



Title of the project: Archaeological evidences of the Mahabharata

Name: Gladwin J

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Department: Amrita Darshanam (International Centre for Spiritual Studies), Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Chennai Campus

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Introduction to Mahabharata



Mahabharata, (Sanskrit: “Great Epic of the Bharata Dynasty”) one of the two Sanskrit epic poems of ancient India (the other being the Ramayana). The Mahabharata is an important source of information on the development of Hinduism between 400 BCE and 200 CE and is regarded by Hindus as both a text about dharma (Hindu moral law) and a history (itihasa, which translates literally to “that’s what happened”). Appearing in its present form about 400 CE, the Mahabharata consists of a mass of mythological and didactic material arranged around a central heroic narrative that tells of the struggle for sovereignty between two groups of cousins, the Kauravas (sons of Dhritarashtra, the descendant of Kuru) and the Pandavas (sons of Pandu). The poem is made up of almost 100,000 couplets divided into 18 parvans, or sections, plus a supplement titled Harivamsha (“Genealogy of the God Hari”; i.e., of Vishnu). Although it is unlikely that any single person wrote the poem, its authorship is traditionally ascribed to the sage Vyasa, who appears in the work as the grandfather of the Kauravas and the Pandavas. The date

and even the historical occurrence of the war that is the central event of the Mahabharata are much debated.

The central plot constitutes little more than one fifth of the total work. The remainder of the poem addresses a wide range of myths and legends, including the romance of Damayanti and her husband Nala (who gambles away his kingdom just as Yudhishtira gambles away his) and the legend of Savitri, whose devotion to her dead husband persuades Yama, the god of death, to restore him to life. The poem also contains descriptions of places of pilgrimages. Along with its basic plot and accounts of numerous myths, the Mahabharata reveals the evolution of Hinduism and its relations with other religions during its composition. The period during which the epic took shape was one of transition from Vedic sacrifice to sectarian Hinduism, as well as a time of interaction—sometimes friendly, sometimes hostile—with Buddhism and Jainism. Different sections of the poem express varying beliefs, often in creative tension. Some sections—such as the Narayaniya (a part of book 13), the Bhagavadgita (book 6), the Anugita (book 14), and the Harivamsha—are important sources of early Vaishnava theology, in which Krishna is an avatar of the god Vishnu. Above all, the Mahabharata is an exposition of dharma (codes of conduct), including the proper conduct of a king, of a warrior, of an individual living in times of calamity, and of a person seeking to attain moksha (freedom from samsara, or rebirth). The poem repeatedly demonstrates that the conflicting codes of dharma are so “subtle” that, in some situations, the hero cannot help but violate them in some respect, no matter what choice he makes.

The Mahabharata story has been retold in written and oral Sanskrit and vernacular versions throughout South and Southeast Asia. Its various incidents have been portrayed in stone, notably in sculptured reliefs at Angkor Wat and Angkor Thom in Cambodia, and in Indian miniature paintings.

Why are we trying to find archaeological evidences for an epic?



Even though the Mahabharata is considered as an epic and the foundation on which dharma is It is a great epic and is one of the pillars of present-day Hindu Dharma. The Mahabharata story and its moral ethos have had a profound influence on millions over many generations. Many believe the Mahabharata war is said to have occurred before the transition of Dwapara Yuga to Kali Yuga (Concept of Four Yugas). Dating the Mahabharata war and the start of Kaliyuga has been elusive and going on for many centuries. There is a great debate about whether there is any historical accuracy or evidence/proof in the story of Mahabharata. This narrative is so remarkable that it has made numerous people speculate ‘Did it really happen? or simply as fiction. Some basic observations which may point to the legitimacy of the epic are:

- a) It has been written in the epic from time to time that Mahabharata is an “Itihasa” which exclusively means “thus occurred”. The words “Purana” and “Itihasa” were specifically coined by the ancient people to categorize the “ancient” and “recent” events. Both the words denote history that has occurred at different times. If the intentions of the writer were to write a poem or a work of fiction, he would have stated it to be a “Maha Kavya” or “Katha”.
- b) Marine archaeology has also been utilized in India off the coast of the ancient port city of Dwaraka in Gujarat, uncovering further evidence in support of statements in the Vedic scriptures. An entire submerged city at Dwaraka, the ancient port city of Lord Krishna with its massive fort walls, piers, wharves and jetty has been found in the ocean as described in the Mahabharata and other Vedic literature.
- c) More than thirty-five sites in North India have yielded archaeological evidence and have been identified as ancient cities described in the Mahabharata. Copper utensils, iron,

seals, gold & silver ornaments, terracotta discs and painted grey ware pottery have all been found in these sites. Scientific dating of these artefacts corresponds to the non-Aryan-invasion model of Indian antiquity.

- d) The dynasties recorded in the Ramayan and the Mahabharata concur without a difference. Even the relations between different kings and their dynasties in both the great “epics” match with each other. If both were mere “epics” written by two entirely different at two different times, why would everything match even up to minor details? Mahabharata occurred at later date than the Ramayan. Why would the author of the Mahabharata borrow the same ideas and characters as those of the author of Ramayana?
- e) European scholars brought the nomadic Aryan tribes, into India after 1500 BC. How could these Aryans create Sanskrit language, gain so much knowledge and write all these texts before 700 BC? Great Indian thinkers including Lokmanya Tilak, Sri Aurobindo, and Dayanand Sarasvati rejected the European theory

Introduction to the archaeology behind Mahabharata

The dating of Mahabharata is a contentious topic as there seems to be various camps of reasoning determining different dates as the accurate representation of the Mahabharata. Some depend on puranic genealogies, others look at astronomical data, others use theories based on Aryan Invasion, etc as their base and finally some who look at archaeological data. Sometimes each of these groups are fixated by their technique and ignore the others. But whatever be the technique, textual analysis or astronomical analysis, it has to reconcile with what archaeology has found on the ground.

Among the dates proposed for Mahabharata, there are a few major ones as listed below:

1. 1000 BCE - This is the date that fits into the Aryan Invasion/Migration narrative. But that date has support from other sources as well.
2. 1924 BCE - Based on Puranic genealogy
3. 2449 BCE - Based on a statement by Varahamihira in 505 CE
4. 3067 BCE - Based on astronomical data
5. 3137 BCE - Mentioned by Aryabhata and the Aihole inscription.

The places mentioned in Mahabharata still bear the same name; there is no other Hastinapura or Kurukshetra or Ahichchhatra. In the 1950s, archaeologists excavated various sites related to the Mahabharata and from that data we have an understanding of that period and these findings have not been contested by any known conflicting data as of now. Archaeology of Hastinapura revealed five distinct layers of occupation with dates ranging from pre-1200 BCE to the 11th and 15th centuries CE.

- Period I (2000 – 1500 BCE): This was the oldest settlement layer found in Hastinapura. People of this period used something known as Ochre Colored Pottery. The tools they used included harpoons, antennae swords, and spear heads. Some anthropomorphic figures were also found.
- Period II (~1100 – 900 BCE): We don't know why the Period I settlement was abandoned, but the next settlers who came half a millennia later used pottery known as Painted Grey Ware. No huge palaces were discovered, but houses which had up to thirteen rooms and an open courtyard were found. There was also the transition to iron age with small nails, tongs, axes, arrowheads, spearheads and daggers. People spent their time cattle-breeding and farming eating rice, wheat and barley. They had domesticated various animals including the horse. Eventually, this settlement came to end due to floods from Ganga.
- Period III (~ 6th century BCE): Hastinapura was occupied once again, this time by people who used an advanced pottery type called Northern Black Polished Ware. This

was the time of Buddha, Mahavira and the Mahajanapadas. The towns were properly planned with excellent drainage systems and wells. Due to the flourishing trade, there were lots of coins and weights. But this settlement too had a disastrous end with a great fire.

- Period IV (2nd century BCE to third century CE) Like before, a new settlement started and from the coins of that period (imitation coins of the Kushans, from Mathura, and Yahudeyas), the occupation date can be said to be between second century BCE to third century CE). There is no evidence on how this settlement came to an end. The next layer starts during the Islamic period and is not relevant to the dating of Mahabharata.

If any of the events in Mahabharata really happened, then a post-Buddha date can be ignored because historical records from that period are available. This leaves two dates: either the events happened in the 2000 – 1500 BCE period which was immediately after the Mature Harappan period or it happened after 1100 BCE. There is a problem with the earlier date because Mathura, Indraprastha, Kurukshetra, Kampilya and various other places mentioned in the epic did not exist at that time. Dwaraka had settlements from the Harappan period, but then none of the sites associated with Krishna such as Mathura had anyone living there. This is the problem that people who push for an earlier date fail to address.

That leaves only the 1100 – 900 BCE date open and during that period Painted Grey Ware was found in most of the sites associated with the epic suggesting habitation. There is another piece of evidence as well. Puranic texts mention that when Hastinapura was destroyed by floods, people moved to Kaushambi. Archaeology revealed not only the floods, but also the settlement of Kausambi at a later date than the settlement of Hastinapura. This happened around 800 BCE according to the data from Kaushambi, and since the flood happened during the time of the fifth descendant of Parikshit, the war could have happened around 900 BCE.

This 900 BCE date is based on archaeology and other ways of analyzing the text and astronomical data reveal other dates. If archaeology suggests a date of 900 BCE, how do we reconcile the fact that astronomical data suggests an earlier date? There are some clues from a similar exercise conducted on the Odyssey but is that a good explanation.? Though we don't have a convincing explanation for how the authors of Mahabharata came up with data from an earlier period, but we do have an explanation for how they knew about Yavanas and Huns. Originally the text had 8,800 verses and later it was expanded to 24,000 verses; now it has more than 100,000 verses. All this expansion happened over a long period of time extending up to the Gupta period in the 4th century CE and contemporary art, architecture, and weapons entered the epic.

The discovery of ancient Dwarka



Krishna's legendary Dwarka built on the site of an even earlier sacred city, named Kususthali, was a well-planned city with a modern and technologically advanced harbor adjusted to large entering ships. It was inhabited by an advanced society. The city of Dwarka has been investigated by historians since the beginning of the 20th century. Also, the exact location of this port city has also been debated for a long time. Several references from the Mahabharata, the Bhagvata Purana, and the Vishnu Purana have been used to suggest the city's exact location which eventually lead to its discovery.

The remains of what has been described as a huge lost city, found by researchers not long ago shows some evidence to Lord Krishna's kingdom spread across' northern India and Pakistan, with its capital in ancient Dwarka, on the coast in Gujarat, just near the Pakistan border. In context of the Mahabharata, Lord Krishna is seen to have had a lot of enemies. His beautiful Dwarka was constantly in danger to be defeated because it was a battlefield for lord Krishna and King Salva, a dangerous Asura leader and the king of this earth, who developed an intense animosity toward Lord Krishna and strongly vowed to destroy Krishna's city of Dwarka, the sacred text of the Bhagavata Purana says. King Salva had a flying machine called "Saubha-pura" which he used when he launched an attack against Krishna's capital Dwarka. "The cruel Salva had come mounted on the Saubha chariot that can go anywhere, and from it he killed many valiant Vrishni youths and evilly devastated all the city parks," we read in Mahabharata. According to Krishna's, own relation in the Mahabharata:

"His Saubha clung to the sky at a league's length... He threw at me rockets, missiles, spears, spikes, battle-axes, three-bladed javelins, flame-throwers, without pausing. The sky... seemed to hold a hundred suns, a hundred moons... and a hundred myriad stars. Neither day or night could be made out, or the points of compass."

"I warded them off as they loomed toward me. With my swift-striking shafts, as they flashed through the sky. And I cut them into two or three pieces with mine. There was a great din in the sky above."

Around 1500 BC the whole western coast of India mysteriously disappeared along with Dwarka - the great city of gold. The deluge came and the submergence took place immediately after Sri Krishna departed from the world. This catastrophic event is confirmed by the sacred texts of the Vishnu Purana stating that "on the same day that Krishna departed from the earth the powerful dark-bodied Kali Age descended. The ocean rose and submerged the whole of Dwarka". The Age of Kali thus ushered in turns out to be none other than the present epoch of the earth - our own. According to the Hindu sages, it began just over 5000 years ago at a date in the Indian calendar corresponding to 3102 BC.

For more than 5,000 years Dwaraka was treated only like a myth, handed over from one generation to another. The discovery was made when the multi- disciplinary underwater surveys, carried out by the National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT), picked up images of several "excellent geometrical objects" which were normally man-made in the nine-kilometer-long stretch, west of Hazira in Gujarat.

According to experts, this was the first time that such sites have been reported in the Gulf of Cambay. It is important to add that the underwater marine structures found in the Gulf of Cambay are similar to the structures discovered at the archaeological sites of Harappan and pre-Harappan times. The acoustic images showed the area lined with well-laid house basements like features partially covered by sand waves and sand ripples at 30-40 metre water depth. At many places, channel-like features were also seen indicating the possible existence of possible drainage in the area.

The vast city - which is five miles long and two miles wide - is believed to predate the oldest known remains in the subcontinent by more than 5,000 years. Mainstream scientists maintain that ancient Indian culture/civilization goes back some 4-5 thousand years. Yet the ruins below the Gulf of Cambay go back at least 9 thousand years, i.e. to the time when the area submerged underwater. This means that the city must have existed before the flooding, i.e. at least 9 thousand years ago. The Gulf of Cambay waters revealed sandstone walls, a grid of streets, and some evidence of a seaport 70 feet underwater. About 2,000 artifacts were found 40 meters under the ocean. The artifacts were spread over an area of 9 kilometers. There were

remains of rectangular buildings, bathing facility, chiseled stone tools, broken pieces of potteries, jewelry, and the human jaws and teeth. Identical pottery has been found in the submerged city of Dwarka. Thus the results have proved that the account in Mahabharata as to the existence of a beautiful capital city of Dwarka of Sri Krishna was not a mere figment of imagination but it did exist.

The ruins have been proclaimed the remains of Krishna's lost city of Dwarka. Excavations conducted at the city by Dr S.R. Rao (1922 - 2013) an Indian archeologist who led teams credited with the discovery of a number of Harappan sites including the famous port city of Lothal in Gujarat and founder of the Marine Archaeology Center of the National Institute of Oceanography of India (NIO) have finally revealed that the descriptions as found in these sacred texts are not to be discarded as fanciful. "It has greatly narrowed the gap in Indian history by establishing the continuity of the Indian civilization from the Vedic Age to the present day", according to Dr. S R Rao.

There is a certain pilgrim city called Dwarka, a place of commemoration of the lost antediluvian city of Krishna and it is a destination for all Krishna worshippers. In the city, there is a magnificent Dwarkadish temple, sacred to Lord Krishna. During excavation works, archaeologists detected many layers of earlier constructions beneath and around the temple. Apparently, the temple had been built on something even older. In addition, underwater ruins have also been found between 3-10 meters from the shore, where today's Dwarka is located.

The discovery of Dwarka - an important historical landmark of India - has set to rest the doubts expressed by historians about the historicity of Mahabharata and the very existence of Dwarka city. The antediluvian Dwarka was not a fable, but a city that really existed and this fact may soon force us to re-evaluate and rewrite not only the history of the Indian subcontinent and the whole world.

Archaeological evidence for the Mahabharata war



Kurukshetra is the place where the epic Mahabharata war fought for 18 days, more than 5000 years ago. Bhagavadgeetha describes Kurukshetra as ‘Dharmakshetra’ – a place where ‘Dharma’ is restored. The location of the battle was Kurukshetra in the modern state of Haryana in India.

The battle was fought for throne of Hastinapur, which is now located between Meerut and Mawana in Uttar Pradesh and is now a forgotten village, but excavations in 1952, revealed the existence of vidurka – tilla (vidura’s palace), Draupadi – ki – rasoi (Draupadi’s Kitchen) and Draupadi Ghat, along with copper utensils, iron seals, Ornaments made of gold and silver, terracotta discs and several oblong shaped ivory dice used in the game of chauper (ancient game in which Duryodhana, with help of his maternal uncle Sakuni, defeated Yudhishtir and sent his brothers along with Draupadi to forest exile for 13 years).

In archaeological excavations around Hastinapur, about 135 iron objects which included arrow and spearheads, shafts, tongs, hooks, axes, and knives were found, which indicate the existence of a vigorous iron industry. There are indications of brick – lined roads and drainage systems,

and an agro – livestock-based economy. The painted grey ware (PGW) of Hastinapura has been assigned to 2800 BCE and beyond.

Based on astronomy of Saptarishi Mandal (they align in same nakshatra/constellation every 100 years), kurukshetra war dates back to 3138 BCE. Ancient Indian Almanacs (Panchangs) have been mentioning Salivahana Saka and Vikramarka Saka(calendar) and also mention the year Jaya Nama Samvatsara (2014-15) as Kaliyuga's 5116.

So, its been 5115 years since the death of Lord Krishna and if we subtract 2014 from it, its 3101 BCE when Krishna left this planet and 36 years prior to that, Kurukshetra war was fought. These calculations are based on mentionings in Mahabharata.

Krishna was 90 years old during war time and his life ended at the age of 126 years.

Yudhishtir and Bheema were elder than Krishna, Arjuna was of same age, Nakul and Sahadev were younger. This is mentioned in a scene where Pandavas are about to leave for forest exile, Krishna bows to Elder two brothers, hugs middle brother Arjuna and blesses the younger two.

According to the Matsya and vayu puranas a heavy flood on the river Ganga destroyed *Hastinapur* and Nichakshu, the fifth king after parikshit (Arjuna's grand son) who ascended the throne after kurukshetra war, shifted his capital to *kausambi*, 50 kilomters from *prayagraj*. Evidence of devastation by the Ganga is still visible in the thick clay soil.

Excavations in Kurukshetra, now in Haryana, yielded iron arrow and spearheads dated by Thermoluminescence Test to 3100 BCE. Sage Veda Vyas also mentions in Mahabharata about usage of atomic weapons from both sides killing millions of soldiers and kings within 18 days. Present excavations at kurukshetra find that the stones at that place were exposed to radioactive energy thousands of years ago.

The site of drowned Dwaraka near Gujarat's seashore (at present Dwaraka) also has artifacts dating back to 4000-5000 years old.

Learning Outcome

I was able to learn about the present-day scenario of the archaeological side of the India's quest for seeking out Mahabharata and understand the role it plays to define the customs and traditions of our country. The archaeological evidence discovered related to ancient Dwarka is probably the one that surprised and amazed me the most, which seems to be not familiar to people who are not well versed in the archaeological side of Mahabharata.

Although the exact understanding of the occurrence of Mahabharata is unclear from an archaeological perspective, this does give us an understanding as to where the basis for the creation of the Epic of Mahabharata might have been from. It seems to give Mahabharata some level of credibility as opposed to a purely religious or fantastical piece of literature.

Finally, I would conclude this paper that the evidences in favour for the justification for the existence of the tales of Mahabharata seems to be strong. However, the evidence for justifying the occurrence of the events in the Mahabharata as historical events seems to be debatable at best and only further research can give clues into this endless search for truth.

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