



The Mahabharata: Mythology or Historical Reality? An Exploration of Ancient Narratives and Modern Interpretations

Monal Mittal

Student,

Department of English

JCC, Jagannath University

Date of Submission: 02-12-2024

Date of Acceptance: 11-12-2024

ABSTRACT: India's most venerated epics, the Mahabharata still remains to be the aspect of considerable discussion and analysis regarding its categorization as mythology or classical existence. While historical texts at times obscure the edge between fact and fiction, the Mahabharata's rich narrative, which bridges the themes of dharma, karma, mortality, and warfare, which amplifies questions about the degree of its historical authenticity. This research paper examines the archaeological testimonies, epic's foundation, and the vocal narrative encircling it. It validates if the Mahabharata is supposed to be comprehended as mythology or might it hold some aspects of real events that are often ignored. With the mythological element in the epic unveil in layers such as heavenly interventions and supernatural manifestations, the epic seems to incline towards fiction. While on the other hand geographical facts and cultural sources nudge the scholars to reflect on its historical underpinnings. As contemporary intellectual pioneers like Ranveer Allahbadia (BeerBiceps) have acknowledged, "The Mahabharata is a metaphorical reality, possibly inspired by real events but told through the lens of mythology." This paper steers through contemporary study, historical scripts, and prevailing opinions to comprehend Mahabharata's stance in the convergence between myth and veracity.

KEYWORDS: Mahabharata, History, Archaeological discoveries, Dwarka, Scientific Interpretation

I. INTRODUCTION

The Mahabharata has always been a focus area of discussion among academic historian analysts, intellectuals, and archaeological researchers in regards of its historical existence. Mahabharata was composed by the great sage Ved Vyasa and for a long time was conveyed orally. It supports as both a historical archive and a moral leader. The mystical elements, such as spiritual

guidance, have grouped it as mythology or fiction, while the archaeological evidences, scientific theories and research hypotheses indicate at its historical veracity. This research paper explores these contradictory viewpoints, advocating that the Mahabharata is found at the convergence between myth and facts.

II. Literature review:

The Mahabharata is an ancient epic attributed to Vyasa, is often examined for its factual and historical authenticity due to its oral tradition and extensive dimensions. Originally it consisted of 8,000 verses, which later expanded to 100,000, raising apprehension about transformations. Regardless of this, numerous researchers, intellectuals, field researcher and archaeologist provide persuasive proof for its historical authenticity.

Archaeological research performed in the 1950s by B.B. Lal at crucial Mahabharata sites, such as Kurukshetra, Hastinapur, and Ahichatra, uncovered notable discoveries. He unveiled pottery that coincides to the Painted Grey Ware Culture, hence, directly associating these places to the historical era mentioned in the epic. Lal's research of these cities establishes Mahabharata as part of India's early history, strengthening the idea of having real events. Correspondingly, S.R. Rao's investigation of Dwarka demonstrated that the sea levels were around 10 meters lower during the founding of the city, and the early settlements in Dwarka go back to the first century BC or AD. This breakthrough provides credibility to the epic's reveal of Dwarka as the city submerged by the sea.

Gaurav Thakur, citing further evidence, revealing other pottery finding discovered in Hastinapur from August 2002. He links these antiquities to Ahichhatra, the capital town of Panchala, which played an essential part during the Mahabharata. According to Thakur, these artifacts might be tied to the narrative of Draupadi's



marriage to the Pandavas which took place around 3000 BCE, supporting the hypothesis that despite the fact that these accounts become epic they still have the basis in real history.

Nilesh Nilkanth Oak, speaking on The Ranveer Show, argues that the Mahabharata's reach extended as far as Syria to the west and Indonesia (or its borders, like Cambodia) to the east. He emphasizes the epic's wide geographic impact, connecting it to scientific evidence such as population studies that show demographic shifts after the Kurukshetra War, which he contends reflect the epic's historical events.

Bijan Kumar Gangopadhyay's astronomical studies further bolster the case for the Mahabharata's historicity, placing the Kurukshetra War around 3102 BCE based on celestial references. Gangopadhyay's dating aligns with other historical timelines, offering a strong argument that the Mahabharata is not just mythology but reflects factual events. Although the epic does have mythological elements like divine interventions and supernatural occurrences, these could be taken as embellishments and thus not necessarily contradict its historicity. Romila Thapar and Wendy Doniger among other scholars hold the belief that ancient texts often intertwine history with mythology and, thereby, the cultural and spiritual perspectives of their time is reflected.

III. Bridging Mythology and Scientific Interpretation:

The Mahabharata is an ancient historical epic at times attributed as the fifth veda composed by the sage, Ved Vyasa, has been passed down through from generation to the next primarily through oral transmission. It has greatly served its dual function of a history narrating the deeds of legendary figures, a deep discourse on dharma, and the ethical and moral foundation of human existence. Transience from the normal realities of life to the divine beings serve as the basis for this weaving, which has fixated the work within the realm of mythology. Nonetheless, in the most recent years, academic practitioners have established a relationship between these supernatural experiences and real-life scientific phenomena by drawing a different historical basis for the text.

One of the more alluring aspects of the Mahabharata is the recital of the birth of Balrama, through the relocation of his embryo from Devaki to Rohini as an act of divine intervention. Traditionally, this episode has been considered a miraculous act of the gods. However, through scientific theories it could be seen as an early

understanding of surrogacy brought by modern day discussions of the issue. Surrogacy is a procedure involving embryos, which are implanted from one woman to another. This pontificated factual hypothesis coincides with the notion that archaic civilizations may have known nothing of reproduction, yet they expressed such knowledge through mythological or religious settings. This interpretation accentuates the possibility for historical texts to encode extensive scientific concepts through the realm of mythical recounting.

Moreover, Nilesh Nilkanth Oak's own way of seeing the Vimanas from Mahabharata and Ramayana as an actual scientific exploration provide another interpretation to the argument. Vimanas are commonly described to be the flying machines which are capable of swift travel and superior competencies. In the Ramayana, the Pushpaka Vimana, originally affiliated to Ravana and later employed by Lord Rama, is described as a machine capable of gliding at hypersonic speeds, was often affected by the airflow, and produce sonic booms during takeoff. Similarly, in the Mahabharata, Vimanas like the Sabhaka, used by Krishna's adversaries, are linked to military purposes and rapid travel. Oak has the opinion that these images are not mere inventions of imagination but can be the record of the old application of aerodynamics and technology in the air. Specifically, the air fluctuations and the noise generation effects, which are explained as myths resemble modern aeroplane technology, inducing Oak to speculate that the historical works may have mirrored the advancement in knowledge and an early comprehension of flight. Though, critics put forward their view that no concrete evidence has so far been discovered to prove that such technology ever existed, proponents, on the other hand, claim that these descriptions are extensively detailed to be only fictitious ones and thus may provide a good reason to think that ancient people had a vivid imagination about a flight capability that might have existed.

IV. Archaeological Evidence Supporting Historical Claims

The representation of the Mahabharata as an ancient epic has been corroborated by archaeological revelation which investigations into the actual reconstructions of the cities and the events. As early as the 1950s, noted archaeologist B. B. Lal led the excavations at the vital sites referred to in the Mahabharata, such as Hastinapur, Kuruksetra, and Ahichatra. At Hastinapur, Lal uncovered pottery dating back to circa 1200 BCE,



associated with the Painted Grey Ware (PGW) culture, which links the site to the early Vedic period and the time frame described in the epic (Lal, 1997). Similarly, S.R. Rao's marine archaeological work at Dwarka revealed submerged fortifications and artifacts, providing evidence for the existence of an ancient city that could correspond with the Mahabharata's account of the submerged city of Dwarka. Rao's findings suggest that sea levels were approximately 10 meters lower during the first century BCE, corroborating the Mahabharata's depiction of Dwarka's submergence, an event described in the Mausala Parva. This research work sheds light on the possible myth-reality connection in the Mahabharata, thus paving the way for the hypothesis that history lies hidden behind allegorical elements.

Thriving Dwarka, a submerged city, located around the coast of Gujarat has been the central place of marine archaeological research. Evidence obtained through excavations includes huge stone structures which include fort walls, bastions, gateways as well as objects such as copper bells, seals, and even pottery. Discoveries of these substances are in line with Mahabharata's Dwarka that is described as a vibrating and well-protected city. Furthermore, the sea level studies confirm that perhaps the city has been underwater because of rising levels which conform to the narratives in the Mahabharata.

V. Genetic Evidence and Population Dynamics

Apart from archaeological discoveries, even genetic analysis has been employed in the corroboration of the Mahabharata as a historical occurrence. Nilesh Nilkanth Oak theories the concept of a genetic bottleneck caused by the aftermath of Kurukshetra War, which according to

the Mahabharata, resulted in the death of millions. Oak proposes that such devastating loss of human life would have led to a specific genetic morphology, especially, the male-to-female ratio in the population. Extensive studies has been conducted by Monica Karmin (2015) among other biologist, they found a severe genetic bottleneck on the male side occurring toward 7,500 BCE, which coincides with the approximate date of the Kurukshetra War (circa 5561 BCE). This genetic shift is evidenced in the Y-chromosome diversity data, which shows a marked decrease in male genetic diversity followed by a gradual recovery. These findings support the idea that the Mahabharata's depiction of a catastrophic war with a disproportionate loss of male soldiers could have had a lasting impact on the genetic makeup of human populations, particularly in South Asia and its neighboring regions.

VI. Astronomical Dating of the Mahabharata

Astronomical studies have also been used to date the Mahabharata and the Kurukshetra War. Bijan Kumar Gangopadhyay's analysis of celestial events mentioned in the epic, such as eclipses and planetary alignments, proposes that the war took place around 3102 BCE. Gangopadhyay carried out his calculations of the positions of planets and the dates of solar and lunar eclipses by applying astronomic software and traditional methods and thus confirmed the timeline given in the Mahabharata. The results substantiate the theoretical premises of those ancient scientists like B.G. Tilak and Aryabhata, who also dated the Mahabharata and other Vedic texts to approximately 3000 BCE. A scientific method of determining the age of the Mahabharata, thus, reinforces its historical chronicle aspect.

VII. Cultural Interpretations of the Mahabharata

Although the majority of academicians perceive the Mahabharata as a text that is deeply cemented in the cultural and religious dimensions, many say that the historical and mythological components cannot be distinguished. Romila Thapar, in her book *Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300*, appreciate the Mahabharata as a notable ethnical record yet points it out as a mythic tales which is an amalgamation of literary image of witchcraft and symbolical narrative. Thapar believes that the mythological

parts and divine interventions in the text are used as a medium to convey the moral and ethical lessons, which are the reflections of the cultural ethics of the time popularly known as dharma. Analogously, Wendy Doniger, in her work *The Hindus: An Alternative History*, acknowledge the Mahabharata as a mixture of cosmic myths and human struggles, where historical events are mixed with divine actions to represent larger spiritual and philosophical themes.



VIII. CONCLUSION

The Mahabharata is, thus, a massive text, a medley of mythology, history, and philosophy. The supernatural parts of the epic, usually seen as gods' interventions, may have some echoes of historical events that happened, thus making it an exciting perspective to look at ancient Indian culture and science. While on one hand genetics, archaeology, and astronomy studies continue providing new information that helps link the epic to authentic historical events, on the other hand, they are also giving weight to the view that the Mahabharata is not only a clever myth, but also a record of the hopes, achievements, and trials of an ancient society besides being a history of a civilization. With constant research and revelations the border between fiction and reality in the Mahabharata will likely become even clearer, thus indicating a more sophisticated understanding of probably the most honored epic of the world.

REFERENCES

- [1] B.B. Lal. The Earliest Civilization of South Asia: Rise, Maturity, and Decline. Aryan Books International, 1997.
- [2] BeerBiceps. "Nilesh Nilkanth Oak Returns: UNTOLD Realities of Mahabharat, Ramayana and Lost History | TRS 404." YouTube, 26 Apr. 2024, www.youtube.com/watch?v=ptxJDBfO42w.
- [3] S.R. Rao. Lothal and the Indus Civilization. Asia Publishing House, 1973.
- [4] Monica Karmin. "Y-Chromosome Diversity in Human Populations." Nature, 2015.
- [5] Bijan Kumar Gangopadhyay. Astronomical Dating of the Mahabharata.
- [6] Romila Thapar. The Past as Present: Forging Contemporary Identities Through History. Aleph Book Company, 2014.
- [7] Wendy Doniger. The Hindus: An Alternative History. Penguin Books, 2010.
- [8] Material Evidence Supporting the Time of Mahabharata. mahabharathascience.blogspot.com/p/material-evidence-supporting-time-of.html.
- [9] Drishith, and Drishith. "Evidences That Support Mahabharata Actually Happened in the Ancient Times." Detechter, 6 Oct. 2022, detechter.com/evidences-that-support-mahabharata-actually-happened.