

REVISITING MAHĀBHĀRATA through BHĀSA, TAGORE and MODERN PLAYWRIGHTS...

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INTRODUCTION:

- Vyāsa's Mahābhārata is one of the two major Sanskrit Epics of ancient India, the other being Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇa. Though at the outset it narrates the struggle between two groups of cousins in the Kurukshetra war and the fates of the Kaurava and the Pāṇḍava princes and their successors, it is an eternal saga of all humanity, embodying the human predicament, follies, aspirations and failures, the human grandeur and beauty, the betrayals and contradictions, the violence and vainness, all of the human triumphs and defeats. It is rightly said that which is not in Mahābhārata exists nowhere else!
- As the title of the Research Project suggests, the chief aim of it is to Revisit Mahābhārata through the critical analysis of the dramatic compositions by Bhāsa, Tagore and Modern Playwrights with reference to both their Texts and Performances.

THE MAHĀBHĀRATA PLAYS ascribed to BHĀSA

- Bhāsa is considered to be the most ancient Indian Playwright whose plays were completely lost to the world for several centuries past and were discovered by T. Ganapati Shastri in the year 1909. Though the authorship of Bhāsa is not universally accepted and the plays are not held conclusively as representing his original works, it is yet possible to study them as 'works of art'.
- Among the 13 plays brought out by T. Ganapati Shāstri, six are based on the episodes from the Mahābhārata. They are, मध्यम व्याघ्र, पंचरात्रम्, दूतवाक्यम्, दूतघटोत्कचम्, कर्णभारम् and कुरुभंगम्.
- The most striking feature of Bhāsa's dramaturgy is that it sympathises with the marginal groups while restructuring the world of Mahābhārata. All those who were worshipped as heroes were ignored, the anti-heroes were honoured by Bhāsa. Kaṣṇa, Duryodhana, Ghatotkacha occupy the centre stage in Bhāsa's theatre, a rare post modern phenomenon found in the ancient Sanskrit dramaturgy.

TAGORE'S DRAMATIC POEMS based on MAHĀBHĀRATA

- During the last decade of the 19th Century Tagore introduced a new form नाट्यकाव्य 'nātya kāvya' or Dramatic Poems in which much like a play, there are verse dialogues between characters but lacking in dramatic action. Though it was borrowed from Western literature it ushered a new era in the Indian Dramaturgy.
- Out of nine dramatic poems composed by Tagore, there are five based on well known episodes of the Mahābhārata. They are चित्रांगदा, विदाय - अभिशप, नरकवास, गान्धारीर आवेदन and कर्ण - कुन्ती संवाद.
- The most striking feature of these dramatic poems is that Tagore lets his creativity take precedence over the plot or sequence of events as well as the nature of characters presented in the Epic.

THE MODERN PLAYS based on MAHĀBHĀRATA

- Like Bhāsa and Tagore, the Mahābhārata has been retold by several playwrights in modern times also to address the contemporary issues, the most prominent being Dharma-veer Bhaxati's अन्धा युग. The others are —
- Jean - Claude Carriere's French Play 'Mahābhārata' translated in English by Peter Brook. • Yayāti, The Fire and the Rain both by Girish Karnard • Kaunteya by Shirwadkar • Karṇa by H. Kanhailal • Chakravayuha by Ratan Thiyam • Komal Gandhara, Ek Aur Dronācharya by Shankar Shesh • Hastināpur, Dehantar by Nandkishor Acharya • Tapaswi and Tarangiṇi by Buddhadev Basu.
- The Dramatic Poems based on Mahābhārata by Umashankar Joshi • Post Independence Gujarati Mythological Plays based on various characters of Mahābhārata.
- All the above Mahābhārata based Dramatic Compositions would be critically analyzed in the Individual Chapters from the point of view of deviation, alteration, innovation in the original sources both in terms of Text and Performance to establish the relevance of Mahābhārata down the ages.