

CHAPTER- I

ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF

MAHĀKĀVYA

I.I INTRODUCTION:

Human beings possess the distinctive power to think, speak and express their ideas and ideals. Expression and transmission of ideas and ideals need a medium and the language satisfies this basic need. Language thus plays a prominent role in the dissemination of human thoughts and helps in the development of society in all spheres of life. Every language requires development to uplift the social and cultural conditions of the people. The development of a language is marked by the extent of good and valuable works of literature. These literary works preserve for posterity, information on the socio, economic, political, cultural and religious conditions of the people of a nation or the age. Besides, they are the repository of the lofty ideals and constructive thoughts of the renowned scholars.

The story of human civilization established one fact that development of any literature goes parallel to the development of civilization in terms of way of living and thinking. Literary development, thus, goes hand in hand with development of culture. It is also globally evident that, for establishment and growth of civilization, the factors that are vitally considered are the sites of settlement and the quality of living. Therefore, settlement has been preferred at a place that is in a close vicinity of water viz., a river, a pond or the sea. Also the responsibility of growth and development of culture and civilization have been entrusted to men of letters who are capable of safeguarding and furthering cultural values through various means viz. rituals, learning and literature.

Generally, the first notable literary work in every developed language happens to be an epic. It reflects usually a great political change or a great war. Such an epic is known as ‘primitive epic’ which portrays the events of the age of its composition of course mixed with the imaginative thoughts of the poet.

Sanskrit is a language of very ancient origin among the Indo-Iranian languages. Sanskrit literature is like the ocean, which is both vast and deep. Its poets, writers and dramatists have drawn their inspiration from the cosmos on one hand and from the contemporary environs of their own times on the other. In turning from the Vedic to the Sanskrit period, we are confronted with a literature which is essentially different from that of the earlier age in matter, spirit and form.⁷ Sanskrit literature contrasts with that of both the earlier and the later Vedic period. While prose was employed in the *Yajurveda* and *Brāhmaṇas* which almost disappears in Sanskrit, nearly every branch of literature being treated in verse, often much to the detriment of the subject, as in the case of law.⁸

The bulk of the Classical Sanskrit Literature was composed at a period very much later than the fixing of the language by Pāṇini. An earlier period in literary and linguistic history is represented by the two great popular epics, the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*. It does not seem that either of these two works reached its final form until well after the Christian era, but the tradition of epic recitation goes back into the Vedic age. The *Mahābhārata* in particular was a long time in forming, and a good deal of what is incorporated in the final recension may claim an earlier date.

⁷ Macdonell, A. A., *Origin and Development of Sanskrit Literature*, p. 188

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 189

We have therefore in the Epics extensive documents of Sanskrit belonging to a period nearer to Pāṇini than the classical literature in the narrow sense. They provide also evidence of the wide popularity of one type of Sanskrit literature among the masses of the people, since these works were reserved for no cultivated audience, but intended for public recital to the population in general. Their popular character is evidenced by their language. This is Sanskrit definitely enough as opposed to the contemporary Middle Indo-Aryan, but it is a Sanskrit which frequently violates the rules which Pāṇini had laid down and which were always observed in the more orthodox literary circles.

The recitation and transmission of the Epic legends was not the business of the Brāhmaṇs, but of the Sūtas, a class of royal servants whose duties had originally included that of charioteer. It was natural that their language should be of a more popular nature than that of the educated classes *par excellence*, the Brāhmaṇas.

The creative genius in Sanskrit has always shown a predilection for the poetic form or *padyarūpa* of *kāvya*. The experiments of Sanskrit poets gave rise to the various forms of poetry such as *muktaka*, *śataka*, *khaṇḍakāvya* and *mahākāvya*.⁹

I.II ORIGIN:

If we look at the *Ṛgveda*, we find dialogue hymns like Yama-Yamī hymn (10/11), Pururavā-Urvaśī hymn (10/15), Agastya-Lopāmudrā hymn (1/179), Indra-Aditi hymn (4/18), Indra-Indrāṇī hymn (10/86), Sarmā-Paṇīsa hymn (10/51/3) and Indra-Maruta hymn (1/165/170) etc. On this evidence, Oldenberg has put the hypothesis that the ancient form of Indian epic was

⁹ Panda, R. K., Some Noteworthy Sanskrit Mahākāvyas of Twentieth Century, *Essays on Modern Sanskrit Poetry*, p. 21

like *Ṛgveda* dialogue-hymns.¹⁰ Winternitz has put his hypothesis that they were *Ṛgvedic* hymns only and from the pattern of their content and form, the poems, epics and dramas were originated later.

The *kāvya* is therefore flowing like the river Gaṅgā from the time immemorial. The *Ṛgveda* is the earliest *kāvya* in Sanskrit language. It contains some specimen of fine poetry. In this regard Kunhan Raja rightly observes: “As poetry, the *Ṛgveda* reveals certain features that are not seen in the recorded remnants of other ancient civilizations. Love nature is one such feather that is very prominent in the poetry of the *Ṛgveda*. There is no ancient nation that has developed a poetic literature comparable to the poetry of the *Ṛgveda*.”¹¹

The beginnings of epic poetry in India are to be found in the early Vedic Literature. The *Ṛgveda* contained hymns of a narrative character, short legends in prose and in verse called *Gāthās*, *Nārāśamsis*, *Itihāsa* etc., occur in the Brāhmaṇa Literature.¹² The Nirukta contains prose tales and like wise the metrical *Brhaddevatā*.

In the Vedic literature there was no essential difference between *Atita*, *Ākhyāna*, *Purāṇa* and *Itihāsa* and generally *Kathā*. They meant ordinarily an old tale, story, legend or incident and they were often interchangeable.¹³ *Kathā* is non specific and may be a causeric rather than a tale. (There may be a *Divya Kathā*, like the legend of *Agastya*, or a *Kathāmṛta* or essence of several *Upākhyānas*, or a *Kathāsāra*, an abridgment of a story)

¹⁰ Oldenberg, Z.D.M.G. Volume 37(1883), p. 54

Volume 39 (1885), p. 52

¹¹ Kunhana Raja C., *Survey of Sanskrit Literature*, p. 21

¹² *Bṛihdāraṇyaka*, II.4.10; IV.1.2; IV.5.9

Śatapathabrāhmaṇa, X.7.1

Atharva-saṃhitā, XV.6

¹³ *Mahābhārata*, III.100.2

Purāṇa literally ‘old’ and *Itihāsa* (*Iti-ha-āsa*) literally ‘so it was’ are almost synonymous, and these terms are found associated with each other in the early literature¹⁴. The word *Itihāsa* may become a saying, proverb rather than a legend (अत्राप्युदाहरन्तीममितिहासं पुरातनम्).¹⁵ In this sense the words *Gītā* and *Gāthā* were also used. *Gāthā* need not necessarily be sung and means only a proverbial verse (अत्राप्युदाहरन्तीमाः गाथादेवैरुदाहृताः).¹⁶

In the extant literature, the terms *Itihāsa* and *Purāṇa* have acquired a distinct use. *Itihāsa* may correspond to an epic and *Purāṇa* to a series of narrations, without the main prop of a running tale, meant solely to explain cosmological and theological tenets.

The *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* are found to be the original epics. The compiled, revised and researched forms of these two have originated the new tradition of epics. As per Jayakishan Khandelwal’s reference, amongst both, the *Rāmāyaṇa* is more poetic and less historic, while the *Mahābhārata* is more historic and less poetic. Hence, the *Rāmāyaṇa* is the father of decorated epics.

The initial *Mahākāvyas* after the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* were:

1. *Jāmbavatījaya* (or *Pātālavijaya*) by Pāṇini (450 B.C.) – It is in 18 Cantos.
2. *Svargārohaṇa* by Vararuci (350 B.C.) mentioned by Patanjali 4-3-101 as ‘*Vārarucam-kāvyam*’ and also by Samudra Gupta in his ‘*Kṛṣṇacarita*’.
3. *Mahānanda-kāvya* by Patanjali (150 B.C.)

I.III FORMS OF KĀVYA:

¹⁴ *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, VII.1,2,4; VII.9,29; III.45

¹⁵ *Mahābhārata*, III.30.21

¹⁶ *Ibid*, III.29, 35; III.135,45,54

The term *kāvya* literally and in its widest sense connotes all that is the work of a poet. In that sense *kāvya* is the subject of Classical Sanskrit Literature. Numerous definitions of poetry have been attempted from time to time by Sanskrit theorists. These definitions have generally been influenced by the author's conception of the essence of poetry. In some cases, however, the definitions are attempts on the part of their authors to describe rather than to define. In earlier definitions, the emphasis lies on the unique relationship between the word and meaning. Bhāmaha's definition of poetry is one of the earliest definitions of poetry. According to him "A happy fusion of *Śabda* (Sound) and *Artha* (sense) is called poetry.

शब्दार्थौ सहितौ काव्यम् । *Kāvyālaṅkāra*, I.16

In other words a form of composition in which word and meaning co-exist. In the opinion of Daṇḍin the body of poetry is the string of words which indicate the aim or the purpose intended (by the author).

तैः शरीरञ्च काव्यानामलंकाराश्च दर्शिताः ।

शरीरं तावदिष्टार्थव्यवच्छिन्ना पदावली ॥ *Kāvyādarśaḥ*, I.10

According to Vāmana, poetry is that union of sound and sense which is devoid of poetic flaws and is embodied with *guṇas* (excellences) and *alaṅkāras* (figures of speech).

रीतिरात्मा काव्यस्य विशिष्टा पदरचना रीतिः । *Kāvyālaṅkārasūtravṛttiḥ*, I.6-7/I.26

According to Ānandavardhana, the body of poetry is the combination of word & sound while its soul is suggested sense.

काव्यस्यात्मा ध्वनिरिति बुधैर्यः समाम्नात पूर्वः । *Dhvanyāloka*, I.1

Kuntaka has defined poetry on the basis of the doctrine of *vakrokti*. Poetry is the union of sound & sense arranged in a composition, which consisting of oblique saying of a poet is delightful to its sensible reader & listener.

शब्दार्थौ सहितौ वक्रकविव्यापारशालिनि ।

बन्धे व्यवस्थितौ काव्यं तद्विदाह्लादकारिणि ॥ *Vakroktijīvitam*, I.7

According to Vidyānātha, poetry is

गुणालंकार सहितौ शब्दार्थौ दोषवर्जितौ काव्यम् । *Pratāparudrīyam*, I.6

According to Hemacandrācārya, poetry means

अदोषौ सगुणौ सालंकारौ च शब्दार्थौ काव्यम् । *Kāvyaśāstra*, I.11

According to Kṣemendra, poetry is

औचित्यस्य चमत्कारकारिणश्चारुचर्वणे ।

रसजीवितभूतस्य विचारं कुरुतेऽधुना ॥ *Aucityavicāracarcā*, I.3

According to Rudraṭa, poetry means

ननु शब्दार्थौ काव्यम् । *Kāvyaśāstra*, II.1

According to Jaydeva, poetry is

निर्दोषा लक्षणवती सरीतिर्गुणभूषिता ।

सालङ्काररसानेकवृत्तिर्वाक्काव्यनामभाक् ॥ *Candrāloka*, I.7

According to Mammaṭa, poetry is constituted by word & sense which are faultless, possessed of excellences, and in which rarely a distinct figure of speech may be absent.

तददोषौ शब्दार्थौ सगुणावनलंकृती पुनः क्वापि । *Kāvyaśāstra*, I.4

In the other words of Mammaṭa, *kāvya* is:

सकलप्रयोजनमौलिभूतं समनन्तरमेव रसास्वादनसमुद्भूतं विगलितवेद्यान्तरमानन्दं
प्रभुसंमितशब्दप्रधानवेदादिशास्त्रेभ्यः सुहृत्संमितार्थतात्पर्यवत्पुराणादीतीहासेभ्यश्च
शब्दार्थयोगुणभावेन रसाङ्गभूतव्यापारप्रवणतया विलक्षणं यत् काव्यं
लोकोत्तरवर्णनानिपुणकविकर्म ।

Kāvya is that which touches the inmost cords of the human mind and diffuses itself into the crevices of the heart, working up a lasting sense of delight. It is an expression in the beautiful form and melodious language of the best thoughts and noblest emotions, which is the spectacle of life, awakening the finest souls.

The definition of poetry put forth by Viśvanātha is that poetry is a sentence, the soul which is *rasa*.

वाक्यं रसात्मकं काव्यम् । *Sāhityadarpaṇa*, p. 39

Paṇḍitarāja Jagannātha defines poetry as a word promoting delight.

रमणीयार्थप्रतिपादकः शब्दः काव्यम् । *Rasagaṅgādhara*, p. 13

According to the modern Sanskrit poetician Rādhāvallabha Tripāṭhī, *kāvya* is that which

लोकानुकीर्तनं काव्यम् । *Abhinavakāvyaḷaṅkārasūtram*, I.1.1, p. 1

Kāvya is divided broadly into two classes viz. *Śravya* & *Dṛśya*. *Śravya* includes in all works excepting dramas which are designated as *Dṛśya* (that can be seen). *Śravya kāvya* is of two-kinds, verse or prose. Thus says Viśvanātha:

श्रव्यं श्रोतव्यमात्रं तत्पद्यगद्यमयं द्विधा ।

From above definitions it is clear that poetry is a form of composition in which word and meaning co-exist and it employs the standard language as its medium and thus differs from the everyday spoken language qualitatively.

I.IV DEFINITIONS OF *MAHĀKĀVYA*:

Mahākāvya is a poetical work of sizeable length written mainly in narrative style. Epic poetry, as distinguished from lyrical, is characterized by the fact that it confines itself more to external action than to internal feelings. As the nation grows up in ideas and civilization, and naturally begins to reason and to speculate, its mind turns inward, putting a stop to the spontaneous outburst of epic, the natural expression of national life.

Poetry in verse follows generally the manner of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Some call *kāvyas*, artificial epics. *Kāvya* is three-fold viz. *Prabandha*, *Muktaka* and *Campu*. In it *Prabandhakāvya* is two-fold viz. *Mahākāvya* and *Khaṇḍakāvya*. Several works on classical Sanskrit poetics have given some

gross definitions focusing the general characteristics of a *Mahākāvya*. The different Sanskrit Scholars have discussed the form of Sanskrit *Mahākāvya* in their own texts. Some of them are sage Vālmīki, Bharat, Vedavyāsa, Bhāmaha, Daṇḍin, Vāmana, Rudraṭa, Ānandavardhana, Kuntaka, Mammaṭa, Ācārya Hemacandra, Vidyānātha, Vāgabhaṭṭa Prathama, Vāgabhaṭṭa Dvītīya, Viśvanātha and Paṇḍitarāja Jagannātha.

Sage Vālmīki has already given some ideas or signs of the form of *Mahākāvya* in his *Rāmāyaṇa*.

उदारवृत्तार्थपदैर्मनोरमै-

स्तदास्य रामस्य चकार कीर्तिमान् ।

समाक्षरैः श्लोकशतैर्यशस्विनो

यशस्करं काव्यमुदारदर्शनः ॥ I.2.42

कामार्थगुणसंयुक्तं धर्मार्थगुणविस्तरम् ।

समुद्रमिव रत्नाढ्यं सर्वश्रुतिमनोहरम् ॥ I.3.8

शुश्राव तत्ताललयोपपन्नं

सर्गान्वितं सुस्वरशब्दयुक्तम् ।

तन्त्रीलयव्यञ्जनयोगयुक्तं

कुशीलवाभ्यां परिगीयमानम् ॥ VII.94.31

The great ascetic Vālmīki of gracious appearance and unparalleled renown composed a poetry consisting of thousands of verses in melodious measure, couching the significance of the history of Rāma. And agreeably to what had been related by the mighty-souled Nārada, that worshipful saint composed the history of Raghu's line, and impregnated with qualities fraught with them, and like to the ocean, abounding in riches, and captivating ear and mind. He heard the *Rāmāyaṇa* sung by Kuśa and Lava, gifted with musical characteristics, consisting of sections, vowels, and consonant and enchanted in accompaniment with the music of a stringed instrument.¹⁷

¹⁷ *Rāmāyaṇa*, pp. 10-11 & 225-226

The great sage Bharata has given the definition of *Mahākāvya* for the first time in the 118th verse of the 16th chapter of his text *Nāṭyaśāstra* as follows:

मृदुललितपदाढ्यं गूढं शब्दार्थहीनं,
जनपदसुखबोधम् युक्तिमन्नृत्ययोग्यम् ।
बहुकृत रसमार्ग सन्धिसंधानयुक्तम्,
स भवति शुभकाव्यं नाटक प्रेक्षकाणाम् ॥ *Nāṭyaśāstra*, XVI.118

Vedavyāsa has discussed in detail the characteristics of *Mahākāvya* in *Agnipurāṇa* as follows:

सर्गबन्धो महाकाव्यमारब्धं संस्कृतेन यत् ।
तादात्म्यमजहत्तत्र तत्समं नातिदुष्यति ॥
इतिहास कथोद्भूतम् इतरद्धा सदाश्रयम् ।
मन्त्रदूत प्रयाणानि नियतं नाति विस्तरम् ॥
शक्वर्याऽति जगत्याऽति शक्वर्या त्रिष्टभा तथा ॥
पुष्पिताग्रादिभिर्वकूत्राभिजनैश्चारुभिः समैः ।
युक्ता तु भिन्नवृत्तान्तानातिसंक्षिप्त सर्गकम् ॥
अतिशक्वरिकाष्टभ्यामेक संकीर्णकैः परः ।
मात्रयाऽत्यपरः सर्गः प्राशस्त्येषु च पश्चिमः ॥
कल्पोऽति निन्दितः तस्मिन्विशेषा नादरः सताम् ।
नगरार्णवशैलर्तुचन्द्रार्काश्रमपादपैः ॥
उद्यानसलिलक्रीडा मधुपान रतोत्सवैः ।
दूती वचन विन्यासैरसती चरिताद्भुतैः ॥
तमसा मरुताऽप्यन्यैर्विभावैरति निर्भरः ।
सर्वरीति रसैः स्पृष्टं पुष्टं गुण विभूषणैः ॥
अतएव महाकाव्यं तत्कर्त्ता च महाकविः ।
वाग्वैदग्ध प्रधानेऽपि रस एवात्र जीवितम् ।
पृथक् प्रयत्नं निर्वर्त्य वाग्विक्रमणिरसाद्वपुः ।
चतुर्वर्गफलं विश्वव्याख्यातां नायकाख्यया ॥

A *Mahākāvya* is usually divided into cantos (*sargas*). It is to be written in pure Sanskrit and in no other dialect. Some historical incidents or some characters of celebrity should form the theme of a *Mahākāvya* or some supernatural events might be as well immortalized in its pages. Such political incidents, as councils of state, sending of embassies, as well as the marching out of soldiers in battle army, should be taken not to encumber its majesty with a dull monotony of detailed descriptions. The metres, to be used, in its composition, are the *Śakvarī*, the *Ati-Jagatī*, the *Ati-Śakvarī*, the *Triṣṭup* and the *Puṣpitāgrā*. The cantos shall deal with different incidents of the same story and they should not be too short or succinct. Over and above these, it shall contain glowing and graphic descriptions of cities, oceans, mountains, seasons, the sun, the moon and the hermitage. The forest, the garden, the sporting with maidens in water, the drinking assembly, the festivities of love, the conduct of wanton girls, the emissaries of love, should be all described and inserted therein. All sentiments with their accessories should be touched upon, and all styles of composition and rhetoric should enter into the making of an epic poem. An epic possesses the above-said characteristics and the composer of a *Mahākāvya*, is called a *Mahākavi*. One predominant sentiment should run through the entire length of the poem, even in the midst of such a diversity of topics discussed therein. It is the sentiment that forms the soul of an epic; the different topics only serve to bring it out to a greater prominence. The poet, in the character of his hero, unrolls the whole universe, as it were, with its four-fold knowledge to the vision of his readers.¹⁸

Among early writers on poetics Bhāmaha never even struck upon anything like a conception of the soul of poetry. In his work, *Kāvyālaṅkārasaṅgraha* he only stresses form and matter well-matched in order to make poetry

¹⁸ *Agni Mahāpurāṇam*, Ed. by K. L. Joshi, Vol. 2, pp. no. 337-338

effective. Further he deems ornate writing alone as the most essential part of poetry.

सर्गबन्धो महाकाव्यं महतां च महच्च यत् ।
अग्राम्यशब्दमर्थ्यं च सालङ्कारं सदाश्रयम् ॥
मन्त्रदूतप्रयाणाजिनायकाभ्युदयैश्च यत् ।
पञ्चभिः सन्धिभिर्युक्तं नातिव्याख्येयमृद्धिमत् ॥
चतुर्वर्गाभिधानेऽपि भूयसार्थोपदेशकृत् ।
युक्तं लोकस्वभावेन रसैश्च सकलैः पृथक् ॥
नायकं प्रागुपन्यस्य वंशवीर्यश्रुतादिभिः ।
न तस्यैव वधं ब्रूयादन्योत्कर्षाभिधित्त्या ।
यदि काव्यं शरीरस्य न स व्यापितयेष्यते ।
न चाभ्युदयभाक्तस्य न मुघादौ ग्रहणस्तवौ ॥

Kāvyaālankāra, I. 19 to 23

It is a work of sizeable length written mainly in narrative style. It is divided into cantos. The diction is ornate and urbane. It depicts various aspects of human life. The plot is dramatically structured. It is devoid of unnecessary details, is well-knit and impressive. The epic hero is either a god or a prince gifted with a noble and magnanimous character. The epic aims at the attainment of the four objectives of life viz., virtue (*Dharma*), wealth (*Artha*), desire (*Kāma*) and salvation (*Mokṣa*).

The great Sanskrit scholar Daṇḍin in his *Kāvyaadarśa* gives the characteristics of *Mahākāvya* as follows:

सर्गबन्धो महाकाव्यमुच्यते तस्य लक्षणम् ।
आशीर्नमस्क्रियावस्तुनिर्देशो वापि तन्मुखम् ॥
इतिहासकथोद्भूतमितरद्वा सदाश्रयम् ।
चतुर्वर्गफलोपेतं चतुरोदात्तनायकम् ॥
नगरार्णवशैलर्तुचन्द्रार्कोदयवर्णनेः ।
उद्यानसलिलक्रीडामधुपानरतोत्सवैः ॥

विप्रलम्भैर्विवाहैश्च कुमारोदयवर्णनैः ।
 मन्त्रदूतप्रयाणाजिनायकाभ्युदयैरपि ॥
 अलंकृतमसंक्षिप्तं रसभावनिरन्तरम् ।
 सर्गेरनतिविस्तीर्णैः श्रव्यवृत्तैः सुसन्धिभिः ॥
 सर्वत्रभिन्नवृत्तान्तरूपेतं लोकरञ्जकम् ।
 काव्यं कल्पान्तरस्थायि जायेत सदलंकृति ॥
 न्यूनमप्यत्र यैः केश्चिदंगैः काव्यं न दुष्यति ।
 यद्युपात्तेषुसम्पत्तिराराधयति तद् विदः ॥
 गुणतः प्रागुपन्यस्य नायकं तेन विद्विषाम् ।
 निराकरणमित्येष मार्गः प्रकृतिसुन्दरः ॥
 वंशवीर्यश्रुतादिनि वर्णयित्वा रिपोरपि ।
 तज्जयान्नायकोत्कर्षणवर्णनञ्च धिनोति नः ॥

Kāvyaḍarśa, I. 14 to 22

A ‘*Sarga-bandha*’ is a ‘*Mahākāvya*’. Its characteristics are told here. Its beginning is either a blessing or a dedication or an indication of the contents. It has its source either in a story told in the *Itihāsa* or other good material. It deals with the fruit (goal) of the four kinds (*Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kāma* and *Mokṣa*). It has a great and generous person as the hero. It is embellished with descriptions of cities, oceans, hills, the seasons, the moonrise, the sunrise, of sport in the garden and of the sport in the waters, of drinking scenes, of festivals, of enjoyment (love), of separation (of lovers), of (their) marriage and (their) nuptials and birth of princes, likewise of consultation with the ministers of sending messengers or ambassadors of journeys (royal progress), of war and the hero’s victories; dealing with these at length and being full of *Rasa* (flavour) and *Bhāva* (suggestion): with *sargas* which are not very lengthy and which are well-formed with verse measures pleasing to the ear; everywhere dealing with a variety of topics (in each case ending each chapter in a different metre). Such a poem being well-embellished will be pleasing to the world at large and will survive several epochs (*kalpas*). A

poem does not become unacceptable even when some of these parts are wanting if the poem is pleasing to those who know how to judge. At first describing the hero by his good qualities and by that very description despising his enemies is naturally a beautiful method. After describing the lineage, prowess and scholarship etc., of even the enemy, depiction of the excellences of the hero by his victory over such an enemy is in our opinion also pleasing.¹⁹

The composer of '*Kāvyaālankārasūtra-Vṛtti*', Vāmana has stressed importance to the *Alaṅkāras* by stating that poetry becomes acceptable because of *Alaṅkāra*. Further he says that it is possible for the poet to have *kāvya* by avoiding *Doṣas* (defects) and adopting *Guṇas* (qualities) and *Alaṅkāras* (Figures of speech).

काव्यं ग्राह्यमलंकारात् । I.1.1

स दोषगुणालंकारहानादानाभ्याम् । I.1.3

According to Rudraṭa, poetry means,

उत्पाद्यानुत्पाद्या महल्लघुत्वेन भूयोऽपि ।

तत्रोत्पाद्या येषां शरीरमुत्पादयेत कविः सकलम् ॥

. कल्पितयुक्तोत्पत्तिं नायकमपि कुत्रचित् कुर्यात् ।.....आदि ।

Kāvyaālankāra of Rudraṭa, XVI.2 to 19

According to Ānandavardhana, poetry is but that whose body is constituted by sound and meaning.

शब्दार्थशरीरं तावत्काव्यम् । *Dhvanyāloka*, pp. 2-3

Kuntaka in his work '*Vakroktijīvitam*' gives the following verse as the definition of '*kāvya*'.

शब्दार्थौ सहितौ वक्रकविव्यापारशालिनी ।

बन्धे व्यवस्थितौ काव्यं तद्विदाह्लादकारिणी ॥ *Vakroktijīvitam*, I.7

The contribution of Kuntaka in this regard deserves special mention. He has concentrated mainly on the structure of the plot. The relationship between

¹⁹ KD, pp. 8-12

the main theme and the subsidiary episodes according to him ought to be organic as between the limbs and the body. The various parts of the plot should be connected in a proper sequence. It can be clearly deduced from Kuntaka's analysis that the epic was a work of art with vast dimensions and a complex plot-structure. He also emphasizes the desirability of incorporating the various elements of drama in the development of the plot. Mammaṭa in his work says that poetry consists in word and sense – without faults and with merits and excellences of style – which may at times be without Figures of speech.

तददोषौ शब्दार्थौ सगुणावनलंकृती पुनः क्वापि । *Kāvyaaprakāśa*, I.4

Hemacandrācārya defines 'Mahākāvya' as follows:

पद्यं प्रायः संस्कृतप्राकृतापभ्रंशग्राम्यभाषानिबद्धभिन्नान्त्यवृत्तसर्गाश्वाससंध्यवस्कंधबंध-सत्संधि-
शब्दार्थवैचित्र्योपेतं महाकाव्यम् । *Kāvyaṇuśāsana*, VIII.6

Vidyānātha gives the characteristics of a *Mahākāvya* thus:

नगरार्णवशैलर्तुचन्द्रार्कोदयवर्णनम् ।
उद्यानसलिलक्रीडामधुपानरतोत्सवाः ॥
विप्रलम्भो विवाहश्च कुमारोदयवर्णनम् ।
मन्त्रदूतप्रयाणाजिनायकाभ्युदया अपि ॥
एतानि यत्र वर्ण्यन्ते तन्महाकाव्यमुच्यते ।
एषामष्टादशानां यैः कैश्चिदूनमपीष्यते ॥

Mahākāvyadilakṣaṇam of Pratāparudrayaśobhūṣaṇa, p. 64

According to Vāgabhaṭṭa Prathama, poetry means,

साधुशब्दार्थ सन्दर्भ गुणालंकार भूषितम् ।
स्फुटरीति रसोपेतं काव्यं कुर्वीत कीर्तये ॥ *Vāgbhaṭṭālankāra*, I.2

According to Vāgabhaṭṭa Dvītiya, poetry is,

शब्दार्थौ निर्दोषौ सदुणौ प्रायः सालंकारौकाव्यम् ।

Viśvanātha in his *Sāhityadarpaṇa* gives the characteristics of a *Mahākāvya* thus:

सर्गबन्धो महाकाव्यं तत्रैको नायकः सुरः ।

सद्धशः क्षत्रियो वापि धीरोदात्तगुणान्वितः ॥
 एकवंशभवा भूपाः कुलजा बहवोऽपि वा ।
 शृङ्गारवीरशान्तानामेकोऽङ्गी रस इष्यते ॥
 अङ्गानि सर्वेऽपि रसाः सर्वे नाटकसंधयः ।
 इतिहासोद्भवं वृत्तमन्यद्वा सज्जनाश्रयम् ॥
 चत्वारस्तस्य वर्गाः स्युस्तेष्वेकं च फलं भवेत् ।
 आदौ नमस्कियाशीर्वा वस्तुनिर्देश एव वा ॥
 क्वचिन्निन्दा खलादीनां सतां च गुणकीर्तनम् ।
 एकवृत्तमयैः पद्यैरवसानेऽन्यवृत्तकैः ॥
 नातिस्वल्पा नातिदीर्घाः सर्गा अष्टाधिका इह ।
 नानावृत्तमयः क्वापि सर्गः कश्चन दृश्यते ॥
 सर्गान्ते भाविसर्गस्य कथायाः सूचनं भवेत् ।
 संध्यासूर्येन्दुरजनीप्रदोषध्वान्तवासराः ॥
 प्रातर्मध्याह्नमृगयाशैलर्तुवनसागराः ।
 संभोगविप्रलम्भौ च मुनिस्वर्गपुराध्वराः ॥
 रणप्रयाणोपयममन्त्रपुत्रोदयादयः ।
 वर्णनीया यथायोगं साङ्गोपाङ्गा अमी इह ॥
 कवेर्वृत्तस्य वा नाम्ना नायकस्येतरस्य वा ।
 नामास्य सर्गोपादेयकथया सर्गनाम तु ॥

Sāhityadarpaṇa, VI. 315-325

Composition-in-Cantos is a long poem i.e. *Mahākāvya* and its definition is being given now. Its opening is a benediction, a situation or a naming of the principal theme. It should commend virtue and condemn vice. It springs from a historical incident or is otherwise based upon some fact. It turns upon the fruition of the fourfold ends viz., virtue (*Dharma*), wealth (*Artha*), desire (*Kāma*) and salvation (*Mokṣa*). Its hero is clever and noble. It wins the people's heart and endures longer than even a *Kalpa* by description of cities, oceans, mountains, and seasons and rising of the moon or the Sun through sporting in garden or water, and festivities of drinking and love. It possesses

good attraction through sentiments of love, separation and through marriages, by description of the birth and rise of princes, and likewise through state-counsel, embassy, advance, battle and the hero's triumph. It should be embellished, not too condensed, and pervaded all through with poetic sentiments and emotions with cantos none too lengthy and having agreeable metres and well-formed joints, and in each case with an ending in a different metre, furnished. There should be an indication of the events to follow at the end of every canto. The basic sentiment of an epic is either love (*Śṛṅgāra*), heroism (*Vīra*), pathos (*Karuṇa*) or serenity (*Śānta*). The epic should be named after the poet or the hero or an important character. The title of every canto should be consistent with its theme. In other words, when relishable matter commences at the very opening of the story, then the Act must commence at the very beginning introduced by the Induction. The death of the principal personage or hero is not to be declared even by the means of the *Viśkambhaka* nor should any of the two – Flavour (sentiments) and matter (Incidents), cover over or out-balance the other. The *Bīja* (Germ), the *Bindu* (Secondary Germ), the *Patākā* (Collateral action), the *Prakarī* (Episode), and the *Kārya* (Deed) are the five sources of the end or the Grand Object – which are to be known and employed according to the rule. That which is the first cause of gaining the end, is but slightly intimated, and expands itself in various ways, is dominated *Bīja*. When the course of the business of the *dharma* seems to be interrupted, the cause of its being developed again is called *Bindu*.

Apart from these, in the development of the plot which goes through five stages known as *Kāryāvasthās* (viz., *Ārambha*, *Yatna*, *Prāptyāśā*, *Niyatāpti* and *Phalāgama*, the five elements i.e. *Arthaprakṛti* (viz. *Bīja*, *Bindu*, *Patākā* and *kārya*), as well as in the characterization etc., we can easily observe the kind of change accepted by the modern Sanskrit poetics. Rahas Vihari Dwivedi in his book *Bhārtīya Kāvyaśāstra Mīmāṃsā* gives the

characteristics of a *Mahākāvya* in *Sragdharā* metre as follows:

सर्गेवृत्तैश्च बद्धं सहृदयहृदयाह्लादिशब्दार्थरम्यं
संवादैश्चोच्चशिल्पैः सततरसमयं ग्रन्थिमुक्तं समृद्धम् ।
पात्रं स्याद् यस्य मुख्यं परमगुणयुतं लोकविख्यातवृत्तं
भव्यं लोकस्वभावं महदपि महतां तन्महाकाव्यमास्ते ॥ p. 81

Krishnakant Shukla also gives the definition of *Mahākāvya* while critically evaluating an epic *Sītācarita* of Reva Prasad, as follows:

महाकाव्यस्य युगानुसारि रूपमाश्रित्य ग्रथितमिदं महाकाव्यं कवेः परिवर्तमानायाः लोकरुचेः
शास्त्ररुचेश्च स्पष्टं निदर्शनम् । तत्र सन्ध्यासूर्येन्दुरजनीप्रदोषध्वान्तवासराः ।
प्रातर्मध्याह्नमृगयाशैलर्तुवनसागराः — प्रभृति महाकाव्य-लक्षणान्यसन्त्यपि तस्य स्वरूपं
युगचेतनया सर्वातिशायि विदधति ॥ *Sītācaritasamīkṣaṇam (Arvācīnasamskṛtam 1/2)*

Further Radhavallabh Tripathi also defines *Mahākāvya* as follows:

पद्यात्मकं समग्रजीवननिरूपणपरं महाकाव्यम् । गीतैतिह्यपुराणलोककथाभेदादस्य नानात्वम् ।
Abhinavakāvyaśālikārasūtram, III.1.3

Rajendra Mishra also gives the definition of *Mahākāvya* as follows:

सर्गबन्धो महाकाव्यं लोकवन्द्यजनाश्रयम् ।
ख्यापयद् विश्वबन्धुत्वं स्थापयद् विश्वमङ्गलम् ॥
नायकस्तत्र देवस्स्यात्प्रजाबन्धुरथो नृपः ।
चारुचर्योऽथवा कोऽपि सज्जनश्चरितोज्ज्वलः ॥
प्रातस्सन्ध्यानिशीथेन्दु- भास्करोदयतारकाः ।
वनोद्याननदीसिन्धु- प्रपाताद्रि- बलाहकाः ॥
ग्रामाश्रम- पुरागम- दुर्ग- सैन्यरणोद्यमाः ।
पुत्रजन्मादिवृत्तान्ताः पामरावाससंकथाः ॥
इतिवृत्तानुरोधात्तु वर्णनीया न वाऽन्यथाः ।
प्रसह्य वर्णने तेषां न च तृप्तिर्न वा यशः ॥

यच्छिवं यच्च सत्यं स्यादथवा लोकमंगलम् ।
 वर्णनीयं प्रकल्प्यापि कथांशीकृत्य सदरम् ॥
 सर्गा अष्टाधिकाः सन्तु कथाविस्तृतिसम्मताः ।
 अष्टत्रिगुणतां यावत्सर्गसमख्या प्रथीयसी ॥
 नोद्वेगः कविना कार्यः पाठकानां रसात्मनाम् ।
 सर्गसंख्यादिविस्तारैर्वर्णनैर्वाऽनपेक्षितैः ॥
 लोकवृत्तं न हातव्यं मूलवृत्तोपकारकम् ।
 लोकचित्रणगर्भं हि महाकाव्यं महीयते ॥
 त्रयाणां पुरुषार्थानां कश्चिदेको भवेद् ध्रुवम् ।
 महाकाव्यफलं रम्यं धर्मकामार्थसम्मतम् ॥
 शृङ्गारवीरशान्तानां कश्चिदन्यतमो रसः ।
 सयत्नमङ्गीकर्तव्यः कविना प्रतिभावता ॥
 छन्दोऽलङ्कारसन्दर्भा भूरिवैविध्य-मण्डिताः ।
 महाकाव्ये प्रयोक्तव्याः भावुकानां हि तुष्टये ॥
 लोकोत्तरगुणादर्शः पुरुषो नायको भवेत् ।
 महीयसी पुरन्धी वा नात्र कार्या विचारणा ॥
 कथावैशिष्ट्यमालक्ष्य समग्रं नायकस्य वा ।
 करणीयं महाकाव्यस्याभिधानं यशस्करम् ॥²⁰

I.V Western Opinions:

In the western literature the *Mahākāvya* is denoted by the word 'epic'. The word 'epic' is derived from the Greek word 'epos' meaning a word or a song but in later and more general use, it is applied to long narrative poems on heroic themes.²¹ Heroic actions are usually based on one principal hero and often with a strong national significance.²² Sometimes it may be of the achievements of one or more heroic personages of history or tradition. It is treated in a very grand style²³ and at great length also.²⁴ Without length it is

²⁰ Mishra, Rajendra, *Drk*, Vol. 9, pp. 24-25

²¹ *New Caxton Encyclopedia*, Vol. 7., p. 2213

²² *Cassell's Encyclopedia of Literature*, Vol. 1., p. 195

²³ *The Columbia Viking Concise Encyclopedia*, p. 305

impossible to have the long vistas of action and the variety of characters that an epic requires.²⁵ The subject of epic should be developed in an orderly manner without emotional stress except in the statements of the characters.²⁶

It deals with the events which have a certain grandeur and importance and come from a life of action, especially of violence such as war. It gives a special pleasure, because its events and persons enhance our belief in the worth of human achievement and in the dignity of nobility of man.²⁷ In the great epic, heroic, folktales and ballads have been combined by the poet and transformed into a single work of art while in the lesser epics the story is still fragmentary. Epic in fact has deep and primitive and haphazard way in which they come to be formed. It may also be a combination of tragedy, comedy, lyric, dirge and idyll.²⁸

As far as the story of an epic is concerned, John Clark declares that it cannot be commonplace, but must satisfy the grand emotions of the soul.²⁹ Abercrombie postulates that the epic not only should express the accepted unconscious metaphysics of its age but do so through clear and authentic story, a story known and already part of the mythology of the audience.³⁰ Further he adds that it must be found deep in the general experience of men.³¹ The subject matter of the story must be of a national significance. It presents many obvious advantages to an epic poet. It engenders patriotic feeling and thus increases the range of the emotional imagination and it enlists before hand the sympathies of the readers.³² An epic is a fitting

²⁴ *Encyclopedia Britanica*, Vol. 8, p.630

²⁵ John Clark, *History of Epic Poetry*, p. 30

²⁶ *The World Book of Encyclopedia*, 'E' Series, p.263

²⁷ C. M. Bowra, *From Virgil to Milton*, p. I

²⁸ H. A. Guerber, *The Book of the Epic*, p. 5

²⁹ John Clark, Op.cit, p. 30

³⁰ Aber Crombie, *The Epic*, p. 56

³¹ *Ibid*, p. 53

³² John Clark, Op.cit, p. 32

subject for historical enquiry, but it lies behind the scene. The epic poem is cut loose and set free from history and goes on the way of its own.³³

The human life and feelings should be spoken mainly in epic poems. The life of epic being human life or humanized life, must to be true to its pattern, exhibit a representative amount though not a plethora of a human mood, says John Clark. He also adds in regard with human life that a poem, without putting something of his day and generation in it, would not be advisable. All epic poets have written for their contemporaries. Greek epic has always been felt to be somehow a type of significant human experience and some generations have wanted to codify and explain the significance, sometimes with an inhibiting effect on writers.³⁴

Time and space are other epic requirements concerning with the story of the epic. Each story is immensely expanded in space and time by reference in figures of speech to all the known world of lists, of the places, of origin, of actors in the story or sheer extent of traveling and by retrospective narrations or visions and prophecies which took for years or even centuries backward and forward from the time of the main action. Thus in an epic the past and the future may be seen and this will strengthen to temptation of symbolic interpretation and certainly justifies the belief that epic heroes are to some extent representative of whole human races.³⁵ In respect of time and space, R. J. Rees declares that an epic may cover a period of many years or even centuries and the events it describes may range from the earth-shaking to the trivia.³⁶

The epic should insist on a moral. This is more important in Indian Sanskrit epics than in the western epics. With regard to these characteristics, E. M.

³³ W. P. Kerr, *Epic and Romance*, pp. 23-24

³⁴ John Clark, *Op.cit*, p. 31, 70 & 197

³⁵ *Cassell's Encyclopedia*, Vol. 1, p. 197

³⁶ R. J. Rees, *An Introduction to English Literature*, p. 46

W. Tillyard says that the large areas of life depicted in epic must be centered in the moral; the epic poet must measure the crooked by the straight; he must exemplify the saintly that has been claimed for true genius.³⁷

Next point is about the heroes. Scholars have tried their level best to present the excellences of the epic heroes. The heroic standard of conduct of a hero means that he cares for some thing beyond his own material welfare, and is prepared to sacrifice for its comfort, safety and life itself, and his care for this 'something' is active. The 'something' varies from personal glory and is distinct from victory or worldly success, though it is a form of self-seeking to the active responsibility for promoting the material or spiritual welfare of a tribe, a nation or even the whole of human kind. C. M. Bowra regards that the greatest heroes are thought to be so wonderful that they cannot be wholly human but must have something divine about them.³⁸ He breaks records from the start and is a fully-grown man when others are still boys. The hero possesses those gifts of body and character which bring success in action and are admired for that reason. He may be strong or swift or enduring or resourceful or eloquent. Not all heroes possess the whole gamut of these qualities but all have some portion of them. The hero differs from other men by his peculiar force and energy.³⁹ Thus C. M. Bowra describes the qualities of heroes.

Character is one of the most important and distinctive features of an epic. In an epic where the characters are vividly imagined, it follows naturally that all their various moods and problems involve a variety of scenery and properties and so the whole business of life comes into the story. The success of an epic depends upon the author's power of imagining and representing characters. Without dramatic representation of the characters epic is merely history or romance.

³⁷ E. M. W. Tillyard, *The Epic Strain in the English Novels*, p. 16

³⁸ C. M. Bowra, *Heroic Poetry*, p. 94

³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 97

Epic characters may be very numerous ranging from Gods to Vagabonds, says R. J. Rees.⁴⁰ The variety of characters must have a variety of personal traits. They must have good character and conduct, nobility and morality more than the common man.

Aristotle stipulates four points with regard to characters. First and foremost is that they should be good; the second point is to make them appropriate; the third is to make them real i.e. they must be true to life. The fourth is to make them consistent throughout.⁴¹

The next characteristic of an epic is the use of episodes. In literature an episode is an incident, story, or action introduced into the general narrative of a poem, play, novel, or other writings for the sake of variety or as a digression from the main course of the narrative. It is also used to point out important consequences in the plot or to develop hidden causes. Episodes are interrupted to fulfill the real necessities of a genuine story. It is a relief when one direction in an epic action is for a time abandoned in favour of another of similar convergence. More characters are thus introduced, and the old ones, when reintroduced, have acquired an access of vitality and interest. This change of route procures variety for the poem, and is provocative of energy on the part of the poet, who takes another track and profits by a different array of suggestive circumstances. It is a good thing to delay the movement of such an action, partly because a persistence in one direction would lead to monotony and the use of questionable expedients, partly because an epic is many-sided and demands, and will have its effects enhanced by, an illumination of its various sides. Cross movements in moderation are beneficial in epic.⁴²

⁴⁰ R. J. Rees, *An Introduction to English Literature*, p. 46

⁴¹ Aristotle, *The Art of Poetry*, pp. 55-66

⁴² John Clark, *Op.cit*, p. 32 & 76

Another requirement for an epic is the style. The word style means a good or distinguished manner with language.⁴³ The clearest style is that which uses only current or proper words. The diction on the other hand is lofty and raised above the common place which employs unusual words. Regarding the style, the epic poet will have the vocabulary. The word-power, joined to a mastery of metre, puts at the disposal of a poet, the magical touch that moulds, vocables and rhythm into a higher unity in which the original mixture of imagination and harmony becomes speaking music, he can work the triad of sound, style and story and thus command the whole gamut of our emotions. The environment of sound that belongs to an epic is an important aid in the differentiation of one epic from another declared by John Clark.⁴⁴

The use of epithets, figurative languages, and the use of elegiac and general poetic excellences, the largeness of utterance and the skillful accumulations of allusion, the lyric movements and the lyric-ornamental matter, and imagination are also regarded as epic characteristics by John Clark. In connection with imagination he says that epic poetry without invention and imagination is inconceivable. Its narrator must either be the medium that voices the beliefs of the popular imagination or be able to set forth with imaginative truth of some legendary or historico-legendary story. We may be sure that these elements may strengthen the epic style.

In an epic the scenery is also suggested by learned scholars as an epic requirement. John Clark describes that the main scene of the action of an epic is earth and men are the chief witness and participants, though scenes from a parallel supraterrrestrial action may be shown and divine spectators and co-workers be introduced.

⁴³ *Encyclopedia Britanica*, Vol. 21, p. 332

⁴⁴ John Clark, *Op.cit*, p. 70

Myth and legend are the most important elements for an epic and they give grandeur and sublimity to epic. H. A. Guerber puts forth that mythology which was the interpretation of nature and legend which is the idealization of history are the main elements of the epic. Being the living history of the people, an epic should have the breadth and volume of a river. All epics have therefore generally been the first-fruits of the earliest experiences of nature and life on the part of imaginative races, and the real poet has been as a rule, the race itself.⁴⁵ A. S. Mackenzie interprets these two thus. From the primitive stage, man has been trying to understand self as well as not self. His efforts to interpret external nature have produced myth-making while the unconscious idealization of oral history has brought forth legend, and myth and legend constitute the warp and the woof of what we are accustomed to call epic art.⁴⁶ During the age of Homer the myths and legends wonderfully covered the world like mist which covered the mountain says Donald Mackenzie.⁴⁷

Gods and divine beings are considered as one of the epic features. The divinities and strange powers that make the machinery of epic are still felt to be necessary by ages which have no literal faith in the divinities and the structure of the human agents in epic is always established by their having divine blood in their veins or direct communication with Gods or at least a mission and a destiny revealed by more than human promptings.⁴⁸

The epic has to present adventures and events aesthetically but it has dramatic qualities, says John Clark. In epic human action is dignified not dwarfed by taking place against a superhuman background and human figures themselves may at moments be raised to act on the superhuman plane. Idealism is also noted as an epic characteristic by scholars. John Clark

⁴⁵ Guerber, H. A., *Book of the Epic*, p. 5

⁴⁶ Mackenzie, A. S., *Evolution of Literature*, p. 157

⁴⁷ Mackenzie, Donald, *The World's Heritage of Epical, Heroic and Romantic Literature*, p. 16

⁴⁸ *Cassell's Encyclopaedia of Literature*, Vol. 1, p. 197

declares that in every well-wrought epic there will appear ideality; a national and ideal handling gives the very best result in epic. A theme cannot be heroic and political without ideality; it is the result of noble and imaginative treatment of the theme.⁴⁹

In addition to these characteristics, two more characteristics are also notable. The first is the jousts and tournaments with proper accompaniment of injured damsels championed by gallant knights, and the second is about the brutal giant who frightens men by his revolting appearance and inflicts hideous tortures on them. Further the Indicrous and the absurd is a notable epic quality both in heroic and Chivalrous epics shown by C. M. Bowra.⁵⁰

I.VI Opinions by Modern Critics on *Mahākāvya*

In the present era i.e. in the modern Sanskrit literature, we observe some sort of change in the current of the poetic thoughts and compositions. The main changes are found in the choice and characterization of hero as well as in the descriptions made in the work. In modern epics we find heroes not only on the basis of mighty, noble or royal family but also on the basis of good qualities instead of their lower background. In this regard Rahas Bihari Dvivedi says that in the epics *Svāmivivekānadacaritam*, *Gāndhīcaritam*, *Tilakayaśo'rṇavaḥ*, *Subhāṣa-caritam* and *Gaṅgāsāgarīyam*, composed in the last decades, the characters are like Sītā and Gaṅgā. Analyzing the role of description in the compositions great poets, modern scholars Ramaji Upadhyaya, deduces the following four principles with regard to their employment in a *Mahākāvya*.

1. Description prepares back-ground for actions & as it will be, the high standards of description in these *Mahākāvya* have greatly added to impressiveness of the action.

⁴⁹ John Clark, Op.cit, p. 12 & 46

⁵⁰ Bowra, C. M., *From Virgil to Milton*, p. 26, 121 & 123

2. Description form the back-ground for characterization also, viz. A city of this description has a king thus the king thereafter is no ordinary ruler of the big city described before wherein he resides.
3. Narration of historical nature is generally insipid. For diversion of reader's mind from narration a change over to description is naturally desirable.

Thus scholars hold their immense opinions on epic poetry. I conclude here by giving all these definitions that the ultimate aim of an epic is to teach morals and a way of life that is based on the concept of *dharma*. Shortly stated, a *Mahākāvya* is a writing of considerable length, varying description and elaborate construction, embracing a narrative, theological or historical and is divided into Cantos for convenience of narration. It is with a panoramic vision and vast dimensions. The plot is complex and has a dramatic structure; the characters are noble and dignified. It has a noble purpose, advocates moral values in life, and is written in a style that is ornate and grand.

The substantial growth both qualitative and quantitative of *Mahākāvyas* (long poems or epic poems) has widened the scope of study and research in Sanskrit. The study of the Sanskrit *Mahākāvyas* of modern period is an interesting exercise to understand the human values preached by the poets through their *kāvyas*. The poets of modern period do not maintain the tradition for the sake of tradition. They do feel the literary value of this type of long composition which gives enough scope for displaying one's creative genius and bringing together many interesting things. They have been striving hard to preserve the language which is perishing day by day by making continuous efforts in composing literature in various forms. They are trying to disseminate the historical truths and to spread the sublime aspects of Indian culture amongst the modern society.

I.VII CHARACTERISTICS OF A SANSKRIT *MAHĀKĀVYA*:

The poet, not only craves the bust of his fable from the popular stories and well-known incidents, but in his imagination, also projects the portraits of the contemporary times and as well craves the idols of conceptions out of the fantasy of his aesthetic perception, giving guide-lines for the future of mankind. Everything in creation is in the continuous and non-stop process of evolving. It is the poet's glory to portray such pictures of life as to inspire the coming generation to evolve on the path of the spiral ascent, heavenwards.

This the poet achieves through the projection of transcendental values which becomes finger- posts on the path of man-kind's march to the attainment of ultimate perfection. These are the forms for judging the stature and performance of the great poets. It is with this yard-stick that posterity measures their height in imagination, breadth of vision and depth in terms of their inspirational projections.

So, we have to apply the same acid tests in evaluating this modern poem, the *Bhīṣmacaritam*, from the luminous pen of our poet, Dr Hari Narayan Dikṣita. The word, *Mahākāvya*, is a composite of two words, (*mahat*) great and *kāvya* (poem), meaning a 'great poem'. *Mahākāvya* is generally differentiated from rest of the *kāvyas* by its essence, i.e. by its subject - matter and treatment. In this connection it is necessary to give first the characteristics of a '*Mahākāvya*' as given by the Sanskrit rhetoricians.

The *Mahākāvya* should be divided into chapters called Sargas.⁵¹ It should have a happy ending.⁵² While dilating on the four-fold objects of human existence, Bhāmaha chiefly mentions the acquisition of wealth, conforming

⁵¹ सर्गबन्धो महाकाव्यम् । KL, I.19

⁵² नातिव्याख्येयमृद्धिमत् । *Ibid*, I.20

to the ways of the world and containing the various ‘*Rasas*’.⁵³ Regarding the arrangement of the plot, Bhāmaha suggests that it should first describe the ancestry, valour, heroism and knowledge of the hero and after that the qualities of his foe.⁵⁴ He further adds that if the person further described in the poem is not intended to dominate the whole poem, and has not to participate in that final triumph, it is useless to describe him at the beginning.⁵⁵

Daṇḍin, a rhetorician coming after Bhāmaha, affirms almost all the views of his predecessor regarding the characteristics of a *Mahākāvya* but with regard to the arrangement of the plot, he seems to have his own views. According to Daṇḍin, there is hardly any difference, if the qualities of the hero such as valour, heredity, learning etc., are described first or even after the description of his foe; the main object is to show the superiority of the hero over his foe.⁵⁶ He considers both the methods as equally good. By prescribing these two methods for the arrangement of the plot of a *Mahākāvya*, Daṇḍin has refuted the then prevailing theory of which Bhāmaha was the outstanding exponent. Daṇḍin, as a reformer in the field of literary criticism, was the first critic to come out with this theory.⁵⁷

Generally speaking the characteristics of a *Mahākāvya* may be classified in two categories – (1) Primary or Principal and (2) Subsidiary or Minor. Under

⁵³ चतुर्वर्गाभिधानेऽपि भूयसार्थोपदेशकृत् ।

युक्तं लोकस्वभावेन रसैश्च सकलैः पृथक् ॥ *Ibid*, I.21

⁵⁴ नायकं प्रागुपन्यस्य वंशवीर्यश्रुतादिभिः । *Ibid*, I.22

⁵⁵ यदिकाव्यशरीरस्य न स व्यापितमेष्यते ।

न चाभ्युदयमाक् तस्य मुधादौ ग्रहणं स्तवे ॥ *Ibid*, I.23

⁵⁶ गुणतः प्रागुपन्यस्य नायकं तेन विद्विषाम् ।

निराकारणमित्येष मार्गः प्रकृतिसुन्दरः ॥

वंशवीर्यश्रुतादीनि वर्णयित्वा रिपोरपि ।

तज्जयान्नायकोत्कर्षवर्णनं च धिगोति नः ॥ *KD*, I.21-22

⁵⁷ The first method has been resorted to in the first and foremost *Kāvya* viz. *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmiki. Rāma’s qualities are described in the first two Kāṇḍas, the mischief of the foes in Aranya- Kāṇḍa and the plot finally works its way to the crowning victory of Rāma in Yuddha- Kāṇḍa. In *Śiśupālavadha*, Māgha expatiates upon the exploits of Śiśupāla at the outset and then gradually works up the scheme to the final victory of Kṛṣṇa. This represents the second of the two methods referred to therein.

the primary characteristics come the three fundamental constituents viz. *Vastu* (Plot), *Netā* (Hero and other set of characters), *Rasa* (Sentiment); Language and style, *Alaṅkāras*, Descriptions and Narrations, and the metres, as compared to former, form the subsidiary parts of a *Mahākāvya*.

(1) Primary or the Principal characteristics of a *Mahākāvya*

(i) *Vastu* (Plot)

Plot or *Vastu* is the foundation of a *Mahākāvya*. It is an aggregate of all incidents and episodes brought home to the reader. The directions of the Sanskrit Ācāryas with regard to the characteristics of the plot of a *Mahākāvya* may be summed up as follows.

According to Ācāryas like Bhāmaha and Daṇḍin, the story of a *Mahākāvya* should relate to some great noble man.⁵⁸ But Daṇḍin lays emphasis on the historicity of the story. He says that the plot of the *Mahākāvya* should be based on history.⁵⁹ Further a *Mahākāvya* should contain descriptions of cities, oceans, mountains, seasons, rise of the sun and the moon, sports in the garden and water, drinking and sportive festivities, marriage, separation, the birth of a son, counsel, embassy, march to leading to the emergence of the hero.⁶⁰ It should depict the four ends of life viz. *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kāma* and *Mokṣa*.⁶¹ Regarding the division of the plot, both Daṇḍin and Bhāmaha

⁵⁸ सदाश्रयम् । KD, I.15
KL, I.19

⁵⁹ इतिहासकथोद्भूतम् । KD, I.15

It is quite evident that no *Mahākāvya* is composed with an absolutely fictitious background. In this respect, it differs from the Rūpakas, some of which, Prakaraṇa for instance are built upon a plot which is purely a creation of the poet's imagination. But Rudraṭa, a later rhetorician, unlike others, lays down that the story of a *Mahākāvya* may be real or imaginary or partly real and partly imaginary.

⁶⁰ नगरार्णवशैलर्तुचन्द्रार्कोद्भववर्णनैः ।

थद्यानसलिलक्रीडामधुरपानरतोत्सवैः ॥

विप्रलम्भैर्विवाहैश्च कुमारोदयवर्णनैः ।

मन्त्रदूतप्रयाणाजिनायकाभ्युदयैरपि ॥ *Ibid*, I.16-17

The last five of these descriptions have been enumerated by Bhāmaha also viz.

मन्त्रदूत-प्रयाणाजिनायकाभ्युदयैश्च यत् । *Ibid*, I.20

⁶¹ चतुर्वर्गफलोपेतम् । KD, I.15

suggest that it should be divided into different *Sargas*.⁶² Daṇḍin remarks that these *Sargas* (cantos) should not be very lengthy.⁶³ Almost all the rhetoricians uphold Daṇḍin's view with respect to the length of the cantos. With regard to the number of cantos, Viśvanātha, a later rhetorician, adds that there should be more than eight *Sargas* in a *Mahākāvya*.⁶⁴ Moreover, Daṇḍin adds that the plot of a *Mahākāvya* should begin with stanzas of benediction or salutation or indication of *Vastu*.⁶⁵

Besides touching upon the above-noted characteristics regarding the plot of a *Mahākāvya*, the Ācāryas do not lay down detailed directions regarding the construction and the development of the plot. Presumably, they were of the opinion that as the constituents of a *Mahākāvya* viz. *Vastu*, *Netā* and *Rasa* were common with those of a drama. So the details, definitions and implications could very well be derived from the canons of dramaturgy. In any case the fact remains that for the definitions and details of these constituents of a *Mahākāvya*, we have to bank upon the material supplied by the dramaturgists. It is pertinent, therefore, to recapitulate the same here in brief.

The plot of a *Mahākāvya*, on the whole consists essentially of the five elements of the story, five stages of actions, and five junctures with its various sub-divisions.

(ii) *Netā*

Netā (the hero and other set of characters) is one of the primary elements of *Mahākāvya*. The poet as a weaver weaves the beautiful web of plot just with the help of character. As in the drama the characters are the wheels of the

चतुर्वर्गाभिधानेऽपि । KL, I.21

⁶² KD, I.14; KL, I.19

⁶³ सर्गेऽनतिविस्तीर्णः । KD, I.18

⁶⁴ सर्गा अष्टाधिका इह । SD, VI. 320

⁶⁵ आशीर्नमस्क्रियावस्तुनिर्देशो वापि तन्मुखम् । KD, I.14

vehicle of a plot, the same is the case with a *Mahākāvya*. The characters act always as the mouthpieces of dramatist or the writer of *Mahākāvya*. Whatever the poet wants to convey or put before the reader, he does it through his characters. The poet and the readers are separated generally from each other by several years and quite often even by several centuries. The characters are the only medium of bringing them together mentally. They, by their behaviour, help the reader in knowing what the poet had in his mind at time of projecting his work. The ideas, behaviour, beliefs and faith of the poet's contemporary society can be brought to light only through the characters in his composition. The proper role of the characters in a story can make or mar the quality of a poem. Thus the characters hold a pivotal place in the structure of a *Mahākāvya*.

Nāyaka (Hero)

Whatever the sentiment or the motive of the composition be, there is always a principal action or denouement, at the core. Whosoever is to enjoy the benefit of the fulfillment of effort is the principal person, for he reaps the real and rich harvest. As stated earlier, the motif or the resultant benefit is called the fruit (*phala*) and the enjoyment of the '*phala*' is called the '*Adhikāra*'. One who has the '*Adhikāra*' is not doubt, the *Adhikārin*,⁶⁶ and it is he who becomes virtually, the principal character, the hero in a composition. He is called the *Netā*, *Nāyaka*, or the hero because the entire action of a drama or a *Mahākāvya* culminates in his benefit and revolves round him, in the main.

Due to numerous complexities of human-nature, the hero may be of as many different types as human-beings can possibly be, so the classification of the hero seems to be a difficult task. Still, the ancient scholars have tried to determine broadly the characteristics of different heroes as characters. In the first place, they have defined the personal merits of a hero. The essential

⁶⁶ अधिकारः फलस्वाभ्यमधिकारी च तत्प्रभुः । *Daśarūpaka*, I.19

qualifications of a hero are enumerated by Dhanañjaya in *Daśarūpaka* as follows:

“The hero should be well-bred, charming, liberal, clever, affable, popular, upright, eloquent, of exalted lineage, resolute and young; endowed with intelligence, energy, wisdom, skill in the arts, pride, heroic and mighty, vigorous, familiar with the codes, and a just observer of laws.”⁶⁷

The hero as the principal character is classified into four types and they are *Dhīrodātta*, *Dhīroddhata*, *Dhīra-lalita* and *Dhīra-prasānta*.⁶⁸ All the same, it becomes an essential qualification of a hero that he should be at all events *Dhīra* - one full of fortitude and courage and should possess mighty strength for facing all ups and downs of life.

Dhīrodātta: The self-controlled and exalted hero (*Dhīrodātta*) is of great excellence, serious forbearing, not boastful, resolute, with self-assertion, reserved and firm of purpose.⁶⁹

Dhīroddhata: The self-conceited and vehemently assertive hero is altogether dominated by pride and jealousy, wholly devoted to magic practices and deceit, self-assertive, fickle, irascible and boastful.⁷⁰

Dhīra-lalita: The self-controlled and the light-hearted hero (*Dhīra-lalita*) is free from anxiety, fond of arts (songs, dance etc) happy and gentle.⁷¹

Dhīra-prasānta: The self-controlled and calm hero (*Dhīra-prasānta*) is a Brāhmaṇa or the like, possessed of the generic merits of a hero.⁷²

⁶⁷ नेता विनीतो मधुरस्त्यागी दक्षः प्रियंवदः ।
रक्तलोकः शुचिर्वाग्मी रुढवंश स्थिरो युवा ॥
बुद्धयुत्साहस्मृतिप्रज्ञाकलामानसमन्वितः ।
शूरो दृढश्च तेजस्वी शास्त्रचक्षुश्च धार्मिकः ॥ *Ibid*, II.1-2

⁶⁸ धीरोदात्तो धीरोद्धतस्तथा धीरललितश्च ।
धीरप्रशान्त इत्ययमक्तः प्रथमश्चतुर्भेदः ॥ SD, III.31

⁶⁹ महासत्वोऽतिगम्भीरः क्षमावानविकल्थनः ।
स्थिरो निगूढाहंकारो धीरोदात्तो दृढव्रतः ॥ *Daśarūpaka*, II.5

⁷⁰ दर्पमात्सर्यभूयिष्ठो मायाच्छदम्परायणः ।
धीरोद्धतस्त्वहङ्कारो चलश्चण्डो विकल्थनः ॥ *Daśarūpaka*, II.6

⁷¹ निश्चिन्तो धीरललितः कलासक्तः सुखी मृदुः ॥ *Ibid*, II.3

These are the four popular types of heroes who lead other characters whether their action is directed towards success in love or any heroic exploit. Generally, a hero has his counter-part, who is known as the subsidiary hero or the *anu-nāyaka*. The leaders of the Episode (*patākā*) or the Incident (*Prakarī*) are generally such characters. They are the principal supplementary to the hero in achieving his end. An *anu-nāyaka* is therefore a character whose part is comparatively much less important than that of the hero.

(2) Subsidiary Characteristics of a *Mahākāvya*

In addition to the primary characteristics noticed above, the Ācārayas have also laid down certain subsidiary characteristics relating to Language and Style, Alaṅkāras, Metres and Descriptions and Narrations of a *Mahākāvya*.

Language and Style, though relatively a subsidiary constituent of a *Mahākāvya*, occupies a very significant position in a composition, because it is only through this element that the poet presents the beautiful and subtle situations before the reader with all the delicacy of ornamented form.

The Ācārayas, like Bhāmaha and Daṇḍin, point out in a very general way some characteristics of Language and Style in the definition of a *Mahākāvya*, they are of the view that the diction and style should be highly polished and additionally the language should be embellished with *Alaṅkāras*.⁷²

Another subsidiary constituent viz. Metre (*Chanda*) is an essential organ of a *Mahākāvya*. Early rhetoricians have been very vague on the proper application of the metres in a poem. Daṇḍin suggests that the metres should

⁷² सामान्यगुणयुक्तस्तु धीरशान्तो द्विजादिकः । *Ibid*, II.4

⁷³ अलंकृतम् । KD, I.18

सालकारम् । *Ibid*, I.19

be melodious in a *Mahākāvya*.⁷⁴ The change of metre has been emphasised at the end of canto by rhetoricians like Daṇḍin and Viśvanātha.⁷⁵ Usually a single meter runs throughout the body of canto; but Viśvanātha a later rhetorician, felt the necessity of having a variety of metres in a canto.⁷⁶

A *Mahākāvya* is great (*mahat*) not only in its conception but also in its form. Every single thing that it incorporates is invariably grand and magnificent. It never aims at mere narration of events; in fact, its primary object is to picture sublime visions of internal and external nature. Naturally, therefore, descriptions serve as a very significant device in the hands of a poet to realise his object. Ever and anon variegated descriptions have been introduced in the poems by the *Mahākāvya* -writers in order to attain the impulsion of aesthetic expression. Moreover, it is through descriptions only that the poem can furnish a picture contemporary society.

It may incidentally be observed here that the tendency to incorporate descriptions in a *Mahākāvya* has been so strong with the Sanskrit poets that they have some time forcibly brought them in even at the cost of the unity of narration.

Analysing the role of description in the compositions of great poets, modern scholar Ramaji Upadhyaya⁷⁷ deduces the following four principles with regard to their employment in a *Mahākāvya*.

(1) “Descriptions prepare back-ground for action and as it will be observed, the high standard of description in these *Mahākāvyas* have greatly added to the impressiveness of the action”

⁷⁴ श्रव्यवृत्तैः । KD, I.18

⁷⁵ सर्वत्रभिन्नवृत्तान्तैः । *Ibid*, I.18

एकवृत्तमयैः पद्यैरवसानेऽन्यवृत्तकैः । SD, VI.330

⁷⁶ नानावृत्तमयः क्वापि सर्गः कश्चन दृश्यते । *Ibid*, VI.321

⁷⁷ Upadhyaya, Ramaji, *Sanskrit and Prakrit Mahākāvyas*, pp. 106-107

- (2) “Descriptions from the back-ground for characterisation also, viz. ‘A city of this description has a king’ thus the king thereafter is no ordinary ruler because of the big city described before wherein he resides.”
- (3) “Narration of historical nature is generally insipid. For diversion of reader’s mind from narration, a change over to description is naturally desirable.”
- (4) “The description may very well be shaped to give to the reader an insight into the principles leading to the development of his personality. This provides an occasion for giving lesson to the reader in a manner enunciated by Mammṭa as

कान्तासम्मिततयोपदेशयुजे ।

Daṇḍin has suggested a long list of descriptions to be introduced in a *Mahākāvya*, but obviously the list is suggestive and not exhaustive. Later Ācārayas and also *Mahākāvya* -writers have not restricted themselves to these subject pointed by Daṇḍin.

In comparison with descriptions, narration of incidents occupies a subordinate position in a *Mahākāvya*. According to Daṇḍin, the narration should be explicit and should be treated with literary vigour and zeal.⁷⁸ Bhāmaha, however, proposes that the details, though rich, should not be too exhaustive.⁷⁹

In summing up, it can be stated that a *Mahākāvya* is an amalgam of various composite characteristics. A *Mahākāvya* making an ideal use of all the primary and subsidiary characteristics discussed above can safely be classed as an ideal composition.

I.VIII TRADITION OF *CARITA-KĀVYAS*

⁷⁸ असंक्षिप्तम् । KD, I.18

⁷⁹ नातिव्याख्येयम् । KL, I.18

The tradition of *carita-kāvyas* begins from Aśvaghoṣa who for the first time composed the great epic *Buddha-carita* in order to depict the life and teachings of Buddha. The successors of Aśvaghoṣa readily accepted his immortal work as a model and continued to write *carita-kāvyas* of different types. They wrote Dramas, *Campūs*, *Mahākāvyas*, *Khaṇḍakāvyas*, *Laghukāvyas*, *Ati- Laghukāvyas* and *Stotras*. The present study brings to light the *Bhīṣmacaritam* of Hari Narayan Dikshit.

Radhavallabh Tripathi gives the definition on *Jīvanacaritam* in his words as follows:

कस्यचिन्महापुरुषस्य प्रेरणाप्रदं चरितनिरूपणं जीवनचरितम् ॥ III.1.3, p. 153

I.IX CARITA-KĀVYAS IN SANSKRIT LITERATURE

Carita-kāvyas play an important role in the field of Sanskrit language as biography is a significant sector of any literature. They mainly form a part of biographical literature. Biography is a narrative, which records consciously and artistically the important events happened in the life of a great person whom the author depicts. The biographical works are the combination of history and literary art. So the biographer shares with the historian a concern for truth and simultaneously with the novelties for the ambition to create a work of art. The life-sketches or the biographies of important persons attracted many poets to write upon. Therefore a huge number of *carita-kāvyas* have been composed.

In this regard Raghavan V. rightly observes, “The new movement was really a re-awakening and a fresh search of the spirit of India. With modern education and the cultivation of the critical spirit and the study of Indian history in a more intensive manner, a fresh realization of the value of the Indian heritage came. The Sanskritists particularly nurtured to the glory that

way in ancient India with a fervour which urged him to a fresh effort for a renaissance. The higher spiritual values of Indian culture and the material nature of modern civilisation, the growth of new fashions and foibles, the slavish aping of west, all these produced reversion and led to a reassertion of the Indian spirit. Soon there was the birth of nationalism and the public movement, and the freedom movement, and a galaxy of outstanding leaders of public movement appeared whose patriotism, sacrifice, eloquence and campaigns stirred the intelligentsia and masses alike. The Sanskritists were also affected by the political activities and the Sanskrit writing of this age, also bear the impress of this new spirit, is the most striking part of contemporary Sanskrit.”⁸⁰

Literary tradition in Sanskrit has been averse to the eulogy of man; an exception seems to have been made in the case of saints and teachers and, in latter times, royalty, as well. This should explain the paucity of biographical literature in Sanskrit, during early and medieval times, and why the available writings of this genre relate to religious leaders and the ruler of the land.

The word *carita* has the following meanings: performed, practised, attained, known, offered, going, moving-course, acting, doing, practice, behaviour, acts, deeds e.g. *Udāra-caritānām tu vasudhaiva kuṭumbakam*, story e.g. *Uttararāma-caritam tat prañitam prayujyate*. *Caritam* means behaviour, habit, conduct, practice, acts, deeds, performances, observance, history, life, biography, account, adventure, nature, disposition and duty, established of instituted observance.⁸¹ The *caritakāvya* literature focused on the remarkable personalities of society. It can be divided in different groups according to the phrase of significant personalities introduced therein.

⁸⁰ Raghavan, V., *Contemporary Indian Literature : A Symposium*, pp. 244-245

⁸¹ Apte, V. S., *The Student's Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 204

Some of the *caritakāvyas* are historical, some are biographical, some are focused on the life of persons, some are on their deeds and some are on their characters. It is interesting to note that there are *carita-kāvyas* of many types and many forms. The objectives behind the compositions are also different. We have to accord due consideration to them as they possess high merit of literature.