

Creation of a Model Society through Epic Reading

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Abstract

A **subhashita** (Sanskrit: सुभाषित) is a literary genre of Sanskrit epigrammatic poems and their message is an aphorism, maxim, advice, fact, truth, lesson or riddle. *Su* in Sanskrit means good; *bhashita* means spoken; which together literally means well-spoken or eloquent saying. Subhashitas are known for their inherent moral and ethical advice, instructions in worldly wisdom and guidance in making righteous deeds. Subhashitas create an appeal as the inherent message is conveyed through poems which quote practical examples which are often rhythmic in nature.

The subhashita deals with various subjects and includes topics of day to day experiences that everyone can easily relate to. A subhashita is always eloquent in form, structured in a poetical form, complete in itself and concisely depicts a single emotion, idea, righteousness, truth or situation. Subhāṣitas act as teacher in formulating the sense of morality and character, which sums up the total of a person's virtues including dispositions, behaviors, habits, likes, dislikes, capacities, traits, ideals, ideas, values, feelings, and intuitions. They are drawn from real life observations or situations with a sympathetic understanding of human impulses and behavior. While some may reflect the state of affairs of the society at the time they were composed; in general the wisdom they espouse is timeless. As such, they generally hold all that is good and true "till eternity." A great strength of subhāṣitas is their ability to provide comfort and hope in difficult times.

Key Words: Subhashitas, Society, Dharma, Experiences, Mahabharata, Ramayana

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Jawaharlal Nehru has said that Sanskrit is a language amazingly rich, efflorescent, full of luxuriant growth of all kinds and yet precise and strictly keeping within the framework of grammar which Panini laid down two thousand years ago. It spread out, added to its richness, became fuller and more ornate, but always it stuck to its original roots.

In 1785 William Jones, said – The Sanskrit language, whatever be its antiquity, is of a wonderful structure; more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin, and more exquisitely refined than either, yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity.

Sanskrit is more than a language. Sanskrit means “elaborated”, “refined”, “cultured”, or “civilized”, implying wholeness of expression. The role of Sanskrit is not merely a language but also a distinct cultural system and way of experiencing the world. Thus, to the wider population, Sanskrit is experienced through the civilization named Sanskrit, which is built on it. The relevance of Sanskrit for modern times is significant and multifaceted. Sanskrit is a rich repository of knowledge that could be gainfully exploited in all the areas. A study of Sanskrit language and literature are absolutely relevant to us, in all aspects of our lives. The role of Sanskrit played in the past as a language in underlining the cultural and religious affinities can hardly be exaggerated. In Sanskrit we have Vedas, Epics, Puranas, Science and Technology to quote a few.

In this paper I will be concentrating more on the Mahabharata. Mahabharata and Ramayana are two gems in Indian literature. Mahabharata is the encyclopedia which contains principles of religion, moral and ethical, science, laws and canons of life, worldly stories, mythological and legendary fables, customs and social practices, gospels of life, science and technology etc. Vyasa through his

narratives touches upon the human characteristics there by exemplifying social and political realities.

1. **Human Identity** – It is believed that literature holds a mirror unto society.

The issue of language and identity implies in fact, the existence of language as a social phenomenon, be it a part of the living present or frozen past.

Human beings live in a society not in isolation. Society is a group of people with common culture, Language, religion and philosophy. Languages play an important role in a society. Even a dialectal variety of a language has its

influence for the identity and unity in a particular society. The role Sanskrit played in the past as a language in underlining the cultural and religious affinities can hardly be exaggerated. Sanskrit represented all that was common to Indian culture. Narratives of Mahabharata give a sense of intertextuality. The impact of these stories can be observed far and wide on the culture of different societies and their literature.

2. **Social Identity** – Social impact has a wider space because it deals with the

everyday people, the masses and how they shape the society. It includes areas of economy and analysis of other aspects of civil society that shows the evolution of social norms, behaviours and more. Further the association between social relations and psychological impact focuses on relationships and national development. Narratives of Mahabharata are concerned with

the social conditions. The foundation of social living and wealth, the concerns of civic society everywhere has been given anxious attention in the epic. Story literature is rich in Indian culture and heritage. It has guided the Indian ethos in a matchless way. Narratives of Mahabharata embody the feeling of values. It has solutions to problems of existence. The epic literature represents vibrant cultural association.

The narratives are also concerned with the foundations of Dharma. Though the society in the epic was transparent and liberal it also shows the bitterness of human relation which is well brought out among Pandavas and Kauravas. But Karna and Duryodhana – exhibited the characteristic features of a retainer and a patron. The concept of friendship changed after the story literature period. It may be observed that there was absence of material culture in relationships.

3. **Political Identity** – The examination of the basic parameters of the political conditions gives a brief idea about the political conditions prevalent during the time of the epic. Mahabharata is a synthesis of various aspects of law in the widest sense of the term covered by Indian conception of Dharma. These narratives speak about politics and government which was based on a dharmic background. A king had to comply with his brothers, councilors and populace which can be seen in the example of Yudhistira. A king had the responsibility of recognizing and respecting the laws of different groups

like family, castes and communities. People were given the right to dispose a wicked king. The king according to these narratives was not only a leader but also a corporal symbol of moral values, a public servant and a trustee who never utilized public property for his own sake.

Progress of the economy in the political context called for a well-disciplined army. We can very well observe the presence of the armies of Pandavas, Kauravas, Panchalas, Yadhavas etc.

According to Vidhurañeeti there is a mention of different persons under the king who are in charge of administrative matters – Prime Minister, Ministers, Councillors, Treasury-in charge, Army General, Commanding Officer, Emissary, Ambassador, Spy, Servants and door keepers. When there is coordination in functioning between each one of these people then administration can be smooth. The fundamental principles of good governance are keeping people free from fear of violence. The class which required sympathy is the weak, poor, exploited and excluded. A good state mechanism should free everybody from exclusion. It is the quality of the governance that determines the quality of social conditions in which human beings are inseparable in the content of social conditions. The narratives of Mahabharata resources on the foundations of law and governance; focus on justice, truth, care and concern for people.

4. **Ethical Identity**– The Indian expression of right activities is Dharma. Our scriptures are full eulogy for Dharma. In Mahabharata it is mentioned as an ethical concept, defined as that which is right and good. In all stages of man's life dharma has to be accepted as paramount. Dharma is the most important urge and should be developed to regulate both artha and kama. Dharma means righteous behaviour based on truth and knowledge of the unity in spite of the diversity, and capable of bringing the highest good to the whole creation.

The narratives of Mahabharata show that dharma is the one which uplifts the social structure, promotes the welfare of the society and helps an individual to become progressive. During the episode of Yakshaprashna Yudhistira exhibits the same dharma when he asks the voice to save nakula.

Mahabharata is concerned with the foundation of Dharma. These narratives highlight on the performance of one's duty, appropriate to the situation which is considered as Dharma. Such situations can be seen during the Mahabharata war.

The main function of dharma is conservation. If dharma is followed, then there is orderly and enduring growth and prosperity. Failure to observe the code of dharma, then it will lead to disintegration and eventually destruction. You can observe this in the case of many kings who become a part of Mahabharata.

Vidura Neeti and the guidance of Bhishma to Yudhistira profusely talk about Dharma Shastra and a detailed account of honouring a guest along with other things is being mentioned. Dharma occupies the premier and basic place in life. It is chief factor that shapes man's life.

Dharma has always been dynamic and a very real force to reckon with in the life of our nation. Dharma was gradually metamorphosed into duties and responsibilities prescribed for various beings in different stages of evolution in life, but it was always based on the principle that this evolution should ultimately bring about enlightenment. If all the members of the society act according to dharma, there is no reason why all should not live in happiness and peace. After all, the saying "dharmarakshatirakshitaha" of the great sage Vyasa cannot go in vain!

5. **Identity Crisis** - A psychosocial state or condition of disorientation and role confusion occurring especially in adolescents as a result of conflicting pressures and expectations and often producing acute anxiety. An identity crisis is a time in life when an individual begins to seriously look for answers about the nature of his or her being and the search for an identity. 20th century developmental psychologist Erik Erikson developed this term, which is used frequently. He used it mostly to apply to the period of transition in the teenage years when kids begin to define what they will do

as adults, and what their values are. It is now thought that an identity crisis may occur at any time of life, especially in periods of great transition.

6. **Over Coming Identity Crisis** – All of us live on the same earth. The same sky is above all of us. We breathe the same air and drink the same water. Ignoring this underlying principle of unity man visualizes multiplicity, which is a big mistake. Mahabharata centers on the principle of unity in diversity. These stories indicate the futility of prevailing human character which is marked by mindless copying, suspiciousness, unrealistic fears and greed that eventually leads to dilemma, frustrations and sufferings which have become the hall mark of the present era. Utility and effectiveness of the epic is widely accepted. Even today people find the morals of these stories useful in solving their personal, family, social or financial problems. It trains the young minds in the daily affairs of life by acquainting them with the accumulated experiences of past era. Every fable of Mahabharata can still be applied to human character and can give amicable instructions on every point. Learning through these stories endows one with modesty, from modesty one passes on to worthiness, being worthy one obtains riches, from riches religious merit and from that one obtains happiness. The end purport of these stories reveals through the fascinating medium of legless fables that basic knowledge and wisdom makes one's life richer, happier and fuller. The stories of the epic aim to cultivate in the reader, the ability to

examine the situation, weighing its pros and cons, proper interpretation and application of knowledge and use of native wisdom. These stories focus on the development of ability of careful observation and examination. These abilities help to ascertain the repercussions of one's actions. These stories are all about survival in a complicated world and the several ways to get over problems. Mahabharata when studied give proficiency in elegant speeches, a variety of expression in every department and a great knowledge of the conduct of human affairs. These stories also guide us through its moral and lead us to the right way of living through its natural analogies.

7. **Conclusion** - Today, since man has lost the ability to see unity in diversity, he is immersed in restlessness. What we need today is to see unity in diversity and the divinity behind this unity. These narratives teach these values in the simplest way. But man has forgotten the message of these stories and is leading the life of a Ravana. One has to face many obstacles in life, but one should never get depressed. Life is a challenge, meet it. Life is a dream, realize it. Life is a game, play it. Life is love, enjoy it. Be cheerful and courageous in the face of adversities; never give scope to any weakness whatsoever.

The cause for man's suffering is that he has constricted his love to himself and his family. He should develop the broad feeling that all are his brothers

and sisters. Expansion of love is life; contraction of love is death. All are the children of God. All are sparks of the Divine. Lord Krishna declared in the Bhagavad Gita eternal Atma in all bodies is a part of My Being. So, man should have the broad feeling to identify himself with everyone. Humanity can never progress without broad feelings. Unity is the need of the hour today. It is unity that protects the world. The prosperity and welfare of the society depends upon the individual. Our thoughts are our greatest asset. If the thoughts are sacred, you will have sacred results. Pleasure and pain are the consequences of your thoughts. So, sanctify your thoughts. When thoughts are good and powerful, you can achieve anything.

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