

CONCLUSION

In this study, an attempt has been made to understand various concepts of the heroic central to the Greek and Indian epics. The *Iliad*, the *Odyssey* and the *Mahabharata* are repositories of grand characters, offering a variety of models of heroic characters. A study of the notions of heroism and their socio-cultural context can help one in comprehending the heroic in epic characters. Heroism, as a quality, varies with every individual. It can be seen that not every character is able to recognize its heroic potential to its fullest. The latency of heroism needs the right epochs, situations and circumstances to come to the fore.

A hypothesis of the heroic was put forward in the Introduction, along with specific problems related to the epic genre. The problematic of heroism was seen as an important aspect of epics, and epic characters were seen as representations of heroism. Questions related to the factors contributing towards making the epic characters heroic, unheroic or 'aheroic', of what is the birth-place of a hero, or what makes an individual heroic, were raised during the course of discussion. The backgrounds of epic composition and the goals of heroic endeavour were described in detail. The search for the hero or the 'heroic' is seen as part of the search for identity in literary works.

In chapter one, "A Vignette of the Heroic", the cultural context and the essential plot outlines of the Greek and Indian epics were discussed. A brief summary of the concept of epic in ancient Western and Indian critical writings was also presented. The theories of Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell were discussed.

In chapter two, entitled "An Exposition of the Heroic", the characters of the Homeric epics and the *Mahabharata* were analysed in detail. The protagonists were examined by focussing on the various qualities exhibited by them during the course of the epic narrative.

An effort was made in chapter three, on "A Philosophy of the Heroic", to develop a philosophy of the 'heroic' by examining it as an immutable yet dynamic concept. The chapter examined the place of certain elemental truths of life as important structuring principles and viewed self-knowledge as an integral element of heroism. Phenomenological and cultural contexts were also considered as significant contributions to the construction of a heroic persona.

The aim of this dissertation has been to examine the nature of the heroic in the epics discussed, and to abstract from them the conceptual framework of the 'heroic' as created by the epic-poets, and as perceived by the major characters themselves in the epics.

On the basis of the discussion in the foregoing chapters, it can be deduced that the epic characters are delineated as representations of physical beauty, fighting skills, semi-divinity, which form the prerequisites for being a 'hero'. A hero also contributes in the shaping or reshaping of mythical history and thus becomes a medium for the fulfillment of Divine wishes. Divine pleasure or displeasure determines the destiny of the hero and in spite of his near-divinity he cannot escape the Destiny intended for him. This reduces a character's freedom of choice. Yet a character's choice makes him heroic, unheroic or 'aheroic'. A character can also be described as 'aheroic' because even a negative

endeavour, to defy accepted norms of society and culture may be considered an action, albeit a negative one. Action is vital for the epic heroes, for it determines their individual identity.

Epics offer some lasting comments on heroism, for even the villains of the narrative are heroic, and the epic poet's world-view includes certain ambivalences. No character is completely heroic or unheroic, or wholly evil or only good. It may have an amalgamation of both virtues, as in real life. There are many factors that shape a character's identity. The heroic is generally the result of the hero's humanity. Even though most of the heroes are half-divine they cannot forget their human element. A hero may forget it temporarily, but he has a realization of his fallibility as a human when confronted with death. His own death is inevitable, but the death of a dear one compels him to realize the transitory nature of the existence on earth and the frailty in his enemies. He looks at his foes with a discerning eye, as co-victims. Such realization of mortality elevates the hero to a level of wisdom attained only by enlightened beings. His actions gain significance despite the uncertainty of the results of his endeavour. The endeavour of a character, to be above the common humanity at the same time retaining its divinity, makes it 'heroic'.

The realization of the hero at such critical moments at once makes him human and yet something more than human. The contrariness of his character is resolved and the similarities are assimilated, and he becomes a key figure of his culture in a given epoch. A certain self-awareness of this is inherent in a hero and he is aided by divine help. Consequently, the god-man relationship is crucial in epics.

Scholars have marked the historical periods of social transition depicted in the epics as Heroic Ages, both in Greece and India. The different religious tempers of the two countries accord the epic characters with two cultural perspectives. The Greeks lived for beauty and sensual pleasure. For them, the body was the site for ultimate pleasure, without which life had no meaning. Hence, death took on tragic overtones for them, engaged as they were in the pursuit of physical pleasures. The Hindus, on the other hand, are believed to be a deeply spiritual people. For them, an action is to be performed without an expectation of its fruits. Hence, an ideal way of living is sought by the Hindus.

Even though the theological tempers of Greece and India propagate opposite world-views, the basic premise of declining state of affairs remains the same in both cultures. The theory of the four Ages and *Yugas* in Greece and India, is an attempt to comprehend the relationship between the life given to man by the Divine and the life shaped by man himself. Those who are able to understand the difference become the saviours for the rest of the human beings. A saviour or a hero is hailed as the one who would deliver his people from a difficult, incomprehensible existence. Immortality of the gods as distinct from the mortality of men forms the basic difference between them. Gods are also unable to free men from the clutches of Destiny. Hence, the epics suggest that man can either submit to Destiny or negate it. In either case, his efforts are lauded as heroic. Such a submission or negation creates an ambiguity regarding the concept of the heroic. The peculiar problematic of the concept can be examined with reference to the cultural discourse arising out of the epics themselves. The

epics give freedom of action and choice to their protagonists who exercise the freedom to project an image of themselves. Essentially, it is through the action of a character that the heroic is experienced. However, the composer of the epic presents his views and that of his society through his creations. Moreover, readers of subsequent ages too contribute to the shaping of a heroic image.

While analysing the characters it was seen that the quality of heroism takes on varied hues when the protagonists are interpreted in the light of certain existential situations and circumstances. Villainous characters like Duryodhana and Karna can be still considered heroic because of their attempt to defy their destiny. Hector's gentle humanity makes him only slightly less heroic when he is compared to Achilles. Both Arjuna and Achilles are in the mould of traditional heroism and they have the requisite qualities of heroism. An alternate vision of heroism also emerges when characters like Odysseus and Krishna are examined. These varieties indicate the changing needs of the societies in transition, when heroism of mind seems to have replaced purely physical heroism. Bhishma and Yudhishtira are depicted by Vyasa as heroic figures, but they are also examples of spiritual heroism. The exemplary lives led by these two figures within the prescribed code of conduct of their religion make them heroes of a different and declining social order. Yudhishtira, in fact, is hailed as the true hero of the epic by many scholars and critics.

The aim of this dissertation has been to establish that though there is a certain universally valid concept of the heroic there are also culture-specific shades of it. Some basic principles of composition structure the

concept, aided by the self-knowledge and awareness of the characters. The contextual cultures of the epics play an important role in creating a heroic-construct. However, once created the characters have an autonomous existence as literary creations, and they settle into an image after a time.

The concept of the heroic had a more central place in the historical periods depicted in the epics, for then the focus was on a culture, a community rather than only on an individual as in modern literary works. Individualism, if the use of the term may be permitted in the context of the mythical epochs, was tolerated to a certain extent, as long as it did not threaten the existence of the community. The loss of epic vision and imagination can be attributed to the modern inability to have an organic link with the past. One can only deduce that like Homer, who is believed to have been blind, or the Sage Vyasa who is horrible to look at, the gift of such poetry of epical vision and grandeur has to be acquired at a high price - at the loss of physical perfection which gives rise to profound knowledge and inner vision. The quest for identity is an eternal theme in literary works. The odyssey of man in many guises is for the recovery of his lost self. Yet, the identity cannot be the same for every man. Since the notions of the heroic are so deeply rooted in a specific culture and epoch, the search for the concept of the 'heroic'. the essence of heroism, cannot end.

After examining and analysing various notions of heroism, it may be said that only a virtual image of heroism can be perceived in any epic, one which is true in a specific culture only. The strands of disparate thoughts and ideologies can form only an illusory, singular concept of heroism.

which in its turn is influenced by the different perceptions of authors, characters and readers. It would be difficult to apply the same parameters of heroism to characters in every literary genre of every age or era. For, like the prism, the lights thrown on the concept will reflect proportionately fluid and malleable images. In conclusion it may be said that the present study establishes that Truths about heroism and the concepts of the heroic remain protean truths and that there cannot be one universal archetype of an epic hero.