finally as veda (verse 204), giving an indication of its growth. Now the expanded version of the epic could not have been composed by Vyasa, as it exhibits five different styles. Obviously, the subsequent bards too thought it prudent to claim the authorship and authority of Vyasa for the expanded version as well as the shorter version. The shorter version Bharata is not

extant now, although it has been possible to retrieve it by the application of statistical tests. This shorter version was merely a war chronicle and had it remained so, it would have passed into limbo of oblivion like the epic of Gilgamesh; in its expanded form, however, it underwent a qualitative change and became a miscellany of mythology, politics, theology and philosophy. It is now cherished by all Hindus as a cultural heritage, as it contains a record of the social, political and cultural changes that took place in Aryavarta during the first millenium B. C. Moreover, with the incorporation of the Dharma and Niti elements in it, it has become the object of veneration as a shruti text or even as the fifth Veda (MGG. XIII. XIV).