



A Preamble to the Grand Itihāsa

WHAT DOES THE WORD ITIHĀSA MEAN?

IT IS A COMBINATION OF 'ITI HA ĀSA', LITERALLY MEANS 'SO INDEED IT WAS'.



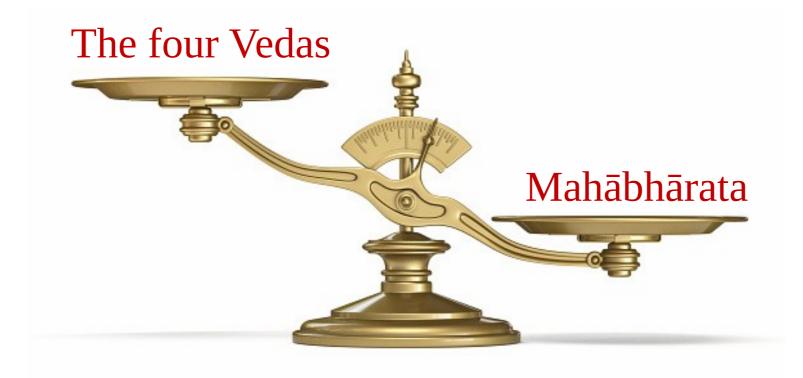
Is it possible at all to measure knowledge?

If possible, what are the parameters to measure knowledge?

Express your views...



Once the devās came together and quantified knowledge. The four Vedās were placed on one side of a weighing scale, and Mahābhārata was placed on the other. The scales tipped toward Mahābhārata.





Vedās, devoid of a beginning or end, are considered as an infinite source of wisdom. Both the *Itihāsas* acknowledge the wisdom of Vedās as supreme.

In fact, Mahābhārata reveals that *Itihāsas* and all *purānās* are intended to convey the supreme ideas of Vedās to untrained people.





Why it was named Mahābhārata?

Mahābhārata is described as the pañcamaveda or the fifth Veda.

The Chāndogya Upaniṣad describes all purānās and Itihāsas as pañcamaveda Sometimes Nāṭyaśāstra and Ayurveda are also categorized similarly.

Then again, for all its vastness and completeness that is comparable to the vedās, the title best suits Mahābhārata.

'Mahatvāt bhāravatvāt cha mahābhāratam uchyate'







- eighteen lakh words and one lakh ślokas
- four times bigger than Rāmāyana
- Iliad and Odyssey combined level to only one tenth of Mahābhārata
- It is philosophical, spiritual and devotional
- the subjects of discussion in Mahābhārata are the puruṣārthās
- complex discussions on *Dharma Adharma*, political strategies, warfare, history, geography, aesthetics etc.
- lessons in statecraft, alongside lessons in forging alliances within personal, social and national spheres.
- stutis like Viṣṇusahasranāma and Siva sahasranāma and that of devatās Siva, Viṣṇu, Durga, Agni Devā etc. are also seen in Mahābhārata.



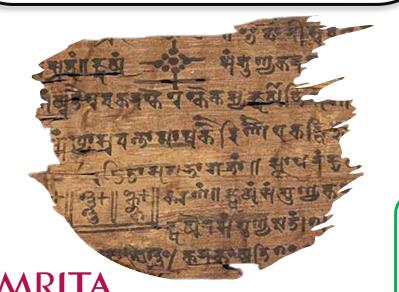


Just like Śrī ĀdiŚaṅkarācārya, several other *Acharyas* like Śrī Abhinavagupta (Proponent of Śrī Kashmirashaiva philosophy), Mādhvāchārya (Dvaita philosophy), Rāmānujāchārya (viśistādvaita philosophy) among several others, have discussed the Bhagavadgītā through their *Bhāshyās*. Today, there 227 around discourses are on Bhagavadgītā in samskṛtam aloné.



Śrī ĀdiŚaṅkarācārya considered Śrimad Bhagavadgītā of Mahābhārata, for laying the foundations of his darśana alongside the ten Upaniṣads and Brahmasūtra.

Thus he said 'gītā-śastram samasta-vedārthasāra- saṅgraha-bhūtam'





To inspire freedom movement, Lokmānya Tilak wrote his commentary on Bhagavadgītā, '*Gītārahasyaṃ*', with focus on *Karmayoga*.

Many prominent people like M K Gandhi and Araviṇda Maharṣi were inspired by the Bhagavadgītā

History	Myth	Epic
the analysis and	stories that revolve around	a narrative that revolves
interpretation of the past.	the divine or people with	around a particular incident
	divine powers, even though	discussing its origin,
It becomes a historical	it discusses ideologies,	progress and
fiction when imagination	morality and righteousness.	consequences. (Aristotle)
and literary tools are added		
to it		

However, *Itihāsas* do not behold any of these characteristics. Then...



What is an Itihāsa?

"dharmārtha kāmamokṣānām pūrvavritham kathayuktham itihāsa prachakshyathe"

Itihāsas explain the four *puruṣārthas*, *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma and mokṣa* by narrating historic events in the form of stories.

This purpose and nature of *Itihāsas* is clearly visible in Mahābhārata, from head to tail. Thus it is an *Itihāsa*



It would be a grievous error to consider the literary genre of a particular language as universal and equate unique literary genres of other languages into it. This would make for a huge categorical blunder.



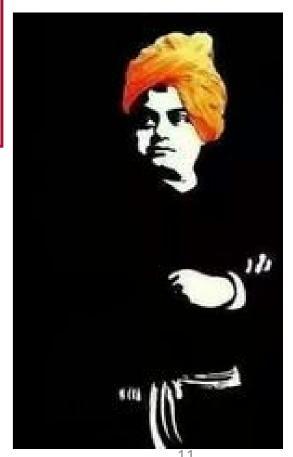
Maharși Veda Vyāsā's own verses on Mahābhārata

Dharme charthe cha kame cha mokshe cha bharatarshabha, yadihasti tadanyatra yanneha'sti na tat kvachit'

O *Bharatarṣabha*! (the best among the Bharatas), whatever is found in Mahābhārata about *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma and mokṣa*, may be found anywhere else. But, what is not in this *Itihāsa*, cannot be found elsewhere.

Swami Vivekananda describes *Itihāsas* as the encyclopedia of knowledge and *Āryasamskriti*. He further added that, *Itihāsas* envisage an ideal culture that our civilisation is yet to achieve





ourușa**r**thās



puruṣārthās are qualities that should be imbibed by an individual and determines the progress of his life.

- *Kāma*, means desire.
- *Artha*, represents the effort to fulfil Kāma.
- Care must be taken to not disrupt the existing balance towards nature and fellow beings, and that concern is *Dharma*.
- *Mokṣa* is the ultimate freedom from the bondage of Artha and Kāma



Can Kāma be limitless?

Which type of effort (Artha) should be taken by us to fulfil Kāma?

Bharat celebrates the idea that one must acquire *Artha* in accordance with *Dharma* and experience *Kāma* also in accordance with *Dharma*. Living this way, all beings walk toward their final goal, which is *Mokṣa*.



Why Itihāsas?

"Itihāsa purānābhyām vēdam samupabrimhayēt bhibhēdyalpa shrutā dvēdō māyayam pratarēditi"

Mahābhārata itself proclaims that, since Vedās themselves are afraid of people with half knowledge (AlpaSruta), because they may interpret Vedās wrongly, the essence of Vedās have to be explained with the help of $Itih\bar{a}sas$ and $pur\bar{a}n\bar{a}s$

Satguru *Śrī Mātā Amritānandamayī Devī* tells us that the Mahābhārata war is also a representation of our internal struggles.





The Author

Maharși Veda Vyāsa

 Born as Kṛṣṇadwaipāyana to Satyavati and Parāsara *Muni*. He is known by the name Dwaipāyana as he was born on an island.

- Divided the *ved*ās to four and composed the fifth *veda*, Mahābhārata.
- He is considered as the author of the eighteen *purānas*, the commentary on Patanjali Yoga Sutras and one of the fundamental texts of Vedanta philosophy *Brahmasutra*.





- *Srimad* Bhāgavata Purāna depicts Maharṣi Veda Vyāsa as one of the twenty-two main avatars of Bhagavān Vishnu.
- In *Srimad* Bhagavad Gita, Lord Kṛṣṇa reveals that "Among *Maharṣis*, I am Vyāsa".
- appearing at the beginning and the ending of the Itihāsa and capable of controlling the flow and direction of the story.





Birth of the Itihāsa

- Maharşi Vyāsa approached Brahma for a person to write Mahābhārata.
- Bhagavān Mahāganapati was given the task of writing Mahābhārata from Maharşi Vyāsa.
- They had a pact that Vyāsa should dictate the entire *Itihāsa* without any pause or interruption, Ganapati should write only after fully understanding the meaning of the narrated verses.
- Thus Mahābhārata was composed by Maharṣi Vyāsa, an incarnation of Bhagavān Vishnu and written by the omniscient son of Bhagavān Shiva, Ganesha on Brahma's advice.





- after completion of Mahābhārata, Vyāsa narrated it to his son Shuka and his other śiṣyas
- Mahābhārata presents itself as a narration by Vaishamapāyana, as commanded by *Maharṣi* Vyāsa, in the *sarpasatra yajna* of King Janamejaya.
- Later Lomaharshana's son, Ugrasravas, who narrated Mahābhārata to the *rishis* in Shaunaka's *satra* at *Naimiṣāranyam*

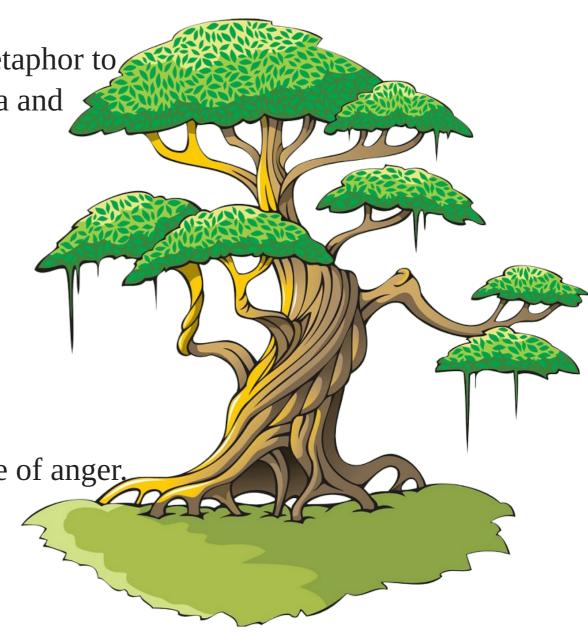


Inside Mahābhārata

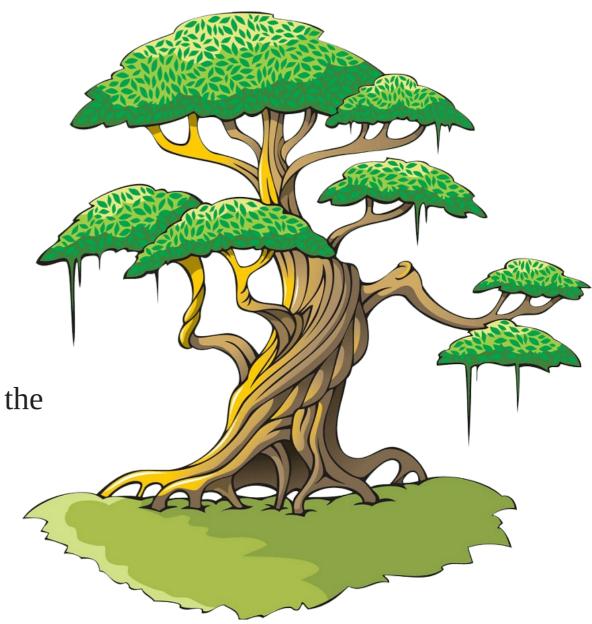
In the \overline{A} diparva, Maharṣi Vyāsa uses a beautiful metaphor to sketch and compare the characters Yudhishthira and Duryodhana.

- Duryodhana is a huge tree, angry by nature.
- Karna is its trunk,
- \triangleright *Ś*akuni is the branches.
- File Its flowers and fruits represent Dushasana.
- the naive Dhritarāshtra forms the roots of that tree of anger,





- Yudhishthira is a great tree of *Dharma*.
- Arjuna is the trunk,
- ► Bhima is the branches.
- The flowers and fruits are Nakula-Sahadeva.
- Its roots, *Bhagav*ān Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself, the *Brahmajnas* and the *Ved*ās.





Characters and places in the Itihāsa



- In Mahābhārata we find unearthly characters like *Deva*, *Asura*, *Rākshasa*, *Yaksha*, *Gandharva*, *Apsara*, *Nāga* etc.
- Then we have different kinds of people like Kings, *Purohits*, Traders, *Sutas*, *Rishis*, Queens, *Dasas*, *Nishadas*, *Mlecchas*, *Yavanas* etc.
- Birds, animals and reptiles among other living beings are also there alongside mountains and rivers.
- Forests, groves, palaces, punyatirthās, grounds, and riverbanks alongside Indraloka, Nagaloka, etc. are the backdrop of this grand Itihāsa.





- the important parts of the story are set with Hastināpura and Indraprastha as the centre
- places like Dwāraka, the Ganges, Magadha, the Kingdom of pāñcāla, and the Kingdom of Matsya are also described.
- also narrates the accounts of Garuda, Nala, Dushyantha, *Bhagav*ān Śrī Rāmachandra, Maharṣi Vishwāmitra, Emperor Shibhi, Randideva, *Bhagav*ān Parasurāma and King Harishchandra

Though the *Itihāsa's* primary subjects are the life and times of the *Kaurav*ās and the *Pandav*ās, Mahābhārata begins with Janamejaya, the grandson of Arjuna's son Abhimanyu. And when the past is narrated in the *Itihāsa* from this point, we are taken back to the time of Bhīṣma and beyond, to Kuru and Bharata, and further even to the origin of the world.



Content and teachings

Mahābhārata is also known as Jaya, Bharata and Kṛṣṇaveda.

- The trail of *Karma* and *Karmaphala*.
- touches the hard and deep realities of life
- twin notions of Truth False or Good Evil
- Discussion on the *Adharma* of the *Dhārmic* side and the *Dharma* of the *Adharmic side*.



a reminde us that Dharma tattua is subtle

Comparison of Mahabharata with other epics

- The Iliad Greek c. 8th century BCE
- The Odyssey Greek c. 8th century BCE
- Epic of Manas 18th century CE epic poem of Kyrgyz people of central asia
- Beowulf 700-1000 CE
- Shahnameh (the book of kings) 977-1010 CE by Persian poet Firdowsi
- Epic of Gilgamesh Sumerian to Akkadian c. 2100 BC 1200 BCE
- Sirat al-Nabi Biography of Prophet Mohammad-1918-1955 CE
- The Aeneid latin linking of Romans to the Greeks 29-19 BCE
- Ramayana atleast 4600 BCE Taittiriya Brahmana mentions Valmiki, traditional dating 12209
 BCE
- Mahabharata Mahabharata war- 3137 BCE, Kali yuga 3102 BCE

maṅgalacharana

śloka

nārāyaṇaṁ namaskṛtya naraṁ caiva narottamam devīṁ sarasvatīṁ chaiva (vyāsaṁ) tato jayam udīrayet

Before starting Jaya, one has to offer namasākram and bow down to the supreme Nara-Nārayana, Saraswati Devi and Maharṣi Vyāsa.

Nara-Narāyanas are Mahāmunis, who were once part of Bhagavān Vishnu Himself. Mahābhārata says that, in the Dwāpara Yuga, they took birth as Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna.



Let the study of Mahābhārata become an initiation, upanayanam, into the divine wisdom of Bhāratmātā.

Learning Outcomes

- Understand how to approach Mahabharata.
- A brief introduction to the author of Mahabharata.
- Insights into the grandeur and profundity of Mahabharata, and how this itihasa came to be.
- Mahābhārata gives valuable insights on political strategies, warfare, history, geography, aesthetics, and a lot more. It explains about *Karma and Karmaphala* and its importance.



