

# Preface

नरत्वं दुर्लभं लोके, विद्या तत्र सुदुर्लभा ।

कवित्वं दुर्लभं तत्र, शक्तिस्तत्र च दुर्लभा ।

व्युत्पत्तिर्दुर्लभा तत्र, विवेकस्तत्र दुर्लभः ॥ *Agnipurāṇam*, 337.3 & 4

Among the extant literary works in the various developed languages of the world, epics stand foremost, from the point of popularity and prominence among the people. These epics are treated as depicting the history of the people of the hoary past and are valued much since they give an interesting reading also, being the works of great poets who have come to be acknowledged for their imaginative and literary talents.

The great epic *Mahābhārata* has been an integral part of Indian culture and civilisation. This unique scripture contains more than one lac verses and so it is counted among the greatest epics of the world. Over the years of its existence the *Mahābhārata* has been playing a very important role not only in the lives of the people of India but also in the lives of the people of South East Asia. As Oldenberg puts it, “In the *Mahābhārata* breathe the united soul of India and the individual souls of her people.” Dr. V. S. Sukthankar says, “Whether we realise it or not, it remains a fact that we in India still stand under the spell of the *Mahābhārata*. There is many a different strand that is woven in the thread of our civilization, reaching back into hoary antiquity. Amidst the deepest of them there is more than one that is drawn originally from the ancient Bhāratavarṣa and Sanskrit literature. And well in the centre of this vast pile of Sanskrit literature stands this monumental book of divine inspiration.” Next to the Vedas, it is the most valuable product of the entire literature of ancient India, so rich in notable works. Venerable for its very antiquity, it is one of the most inspiring monuments of the World and an inexhaustible mine for the investigation of the religion,

mythology, legend, philosophy, law, custom and political and social institutions of ancient India.”

The *Mahābhārata* has not only influenced the literature, art, sculpture, and painting of India but it has also moulded the very character of the Indian people. Characters from the Great Epic like Bhīṣma, Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Karṇa, Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma, Arjuna, Abhimanyu, Duryodhana, Duḥśāsana, Śalya, Kuntī, Gāndhārī, Draupadī etc., are still household words and serve the purpose of driving home in a pithy manner the point that the speaker wants to convey. These characters stand for domestic or public virtues like filial love, fraternal attachment, generosity, steadfastness of purpose or vices like hatred, wickedness, faithlessness, etc. call a man Bhīṣma, Karṇa or Abhimanyu and any Indian will immediately understand your estimate of the character of the person concerned.

Dramas, poems, novels, short-stories have been inspired by the episodes from the *Mahābhārata* right from the days of Bhāsa (B.C. 400) down to the twentieth century in Sanskrit, Prakrit, and all the modern Indian languages. In India a philosophical or even political controversy can hardly be found that has no reference to the thought of the *Mahābhārata*. Also, men and women in India from one end of the country to the other, whether young or old, whether rich or poor, whether high or low, whether simple or sophisticated, still derived entertainment, inspiration and guidance from the *Mahābhārata*. Indian writers, ancient and modern, have found in the stories of the great epic excellent vehicles for the expression of their creative genius. There is indeed no department of Indian life, public or private, which is not effectively influenced by the great epic. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the people of India have learnt to think and act in terms of the *Mahābhārata*. The *Mahābhārata* is equally popular in Burma, Siam, Java, and Bali. Its influence can be discerned from the temples of these countries which have stories from these epic sculptured on their walls. Artists in these countries have painted them on their canvasses and showmen act

them in their *lakons* in Java, a particular *lakon* being played on a particular occasion in the family. As time passed, it became traditional to look upon the *Mahābhārata* as Śāstra on piety.

The modern Sanskrit epic *Bhīṣmacaritam* is an example of the same with its plot based on the mythology of the *Mahābhārata*. It stands with a rank high because of its poetic qualities. It will not only enrich our tradition but it will also imbibe a new spirit and create interest in the minds of the readers of the present generation to have critical and comparative studies of these great classics. The personality and noble character of great Bhīṣmapitāmaha and his virtues like moral and ethical values, dedication, modesty, kindness, generosity, etc. will inspire today's generation for performing such good deeds.

The *Bhīṣmacaritam*, composed by a great modern poet of our time Dr. Hari Narayan Dikshit on 12<sup>th</sup> February 1991, is an epic poem comprising of 20 cantos and 1118 verses. It occupies an important place among the mythological *Mahākāvyas* for its aesthetic attributes. This mythological poem is worthy of note for a number of reasons. This poem describes the life of Devavrata Bhīṣma starting from his birth till death involving his valourous act, his mighty prowess, wisdom, philanthropic act and noble personality. The poet has nicely depicted the character of Bhīṣma. He has properly dealt with the subtle characteristics of Bhīṣma. There is no doubt that the pen of the poet has given birth to an excellent and pleasant epic in a beautiful, impressive and very heart-touching style. The work is appreciable for its theme and presentation. The poem is first of its kind and is a best one from literary perspective. The present thesis contains a critical, literary and linguistic evaluation of the epic *Bhīṣmacaritam*.

I must express my deepest sense of reverence and gratitude to Dr. Rabindra Kumar Panda, Nyāyācārya, Viśiṣṭācārya, Ph. D., my preceptor and research guide, Head and Associate Professor, Department of Sanskrit, Pali and Prakrit,

Faculty of Arts, The M. S. University of Baroda. He is a genuine creative writer, poet and critic in Modern Sanskrit Literature. He first advised me to take up a critical study of the epic *Bhīṣmacaritam* as my subject for research study. He also helped me ungrudgingly with valuable suggestions whenever I approached him in connection with the present work. He had spent his precious time in discussing some debatable points. His useful suggestions and necessary corrections have helped me a great deal to make improvements in the presentation and style of my research work. In spite of serious personal inconveniences he kindly gave me an opportunity of revising with him a greater portion of the thesis before submitting it. I am highly grateful to him. I owe to him more than what I can express by words.

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Guru Pūrṇimā

Kartik Pandya

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